WRITING OTHER TIMES: ON POSTCOLONIAL TEMPORALITIES IN VIETNAMESE FRANCOPHONE AND FIL-HISPANIC NOVELS

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This dissertation attempts to think about time in the postcolonial novel, or what I call postcolonial temporality, which refers to both the conception of time, in relation historical progress—as perceived by its authors—as well as the time period in which a literary text is written and circulated, in conjunction with its country's sociopolitical development. The central concern that prompted and animated this investigation is "Why do we read certain literatures and not others?" Of course, these other literatures I am referring to are works from the Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic(Philippine literature in Spanish) traditions, which are often overlooked both in their respective countries, as well as in literature programs in the United States where these bodies of literature still remain marginal. Throughout this work, I argue that central to the question of why these works are not read, is a periodizing tendency from readers and academics to align literatures from postcolonial countries with the development of the nationalist state. Because of this temporal conception of the development of national literatures, works stemming from these countries that do not fit under market descriptions, or align with the outside conception of the country's progress, are devalued and regarded anachronistic or aesthetically retroactive. Such is the case with Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic literature, where the two countries' social development have left these literatures without a viable readership. Beyond this practical obstacle towards readership, however, I also make the case that because of an implicit demand from politically left-leaning, postcolonial academics, postcolonial literary oeuvres that do not advance a concrete revolutionary or decolonial narrative are often

sidelined, such as with the novels I investigate. Here, “Writing Other Times” refers to the way that Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic authors utilize the former colonial European languages to address and contest colonial history, social displacement, and liberation from neocolonialism. Through the readings of Anna Moï, Linda Lê, Kim Lefèvre, Pham Duy Khiêm, Antonio Abad, and Jesús Balmori, I argue for a broader conception of the historical timeline in which these literatures are produced, as well as a more contextually based reading of how each narrative regards and situates itself within its country’s national formation. For me, to adequately appreciate these works it is necessary to think of postcolonial temporality as an *other* time that is parallel, adjacent, and antithetical to the development of the unitary cultural space as encapsulated by the nation state. Ultimately, this work aims to think about how we might listen to others and understand how they think of themselves, visions that, to me, are all dependent on not just another place, but of another time.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vinh Phu Pham is a scholar on postcolonial theory, nineteenth-century Spanish Peninsular literature, and twentieth-century Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic literature. He holds a BA (2013) and MA (2015) in Spanish literature from Florida Atlantic University, as well as an MA (2019) in Comparative Literature from Cornell University.

For my family

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Introduction

> "The injunction to see things from the native's point of view speaks for a definite ideology of truth and authenticity; it lies at the center of every polemical discussion on "reality" in its relation to "beauty" and "truth.""[1]
> --Trinh Thi Minh Ha, "Outside In Inside Out"

1. **Analogy of untimeliness**

In the summer of 2013 during my first year of the Master's program at Florida Atlantic University, I visited Paris, France for the first time. On my second day in the city, I decided to pick up some lunch at a Banh Mi shop right next to the Centre Pompidou before heading over to the square in front of the museum. After finding a sparsely crowed spot, I sat down on the ground to eat my sandwich. Two bites into this cold cuts Banh Mi with chicken liver paté and Thai chili peppers, I began to sob. It wasn't the spice of the chili peppers that prompted this as I grew up in a Vietnamese household where chilies usually accompanied a meal, but rather the realization of something I never thought would happen.

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Twelve years earlier, on the morning of 9/11, an older gentleman was on his way to the airport for a flight to Paris. Upon arriving at the gate, news broke out that the Twin Towers in New York City had just been attacked and that all flights would be canceled. This gentleman, who grew up in French Indochina in the 1930s, worked for the Trésor Colonial then as a pilot for the South Vietnamese National Army, who had spoken French his entire life, who forced all his children to learn the French language because it was "the language of culture," and who still bowed to his French doctor more than half a century after independence, had never seen France

[1] T. Minh-Ha Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780203700624, 65.

with his own eyes. On that fateful day, when thousands of Americans had died, so too did his dreams of laying eyes on the country that shaped his entire life and world view. By this by point, he was already too old to travel internationally, and not long after the tragic attack, his failing health would no longer allow him to leave the vicinity of his home. He was my grandfather.

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More than a decade later, there I was, a caricature of a globe-trotting young millennial with an American passport, eating a sandwich born out of violent conquest and cultural *métissage* at the heart of country whose language I've uttered as a child growing up in an independent Vietnam, but had never witnessed first-hand. What confounding sense of irony was there in this scene where the desire to see a building whose architecture is turned inside out, where the frames and pillars are externalized to vacate the interior clutter, had I found tears of cathartic relief. In that moment, naïve and alone, two generations from the man who fled his country on a small rocky boat in order to save his children and grandchildren, I had fulfilled my promise to this man by making it to the city of lights. Some stories cannot be anticipated. Some stories are made by marks that have existed before we ever knew what they were. Only time will reveal to us the stories in which we lived and build.

2. **A reflection on postcolonial time**

Towards the end of Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* where she asks readers to re-think the field of a planetary Comparative Literature, she writes:

> The time of producing historically thin "theory" describing the feelings of migrants in pseudopsychoanalytic vocabulary is over […] The old postcolonial model—very much "India" plus Sartrian "Fanon"—will not serve now as the master model for transnational to global cultural studies on the way to planetarity. We are dealing with heterogeneity on a different scale and related to imperialisms on another model…"[2]

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 85.

Almost two decades since the book's 2003 publication, the world Spivak described has changed more radically than anyone could have imagined and everything from the movement of people, global trade, to financial crises, to forms of neocolonial practices have altered in such a way that it begs the question of whether we have adequately arrived at understanding our current conditions. Indeed, since Spivak's call for this new model of comparative literature with an emphasis of thinking in terms of planetarity, new understandings of postcolonial literatures seem to have come about, yet the definition of the "post" still seems to elude scholars on what is rightly postcolonial.

For many, the issue of this "post" has less to do with the philosophical stance of colonialism as an on-going struggle than the fact that it maintains an implicit shade of historical and social periodization. Consequently, the postcolonial world is taken for granted as following linear developmental model, that finds its beginning upon a country's independence. Of course, this poses many concerns as the tendency to periodize literary development alongside national political movement never fully captures the full weight and valuable perspectives of the literature. Not only that, the seminal theoretical texts which often provide the critical frameworks for new postcolonial critiques are also often based on readings of earlier European literary works. Here, one might think of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Shakespeare' *The Tempest* as prime examples of such works. Of course, while the theories that come out of the analyses of these works provide, at times, invaluable critiques of the imperialist gaze that accompanies and substantiates the colonial enterprise, the fact that these theories are based on now outdated forms of imperialism should also not go unnoticed. This is not to say that the impact of these older forms of colonialism can no longer be felt, but that the shift from old school European imperialism to American economic neocolonialism requires the engagement

with texts that directly address this novel encounter. As noted within Spivak's own works and elsewhere, this reliance on the Imperial age, European texts—particularly of the English traditions—can only offer a glimpse of the picture, and never the whole story of colonialism—no singular tradition could. Yet, across literature departments in the Euro-American universities today, such texts still hold immeasurable sway in the formulation of how we think and teach postcolonial studies as a discipline and how we approximate postcolonial literature as objects of this shared history.

To me, the issue that arises here is not so much that this method of engagement cannot further our notion of anti-imperialist or decolonizing knowledge, but that in basing our theoretical tools on any particular context—especially on the English + commonwealth model—only produce further blind spots in the way that other postcolonial societies experience our disjunctive world. Indeed, since the turn of the century, the burning question in terms of engaging with artistic production, well summarized by Alain Badiou, and not only in regards to postcolonial literature, is "How can one represent the development of a subject while at the same time elucidating the play of forces that constitute it, but which is also the space of its volition and its choices?"[3] Here, to answer the question adequately for the postcolonial context, I find it insufficient to only trace out the imperialist ideologies which undergirds our current models of domination and, therefore, produces the postcolonial subject. Instead, it must be a necessity to also to read and think in tandem with those who come from the former outposts of colonial metropoles in order to see how such subjectivities are imagined and postulated. What is difficult in this task, however, is that colonized individuals, even those from the elite classes of the newly

[3] Alain Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 42.

independent countries, cannot always imagine and articulate a radical future—at least in a way that is readily legible for those of us reading back into history.

Indeed, in line with Frantz Fanon when he wrote about the liberation of Africa exerting the necessity for the self-recognizing agency of the colonized subject:

> The liberation of the individual does not follow liberation. An authentic national liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation. It is not possible to take one's distance with respect to colonialism without at the same time taking it with respect to the idea that the colonized holds of himself through the filter of colonialist culture.[4]

I believe there is a need to read what these subjects thought about themselves and their world through the lens of their literature in order to understand what liberation looks like for them. Crucial to this process, however, is the recognition that different from wealthy liberal democracies in which individualist subjectivities are valued and theorized, such as France, Germany, US, and UK. Postcolonial literary texts from places like Vietnam and the Philippines must also contend with the socio-political development of their countries, which have had more war than peace over the course of the century. In such a way, these narratives often times blur the line between personal biography and nationalist historiography. To me, this is not an indication of the individual receding to the background in order to prioritize the state. In fact, if anything, it proves to me more of a self-recognizing dialectic in relation to the individual subject and the on-going process of nation building. In wealthy countries of the global north, this postcolonial fixation on the state to give meaning to the individual, at times, feels antiquated. Yet, what readers and critiques of these countries tend to forget is that, until quite recently, many of these postcolonial countries did not have a stable government nor reliable access to institutions and markets in order to produce the consumerist individual who might think of himself "beyond" on the state.

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[4] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 103.

What this adds up to, generally speaking, is the lack of appreciation from some of the literary works that come out of this tradition with the charge that they somehow cannot think beyond the confines of 19th century models of nationalism and ergo are discardable. Or that by recycling literary tropes and styles of earlier periods—mostly European modernist and *costumbrismo*—that one cannot think of futurity within their terms. In addition to this, because liberation, as an act to freeing oneself of a bind, is never a straightforward path, and the internal, psychological conflicts of an individual are never a traceable map of actionable objectives, we must hold a conception of the postcolonial as something other than the promised land of self-realized autonomy. Indeed, as I hope to show throughout this dissertation, the postcolonial period, which were are still in today, is an non-foreclosed period in which the processes of statecraft are still being contested and deliberated. This is important on many levels, however, to me, what must be underlined is that, often, some of the most revealing literary oeuvres to which we have access are also some of the most neglected for arriving at these discussions since on the surface they wear a mask of cultural integration and assimilation—simply for writing in their colonial languages.

In some contexts, such as North/West Africa, South Asia, and even Latin America, this is not an issue generally posed as the historical development of some of these former colonies have allowed them to make cultural claims about the continuity of language and literary traditions since the beginning of colonization. Of course, the politics of decolonization is a hotly contested issue, but no one asks why an Argentinian writer from the twentieth century, like Borges, writes and philosophizes in Spanish or why Alain Mabanckou's novels must be translated into English from French. In other contexts, however, such as the this dissertation addresses—Vietnam and the Philippines—this cultural heritage and reconciling with the colonial legacy vis-à-vis

language, cultural practice, and literary traditions is broadly overlooked by the fact that such claims for cultural continuity cannot be easily perceived by those from the outside. I find that this is not only an issue predicated by our framework for what constitutes proper materialist, historical transmission or an aesthetic formation, but also invariably a misguided conception of what precisely one understands as the temporality of postcolonial society and culture by the types of colonial vestiges that are valued and deployed.

Here, in between the fault lines of former and current empires, postcolonial societies in places like Vietnam and the Philippines take shape—write and narrate themselves—by way of assemblages and pastiches that do not always yield temporal coherency. I am not only referring to the disjunctive and chaotic nature of the cultural area as understood by continental definitions of postmodernity, but that whatever time frame we hold to places that have experienced former and on-going colonialism will always fall short in understanding the traces of colonial society. The temporal dimensions of postcolonial literatures from these places, thus, cannot simply rectify nor clarify itself simply through the hyphenation of nationalized cultures, though at times it is useful. Indeed, to understand the works of the postcolonial authors in this dissertation, another approach to time and temporality, on which I will later elaborate, must be held in place.

3. **Recontextualizing Coloniality**

After WWII, the old European colonial map had become an obsolete guide to viewing the world, as the American empire brought about a new world order. Indeed, ever since the end of the Spanish-American war in 1898, when Spain lost its last major remaining colonies, US financial and military involvement became the dominating force in global politics. In places like Southeast Asia, and particularly Vietnam and the Philippines, this American presence drastically affected the development and historical trajectories of the two countries. In Vietnam, US support

for French troops trying to reclaim the colony turned into a full scale invasion and a decades long war. In the Philippines, liberating the former Spanish colony meant another almost fifty years of US military occupation. In these two countries, where European languages, cultural practices, and educational institutions had been familiar to the people who lived there, the arrival of Americans and their material culture brought about incredible change.

Among this shift, in addition to the rise of consumerist culture and a leaning towards liberal democracy, was a push towards English as the new competing lingua franca. While not unheard of in the region, as the British East India Company had long established an English legacy in places like Burma, Hong Kong, and Singapore, what made the new orientation towards English significant in these two countries was the fact that both countries had already undergone the process of modernization through the adaptation integration of the former colonial European languages. In this sense, the arrival of English with the Americans presented an injunction not simply because locals must now translate into another language, but that this new linguistic landscape presented yet another possibility through which the processes of modernity can be articulated. Of course, with this new possibility, the prior conception of cultural formation as building blocks, where one starts with the alphabet before reaching to literary heights ending with the European novel, is brought into view.

In the Philippines, this sentiment was best encapsulated by Nick Joaquin, one of the most well-known contemporary writers of the country, who wrote in his now canonical work *The Woman With Two Navels*:

> In two swift decades they would find themselves obsolete—discarded and displaced persons gathering in each other's parlors to revile the present and regret the past. The future of which they had so happily babbled had turned into a dead end. They were to have no continuation; a breed and a history stops abruptly with them. Not from these protagonists, with their fine manners and classical vocabularies, would evolve the mind of the following generation, which was actually to speak in another tongue. A people that

> had got as far as Baudelaire in one language was being returned to the ABC's of another, and the young men writing in the 1990s would find that their sons could not read them. The father spoke European, the sons would speak American.[5]

There are crucial ideas that need here; First, it is this notion of the linearity of national culture, no doubt a product of nineteenth century views of cultural progress and historical development, which informs the character's sense of tragedy in the realms of cultural transmission and continuity. Second, and more importantly, it is that this swift shift is seen indeed as a rupture in a country's cultural development and not the welcomed opening up to another possibility of self-articulation.

In the case of Vietnam, this transition from French to English also came as a major rupture as scholars and intellectuals of nineteenth century Vietnam already had to transition from classical Mandarin to French. Indeed, not until after the 1910s would the Vietnamese language transition at the state level into the popularized Latin script where the vernacular could be represented by itself rather than through translation. Of course, because this development also came about during the same time French language education was becoming accessible to common Vietnamese people on a national level, modernity in Vietnam just as it was in the Philippines, was an era of major social change where returning to the ABC's of yet another language was the common theme.

4. **Towards A Theory Of Postcolonial Temporality**

So what does this mean for the postcolonial literature in each country? If the context I've just described seems like a heterotopia of immense linguistic complexity, it is because these societies were always already grappling with internal differences even prior to colonization. In the case of both countries, the arrival of these vehicular, European languages provided an

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[5] Nick Joaquin, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (Makati, Metro Manila: Bookmark, 1991), 170-171

outward facing global medium through which they articulate their sense of self. With the arrival of English, this already fractured self, was once more becoming fractured. Those who chose to still write in the European languages well-after independence, encountered a public that mostly could no longer read them. Yet, as is the case in both countries, this did not stop many of the writers who keep writing even till today. And with the new possibilities for movement and immigration, many of these writers also no longer live in their respective homelands. Because of this context, any notion of temporality in postcolonial literature from both countries must recognize the ways in which history—both national and personal—is interwoven in a manner that does not readily lend itself to temporal linearity. To be clear, then, what I mean by temporality here is not the absolute time that is supported in the natural sciences, but rather the non-concrete relation between narrative and experience. In other words, it is an expression of perceived historical time that is nonlinear and non-repetitious. As such, any serious criticism of literary works stemming from this tradition ought to continually remind itself of the fact that the postcolonial literary world is world of disjuncture, paradoxes, ironies, referentiality, intertextuality, and cultural hybridity. To this end, words like anachronistic, or any gestures towards a backward gaze on the part of the authors, should strategically be avoided.

The claim of this dissertation, thus, is that postcolonial temporality, particularly through the conception of linear time as imposed by the demanded of an accumulatory view of history, is flawed. Not only that, but this view has thus been sustained by the simple fact that the countries and text from which theories of postcoloniality stem—mainly anglophone countries—have generally maintained English due to both colonial history and the rise of English as the language of global capital. Because of this, there is a linguistic continuity that tethers some colonial languages with these newly independent states, foregoing the double process of acquiring new

languages, like the United States or India with English, while others, like the Philippines and Vietnam, must layer English, yet another colonial language, on top of the previous one. In the places where Great Britain was not the colonial power, therefore, any new literature written in the European language that is not English is seen as nostalgic and backwards looking, and consequently left unnoticed. For me, a true appreciation of these literary spaces—Vietnamese Francophone and Philippine literature in Spanish(Fil-Hispanic)—recognizes postcolonial temporality as the movement of non-nationalist teleologies. In other words, my understanding of postcolonial temporality in the works of Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic literature—the way history is imagined by the actors in the novels—constitute an other time that is both parallel, adjacent, and antithetical to the development of the unitary cultural space, as demanded by the essentialist conception of the nation-state. Within this other time, the forward and backwards narrative movements of pre and post-colonial histories are intertwined; where past, present, and future do not hold their distinct hierarchies, and where the individuals who speak out—generally allegorical figures of the nation—always fail in their quest for narrative resolution. Within this space, language and language choice are as political, to the extent that they address colonial histories, as they are personal in the way that it allows its authors to carve out an otherness in their writings. For me, this space is important not merely for the sake of cultural continuity, which I recognize can never be actualized and yet allows writers to make their own sense of other histories, but that the other histories to which these literatures attest may never be overlooked nor forgotten as *not* historical.

5. **The case for Vietnam and the Philippines**

While both Vietnam and the Philippines share similar histories of European colonialism, American occupation, and are geographically located in proximity to one another, rarely are

there comparative literary studies carried out addressing their respective European corpuses. By putting these two countries in conjunction, I want to draw attention to how despite their similarities, there are also differences that can elucidate how the ghostly presence of a former colonial language can indeed help us understand their versions of postcoloniality. Of course, similar arguments can be made for other countries in the region, like Laos or Cambodia, which have also had comparable patterns of colonialism, and I would welcome such comparisons. My choice for these two particular ones, admittedly, have as much to do with my own personal interest as it does with the fact that both have a fairly robust literary corpus in the former European language. Moreover, as two of the primary actors and stakeholders in the South China Sea conflict, both countries have historically been significant entry ways for European powers to enter the Chinese commercial market. Because of this, I believe there is much more than can be said about how each county's literary tradition has developed and consequently studied. Therefore, I sincerely hope that this dissertation will make up only a small portion of intellectual work, which combines both Vietnam and the Philippines together.

6. **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation spans four chapters. In an effort to write against this idea of continuity as the only legitimate form of literary history and analysis, the following chapters have been structured in a way that need not build on one another. Unless stated otherwise, all translations into English are my own. The arguments I make in them, and the examples I employ are all attempts at underlining a temporal concern that accompanies the understanding of postcolonial history in places where the colonial language serves as the dominant tongue. Throughout these chapters, the theories I draw upon to engage with the literary works come from a variety of sources, yet I recognize that many of these sources stem from a particular Euro-American

literary theory traditions, which is to say; a heavy leaning on continental philosophical texts, and post-structuralist thinkers, as they have shaped my own intellectual trajectory in learning more about this subject. I understand that this may present some theoretical blind spots and that the possibility of this project turning out differently was and is probable were I to have included more theorists from the Global South and even from these countries. Yet, because the texts and authors I choose are more often recognized in American academia than in their respective countries, drawing from critics local to those countries is not always possible. Further, I also provide more examples from the Vietnamese Francophone sphere than I have for the Fil-Hispanic tradition, which had a much steeper decline by uncontrollable forces of history and, therefore, there is a bit of imbalance. For the present being, this is my earnest first attempt at articulating what I believe is a sustained engagement in some of the most significant texts in both fields, which undoubtably will find better forms in future versions. With these shortcomings in mind, the following is a brief overview of each chapter.

Starting with chapter one titled, "Minor Literature and the Possibility of Postcolonial Temporality," I engage with Gilles Deleuze's notion of Minor Literature as a positionality form which one can attend to literatures on the fringe or literatures that are not well represented within the narrow cannons of the traditional academic disciplines. In attuning to this temporality of the minor, and offering a reading of Linda Lê's *Héroïnes,* I push the argument that this minor literatures allow us to think about the temporalities of these novels in a more open way. In other words, I argue that the minor position has the most revolutionary potential when considering how it may affect the shape of a particular cannon, and more importantly, the ways in which we periodize certain traditions. Along the way, I offer a brief overview of discussions of the Minor

by Gayatri Spivak in response to Deleuze, and how her critiques have later been revisited in the defense of the minor.

In chapter two, "Deferred Time: On the Limits of Postcolonial Trauma in Anna Moï's *Riz Noir*," I argue that a fruitful interrogation of other ways to look at temporality in postcolonial literature is to reconsider the literature's relationship with theories of trauma. By looking at the development of Trauma Studies as a field, I outline how it has always had a poor reception within postcolonial studies, principally for the fact that many of the founding elements of Trauma Studies stem from a western conception of event-based trauma, which often does not consider on-going traumatic experiences such as racialized trauma, as well as a politics of visibility demanded by postcolonialism contentious relationship with material and positivist base. Through a reading of Anna Moï's *Riz Noir*, my claim is that despite Trauma Studies' philosophical grounding, which offers no resolution and demands that one listens to the suffering of the other without requiring a visibility to the site of trauma, it is possibly to allow other histories to arise from the past in the present.

The last two chapters offer a broad historical context for the Vietnamese Francophone and Fil-Hispanic corpus. Here, historical details allows us to make more concrete claims about the decline of both French and Spanish in both countries, and why it is significant to look at these text in light of the almost non-existent audience in their countries. I believe this is necessary as, here and elsewhere, context allows us to enter the literature as culturally and historically specific phenomenon responding to the circumstances of its production and circulation.

In chapter three, "Configuring the Future in Marguerite Duras, Pham Duy Khiêm, and Kim Lefèvre," I tackle the issue of futurity, or perceived lack of futurity in three Vietnamese

Francophone novels; *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* by Marguerite Duras, *Nam et Sylvie* by Pham Duy Khiêm, and *Retour à la saison des pluies* by Kim Lefèvre, which I read against the charge of colonial nostalgia. Here, my argument is that despite appealing to the nostalgic mode, all three of the works offer their own version of what futurity looks like. As the only non-ethnic Vietnamese in the list, Marguerite Duras, has been purposefully chosen to claim that, in accordance to cultural *métissage*, Duras' own upbringing in colonial Indochina had profoundly affected her understanding of the colonial world and the shifting positionalities which constituted this world. Framing my reading of the three novels through Lee Edelman's notion of a non-reproductive futurism, as a way to think of a radically different politics of being, I make the case that the failure of all three romance narratives in each work aims at this radical future.

Lastly, in chapter four, "Trapped In Time: Abad, Balmori, and The Philippines' Forgotten "Golden Age,"" I make the case that the oft forgotten Fil-Hispanic Golden Age is indeed not an aesthetic regression that could not imagine itself beyond modernist sentimentality, but rather that the *costumbrismo* style was a deliberate choice to give shape to a Philippine nationalist tradition since José Rizal. At the same time, this contribution to the Fil-Hispanic cannon can also be read as a time capsule of a literary tradition, whose existence always held a close relationship with the possibility of its eradication. Through the reading of Antonio Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* and Jesús Balmori's *Los pájaros de fuego*, I show how the two authors and their characters aligned and differed from each other, each making reformulations to tropes of a continuous tradition. Here, in both novels, the presence of US occupation animates the discussion of neocolonialism and the need to think of a qualified form of liberty under postcoloniality.

Read together, these chapters represent the culmination of personal and intellectual preoccupations I've had during the last few years of graduate school at Cornell, which, at times, felt too short, while at others cycle eternity. Here, I do not hold the pretense of having offered a definitive answer to the question of temporality in the postcolonial novel—rather, what I offer here are the ruminations of someone who always sensed an untimeliness to the ways in which we read certain literary traditions. In addition to this, is a reminder of how context can help to make us reconsider what the postcolonial present is for those who live within this disjunctive other time, where the past is not past and the present is ever unfolding.

Chapter 1

Minor Literature and the Possibility of Postcolonial Temporality

In 1975, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari set out to answer the question of "what is a minor literature?" in their book *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*). For Deleuze and Guattari, what makes a minor literature can be surmised to three components 1) The deterritorialization of language 2) the connection of the individual to political immediacy 3) the collective assemblage of enunciation. [6] On this they write:

> We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature. Even he who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language, just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian. Writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois, his own third world, his own desert. There has been much discussion of the questions "What is a marginal literature?" and "What is a popular literature, a proletarian literature?" The criteria are obviously difficult to establish if one doesn't start with a more objective concept—that of minor literature. Only the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on. Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of expression and really be able to treat and develop its contents.[7]

Here, the relationship between minor and major literature seems to be one of mutual constitution since minor is taken as "the revolutionary condition" for every great literature. In this sense, minor literature has less to do with a preordained literature or the minority groups that produce them, than it does a type of literary practice that demands one to think of the literary realm as a dynamic totality. Minor literature is a type of literature becoming or, put differently, it is that which exists as a reminder of potentiality within and in relation to an established literature. It is for this reason

[6] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Theory and History of Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-19.
[7] Ibid, 18.

that the minor literature must necessarily be within the major language, in order to test the limits of what is perceivable or possible within that particular language, in the broader sense of the term.

Kafka, who was a Czech Jew living in Prague at the time of the Austro-Hungarian empire writing in German, seemed to not only meet these conditions, but is taken as the prime example of someone producing such a literature because his writing exceeded the parameters of the symbolic order, and other forms of readings that have been applied to his body of works.[8] As Réda Bensmaïa points out, Deleuze and Guattari's investment lied in giving readers "a means of entering Kafka's works without being weighed down by the old categories of genres, types, modes, and style."[9] In other words, for Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's works represented a point of departure from an established order by way of *deterritorializing* language, through appropriating language outside of its traditional context. In line with this understanding of the minor, it would seem that many, if not all postcolonial works in colonial languages would necessarily be seen as having the potential. Yet, that is hardly true for scholars such as Spivak, whose theorization of the subaltern voice seems to advance the notion that one could never fully arrive at full authenticity or emancipation as representation is always already prefiltered. In other words, if there is a pure politics from below that might be offered from these unheard voices, according to Spivak, we would never know. For decades this dead-end argument has produced some interesting interventions, but it has also ultimately produced two false camps that appear irreconcilable between one another, with one overstating the impossibility of voicing the subaltern and the other over-valorizing certain cultural

[8] One of the fundamental tenets that inform Deleuzian thinking is the way psychoanalysis limits subjectivity. In regards to reading, for Deleuze, it translates to a form of reading that grounds meaning within a hidden structure, which is not at all there. This is why they find Kafka interesting, since he seems to resist the temptation of allowing his characters to be under the oedipal complex. In section II, titled, "An Exaggerated Oedipus," Deleuze and Guattari write, "The mistake of psychoanalysis was to trap itself and us, since it lives off of the market value of neurosis from which it gains all its surplus value. "Dramas and tragedies are written about [the revolt of the son against the father], yet in reality it is material for comedy." Ibid, 10-11.

[9] Réda Bensmaïa, "Forward," Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xiv.

productions on the premise of a politics from below. My interest lies not in the resolution of this issue, but in how this type of framework forecloses the conversation for postcolonial writings that do not fit neatly within this divide. My query, in other words, is whether one might be able to think of and valorize postcolonial literature, such as those from lesser read parts of the globe (in my case, novels), as performing a role which is neither politically revolutionary, nor striving for authenticity of the colonial experience.

For years, scholars of Vietnamese Francophone literature in North America have had to do a lot of leg work in order to justify their corpus within their larger fields, despite the amount of French language texts that exists in the country since the mid 1800s onwards. Why is this so? Well, the short answer is that Vietnam simply does not produce the same large quantity of works as, say, Senegal or Algeria, on the one hand, which makes it less attractive to French departments in terms of required colonial texts. The long answer, on the other hand, or what this chapter will essentially cover, is that it suffers from a misrecognition that is tied to the very way that postcolonial studies have framed the conversation about Deleuze and Guattari's the minoritarian figure. Unlike those other previously mentioned former colonies, where independence produced a clear separation between colony and newly formed state, Vietnam's drawn out civil war battle for independence throughout the long 20th century begs the question of what independence or decolonization really looks like. In light of this history, if one thinks of Vietnamese postcolonial novels written in French, during and after French and American occupation, within the formulation of the minor/major dualism, it does not fit. Put differently, what does one do with texts from former colonies whose processes of independence produce multifaceted relationalities that are not limited to a revolutionary politics towards any singular colonizer? Taking this point to its logical conclusion, if there is no fixed point of departure, and no strategic moment at which something

could necessarily be considered as properly "post," how might one reconsider the place and time of the postcolonial designation?[10] Vietnamese Francophone literature is neither entirely French nor Vietnamese, but exists as a minor literature that straddles between multiple major categories and which, in practice, because of the diaspora after 1975, is inherently transnational. As a result, scholars have had to find creative ways in order to affirm the field's relevance as a minor/subfield within related disciplines, such as diasporic literature, war literature, third-world literature, global south, Asian American (for those in Quebec), all with this implicit political potentiality, even if not all the works are invested in this battle. At the same time, because of the historical conditions that produced these literary works, with highly educated Vietnamese writers working in a foreign language, they couldn't hardly be called authentically subaltern either. So what exactly, then, are we to do about these works?

Indeed, American interventionist policies in Vietnam during the 20th century has disproportionately placed emphasis on US related narratives in English, especially after the end of the Vietnam War. At the same time, the development of Vietnamese Francophone literature since formal independence in 1945, with its themes and questions, also could not have taken place had it not been for the lasting presence of the first Indochina war. Simply put, then, the conditions of Vietnamese Francophone might very well be understood in terms of this double relationship between both the former French and latter American empire. Or, despite being written in French, it would be impossible to read this body of work as entirely disparate from the Vietnam War, as well. What's important about this claim is that it rejects any strict timeline for when some of these

[10] While examples abound, I think the relative position of Francophone literature in French studies is a good example of how primacy is still given to the metropole. In many French departments across the US, francophone is generally seen as something minor, and the recent interest/emphasis on North/Sub-Saharan Africa only seems to be reactionary to changes in the French speaking demographics where former colonies now make up the majority of new French speakers. Of course this is a disciplinary problem, but one that is consistent across different fields.

works appea, from the 1980s till today. Additionally, it raises the question of when exactly the postcolonial moment is, and what exactly it looks like, especially when the language and politics espoused in the literature does not seem to adhere to the expected values placed upon those texts by this prior categorization. This postcolonial temporality, inflected by the minor position, is what I am after—or better said, the postcolonial temporality that is not accounted for, or slipped through the cracks between the Spivakian and Deleuzian divide.

The goal of this chapter, thus, is to engage with a certain notion of the minor as what was once considered a singular trajectory related to the major, and to argue for more nuanced understanding, which suggests that because there is no singular relationality between colonizers and colonized, there is no reason to think of the "post" in postcolonial as any singular point of departure either. In other words, previous understandings of the minor ties the historical trajectory of a newly independent state with its former colonizer, whereas my claim is that the minor position, can in fact be informed by a multiplicity of factors and therefore its time frame must be more radically open. In this way, Vietnamese Francophone literature from the early 2000s is just as valid a point of departure as anything written in the 50s, when one speaks about postcolonial. To do this, I will offer a reading of Linda Lê's 2017 novel, *Héroïnes*, which, for me, plays with the figure of the minor in a way that brings forth both the question of postcolonial time, and how that affects one's minoritarian relationship to language. From my perspective, what is often left out in comparisons between postcolonial literature as minor literature is the temporal structure they conjure and the political implications they have. This is to say that despite the overwhelming references to Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of the minor within postcolonial discourses, little attention is paid to how the minor itself does not exist a-temporally and that the positionality of the minor itself is never singular. This is an important reminder as the meaning of "post" in

postcolonial does not only mean the era right after colonialism, and minor literature is not simply that which temporally follows a major literature. More importantly, I insist that in order to productively perceive the minor, care should be taken to not fall into the trap of over-valorizing the authenticity of the subaltern voice, nor to romanticize the minor as a perpetual kernel of revolutionary potential. All that glitters is not gold.

Indeed, capitalist integration of third world markets after the Cold war has given the impression that globalization has successfully brought about a synchronous time, whereby bland uniformity in artistic expression via the culture industry becomes apparent on the one hand, and the liberation of expression via some desire for originality on the other. Postcolonial scholars tend to disagree with this impression of temporal synchronicity, but at the same time have also turned away from the figure of the minor as a resource for further exploring the temporality of the postcolonial condition, as it has led to some dead-end discussions. Nonetheless, it is a question worth pursuing. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this reluctance seems to stem from a broader disagreement, to which perhaps too much attention has been paid, about how the postcolonial subject is constituted, and whether or not such a subject can be articulated in an authentic way.

In my view, thinking of postcolonial literature as a form of minor literature ought to make one more attuned to considerations of temporality, rather than to foreclose as a given. I say this with the conviction that the category of minor literature and what one understands as postcolonial literature are not irreconcilable designations, neither in their aims nor their practice. To be clear, my goal is not the resolution of the dichotomy between major and minor, nor the universal and the particular; Rather, the question I want to explore in this chapter is what minoritarian thinking, or thinking of the minor as a form of becoming, can contribute to our understanding of postcolonial temporality and what this ultimately means for us to read works by Vietnamese authors in French.

If a minor literature, by its nature, is a reservoir for difference and becoming, then the present future for which it calls is the same as postcolonial literature's orientation towards the yet-to-come. However, if these same works are singularly valued by a demand of a certain politics (generally emancipatory), which is no longer the case when a novel is written decades after formal independence, which is very much the case in Vietnam, then we may very well miss what they offer entirely. Simply put, writers from former colonies like Vietnam might choose to write about the colonial experience explicitly, or they might not, but the possibility should not be foreclosed to them based on when they write.

On Postcolonial Literature as Minoritarian Literature

The first question that usually arises when one speaks about postcolonial literature is "which postcolonial literature are we talking about?" The histories and processes of colonization and decolonization around the world are so varied that no universal account could be made on behalf of all of them. Additionally, the usage of "postcolonial" in the United States and elsewhere has also shifted from meaning the era immediately after colonial independence to one of a certain political orientation.[11] Yet there still seems to be a drive to make generalizing claims about the nature of postcolonial literature as though it were possible, given that there seems to be enough thematic crossover and overlapping that the term postcolonial still carries weight. In the past, the rationale for why one ought to be able to make such claims seem to stem from the desire to make sense of the postcolonial condition as a global phenomenon, similar to theories of postmodernity. It is this drive for a totalizing and cohesive narrative without the disavowal of locality which has made it possible for thinkers like Shu-Mei Shih, Françoise Lionnet, and even Édouard Glissant, to

[11] Neil Lazarus, "Introducing Postcolonial Studies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521826942.001.

theorize from their positions.[12] In their defense of the difference of the other, which falls in line with broader trends of postcolonial thinking, the tendency of all these thinkers is to make a recourse to mutual contingencies through figures of relationalities and poetics as the basis for community and a vision of an interconnected world. They are not alone, of course, as other thinkers such as Lisa Lowe has already brilliantly demonstrated, how the historical and material conditions brought about by colonialism has brought the world into a type of global intimacy?[13] So, while they do not wholeheartedly embrace the figure of the minor, they also cannot do away with its theoretical worth in articulating a minoritarian stance and politics, as an alternative for class distinction. Their practice of the minor, thus, is one of a double gesture; between groundedness, whether in identity and historical conditions, and a will to flee from those conditions, which requires one to hold onto difference in sameness. It is a type of "glocal" thinking that is indicative of our era. So rather than nationalism, one arrives at trans-nationalism, rather than major trans-nationalisms, one moves to minor trans-nationalisms, and rather than fixity of a single territory, one proceeds to errantry that moves across borders. Of course, what is constant in all these methods, or the glue that binds their pluralist thinking is the continual gesture towards the other via movement.

The quandary one encounters, thus, is one in which the binary opposition between homogenization and heterogeneity must be upheld, as to secure a continual production of infinite differences and of the same. On the one hand, the desire to produce different histories of colonialism is brought about by the totalizing force that wants to see all experiences of colonialism as variants of the same historical forces, namely capitalist expansion on a global scale. On the

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[12] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Duke University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386643.; Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[13] See Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375647.

other, the defense of the different forms of contestation in postcolonial literature is brought about by the reductive assumption that all contestation is registered similarly, or merely varying repetitions of an essential argument; freedom. In other words, in the pervasiveness of a certain kind of postcolonial aesthetics, which locates its strength in the colonial liberation/class struggle, narrative becomes an implicit hallmark for the field. Narratives that fall outside of this reification of the postcolonial, are then read as something other, or are misread entirely. It is as if the institutionalization of postcolonial thought had reproduced the very same hierarchical dynamic it had originally sought to unsettle. What was once the proliferation of difference(here difference in types of narratives), is now tainted by the processes of canonization that seeks to reproduce a recognizable sameness. In other words, a recognizable postcolonial aesthetics.

When one wants to defend difference for difference's sake, one must admit that at some level, radical difference is always in some way supplementary to the forces that seek to reduce it to sameness. Otherwise, there can be no determinate quality to be recognized as difference at all. So, as an example, if the category of the postcolonial is allowed to be everything, then is it really anything at all? This is not a silly question, as it is a fundamental quandary for those working within postcolonial studies—which is to say, how is it possible to defend a corpus as other without reproducing colonial narratives of national or ethnic essentialisms. In other words, what necessarily makes the "Vietnamese" in Vietnamese Francophone? The details on that are hazy, but the idea remains simple—which is that those working within postcolonial discourses have had to continually balance between difference and sameness as they inch forward in their analysis of the culture, of language, and of the subject. Even hybridity and creolization, which supports a type of striated subjectivity, seem to still favor its own existence as a different postcolonial ontology.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze expresses difference as the "state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction," and as such, we must say "that difference is made, or makes itself."[14] To think of postcolonial literature as something that is essentially different, then, is to think of it as constituting that difference by way of its very existence within the historical context of the colonial world. When thought in this way, difference for itself is not the negation of sameness (purely responding to the totalizing homogenization and nothing else), but an affirmation of being different for itself. In other words, one might say that postcolonial literature on a broader level, and Vietnamese Francophone, on a more particular level, are forms of self- differentiations, which cannot be considered or accounted for as merely reflexive to their broader categories—that is; existing only in relation and as a response to its background, but whose meanings and purpose are affirmatively and entirely different than that which comes prior to them. Simply put, while Vietnamese Francophone exists and can be thought of in conjunction to the broader categories of French and Postcolonial literature, the fact of difference in itself is constituted by way of its own trajectory towards something other. When contemporary Vietnamese writers produce their works, they are neither paying homage to the metropole nor are they devoted to reifying a new image of colonial Indochina. Quite differently, they are using a colonial language to carve their way through the messy rubbles of colonial history and literary institutions that seek, at all turns to trap them as parts of the larger categories. Yes, they are those things i.e. Francophone, postcolonial, diasporic, etc... but they are also more than the sum of their parts. The significance of the minor difference, therefore, is the recognition that finding a proper voice within this historical landscape is about recognizing bridges and fault lines that may lead to nowhere and building a new road forward anyways.

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[14] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 28.

Lê's *Héroïnes* and the Affirmation of Minor Difference

Of all the writers in France of Vietnamese origins, Linda Lê is perhaps the most prolific of our times. This is not only because she has had a long career in the Parisian literary scene and a long list of works to her name, but it is her manner of her engagement with questions of language, identity, and exile that makes her a particularly interesting figure when thinking about the Vietnamese diaspora in postcolonial France. Born in Dalat, Vietnam in 1963 and later transplanted to Paris after the Fall of Saigon in 1977, all of Lê's writing reflect, in one way or another, on the difficulties of articulating any singular, indivisible notion of the self that is grounded in a particular place. As noted by Vietnamese Francophone scholars like Alexandra Kurmann, and admitted by the author herself, Lê rejects any identification that boxes her as either strictly Vietnamese or French, but locates her home within the space of literature.[15] Because of this way of self-identification, Lê has become somewhat of an ideal literary figure when thinking about questions of hybridity and postcolonial alterity, as she has distanced herself from other Vietnamese Francophone writers to embody a more deterritorialized persona. For Kurmann, Lê's commitment for a broader connection with the European tradition, as opposed to just the French one, is a result of her interest and engagement with other writers at the margin in Europe, which like the layered self, is a practice of intertextuality.[16] An expanded marginality where the national frame is deemphasized, however, is not a refusal of the marginal position *tout court*, and thus the figure of the minor remains, even if displaced. Accordingly, this self-separation from the broader categories by a conscious act of composing oneself as to belong to something other, has provided space within

[15] Alexandra Kurmann, *Intertextual Weaving in the Work of Linda Lê: Imagining the Ideal Reader* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 2.
[16] Ibid.

her work to meditate on what precisely constitutes the minor within postcolonial France and the postcolonial genre, more broadly speaking.

In her 2017 novel, *Héroïnes,* a story that focuses on three different female figures, Lê pushes the question of what it means to inhabit the space and time of exile, and how one might think of belonging and the homeland. And it is this story, which I find most compelling in conceptualizing the figure of the minor as that which exists for itself. Lê's narrative is structured around V., a male, Swiss-born student of Vietnamese origins, whose parents had left Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon in 1975, and whose life as a grad student writing about Kafka is suddenly altered when he attends a gallery and sees a photograph of an old Vietnamese celebrity, known as the Vedette de Saigon. After seeing this photo, V. takes note of the photographer, known simply as La correspondante, a bourgeoise, French-born woman of Vietnamese origins, and the two quickly develop a relationship by email. The novel unfolds through this regular exchange, as V. learns that the famous singer, once the talk of Saigon social life and friends with high ranking politicians in the Southern Republic, has since become a refugee in California then emigrated to the 13th arrondissement of Paris. Living in the same building as the Vedette de Saigon, is the novel's second heroine, la maquisarde, a former North Vietnamese revolutionary, anti-imperialist guerilla fighter, who has since then become a prominent dissident voice against the one party government. The third heroine, referred to simply as le lys brisé, is the Vedette's younger and hated, half-sister who resides in Austria, and who is married to an infamously lustful and dangerous Baron.

All together, these three female figures represent different facets of diasporic life, and the troubles that come along with each one. For the Vedette, it is about finding ways to keep herself relevant, for La maquisarde, it is about fighting for an ideal, and for le lys brisé, it is about finding her place in the world that allows her to be her own person separate from being simply "the half-

sister." What attracts V. to these women, and perhaps la correspondante as well, is the way these women's lives intersect differently with a country only their parents knew, to which they themselves have never been, and which no longer exists. Throughout the novel, starting with the first few lines, continual reference is made to the Fall of Saigon on April 30th, 1975, which seems to mark and frame all of their lives within a very particular mode and time frame, despite having very different outcomes.[17] For V. and la correspondante, they share a mutual curiosity for these women, as neither of them were born in Vietnam, yet the country's presence haunts them in their daily lives in different parts Europe. For all of them, the fact of diasporic life means that everything ranging from their relationship to language, to others around them, and to themselves, is defined by this existence where time is not their own. In other words, the origins of their present is and continues to be marked by the moment of flight from the homeland, even if V. and la correspondante they did not personally make the journey themselves.

What interests me about this novel in regards to its relationship with the minor is that each character seems to embody a form of minoritarian attachment to their lived conditions. At the most obvious level, they are all inheritors of a history that have made them foreigners to the place they inhabit, and thus always looking to recreate the homeland wherever they are. In describing the migrant life of the Vedette de Saigon, Lê offers a bittersweet, but succinct analogy to those who fled Vietnam:

> Ils avaient fini par incarner ce que la vie des émigrés vietnamiens en Amérique avait de plus triste: dans leur esprit, la ville de Saigon qu'ils avaient connue, la capitale du Sud où, d'après eux, c'était malgré tout la *dolce vita*, n'avait pas disparu, ils l'avaient recréée en Californie, ils essayaient d'y mener une existence qu'ils imaginaient semblable à celle qu'ils auraient menée s'ils avaient continué à fouler le sol natal.[18]
>
> They had ended up embodying the saddest part of life for Vietnamese immigrants in America: in their minds, the city of Saigon that they had known, the capital of the South

[17] Linda Lê, *Héroïnes: un rêve éveillé* (Paris: Christian Bourgois éditeur, 2017), 11.
[18] Ibid, 14-15.

> where, according to them, it was despite everything the *dolce vita*, had not disappeared, they had recreated it in California, they were trying to lead there an existence which they imagined similar to the one they would have led if they had continued to tread the native soil.

More than just recreating the feel of the physical homeland, however, Lê's description also points to how this displaced population continues to live in a state of nostalgia, as though South Vietnam never ceased to exist, "Ils n'avaient pas seulement recréé l'atmosphère de Saigon là où ils habitaient, tout ce qui faisait partie de leur quotidien, leur nourriture, la musique qu'ils écoutaient, les livres qu'ils lisaient, les prières faites à l'Éveillé, les renvoyait au passé, était *sursaturé* de nostalgie" "(They had not only recreated the atmosphere of Saigon where they lived, everything that was part of their daily life, their food, the music they listened to, the books they read, the prayers made to the Enlightened one, sent them back to the past, was oversaturated with nostalgia)"[19] Using the life of the Vedette as a figure for the larger Vietnamese population in California, Lê's narration paints this diasporic group as a people whose daily existence lies outside of itself, outside of its time. This is to say that despite having resettled elsewhere, like California, where life could in theory begin anew, the reality of this population is one in which all emphasis is placed on the preservation of a particular life. And it is in the active process of preserving such a life, that rather than assimilating to their surroundings and keeping up with the times, they choose to maintain a life that goes against time. In other words, to make themselves minor figures, not with the purpose to contrast with those around them, but to maintain a life prior, while hoping for a different future.

However, this reality does not account for all those Vietnamese people who left the South. There are others, such as V.'s parents, who found themselves in Switzerland, far away from one

[19] Ibid, 15.

of the Vietnamese diasporic epicenters, insisted on making sure their son fit exactly into his place of birth. Lê offers a window into this other reality by describing V.'s life growing up:

> Tout ce que V. savait du vietnamien lui venait des refrains de la célèbre chanteuse. Avec ses cousins, et ses cousins, il parlait français. Même ses oncles et tantes, qui saisissaient tous encore très bien les finesses de leur langue maternelle, mettaient un point d'honneur à s'exprimer dans un français châtié, s'abstenant de transmettre ce qui leur restait du vietnamien à leurs enfants, de peur qu'ils ne fussent pas de *purs produits de l'Helvétie*.[20]
>
> Everything V. knew about Vietnamese came to him from the refrains of the famous singer. With his cousins, and his cousins, he spoke French. Even his uncles and aunts, who all still grasped the subtleties of their mother tongue very well, made it a point of honor to express themselves in polished French, refraining from transmitting what remained of Vietnamese to their children, from fear that they were not pure products of Helvetia.

Indeed, here, for fear that their kids would turn out to be oddities who do not look or feel the part, or to condemn them to a life as an outsider, V.'s parents, aunts, and uncles made every effort to deny their children of the Vietnamese language. So powerful and permeating was this fear, that they would have nightmares that his French would not be perfect, "Comme beaucoup d'émigrés, ils étaient souvent visités par ce cauchemar que V., plus lettré que ses oncles et ses tantes, qualifiât de conradien: ils rêvaient qu'ils ouvraient la bouche pour se présenter dans l'idiome de leur nouvelle patrie et, du fond de leur gorge, il ne sortait qu'un son guttural, presque un râle inaudible" "(Like many emigrants, they were often visited by this nightmare that V., more literate than his uncles and aunts, described as Conradian: they dreamed that they were opening their mouths to introduce themselves in the idiom of their new homeland and , from the back of their throats, only a guttural sound came out, almost an inaudible rattle)".[21] Presumably, as others would have, I take the liberty of reading this groan (râle) in both the literal and symbolic sense of the word, which, unsurprisingly is both their personal and political voice. V.'s parent's nightmare that their over educated son would be incapable of speech, or that his speech would be unintelligible, point

[20] Ibid, 17-18.
[21] Ibid, 18.

towards an anxiety of not being heard, or worse, mis-recognized in the very same way that forced their departure from their homeland in the first place.

Indeed, this anxiety surrounding a political voice in the host language is one that is recognizable to most of those whose circumstances have moved them abroad. As a diasporic person, one simply does not speak as though speech itself were a given, since it is not always pragmatically feasible, nor is speech itself universal to the extent that it would be recognized without certain parameters. Put differently, here, speech gives way to language, and language gives way to self-affirmation and political representation, which is why it is so important that V. cannot simply speak like a minor in the French language, but must overcompensate as "*purs produits de l'Helvétie*," studying literature of all fields, in order to secure and justify their presence. The pure irony of it all, however, is that the object of study, this *lettré* son of theirs is no other than the long touted estranged figure of language and paragon of the minor figure; Kafka himself. In interjecting the letters exchanged between Kafka and his lover Milena as a way to compare how V. is developing his relationship with la correspondante, here, Lê makes the leap between what it means to be a *lettré* and to write oneself towards danger, "Kafka en 1922 avait envoyé à Milena les quelques lignes immortelles, confessant que tout le malheur de sa vie venait des lettres, qu'écrire des lettres, c'est se mettre nu devant les fantômes." [22] Such is the irony, thus, that not only has V.'s parent's anxiety about fitting in and speaking perfectly made him study the main figure of not fitting in, but it has also pushed him to take writing, the supplement of spoken language and speech, as a way to address his malaise and bring further trouble to his life.

Of further interest in this section, is that this comparison between V. and la correspondante, two displaced people of Vietnamese origins in Europe, is mapped both unto Kafka and Milena, as

[22] Ibid, 75.

well as the disparate Vietnamese populations living in Western and Eastern Europe, particularly in the Czech republic, the former Czechoslovakia, during and after the fall of the Berlin wall. This theme of separation, of producing difference between one of the same as with the given examples, is repeated throughout the text to emphasize the distance and difference between the different minoritarian relationships to language. Unlike V. and his family who found themselves in the West, with their "confort matériel," the former Vietnamese guest workers of the Eastern Bloc, despite having spent considerable time in the country, do not even achieve social acceptance: "[C]es travailleurs, qui ne parlaient pas la langue du pays où ils avaient échoué, étaient très isolés, mal acceptés, mal traités par les autochtones, relégués dans des ghettos" "(The workers, who did not speak the language of the country where they had ended up, were very isolated, badly accepted, badly treated by the natives, relegated to ghettos)."[23] Language, thus, is not only significant in order to have a vibrant life, it is also indispensable as that which guarantees visibility. It is what separates him, from *those* Vietnamese folks, whose isolation stems from their inability to transgress this linguistic frontier that would reduce their difference to sameness. On the opposite end, however, V. also envies them, as from appearances, they seem to have access to something he does not; a more profound relationship to a country he has never known, and to a language from which he has been effectively denied. Lê makes a point of this when she writes:

> …quand il se les représentait, il ne pouvait réprimer un certain sentiment d'envie à leur endroit, il se disait qu'ils gardaient dans leur mémoire des images d'enfance qui les reliaient à une part d'eux-mêmes restée intacte, tandis que lui, quand il regardait en arrière, ses images étaient brouillées par l'impression qu'il était toujours à côté: quelque chose là-dedans lui serait toujours étranger, il l'avait usurpé, il aurait un jour à se justifier de tromper son monde en ayant une apparence qui ne coïncidait pas avec son langage, sa manière de vivre et de penser.[24]
>
> when he imagined them, he could not repress a certain feeling of envy towards them, he told himself that they kept in their memory images of childhood which linked them to a

[23] Ibid, 74-76.
[24] Ibid, 76.

> …part of themselves that had remained intact, while that he, when he looked back, his images were blurred by the impression that he was always on the sidelines: something in there would always be foreign to him, he had usurped it, he would one day have to justify himself for deceiving his world by having an appearance that did not coincide with his language, his way of living and thinking.

Taking this passage in consideration, where full integration also has the opposite effect of making one feel estranged to one origins, Lê's description of V.'s turmoil is that of never feeling fully comfortable within his own skin, precisely for the fact that he inhabits too fully one language and, therefore, is a stranger to the other. So rather than achieving his parent's desired result, where V. would not stand out as a minor, Lê leaves V. as a being who learned from Kafka to never find solid ground, "Il avait peut-être appris avec monsieur K. à n'avoir de dents que pour sa propre chair, tout en cultivant toujours les situations pleines d'ambiguïté qui lui permettaient de se tenir au bord de l'abîme en veillant à ne pas y tomber" "(He had perhaps learned with Mr. K. to have teeth only for his own flesh, while always cultivating situations full of ambiguity which allowed him to stand on the edge of the abyss, taking care not to fall)."[25] Language, in other words, becomes the limit to the abyss, as it could lead one towards liberation just as much as it could deny one a proper voice, which in turn affirm one's sense of being in the world.

At a glance, it might appear that I am only referring to fluency or command within a spoken language, yet, that would not paint the full picture. The fluency and command that concerns me, here, is what allows one to think about the self and self-representation, in the sense of claiming authenticity and connection to a motherland, which is indispensable for conceiving one's way through the world. This is why in the later part of the novel, when le Lys brisé, the Vedette's half-sister, upon encountering another Vietnamese person on the train, and anxious in trying to escape from her abusive husband, finds herself lost in language. Here the narrator tells us:

[25] Ibid, 77.

> Comme elle parlait mal l'allemand et ne faisait que baragouiner quelques mots de français, elle était au début tout heureuse de rencontrer un compatriote avec qui elle croyait pouvoir converser en vietnamien, mais il s'avéra que la passagère du train de 8 h 24 à destination de Paris avait oublié sa langue maternelle, ou l'avait si bien refoulée pendant ses années autrichiennes, qu'elle pouvait répondre en anglaise, en allemande et en français, mais était incapable de prononcer un phrase entière en vietnamien, d'autant moins qu'elle était fébrile, anxieuse, comme si quelque chose la rongeait.[26]
>
> As she spoke German badly and only jabbered a few words of French, she was at first very happy to meet a compatriot with whom she thought she could converse in Vietnamese, but it turned out that the passenger on the 8.24 a.m. train to Paris had forgotten her mother tongue, or had repressed it so well during her Austrian years, that she could reply in English, German and French, but was unable to utter a whole sentence in Vietnamese, especially unless she was feverish, anxious, as if something was eating at her.

Indeed, if for nothing else, language here is not only a barrier to one's quotidian life, it is also that which gives a sense of connection to a place of origins, which because of her distance or repression, since the narrator won't definitively say which it is, has ultimately failed her in this crucial moment of her escape. What is painful in this moment, with the elaboration on all these other languages in which she could potentially converse, is the fact that it is precisely the mother tongue, which seems to be the one thing she was supposed to depend on as her salvation with the stranger on the train, has been cut off.

For me, these problems of language in the novel reveal something about the way certain diasporic populations encounter one another and how they build their relationships. But more crucially, and more pertinent to the current issue, it can also be reducible to the complicated reality of minoritarian self-differentiation. Indeed, like the looming ghostly presence of Kafka, who stands as a reminder of difference in the same, both as an individual and as a paragon figure of minor language/literature, V. parent's insistence on perfect language is nothing more than an attempt to distinguish him from other Vietnamese in the former Soviet countries. Alternatively, the Vedette's

[26] Ibid, 205.

singing voice is all that discerns her from her prettier half-sister, and the maquisarde's politics is all about differentiating herself from the communist regime of which she was once a part. Here, none of the characters wish to be different simply because they have some grand scheme for a pure reactionary life, but their act of differing, if one would allow it, is a form of existential affirmation. Alternatively, the continual reference to the Fall of Saigon throughout the novel already confers the narration with an originary split, between North and South, then followed by absorption of one into the other, and it is this unified Vietnam from which their existence, as people in diaspora, differs. Difference, thus, is constituted as part of their *raison-d'être*, it is that which makes them a certain type of Vietnamese without having to embody all that such a signifier might demand, it is that which makes them authentic, even if only to themselves and to a particular experience, rather than those bodies whose lives are defined by language and borders.

Comparatively speaking, then, one might also see parallel lines to this same notion of difference as that of the subaltern voice as an unrepresentable marker of difference for itself, or the difference that makes the other, as they are all in a way othered by their context. Yet, what makes them all circumstantially other is also not predetermined by factors that any of them could control. Difference, in this sense, is that which can be felt, but never fully articulated. In the context of V., he cannot determine what it is that sets him apart from the people in Vietnam, or what marks him as different from them, but he feels it nonetheless. All measures of his otherness, thus, is an attempt at producing concrete referents in which such senses of difference could be embodied. Language and cultural fluency, therefore, are reduced not to their objective components, rather as the substantiation of a feeling of otherness that otherwise could not be encapsulated by name. In other words, V.'s obsession with Kafka might very well be read as an entry point to finding out where one's otherness lies, not to portray himself as the unrepresentable other. This must be so

because V.'s alterity to his social context should not be confused with the status of being a subaltern worthy of the name. Quite the contrary, Lê's narration makes clear that the privileges conferred to people like V.'s family, gives them both material comfort and political voice, so what anguishes him is not so much representation as the absolute and achievable goal, but the fault lines that separate him and those other Vietnamese people. For Lê, writing as a person of Vietnamese origin about a deracinated Vietnamese person writing about Kakfa in French, marks the clear desire of searching for such difference in writing and in language. It is a way of deferring lived otherness to the otherness of writing, not as pure radical difference, but as supplementary to the totality of diasporic life. Lê's novelistic meditation on being and belonging, therefore, should not be reducible to a consumer product under the name of a #postcolonial novel, but as personal interrogation of the multiple minor positions that frame the lives of millions around the globe.

Taking this approach to another level, conceptualizing the postcolonial critique as that attempt of producing difference, not as a reclamation of what cannot be said, but as supplement to what has been prior, is what makes it possible for the postcolonial moment to not have to embody an absolute alterity. Which is to say, between the colonial and postcolonial, there does not need to be an evidently clean break neither in language use, or political determination. So, yes, it is both possible/acceptable, and without irony, for Lê to interrogate the Vietnamese experience of being minor while still using the French language. The problematic I am attempting to draw out here is a straightforward one; theories of difference and sameness in the postcolonial context are predicated on two homogenous desires. On the one hand, difference, whether it be aesthetic or otherwise, must be propagated as a defense of the existence of postcolonial literature as a departure from the canon, insisted upon by colonial institutions. On the other hand, there must be some level of sameness in order for postcolonial literature's expressions and contestations to have a

recognizable aesthetic, to be able to call it as such. In other words, difference and sameness are not on opposite ends of a sliding scale, but rather embedded within one another, and similar to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between smooth and striated space; the distinction here is neither one of clear symmetry Nor simple opposition, but of unexpected movements, which links one thing to another.[27] What this translates to in terms of thinking about postcolonial literature as the figure for the kernel of infinite difference, then, is the acknowledgement of its partial contestation to its historical conditions, alongside the desire for pure difference for itself. Lê's novel attests to this all her characters are grappling with these dual desires to fit in, and yet not entirely be lost and absorbed into the mainstream.

It is in this sense that, against all totalizing gesture, I think it worthy and productive to consider certain articulations within postcolonial literature as minor literature—not for what can be considered essential in postcolonial literature, but for the inherent inescapability of the colonial legacy as well as an undetermined movement towards difference. Put differently, in reading postcolonial literature as minor literature, one simultaneously recognizes that it is attempting something that is radically different than the tradition from which it comes, while still expressing some contestation to colonial ideology. The fact of circulation and globalization does not undo this dynamic, but further reinforces this reactionary function by displacing the locality of domination. European empires and the centrality they produced may have nominally disappeared, however, the homogenizing reaches of imperial ideology and the materiality of neocolonial practices have not. A continual emphasis on the minoritarian thinking of postcolonial literature, therefore, takes up this movement as the primary condition for conceiving of difference, and not the reification of the same—even if it means employing the imperial language. In this sense, Lê's writing in the twilight

[27] Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 19 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 474-475.

of the Vietnam war might be read as a response to a much longer history of colonialism, where the lines between the end of one conflict and the beginning of another is hardly discernible. The fact that Lê's novel is written in French with a continual emphasis on the perfection of language is not negligible, but rather marks the very different type of embeddedness that separates postcolonial Vietnamese Francophone from its diasporic Anglophone literary counterpart. Unlike the Indian novel written in English, for example, where there is a linguistic continuity between colonialism, independence, and the happenstance of English dominating business and education, making it accessible to those in India, few in Vietnam will ever have heard of Lê, and even fewer are capable of reading her in French. Yet, it is not her concern, since her belonging is to the writing and not to any country. And unless one recognizes this crucial point, aesthetic difference in postcolonial literature from many countries, including Vietnam, will be read no differently than mindless reproduction of bourgeois modernism's attempt of an ahistorical art for art's sake *ad absurdum*.

Indeed, this is what I also believe to be part of Édouard Glissant's goal when he strove to articulate errantry as an aspect of the poetics of relation.[28] For Glissant, errantry is neither apolitical, nor is it inconsistent with a will to identity. Its politics, wherever they may lie, rests within its capacity for relationality.[29] Building from Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant's poetics of relation functions more like a rhizome, an enmeshed root system rather than a predatory root stock seeking to permanently take over.[30] Put differently, errantry, as a form of the poetics of relation maintains a notion of rootedness, but not a totalitarian root.[31] This means that "one who is errant […] strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—

[28] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
[29] Ibid, 20.
[30] Ibid, 11.
[31] Ibid.

and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides."[32] And so, in thinking of postcolonial literatures as minor literatures (as a form of errancy), one is tasked with understanding how, inflected within this movement towards the minoritarian, one does not do away a notion of identity, but rather incite the very relations and processes by which identity is produced. In *Héroïnes*, even when the focus seems to be tied to V.'s development, the narrative structure of the novel depends on his textual relationship to la correspondante, it is she who offers him an insight to his own subjectivity, and in this way the thrust forward is not based on his singular alterity but rather a shared condition of relation with other actors. Furthermore, in thinking of bodies of texts like Vietnamese, Algerian, or Senegalese francophone literature after independence, which are all postcolonial and minor literatures in the French language, the point is not to reify these corpuses as expressions of some concrete native identity or bastardizations of a French colonial identity(though some might try). The same might be said of Commonwealth literature, which, by large, acknowledges the history of colonialism, but whose existence is not limited by its legacy. Instead, the existence of these literary corpuses ought to demonstrate how identities and their expressions are the product of a relational world—one where relationality is a condition and not the limit of difference. What makes the corpus of Vietnamese Francophone minor to French studies is precisely what opens it up to other relationalities, such as American studies, diasporic studies, Vietnamese studies.

This is crucial since the other in postcolonial literature is always represented and configured from within, even if it is displaced—it is always the other which supplements the central subject of putative colonial subject and rarely a replacement. Making the comparison between language as a colonial aesthetic to an actual spoken language, it is easy to see why the

[32] Ibid, 20.

first quality of a minor literature is that it must be within the major language; in order to posit its externalized, internal other. Here, one might think of the trope of internal exile, whether physical or within language, as another expression of internal difference within postcolonial literature.[33] Of course, the impact of the minor here relies effectively on this shared communicative horizon where meaning and expressions are challenged within the imagined linguistic borders of a particular language. Intelligibility, thus, is an issue dependent on a common language, and by extension meaning's false sense of stability and opacity. Glissant points to this when he says that "[t]he poetics of language-in-itself strives toward a knowledge that by definition would only be exercised within the limits of a given language."[34] My claim, then, is that when postcolonial literatures are written in a colonial language, it is already enacting a relation of difference and sameness that is distinctive to its condition. Relationality, once again, is not a negligible aspect of postcolonial literature, insofar that it shares a common language, but the very condition of its being towards difference.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, this process of deterritorializing language through the literary machine has been exemplified numerous times among many former European colonies. From Indochina to Senegal to India, and many other places in between, minor literatures constituted the literary other within the empire before they were constituted as anti-colonial after the fact. That distinction in timing is crucial. By writing in the imperial language, colonists and colonized intellectuals shared a common ground by way of linguistic expression that articulations of difference (whether politically or otherwise), could be made and, consequently, materialize in political change. It was as if for the first time colonial language, rather than national borders, could shape a community. Each enunciation, regardless if it came from Saigon or Calcutta

[33] Ibid, 19.
[34] Ibid, 25.

were echoes affirming the seeming universality of these vehicular languages and the seeming universality of the empires from which they came. Indeed, minor literatures were important insofar as they contributed to the imperial imaginary of a total global presence, where the different uses of English, French, and Spanish for example, stood as both the reminder of the vast pluralism of empire and the very immanent grounds on which those empires stood. However, as quickly as this sense of universality caught-on, it was just as quickly discarded when it became apparent that such universality was nothing but a farce. Moreover, it became evident that the capacity for communication in the common tongue, which might have introduced difference, was in no way a guarantee that such difference could ever be more than rhetorical. So why did some postcolonial writers continue to write in the language of their former colonizer?

Though the reason for each writer differs, expediency and the colonial pedagogy rank high on the list of possible reasons. This was very much the case for other postcolonial writers like Pedro Paterno, Pham Duy Khiêm, Chinua Achebe, Tsitsi Dangarembga, or Anita Desai, who all had differing levels of reservations about such usage in their respective domain, and all of whom came from a privileged background where access to a colonial education was possible.[35] This was not the case for most of the colonized world. In their collection which seeks to read Deleuze alongside postcolonial literatures, Lorna Burns and Birgit Kaiser have posited that:

> While some postcolonial writers, most vocally Ngugi Wa-Thiongo, have (like Spivak) argued that the continuing use of the language of the coloniser perpetuates an imperial hegemony, a far greater number have defended their use of the colonisers' language. From Yeats to Achebe, Walcott to Djebar it is the creative potential of language, its mutability when faced with registers of dissent and resistance, hegemony and privilege, that signals the potential of postcolonial articulations – and very specifically postcolonial literatures – to disrupt the dominant forms of colonial discourse.[36]

[35] Although they wrote in different languages, all these writers were well known for their works in the language of their former empires, which gained them notoriety, but also produced further questions about which language to use.
[36] Lorna Burns and Birgit Mara Kaiser, eds., *Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze: Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4-5.

From here, no individual language is mistaken as having the sole access to universality, nor the finite horizon for potential expression. On the contrary, in these circumstances, the decision to use the colonizer's language is a conscious choice to explore, interrogate, and reflect that language's very pliability through contact with its internal other. In other words, it is an act of agency on the part of the colonized writer to be conscious of their own possibility of enunciation, rather than some betrayal to the native tongue, which produces its own politics. For Linda Lê, writing in French does not take away from her Vietnamese origins, nor confer her to an absolute French identity. It is this same line of thinking that makes Chinua Achebe wholeheartedly affirm that an African could learn English well enough to write creatively, while hoping that person never speaks like a native speaker.[37] The point in saying this has nothing to do about the peculiarities of the English language, but of the importance of maintaining a critical eye towards difference and our conception of language. This is especially relevant in contexts where the choice of the writing language is either not obvious or, when one considers the infinite enunciative possibilities that result from decolonization. Or, As Rey Chow has stated on the languaging of postcolonial writers working in English:

> The point is no longer whether, regardless of their descents, they grew up as bona fide native speakers of English in England, the United States, Canada, Australia, Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia, or elsewhere. Rather, that the linguistic multiplicities they unleash […] are unmistakable clues to a collective refashioning of that mass experience known as postcoloniality.[38]

Given this language landscape of postcoloniality, reading postcolonial literature as minor literature, is a deliberate choice to see these works as a literature becoming, which exist in a political vacuum, and as a form expression that both exemplifies (as well as questions), the very

[37] Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," *Transition*, no. 75/76 (1997): 347, https://doi.org/10.2307/2935429.
[38] Rey Chow, *Not like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 60.

contradictions inherent within the colonial enterprise. If one of the liberating prizes of this minoritarian position is not having to cohere to the norms nor conventions of the major literatures, or to reproduce the major literatures' concerns, then the choice of language is already a political act in which the majoritarian position is put into question. In such a way, minor literature is not what follows a major literature, but rather what has always been present, as part of the condition of coexistence. Yet, to simply say that they are contemporaneous, would also be a reductive statement since the minor also seeks to move beyond the major. So can there be a satisfactory answer to the question of temporality for minor literature when it is also looked at as postcolonial literature? Before addressing this question, it is necessary to unpack what the debate regarding the minor looks like and the possibility of its articulation.

Sustaining a Minor Discourse

In the introduction to their collection *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih trace out the problem endemic to many minority discourses; mainly their lack of encounters with one another despite their many shared commonalities.[39] For Lionnet and Shih, one of the pitfalls of the emphasis on this minoritarian position is that it puts pressure on the minor subject to identify themselves in relation to the dominant discourse rather than with other minorities.[40] The negative consequence of this framing is that it does not do away with the binary of major and minor, nor does it resolve the slated opposition between universalism and particularism.[41] In fact, for Shih and Lionnet, the continual critique of the center via the margin only reinforces the dynamic:

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[39] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalism* (Duke University Press, 2005), 2, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386643-001.
[40] In their words, "We study the center and the margin but rarely examine the relationships among different margins," Ibid, 2.
[41] Ibid.

> Critiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study. The deconstructive dyad center/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it. The marginal or the other remains a philosophical concept and futuristic promise: the other never ‘‘arrives,’’ he or she is always ‘‘à venir.’’ The ethical implications of this approach are important in that they prevent the reification of the other, one of the major pitfalls of identity politics. However, when seen from this perspective, the other continues to exist more as a promise than as a reality. To say it bluntly, this promise of an ‘‘à venir’’ may be analogous to the illusive and elusive promise of equality in Republican universalism.[42]

In this view, even though thinking about marginality seems to provide an escape, its elaborated consequence is that the other is kept perpetually out of reach. Their contribution, thus, is to think of minor transnationalism, which does not take the action-reaction politics of the major and minor distinction, but rather, drawing on Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, recognizes the creolization and multiplicities of minority experiences.[43] They do so because like the other, there is not a singular basis upon which one can think of the minor subject nor of the relations within which this subject participates.

This critique of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the minor builds on the problematics that was brought about famously by Gayatri Spivak when she wrote "Can the Subaltern speak?" For Spivak, given that there is no singular universal postcolonial subject, one cannot make the claim to represent the subaltern as though they too are singular.[44] All attempts in that direction are seen as a Eurocentric attempt to preserve the Western subject.[45] Beyond this, she insists that what both Foucault and Deleuze seem to look past is the way in which "speech" must be presented within the structure of Western epistemology in order to be rendered intelligible.[46] So, in a sense, one may attempt to represent the speech of the subaltern, but it will only rest as representation of

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[42] Ibid, 3.
[43] Ibid, 7-8.
[44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillian Education, 1988), 271–313.
[45] Ibid, 271.
[46] Ibid, 68-70.

a particular sense, since the subaltern invariably cannot speak. In short, Spivak's argument is that speaking *for* and speaking *as* are not two of the same. While I concur with both of these assessments that subjectivity is too heterogenous to be reducible to something like a monolithic minor and major, or any category that assumes a pure and unified subject, it needs affirming that minor positionality itself is also not relegated to any one particularity and, therefore, the concern was never of a representative authenticity. Put differently, a minor literature is not a fixed literature, in the sense of a corpus or an extended fixed identity(since there is no such thing as an authentic postcolonial subject), but a literature in the process of deterritorialization. A literature with a multiplicity of relations. But why the designation of the minor? In their own words, Deleuze and Guattari have stated quite neatly that:

> There has been much discussion of the questions "What is a marginal literature?" and "What is a popular literature, a proletarian literature?" The criteria are obviously difficult to establish if one doesn't start with a more objective concept—that of minor literature. Only the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on. Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of expression and really be able to treat and develop its contents. Kafka emphatically declares that a minor literature is much more able to work over its material.[47]

Taken in this view, the point of a minor literature seems to have less to do with positing some type of unified, universal other, or an absolute other of the European subject as a form of authentic self-proclamation, than an attempt to signal out a site where deterritorializations might take place. It is a minoritarian stance, rather than a subject. The practice of minor literature, thus, is already a form of difference in action, even if it takes place within a major language. Yet, such formulations seem to affirm Spivak's critique in that deterritorialization(or the speaking subject) still takes its root

[47] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 19.

within a certain plane of intelligibility(within a major language) and, ultimately, remains indifferent to true alterity.[48] But what is this true alterity that cannot be articulated?

In an effort to defend Deleuze and Guattari against Spivak's critique, Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey took a systematic approach to teasing out the basis upon which Spivak makes her claim. Their counterclaim, among other things, is that Spivak makes the charge under a fundamental misreading of Deleuze. Of the several points they pose, it is Spivak's perspective of desire which Robinson and Tormey see as the main obstacle to locating the Deleuzian subject. Their critique is as follows:

> Spivak attempts, in Lacanian fashion, to discern a 'subject of desire' in Deleuze. However Deleuze's view is not only that desire can be differentiated from subjectivity, but also that desire alone does not produce a unified subject. Desire for Deleuze is not an attribute of a desiring subject but is a matter of flows and becomings which traverse the entire social, and indeed material or ecological field. Hence, desire is not something 'possessed' by the sovereign subject but something inter-, sub- and extrasubjective. The subject, where it exists, is a product of certain forms of desire, but only one of the possible outcomes of what is termed 'desiring-production'. It arises from a certain kind of 'molar', 'majoritarian' or 'reactive' construction of desire which produces self-other boundaries and identities. But it arises only from this specific configuration of desire, it is a product (not producer) of desire, and its genesis is in the trapping or capture of desire and not in the kind of affirmative, free-flowing desire Deleuze and Guattari seek. As Deleuze and Guattari explain in their AntiOedipus (which Spivak largely ignores), desiring-machines are always molecular, engaged in their own assembly, and their function and formation are indiscernible from one another (1983: 1–9). On the other hand, molar machines are structurally unified: each appears as a single object or subject, and they have limited and exclusive connections and exclusions. Molar aggregates are products of paranoiac desire, engineered into existence by pitting 'packs' and 'masses' against one another (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 286–7, 279). The molecular is taken as primary, always existing as a vibrant multitude beneath any molar formation. Hence, beneath limiting schemas and couples there are bundles of networks and radiations in all directions; '[a]n entire multiplicity rumbles under the sameness of the Idea' (Deleuze 1994: 51, 274).[49]

[48] Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, "Living in Smooth Space:: Deleuze, Postcolonialism and the Subaltern," in *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*, ed. Simone Bignall and Paul Patton (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 22, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r20xg.5.
[49] Ibid, 22-33.

Through this clarification, the subject of Deleuze and Guattari is shown not as a "subject of desire" in the sense of an originary lack wherein desire is produced or possessed by a singular subject. Instead, subjectivity is only one product of certain forms of desire, since desire is something that flows, something that is inter-, sub-, and extra-subjective and, therefore, is not necessarily linked to a particular subject. In other words, there are at least two subjects of desire, if one sees one subject as a force of subjection and subjectivation, and the other as a force of deterritorialization.[50] What Spivak misreads of Deleuze and Guattari, according to Robinson and Tormey, is that subjectivity derives from a unified subject, which for Deleuze and Guattari does not exist since desire does not have a singular origin. To put it plainly, Spivak argues that in attempting to represent an oppressed group, as to give them voice, Deleuze and Guattari is essentially silencing them by conflating entire swats of people and effectively silencing many for the sake of a few, hence, the subaltern cannot speak. This is an intriguing proposition, yet, what is the alternative? Does one do away with representation? What does this extended analysis of subjectivity and desire mean for the designation of major and minor? If the majoritarian, molar subject exists, which itself is the result of a desiring-production, then, it is the minor's molecular function that is responsible for this existence by way of its own assemblages, networks, and processes of becoming. In this regard, Robinson and Tormey reaffirmed in their reading of Deleuze and Guattari that:

> These(forces) could also be termed a majoritarian subject and a minoritarian becoming. Here majority and minority are not matters of relative quantity; rather, majority refers to 'the determination of a state or standard'. It necessarily 'implies a state of domination'. 'Majority implies a constant . . . serving as a standard measure' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 291, 105). A minoritarian force is an expression of singularity and intensity, and hence is a qualitative phenomenon, pitted against the denumerable, quantitative regime of majorities (and quantitative minorities). A minority is defined not by smallness but by its expression of the process of becoming (rather than the fixity of being), and by the gap of its situation from the majority axiom or benchmark (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 469). By

[50] Ibid, 23.

> the nondenumerable, qualitative process of becoming, it threatens to destroy the very concept of majority.[51]

Once again, it is in this becoming minoritarian as process rather than fixity that provides the most traction in the production of the subject. However, because the minor works within its own forms of assemblages, the supposed relation between major and minor is not one that necessarily precludes the type of relationality within or between the minor(s), nor does it concretize a fixed opposition to the majority. From this vantage point, one quickly sees how Lionnet and Shih can simultaneously critique the major/minor binary while upholding a "minor" transnationalism, since this dynamic, too, must submit to, or at least acknowledge that regardless of networks of migratory movements and capital flows, the desire of subjugations and deterritorialization still holds.

What I want to make clear, and where my claim differs from Spivak's conception of the major and minor here, is that when I call something Vietnamese Francophone and posit it as minor, I am not destroying or erasing its enunciative properties or capabilities. There is no subject here to begin with, other than a collection of narratives that are attempting to grasp onto a world that constantly escapes them. They are separate but related. Different and the same. The only silencing that takes place is when one is afraid to recognize it as a corpus among all others.

Returning to the minor, what makes the minoritarian dynamic is precisely its capacity for original production, which is to say; production for production's sake. It is for this reason Robinson and Tormey posits that the concern of Deleuze and Guattari is not whether the Subaltern speaks authentically—that is, in an original and unadulterated voice, but whether and how this voice is being constructed, and if the voice is "speaking" in a manner disruptive of the processes of domination.[52] Again, an educated Vietnamese person in Vietnam, or one living overseas writing

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[51] Ibid, 23-24.

[52] Ibid, 24.

in French does not pretend to offer some unadulterated, authentic experience of postcolonial Vietnam, rather they only offer a singular narrative that might resonate with other postcolonial narratives. When thought about in this way, one can move beyond the impasse that the figure of the subaltern must ultimately bring about, since authenticity of the voice is already disavowed as the primary condition of validity.

The bottom line, then, seems to be a recourse to the accusation of an essentialist practice in which the other becomes the product of concrete elements, or of specified categorization.[53] Yet, even if this is true, which is not the case, did Spivak herself not insist elsewhere that at times a certain strategic essentialism is required in order to achieve political ends?[54]Are those ends representative of the singularity of what essentialism can achieve? Put another way, are essential categories only necessary when they have definable objectives? How would one know when one occasion requires essentialism and not at another? In their observation of minor discourse, Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd have affirmed that "The theoretical project of 'minority' discourse, involves drawing out solidarities in the form of similarities between modes of repression and struggle that minorities experience separately but experience precisely as minorities.''[55] In other words, regardless of their differences there still needs to be a line of commonality among the "oppressed." And that representation ought to demonstrate the limitations of language, rather than being the limit itself.

Making the analogy to another field, this is also the strategy deployed by thinkers of the Global South, wherein the specificity in the location of the South is not what is at stake, but rather

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[53] Ibid, 25.

[54] See Mridula Nath Chakraboty's elaboration on Spivak's 1987 interview with Angela Ingram where she explains the necessity and inescapability of strategic essentialism in "Everybody's Afraid of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Reading Interviews with the Public Intellectual and Postcolonial Critic," *Signs* 35, no. 3 (2010): 621-645, https://doi.org/10.1086/649575.

[55]Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9, http://www.gbv.de/dms/hbz/toc/ht003914180.PDF.

the potential to consolidate various positionalities of the world's marginalized peoples into a minoritarian position.[56] Is the act of constituting this subject of the Global South an act of silencing those peoples, in the sense that it assumes a figure of the unified, southern oppressed, as well? In other words, does it suggest some essential "southerness?" Certainly, that is not the case. Nor is it the case that by inciting a Global South one is explicitly reifying the Global North as something that is also singular. No. The point of such incitements is to show that despite the world's uneven development, solidarity is possible among those who find themselves in disadvantaged positions caused by a shared history of colonialism and global capital.[57] Here the strategic essentialism that divides the world into a North and South has a purpose—to produce a common horizon for those living in the underbelly of the global division of labor, and to give a platform from which contestation could be carried out. At the same time, studies of the Global South have continually reminded us that Global is not an implicit erasure of the local.[58] Solidarity, therefore, requires if only for an instant, the possibility for articulating the South as both subject and object. And it is within this common space that, arguably, any form of active politics can take place. To claim something like the global South as a subject is not an erasure of other possibilities, rather only an emphasis on a similar if not shared economic condition brought about by the global division of labor. What is at stake in designating the global South as a parallel minor to the global North, then,

[56] See. Sinah Theres Kloß's "The Global South as Subversive Practice: Challenges and Potentials of a Heuristic Concept," *The Global South* 11, no. 2 (2017): 1–17.

[57] While definitions differ, I don't find it controversial to say that, in general, qualifications for what one thinks as the Global South rely heavily on analyses if not conventions of economic and social development, which also correlates with histories of colonialism.

[58] In *An Everyday Geography of the Global South*, Johnathan Rigg defines the Global South by saying, "Some scholars prefer to add 'Global' to make it clear that this is not a strict geographical categorization of the world but one based on economic inequalities which happens to have some cartographic continuity. In addition it emphasises that both North and South are, together, drawn into global processes." In this way, by designating a Global South, one is inciting more of the idea of connectivity than one of separation. Rigg also demonstrates that by looking at the everyday in the global, we can arrive at a different view of these places and peoples. Jonathan Rigg, *An Everyday Geography of the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3-5.

is the possibility of recognizing where the site of contestation and change may lie. Whether it is minor literature or literature of the Global South, unless one can point to it as something in the process of becoming, something that requires an alternative way of thinking in order to grasp it, it will continue to be unfavorably read under the prevailing conventions, if not dismissed entirely. Once again, this is not only a concern about literature, but of the politics for any minoritarian grouping given that the claim to the minor is a claim to an ethical position.

Furthering this line of thought, the minoritarian figure does not stand outside of the state machine as that which is impossible to represent, but as a figure whose representation is itself the site of contestation and deterritorialization. This is especially important within a political framework where the majoritarian will is often carried out in the name of the people or the community as though it were the very expression of popular sovereignty. However, just like the popular sovereignty within the social contract, this speaking for the people is never truly and fully representative of the collective will, and as such, produces the very subjunctivizing, if not oppressive conditions, out of which minoritarian subjects are born.[59] The false givenness of the people, or its seemingly natural constitution, like that of the age-old figure of a Western, male reader, is never posed as a question until one approaches the minoritarian figure as the figure of resistance and escape.[60] As with minor literature, here, thinking the minor in the realm of politics is not as much an outlining of a particular group of people as it is a practice and political condition

[59] David Rosenfeld, "Rousseau's Unaimous Contract and the Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty," *History of Political Thought* 8, no. 1 (1987): 83.

[60] Though Deleuze and Guattari are rarely explicit in terms of articulating concrete identities such as race and gender, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write the following on what one form of the majoritarian figure looks: "Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First because man is major-itarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. It is not a question of knowing whether there are more mosquitoes or flies than men, but of knowing how "man" constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority." See. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291.

in which inclusion is predicated upon the relationality one has with the notion of the nation and the people—it is about questioning a presumed subject of both law and civility. Major literatures don't disrupt the canon, they are, unquestionably, what constitutes the canon; a corpus that regularizes and prescribes norms. Becoming minor, thus, is a matter of ethics as it does not take the reversal of the political status quo as an end—to make the minor the major, but rather as an inconclusive question of the possibility of what and who the people are, and where they are going. It is a signal of a politics to come.

Thinking the figure of blackness in the United States is not a question of substituting whiteness or to silence black individuals via a collective subject, but to excavate and expose the reaches of power and oppression that whiteness seeks to conceal. Quite similarly, in reading as woman or thinking through woman as a minoritarian subject, the desired outcome is not a world where patriarchy is replaced by a feminine counterpart, but to reveal the rhetorical and ideological imprints that have historically informed our conception of women as objects. In thinking of the postcolonial literature in light of the colonial past, then, the point is not about reproducing colonial tropes only to reverse them, though I am sure some do, but to work with the materials at hand, even if it means playing with a colonial language, literary forms, or aesthetics, in order to find ways to move beyond them. Yet I would contend, as it is now clear, that the underlying objective of all these examples is not to claim an otherness for alterity's sake, instead it is to shift the notion of what it means to exist alongside the other and as an act of producing community moving forward.

The Temporality of the Minor Postcolonial Literature

In order to properly address what minor temporality would look like, we must first establish what the current understanding of postcolonial temporality is, or rather, how it has been conceived.

To be clear about what is meant by postcolonial temporality and the purpose for inciting it, I will borrow Keya Ganguly's very precise clarification which states:

> …there is no special postcolonial theory of time, nor any reason to assume that postcolonial studies has contributed uniquely to our understanding of time by virtue of its foci, range of experience, or methodological insights. Hence, to conceive of time as an objective constituent of postcolonial forms of consciousness is not to suggest that we can say something about time in ways that were previously unthought or unthinkable.[61]

With this in mind, to speak of postcolonial temporality is less a claim to an alternative truth about time than it is an approach to thinking about how the mark of colonial history bears itself within the present. Indeed, if it has not been evident till now, the goal of my inquiry was never a philosophical treatise on time itself, rather it is about reading postcolonial literature in a way that challenges the temporal framing implicit to literary and institutional conventions. In her analysis of temporality within postcolonial discourses, which covered all the major thinkers from Kant to Hegel to Marx to Benjamin, Ganguly asserts that, "Temporality has been explored rather more fruitfully in postcolonial studies by approaches that regard the postcolonial not as an epoch or age but as a particular mode of historical emergence."[62] For Ganguly, one arrives at this understanding of the postcolonial by having conceived its alterity as the other's time, whose logic and historical expression are incommensurable with the normative temporality of clock and calendar associated with Western modernity."[63] Indeed, broader discussion of postcolonial temporality has generally concluded, in a similar fashion to Ganguly, that there is something else to be said—something that has not been accounted for in how one currently conceives this historical emergence. However, as Neil Lazarus warns us, conceptualizations of this "gap" in difference also have the potential of

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[61] Keya Ganguly, "Temporality and Postcolonial Critique," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 163, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521826942.009.
[62] Ibid, 62.
[63] Ibid.

falling into fetishization under the rubric of incommensurability.[64] As such, to produce any definitive claim to what this temporality might look like, whether one upholds the time of the other as something different or the same, one opens the way to many pitfalls such as an overdetermined historicism or of relativism.[65]

The predicament that invariably presents itself on this journey of trying to understand postcolonial time is trying to understand the temporal contradictions that result from modernity itself. As a form of discourse that borrows much of its intellectual materials from the European tradition of temporal self-reflection, postcolonial studies has largely, on the one hand, focused its energy into what seems like a recuperation of another time that colonial modernity have supposedly wiped out—while on the other hand, it seems to seek an escape from this linear time.[66] This is, of course, supported by postcolonial thinkers from the Marxist tradition who see this "other" time as the encounter with material reality, which may fall under a type of romantization of pre-capitalist societies. In other words, it is a fixation with the very processes by which material reality is understood and taken as the mode of understanding for the history of modernity, or simply put, the desire to reduce the history of mankind to class antagonism and consciousness. But what are some of these thinkers really trying to recuperate and bring back? Is it simply the *a priori* knowledge that life could have been conceived differently which propels us to take up the task of mulling over this history? Is this knowledge itself not the cruel joke of history where the possibility of total knowledge lies just beyond the edge of an impossibility? If there is something to be said about postcolonial temporality, which does not try to determine it as something outside of the

[64] Lazarus, "Introducing Postcolonial Studies," 10.
[65] In one of the examples, Ganguly look toward's Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*, where Fabian argues that in privileging the other's temporality as a valorization of difference, or the denial of the co-evalness of the other, the anthropologist is unable to reckon with sameness in the other and, therefore, fails to see them as being part of the same history. Ibid, 170.
[66] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 246.

possibility of experience, it is that such a temporality must wrestle with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the history of modernity—that is; mankind's capacity to see itself as a subject to its own history, and yet incapable of freeing itself from the teleological, or even spiritualist notion of progress as salvation. To put another way, if one is to interject a notion of temporality within postcolonial discourse without meandering in a messianic trajectory, it would be that of a radical present which finds its strength in an endless fight against modernity's still pervasive conception of linear time as the progression of history.

Unsurprisingly, the arrival of postmodernity did not resolve this issue of time as much as it provided ever more specters of the crisis of modernity, wherein linearity in history is but one among many.[67] But different competing narratives of time and history are not necessarily more liberatory than the grand metanarratives of centuries past. To believe so, would mean to fall right back into that very notion of "more is better" rhetoric, which has been the tenet of capitalist society. While it is true that the proliferation of different histories have aided in the quest to vanquish a singular metanarrative of history as progress, it must also be said that these expanded accounts are simply part of our historical condition, but in itself does not signify a movement towards the totality of knowledge.[68] In short, volume is not equitable to quality and those who read postcolonial literature quickly come to the realization that, like the figure of the other, the encounters with the

[67] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London ; New York: Verso, 1995), 4.

[68] In his now well-known work, *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard has famously put forward the claim that the postmodern condition in one in which there is incredulity towards metanarratives. In his own word, Lyotard writes: "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences : but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds; most notably , the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great –dangers its great voyages; its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements - narrative , but also denotative, prescriptive , descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable." See. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

text, as an opening to a history, is indeed singular and irreducible, but also never conclusive. I am not saying that further explorations into the postcolonial condition in which we live are not necessary, only that more should not be confused with better, insofar as better could be positively measured by some horizons we have set for ourselves as the point of arrival. To think of postcoloniality as the present, therefore, is to acknowledge our place within a history, not as narrators from without, but as actors whose histories are yet to be determined and whose past still looms large.

As with postmodernity, the inherent social and philosophical contradictions that European colonialism introduced into the world are not simply resolved within the time of the postcolonial. Instead, it is within postcoloniality, perhaps for the first time, that such contradictions are brought more to light and recognizable as constitutive elements of the on-going postcolonial condition. As Walter Benjamin once wrote, history itself "is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous empty time, but time filled full by now-time (Jetztzeit)"—a now in which we still live and where the postcolonial condition is currently unfolding.[69] From this view, postcolonial temporality is a temporality whose concerns are not so different to that of postmodernity in that it is an opening to a history, but not History itself since we have not reached the end. What complicates this history is that it seeks, at every turn, to subordinate other histories in an effort to privilege a totalizing notion of history as a *fait accompli*—as if to say "another chapter closed." Postcolonial literature challenges this totality (of the canon) by positing the question of finitude, not of man, but of the material accompaniments with which man conceives as the end of one era

[69] Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 395.

and the start of another.[70] What happens, then, when the colonial language is taken to be that material in which we understand time? Do colonial languages expire as soon as independence is achieved? Is the nativist and ethnocentric turn of postcolonial nationalism the cut-off point for colonial history and its aftermath? Certainly, this is not the case.

In their work, which tries to access postcolonial time, Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola write:

> Postcolonial time is that in which colonial experience appears, simultaneously, to be consigned to the past and, precisely due to the modalities with which its "overcoming" comes about, to be installed at the centre of contemporary social experience – with the entire burden of domination, but also the capacity for insubordination, that distinguishes this experience.[71]

In this view, what is present is the simultaneity with which the colonial past seems to collide with its presence in the present. Yet, what makes it differential as present is precisely this unnamed capacity for "insubordination," or as I understand it; to work against the order of things. This is not an attempt at eliding the question of temporality, or a slight of hand in the game of history where *Neuzeit* and *Jetztzeit* become one, since such formulations would undo the historical specificity of the present.[72] If one takes the thesis that postcolonial temporality is the ever specious present and the historical conditions in which we live, then what's at stake cannot simply be an opening to more now moments, but rather, the shape and form this nowness takes. The present, as

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[70] John Marx, "Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83–84, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521826942.005.

[71] Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola, "The Postcolonial Condition: A Few Notes on the Quality of Historical Time in the Global Present," *Postcolonial Text* 2, no. 1 (December 31, 2005), https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/393, 1.

[72] In Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time*, he traces out the genealogy of the concept modernity by accounting for the four stages by which this term is deployed and understood. In this account, the latest conception of *Neuzeit*, as a descriptive term for the sense of newness of the time, as radically different temporality than what came before it, was the result of European enlightenment's grappling with the irreversibility of Christian time as moving towards doomsday and its related notions of eternity, which shed went against the expectations of doom. See, Osborne, *The Politics of Time*. 10-11.

constituted markers of a by-gone now, is ever looming, and as such, rests within reach insofar as it is both accessible and yet to come. In other words, what one should anticipate is not the future anterior to ensure that one's desires are met, or what was previously desired will have come to pass, but a future present in which one's will, like one's conception of history, is still in the works. Likewise, the present corpuses of postcolonial literature, from whatever nation it may be, should not be seen as the end of coloniality, and that new works are mere reverberations of a concrete past, but as articulations of desires that may not have yet to be registered within the politics of our present.

It is in this last point where I find the minoritarian figure to be most useful, whether it is an actual figure, or as an approach and supplement to understanding postcolonial temporality. Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration on the third feature of a minor literature, which deems everything to be of collective value, they emphasize it as a literature that produces an "active solidarity in spite of skepticism," and that "if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community," then, "this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility."[73] What this suggests is that there seems to be no requirement for temporal reflexivity between a literary work and the society that it is supposedly meant to reflect—that is to say; the act of writing (as if it should come to any surprise), does not have to be limited to inscribing a reality *tel quel*, nor does that limit include merely being a faithful witness to the historical events which unfolds before it. Rather it is an act of creating something new, something that has yet to be actualized. Put differently, it is an emphasis of creation rather than discovery, if discovery is understood as approaching and uncovering something that already

[73] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, Ibid, 17.

exists, and which forecloses newness. Deleuze and Guattari furthers this notion in relation to the minor by claiming that the literary machine then becomes "a relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come," not for ideological reasons, but that it is "determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation."[74] Under such conditions, the literary machine of postcolonial literature, by the very act of its production, is meant to propel towards something other—not as an inscription of a past now to be archived, or as a captured image of a society in stasis, but also as a probable thesis of what and how society and community could be.

In this view, when postcolonial literature's temporality is taken as minor temporality, then, most if not all previous critical categories, whether in relation to aesthetics or genre, no longer apply. Nor can they be seen as either anachronistic or disjunctive, but only as an expression of its own self-understanding present that continually unfolds. The implications of this are far-reaching, since the accusations towards many postcolonial writers have been executed under the charge of a certain temporal delay or of nostalgic longing, which subordinate their politics to another time. It is a charge that has undoubtedly forced many writers to be read as only addressing "historical" concerns—that is; outdated politics or events—rather than an ever relevant address to the reader's present. Linda Lê, for example, is not a hopeless nostalgic who is writing anachronistically, but a writer of her time. To read postcolonial literature as a minor literature, therefore, reorients the temporal framework through which this literature has been read, and recognizes it as being both a product of its time, as well as a cultural product whose relevancy exceeds its time of production. After all, there is no conceivable form of alterity that does not at first react to its given condition. If difference is the act of being different for itself, what constitutes any temporal disjuncture is the recognition that such temporality(like that of the major) never truly existed in synchronous time.

[74] Ibid, 18.

The minor, to be minor, must exist in a double time, one reactionary, because it must exist in relation to something, and another entirely incalculable time, as it must push ever onward. Like Homi Bhabha's double time of the nation, it must boast both its archaic constitution and its grasp of modernity to affirm the narrative of its existence.[75] Thus the temporality of postcolonial literature is fractured in that it must respond to its historical conditions, but also be left open since, like the postmodernity, the postcoloniality is our current condition. When taken as overlapping orientations, thinking the postcolonial as the minor reveals how the question of temporality is neither passé nor irrelevant, instead it shows how the emphasis on the question of temporality is, in a way, the very core of the postcolonial condition and the manner in which postcolonial literature is read in the present.

[75] Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990). 294.

Chapter 2

Deferred Time: On the Limits of Postcolonial Trauma in Anna Moï's *Riz Noir*[76]

In history books and the collective memories surrounding the Vietnam War, few events carry a ring as much as the Tet Offensive (Sự kiện Tết Mậu Thân). Tet, the traditional Vietnamese (Lunar) New Year, was and is the most important holiday in Vietnam. Because of its significance, this holiday often marked a period of informal truce between the divided North and South, so that regardless of which side of the 17th parallel one found themselves, Tet meant temporary peace. However, on the morning of January 30 of 1968, the Communist North broke with tradition and launched a thirteen-city offensive throughout south Central Vietnam. By the end of twenty-four hours, this offensive amounted to 120 different attacks. According to most accounts, this unexpected "battle" was a strategic victory. Firstly, it proved that such a large-scale attack could be carried out successfully, and secondly, the audacious attack on the US embassy in Saigon shifted morale and thus marked the turning point of the war in favor of the North. In both modern-day Vietnam and the US, the events of the Tet offensive live on in legend. In the US, countless history books have been dedicated to these events and its aftermath. In socialist Vietnam, it is seen as a point of pride in nationalist historiography.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in terms of literature, particularly Vietnamese American literature, the Tet offensive often serves as the crucial *point de départ* of immigrant stories and as a contested site of trauma. For Vietnamese Francophone literature, the case is no different. Consider this passage from the end of Anna Moï's *Riz noir*, a tragic novel about two teenage sisters

[76] The title is translated as *Black Rice*.

imprisoned in Poulo Condor[77] after the Tet offensive of 1968. One of the sisters, Tan, concludes the novel by saying:

> Aujourd'hui, il me reste à récupérer mon âme errante. Si vous la rencontrez, dites-lui que mon corps est intact, presque intact. Quelques plaies suppurent encore, mais j'ai le temps. Quand j'aurai quitté cet endroit, je n'oublierai pas le parfum vacillant des fruits mûrs des anacardiers à la limite de la pourriture. Des miasmes de ma chair sont restés ici, des traces de mes ongles, des gouttes de mon sang menstruel. Et pourtant, en dépit de tout cela, je suis déjà nostalgique de cet endroit de sable blanc et de murs noirs, où une partie de mon adolescence a été séquestrée.[78]
>
> Today, I have to recover my wandering soul. If you meet her, tell her that my body is intact, almost intact. A few wounds are still festering, but I have time. When I leave this place, I will not forget the flickering scent of the ripe fruits of the cashew trees on the verge of rot. Miasma of my flesh remained here, traces of my fingernails, drops of my menstrual blood. And yet, despite all this, I am already nostalgic for this place of white sand and black walls, where part of my adolescence was sequestered.

This account of her departure, which has yet to come to pass, brings along with it a sense of futuristic nostalgia—one that anticipates liberation but is not quick to forget the trauma experienced by its victim in the form of bodily wounds left on her skin. While Tan, like her sister Tao, may have survived the physical horrors of torture and imprisonment, they could not do so without a violent disassociation between body and mind—a seemingly necessary reflex that allowed the body to withstand and bear witness to what the mind could not: the robbing (séquestrée) of her childhood. There is no doubt, however, that Tan's wounds were also profoundly psychological, to the extent that the possibility of recovery, both in the sense of healing and of recuperation of a history, are put into question, which she alludes to in the previous page, "Je ne sais pas ce que mes pieds foulèrent demain […] Je ne sais pas si c'est important. Je ne sais plus ce qui est important. Il faudra du temps pour comprendre de nouveau le monde des vivants et des héros. Je ne sais quoi faire de mes rêves" "(I don't know what my feet will tread on tomorrow […]

[77] Poulo Condor or Côn Đảo in Vietnamese, is an island off the coast of Southern Vietnam where the French colonial government built the Poulo Condor prison to house political prisoners.
[78] Anna Moï, *Riz Noir*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 177.

I don't know if it matters. I don't know what's important anymore. It will take time to re-understand the world of the living and the heroes. I don't know what to do with my dreams)."[79] Here, Tan's uncertainly about the past, future, and of what is important speaks to the experience of a trauma as that which cannot be rendered intelligible for the survivor in their immediate consciousness. Time, therefore, becomes the necessary element in order for these events to make sense.

In the larger scope of Vietnamese writing, novels such as *Riz Noir* are abundant insofar as trauma remains a large part of the narrator's experience. This is unsurprising since the modern Vietnamese literary tradition is marked by the transition from empire to colony to independent state, a transition that took over a century and involved several bloody wars costing millions of lives. Yet unlike many of the novels from the 1990s and early 2000s written in English about the war, *Riz Noir*'s author, Anna Moï, deliberately chose to write this novel in 2004 entirely in French, a language which bore painful and often traumatic memories for those who still remember the former colony.

Indeed, just as Tan's account bore witness to the everlasting wound of the Vietnam war, Moï's decision to write exclusively in French was, in some ways, also a deliberate reopening of an older wound that still persists within the Vietnamese psyche.[80] Here, literary trauma is not only bound up solely within textual interpretation, but also within the act of literary production itself. Rather than bypassing the open wound of colonialism, Moï's text displaces it, adds another layer,

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[79] Ibid, 176.

[80] Though Moï herself does not focus explicitly on trauma, her awareness of the writing language as a questioning of identity and cultural memory is not negligible. In an interview at the Centre National du Livre she explains, "J'ai grandi pendant une guerre en parlant deux langues. Le vietnamien, ma langue maternelle, est aussi celle dans laquelle la mort m'a été décrire dans toutes ses variantes; le français appartenait à un pays lointain, rêvé, libre et qui n'existait pour moi qu'à travers la littérature et la poésie. J'ai choisi d'écrire dans ma dexième langue maternelle, celle du monde imaginaire qui, même confronté plus tard avec sa réalité parfois violente, garde intimement les traces, dans mon esprit, du paradis. Thanh-Vân Ton-That, "Anna Moï's *Riz Noir*: A Feminine View of War, Between Two Cultures," *Anamnesia: Private and Public Memory in Modern French Culture* ed. Peter Collier (Peter Lang, 2009), 221-222.

and recontextualizes it within a different era where the intersection between textuality, language, and temporality produces a different understanding of historicity and trauma. In doing so, the text exceeds and questions what is traditionally understood as the temporality of postcolonial writing, since the end of French occupation in Vietnam was immediately followed by the arrival of the US military. The questions that ensue, therefore, are: where exactly is the limit of trauma both in historical time and among individuals? Who has access to that trauma? What is the essential difference between collective or individual trauma? And can one neatly compartmentalize trauma in a way that delineates the authenticity of once experience from another, within a postcolonial context like Vietnam? Moï's novel is a prime textual example of this line of questioning — not only by recasting these questions within the textual body but also by offering a postcolonial narrative of trauma that cannot easily be characterized as either purely postcolonial or purely traumatic fiction. In other words, Moï's historic fiction challenges the boundaries of time and makes readers reconsider what exactly a postcolonial narrative entails, and when it is the right time to tell them.

The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to engage with Moï's novel, which stands at the nexus between both trauma writing and post-colonial historical fiction, and to see the difficulty that such textual displacements, especially in the face of trauma, bring to the understanding of postcolonial temporality. A temporality, which, as I've mentioned, is neither conclusive as a method of engagement, nor readily self-evident as a fixed mode of reading. What's more, however, is that while the emphasis and application of theories of trauma may help explicate literary texts such as *Riz Noir,* there are still ways in which the text resists conventional readings of trauma. My goal, thus, is twofold: firstly, to give an account of where postcolonial studies' resistance to trauma theory lies, which can be boiled down to a perspective of trauma based on historically specific

European phenomena, a lack of positive historicism, and the privileging of event-based trauma, which only recognizes trauma within concrete historical events. Secondly, my goal is to demonstrate why engaging with a notion of trauma as something that is on-going, such as the racialization of individuals, within a hierarchical society, might yield a better ethics of listening within postcolonial temporality.

Moï and Her Context

Anna Moï (Trần Thiên Nga) was born in Saigon in 1955 to an educator and journalist. After graduating from the Lycée Marie Curie de Saigon, she moved to France to study history at the Université de Nanterre. Though she was initially interested in journalism, she would later gravitate towards the world of fashion, and became a fashion designer with boutiques in Paris, Bangkok, Tokyo, and Saigon. After returning to Saigon in 1992, Moï began her literary career as an editor for *Passions Vietnam* and as a contributing writer to the Saigon-based magazine *l'Echo des Rizières*. The writings from the latter would later be compiled and published as a book in 2001. As a polyglot who speaks six languages, and as non-native speaker of French who writes mostly in French, Moï's relationship to language might be best described as critical. This is especially evident in her insights into the politics of the Francophone literary space, such as in *Espéranto, désespéranto. La francophonie sans les Français*, where she explores the implicit exclusions typically involved in what is considered francophone. In this regard, she has often been associated and compared with Linda Lê, who, like Moï, refuses the simple identifications that are placed on non-French writers purely on the basis of the mother tongue.[81] Language, therefore, and French in particular, is not a marginal aspect of Moï's literary work, but rather assumes the central role as

[81] Ching Selao, "To be or not to be… francophone / Espéranto, désespéranto. La francophonie sans les Français, d'Anna Moï. Gallimard, 67 p.," *Spirale* 213 (2007): 40–41.

the medium of possibility. It sets the tone, so to speak, of both reader and writer in a way that establishes narrative legibility and questions who is allowed to say what.

To date, Moï has published eleven books in different genres; however, *Riz Noir* was her first novel and the one most associated with trauma amongst her writings. Yet, to call this novel a trauma novel is also tricky as it does more than re-present trauma of the war. After all, the novel is a work of historical fiction that recounts the story of two French-educated sisters, Tan and Tao, with whom Moï was close friends, but it is not a full biographical novel about the two sisters. Though not fully a testimonial work, the novel leans heavy on personal introspection and reflects deeply on the act of storytelling in the face of war trauma. Spanning four chapters, the narrative moves between the rise of the two sisters' family history to the major events in the Republic of South Vietnam during the 1960s, while including larger-than-life historical figures.

Starting with the imprisonment of the two sisters, Moï's novel moves both backwards and forward, fleeing in and out of their personal trajectories to that of the southern republic. Like the young girls' questionable fate in prison, here, South Vietnam is also represented as a hostage state, wherein the fate of the country is continually affected by outside actors. From bombings to protests and long descriptions of cultural practices specific to the region, the country is represented as a combination of melancholic beauty and abject destruction, where things could change at any moment. Because of this, history does not seem fixed, but rather as something exterior to linear time. The retelling of the Vietnam war is interlaced with moments that continually refer back to the French colony. Here, colonialism lives on as the backdrop. France's ghostly presence is felt by its lasting cultural intuitions. For example, in a passage where Moï, speaking as Tan, reflects on the bombing of the Independence Palace (Dinh Độc Lập), formerly the *palais Norodom*:

> …le prestige met au second plan la violence des événements passés. Les derniers vestiges du pouvoir colonial, symbolisés par les ornements néo-classiques de l'ancien palais

> Norodom, ont disparu. Mais le français est toujours enseigné au lycée Marie-Curie, fréquenté par les deux petites filles d'une ancienne marchande de *hu tieu*.[82]
>
> …prestige overshadows the violence of past events. The last vestiges of colonial power, symbolized by the neo-classical ornaments of the old Norodom Palace, have disappeared. But French is still taught at the Marie-Curie high school, attended by the two granddaughters of a former *hu tieu* merchant.[83]

Indeed, history in this context is not something of the past but a living thing that seeps into the everyday lives of people who inhabit it, who shape it. The colony and its traces are both banal and significant. The destruction of a neoclassical façade on the palace walls is counterbalanced by the very continual existence of the Lycée where French is still taught. France's absent presence is not understated. By the same token, the history of colonial trauma preceding the war also seems to move alongside the main narrative. Whose trauma? From when and where, towards what? At which point can one separate the pain of one war from another more seemingly present pain? In which case, could we then call this novel a postcolonial novel? And if so, to which "post" are we referring? In a context like Vietnam, where the sedimentation of different conflicts form the basis of the literature, novels like *Riz Noir* offer a glimpse into the different layers of storytelling at play. In doing so, Moï's shows how the demand of linear historiography, like positivistic demand of event-based trauma, misrecognizes the unique temporality that this type of postcolonial work provides. To make my case, in the next section, I will offer a brief sketch of the complicated relationship between trauma studies and postcoloniality.

The Postcolonial Resistance to Trauma Theory

As an area of inquiry whose aims are premised on questions of ethics, and whose foundations are the built upon the nexus of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, trauma studies rose to prominence in the early 1990s. Trauma studies' road to popularity was not without bumps,

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[82] Moï, *Riz Noir*, 69.; Named after the King of Cambodia, Norodom Prohmbarirak (1834-1904), the palace was finished in 1873 and served as the residence of the Governor of Cochinchina (*Gouverneur de la Cochinchine*).
[83] Hu Tieu or *Hủ tiếu* is a breakfast noodle dish that is usually associated with street food.

however, as earlier versions of the then emergent field found itself under much attack for a "textualist" paradigm that seemed to stand indifferent to real-world injustices.[84] Recognizing these critiques, and the field underwent major shifts by the mid 1980s, with scholars making for a discernable effort to be more inclusive of with more inclusion of advocacy criticism such as Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, etc...[85] However, even with these changes in orientation and with more self-critical reassessment, many still felt that trauma studies fell short when it came to handling postcolonial literature. For some, trauma studies' European textual base made it difficult for trauma studies' promise to provide a "link between cultures" to be actualized, and instead has made it "a narrowly Western canon […] which privileges the suffering of white Europeans, and neglects the specificity of non-Western and minority cultural traumas.[86] In my view, this is the critique has held sway for much of the past few decades especially amongst scholars such as: Jill Bennett, Roseanne Kennedy, Gert Beulens, Stef Craps, Michael Rothberg, and Roger Luckhurst.[87] In his clarifying book *Postcolonial Witnessing*: *Trauma Out of Bounds,* Stef Craps has boiled down the critique against trauma theory from the postcolonial standpoint to four main points:

> they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favor or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas.[88]

I will do my best to address some of these points, as well as elaborate on others, however, even at a glance, anyone familiar with trauma studies from the past several decades can attest that these charges are neither new nor surprising. This is especially relevant on the point of trauma's Euro-

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[84] Stef Craps and Gert Beulens, "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels," *Studies in the Novel* 40, no. 1/2 (2008): 1.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Sonya Andermahr. "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism"—Introduction. Humanities 2015, 4, 1.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

American framing and epistemic base, which I will explore in depth later. However, for now, the criticism directed towards trauma theory, particularly those strands developed in the Yale school, which found their roots in deconstruction and poststructuralism, all suffer from the same charge of having an emphasis on textuality. In response, major proponents of trauma, including some of the big names that made trauma more accessible in recent memory such as Dominik LaCapra, Shoshana Felman, Geoffry Hartman, Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth, have generally defended trauma theory's specific attunement to representation as a form of ethical listening. For example, in Caruth's foundational text, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, she responds to this concern for historicity by insisting the story of trauma is one in which models of straightforward referentiality fall short.[89] Indeed, if the encounter of trauma is one of repetitive bewilderment, or one in which narrativization and signification does not hinge on the subject's consciousness, then it is necessary to develop a working model for treating/understanding those difficult experiences where consciousness of 'what really happened' is sometimes impossible and possibly at odds with rigorous understanding. And it is for this reason that Caruth argued for rethinking reference, not to reject historicity, but rather to permit "history to arise where immediate understanding may not."[90] This is perhaps where trauma theory's ethical commitment to the other seems to shine the most — by permitting history to arise in a way that challenges conventional narrativity, and by rethinking the possibility of history in a manner that highlights our ethical and political relation to it.[91] The result of this opening does not lead to a morally bounded criticism, however, as Geoffrey Hartman points out, "because this newest perspective does not attempt a

[89] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 12.

definitive judgment or evaluation of the individual work."[92] Rather, it is a shift in focus that operates at the level of theory and exegesis where "the focus is on disclosing an unconscious or not-knowing knowledge—a potentially literary way of knowing."[93]

In considering the history of colonialism, which was indeed a violent and traumatizing affair whose lasting psychic impact is still unfolding, trauma theory, which founds itself on dealing with the aftermath of violence, might appear naturally positioned to support postcolonial theory, insofar as the latter must reconcile between the psychic and the material. Yet postcolonial theory's other demands for historical specificity and local context in order to locate instances of violence or designate traumatic events, and an overall desire to produce a cohesive genealogy, also pose a problem to trauma theory's Freudian base, which situates trauma within the abstract and the unsayable.[94]

For postcolonial scholars, the problematic in encountering trauma is thus presented by a dual desire to liberate history from the colonizer's grasp by producing an alternate account of the colonial project from below (through alternative forms of historization and epistemology), while at the same time, to see history not only as the constituted, grand events which reduce colonized bodies to mere casualties or a collective of faceless objects of knowledge.[95] In trying to attend to the latter issue, trauma theory has, until now, been less concerned with achieving the final say on the exactitude of originary trauma itself, than with an ethical listening to the individuals for whom trauma is the real. As I see it, therefore, the issue for many postcolonial scholars is that while trauma theory useful for this latter task of listening, it does not fare well in the effort to produce

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[92] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3, (1995): 544.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 273.
[95] Leela Gandhi, "Postcolonialism and the New Humanities," in *Postcolonial Theory*, A Critical Introduction (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 44.

positive history, which is part of postcolonial studies' demand for addressing imperialist, revisionist history. In other words, by balancing out these simultaneous desires, those who follow the works of theorists like Caruth and Felman are more drawn to how one treats and attends to the individual, rather than producing a verifiable history.

Though I do not see this as a primary issue for reading literary texts, it does present a challenge for those within postcolonial studies who must rely on indigenous historiography to validate counter-European, epistemological claims. Because of this, I feel that it is important to stress that in reading literary trauma, the point is not to reclaim a history—to pull truths out of the unconscious—but to see these texts as an opening to another history. This is crucial, as Andrea Bachner points out, since the same tension between the psychic and the real within trauma studies, is also re-inscribed within the postcolonial division between the material and the psychic. [96] In a sense, both are attempts of understanding histories that leave a mark and histories that do not, given that the postcolonial world, like trauma, is marked by a doubling of presence and absence.[97] The question, then, is: How does one negotiate a rewriting of colonial history in the postcolonial era, which acknowledges a historical/material reality while at the same time does not forgo the testimonial of the colonized individual?

It is also worth noting that the demand for historical veracity itself when it comes to trauma (at least in part), is the product of sanctioned systems of legality and state control, which presume a precision and a transparency to language that is at best questionable. By now, the general humanities perspective on language, and literary language especially, is one that does not work on a one-to-one relation with the real, or differently put, there is no cause to assume a divine and

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[96] Andrea Bachner, *The Mark of Theory: Inscriptive Figures, Poststructuralist Prehistories*, First edition. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 64.
[97] Ibid.

concrete linkage between signifier and signified simply because there is an external demand for it. In taking this discrepancy seriously, one quickly recognizes how the desire for accounts of postcolonial trauma to register or attest to the originary puncture already presumes subjective integrity of body and mind. It is a view that takes the colonized body and mind as merely surfaces to be inscribed, and the presence of the body as though it were a clear presence of a prior traumatic impact—a sort of inscription without a mark.[98] Yet the contradiction of this demand is quickly made clear as soon as one remembers that the affective side of the colonial enterprise is the disintegration of the colonized subject, or as Fanon plainly stated in the *Wretched of the Earth*, "the colonial world is a compartmentalized world."[99] It is a compartmentalization that values order, efficiency, and a direct, if not perfect, correlation between language and subjectivity, even if language itself also functions as a regulative apparatus that divides colonial subjectivity. But it is in recognizing the very impossibility of pure, objective representation that one can begin to listen to the history of colonial/postcolonial trauma. Indeed, this is why I do not see the encounter and application of trauma theory in the domain of postcolonial studies as antithetical to one another, since it is this impossibility of establishing a direct relation between language and 'the truth,' or language and a 'real' representation of history, that supports trauma theory's emphasis on interpretation, without which a rigorous understanding of traumatic narratives is elusive. In other words, trauma theory leaves space open for other accounts of trauma to be told by not insisting on the demands of official history.

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[98] Here I am drawing on Andrea Bachner's reading of Derrida's "Shibboleth" where he writes on circumcision as a way of thinking the circular structure of trauma. Here Bachner explains that for Derrida, as much as it was for Freud, corporality is always already a scene of reading and writing beyond the literal, and as such, trauma's inscription (here via circumcision) must wrestle with both the particular and the universal. The proper body, in other words, is the site of a shared human condition in which some bodies are visibly marked and other not, and it is through the non-marked bodies that trauma's dual presence and absence is substantiated. If this logic of trauma is to be applicable in the postcolonial case, then one might say that all colonized bodies are, in a certain sense, already marked by the impact of trauma even if they are not marked. Ibid, 102-103.

[99] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 3.

In the case of Fanon, Let's consider, for example, the case of the ailing North African in another one of Fanon's texts, "The North African Syndrome."[100] Here, Fanon describes a patient who is obviously suffering from a malady, but who can name with certainty neither the condition nor origins of what ails him. On this, Fanon writes, "except in urgent cases—an intestinal occlusion, wounds accidents—the North African arrives enveloped in vagueness. He has an ache in his belly, in his back, he has an ache everywhere."[101] The patient's conveyance of a pain everywhere is not enough, however, in the eyes of the medical examiner since symptoms without a proper identifiable lesion or cause presumably cannot lead to treatment given that "medical thinking proceeds from the symptom to the lesion."[102] So what is to be done in the moment when language, which is meant to approximate the pain, fails to represent that which is present but out of sight? Further, how does this affect the way one sees the patient? For Fanon, the failure of the patient to offer exactitude for his condition is both a condition of language's own limits, as well as that of the colonizer's gaze, which always takes imprecision of the diagnosis as the inexistence of the wound. It is for this reason that Fanon goes on to say that within colonial logic, "a thing is said to be vague when it is lacking in consistency, in objective reality. The North African's pain, for which we can find no lesional basis, is judged to have no consistency, no reality."[103] And thus it is the visibility of the wound or, at the very least, verbal precision which takes primacy in the colonial logic of presence and of the real—any other form of address, therefore, presents an impediment towards a physiological resolution. In these instances, the value of trauma theory—its insistence on the limits of language and knowing—becomes indispensable as a position from which one ought to think of the inarticulable trauma of the colonial enterprise.

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[100] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1969).
[101] Ibib, 4.
[102] Ibid, 8.
[103] Ibib, 6.

Even then, for Stef Craps, this promise of disentangle trauma from a concrete history is counteracted by the fact that for many postcolonial scholars, current theories of trauma still "adhere to the traditional event-based model of trauma, according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event."[104] In other words, despite its appeal against representation, trauma theory still seems to demand an epic originary event, even if the details of said events are vague, such as the Holocaust. One need not ponder too much why this is an issue for postcolonial literature; the trauma of colonialism does not always take the shape of an event. How, for example, would one represent trauma, or write about trauma that cannot be described as a singular experience, such as the case with structural racism? This is important in regards to representation and accuracy, because according to Craps, "Unlike structural trauma, racism is historically specific; yet, unlike historical trauma, it is not related to a particular event, with a before and an after. Understanding racism as a historical trauma, which can be worked through, would be to obscure the fact that it continues to cause damage in the present."[105] Indeed, how was the North African ever supposed to locate the event that is the dehumanizing process of colonialism from within? Where is the temporal cutoff for structural racism and historical trauma?

As far as contemporary trauma theory is concerned, much like those other physicians in the colonies, the lack of a lesional base also signaled an absence of the event through which the originary trauma could have been constituted. Though grossly simplified, might we not say this colonial, medical gaze also lives on in the sort of literary criticism that demands historical exactitude, veracity, materiality, visibility of trauma, and so forth within the postcolonial novel? In other words, must a literary work address the cause of colonial pain, or the site of infraction in the most direct manner in order for it to be registered as traumatizing or as an account of trauma

[104] Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing, 31.*
[105] Ibid, 32.

in a testimonial sense? Further, is postcolonial theory's aversion to reading literary trauma reflective of its simultaneous and paradoxical desire to appeal to the real while at the same time tittering on the immaterial impact of trauma? The question still stands; how does one make a case for trauma in postcolonial literature when the impact is neither always visible nor necessarily legible in its absence/presence? Looking at it another way, what would constitute colonial trauma if no specificity can be recalled? Is it particular instances, a constant scarring, or the general condition of the colonial experience itself? To answer these questions, as well as an earlier one about how one might reconcile testimony with historical accuracy, my suspicion is that in order for a successful postcolonial reading of trauma to take place, one's general disposition when reading postcolonial traumatic texts must be other than an arrival at any true history. In other words, whatever material or concrete elements presented in the text, must be understood as necessarily constitutive of the process of arriving at the "truth," rather than the truth itself,

Indeed, going back to the opening example of *Riz Noir*, where Tan recounts her experiences of being in prison, we might ask whether the horrific acts recounted mattered in their singularity, or as a sum of experience which constitutes the experience of trauma? That is, was it the individual memories of torture or the experience in its entirety that must be rendered intelligible? This question, however, would also demand that the traumatic impact itself be locatable, and would require the upholding of a colonial politics of visibility as reality. The issue at hand with such a perspective is that it misses the point Caruth is making when she says, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on."[106] When trauma is understood in this way, stories like Moï's do not and

[106] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 4.

cannot state the site of traumatic impact, even when they name them, but always that which escapes verbalization. Trauma for Tan, in other words, is not just the description of torture in its detailed articulations, rather it is the promise of what has yet to reveal itself to consciousness. And it is for this reason that Tan herself repeatedly expresses her doubt towards the end of the novel by the repetition of "je ne sais pas… je ne sais plus…je ne sais pas" "(I don't know… I don't know anymore… I don't know)."[107] For how could she know what the totality of all the trauma entails or will entail? While it is true that they may recount some of the events during her imprisonment, even if at times inaccurately or with inconsistencies, there is no way of predicting what psychic symptoms may arise after the moment of her retelling.

Coming full circle, one sees that as much for Caruth's reading of Freud as it is for Fanon's reading of his North African patient, or even Moï's depiction of Tan, the truth of trauma lies neither in linguistic precision nor identifiable/knowable wounds, but instead it is belated and signaled out by what is unknowable in language.[108] If one takes this abreactive model of trauma as the model of postcolonial literature, that is, to work out the trauma by narrativization, then it is only through the mediation of language and of the act of reading that one can listen and attend to the suffering of other. The textual body, in other words, through its figurations, acts as the literal body, and it is through this entanglement of art into life and vice versa, that the literary proves itself indispensable as another encounter with trauma. In sum, therefore, an approach to trauma that respects its inability to be represented as a linear, collective narrative is necessary to grasp its complexities and necessarily deferred temporality; yet at the same time, that does not mean one cannot put the so-called ethical listening of trauma theory in a broader historical context, as responding to very particular demands.

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[107] Moï, *Riz Noir*, 176.
[108] Ibid.

On Reception and the Critique of Trauma

In further exploring the complicated relationship between listening and reading as an alternative approach to history, it is worthwhile to mention how the process of listening to witness testimonials—or reception as it is commonly referred to—is still a contentious issue. In Thomas Trezise's book *Witnessing Witnessing*, where he addresses issues surrounding reception in Holocaust testimonies, Trezise highlights a key distinction between listening to a witness silencing them, by way of personal framing. In chapter one, Trezise addresses this problematic by taking a critical look of two at Dori Laub's essays, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" and "An Event Without a Witness: Truth Testimony and Survival."[109] For Trezise, the aim of focusing on the reception of testimony, or the witnessing of witnessing, is that it reveals the processes by which testimony, previously taken as a mere recounting of historical events, is instead an active construction within the present of its retelling. Honing in on Laub's account in "Bearing Witness," where Laub describes a video interview with a survivor from Auschwitz, and then later to a conference where he is confronted with skeptical historians, Trezise carefully separates the two modes of concerns that impact the witness' reception. For the sake of efficiency, my priority is not to reproduce that exchange here in all its details, but to comment on the differing motives at the center of the debate. However, in short, the main nexus of contentions has to do with certain historical inaccuracies of some of the witness testimonies, such as the number of chimneys destroyed and other details concerning a rebellion at the camp where Polish resistance forces failed to assist the inmates.[110] Because of these inaccuracies, Trezise explains how it is possible for

[109] Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony*, First edition. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).
[110] Ibid, 12, 20.

historians to be skeptical about the witness' testimony, all the while, for Laub to also be dismissive of historians for putting too much attention on less significant details.

According to Trezise, Laub's position on the matter is one that centers the witness as witness, which is to give value and primacy to the retelling of the individual and to take those memories as "historical truth," rather than some objectivity that is to be discovered and against which such memories could be verified. This is because, and in Laub's own words, "the trauma—as a known event, and not simply as an overwhelming shock, has not been truly witnessed yet," and as such, the listener who tends to the trauma, and who may also pose questions or counter points, shares an active role in the "creation of this knowledge *de novo*."[111] In other words, part of the process of reception, as it is suggested here, is that reception of a testimony is inseparable from the construction of the trauma narrative. On the other end, in order to not dismiss the skeptical historians about which Laub writes, Trezise also points out how Laub's language also raises suspicion about "Laub's own questionable assumptions about history as a discipline."[112]

For me, what's significant about Trezise's engagement with this debate is not that it is in any way salacious, but that it points to the same fundamental issue that plagues postcolonial theory's own contentious relationship to history via literary trauma. Indeed, just as a postcolonial novel is not the same as a "historical" document, one also cannot reject the novel's appeal as a testimony to a different kind of history. In other words, for postcolonial literature, just as it is for trauma theory, the dividing tension between the True story, and the narrativized retelling of trauma are not commensurable. However, the point was never to make one take primacy over the other. Moreover, as Trezise points out, part of the concerns raised by Laub's historian critics is that details

[111] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57.
[112] Trezise, Witnessing Witnessing, 13.

of the True story is what shields these witness testimonies from Holocaust deniers, a fear that is equally felt by those in postcolonial studies who must confront revisionist historians in their field.

For Trezise, who no doubt sympathizes with trauma victims in general, and who also wants to give fair assessments to historians, objectivity has a utility that exceeds its purported singular role of dismissing inaccurate testimony; undeniably, given that the listening and telling of trauma produces a community, "holding the witness accountable to certain objective standards in order to fulfill the responsibility of listening for others might well be considered a way of welcoming a witness herself into the community of these listeners."[113] Thus, the takeaway is that while it is true that the person witnessing a witness may co-produce the narrative of trauma, it must also be said, and what amounts to the same, that such a process also requires an inquiry into the objectives of the questions posed, and the larger objectives of the act of listening. Because of this, what I want to stress is not simply that there are different demands for objectivity depending on disciplinary preoccupations and therefore certain genres are more scrutinized than others, rather, that the history of trauma, given its diffuse and often times unrepresentable nature, such as with the example of the Shoah, demands a myriad of approaches and genres so that effective "listening" is freed from any preconditions. But how are we to think of this listening within the context of the postcolonial?

To address this question, whether it is Moï's narrative on Tan and her sister, or Fanon's diagnosis of the North African, any proper attempt to see or read "history" from literary trauma will depend critically on what "listening" entails and with it, a proper understanding of the community of listeners that are involved. This is one of the major concerns of postcolonial theory and practice—not only who speaks, but also who is doing the listening. As such, if one of the

[113] Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 25.

major fears of postcolonial scholarship is the potential for trauma to introduce unverifiable elements into the history of regional and global colonialism, which would thus give ground to neocolonial and revisionist history where everything is "valid," it cannot simply resolve the issue by foregoing the individual subject by dismissing the role of personal testimony for whatever truth function such histories might serve. To put this in a cruder manner, the simultaneous desire for postcolonial studies to uphold some politics of objectivity while trying to be inclusive to subjective experience of colonialism and its aftermath, via literature, film, art, etc…runs the risk of doing the same with trauma (as a practice of listening) with what it fears official history does to alterity: silencing. Simply stated, then, for me, flirting with objectivity as a counterpoint to revisionist history, without also accounting for the unknown, unknowable, unrepresentable of personal history, and how such histories implicate the self and the other, runs the risk once more of speaking *for* the other—or worse, it sets an implicit precondition of objectivity as the barrier to speaking. If otherness is to be heard when it speaks, one should hope that the act of listening is itself unconditional.

Indeed, I recognize that there is a need for a critical restructuring of how postcolonial literature's relationship with trauma is perceived on a broader scale. Yet, what also should not be forgotten is that the articulation of historical trauma in these novels does not always purport to relay a reality, in a traditional sense, or to bring full justice to an unperceived event; rather, by locating a personal narrative within the wider web of colonial relations, these narratives pose a challenge to history's demand for the constitution of grand events as the prerequisite of narrative coherency. As with Moï's text, for example, Tan's narrative should not be taken as a literal witnessing witnessing, but instead a co-elaboration of events that make the inseparability between the development of a nation and an individual.

By the same token, and we can see why this perspective might cause resistance, in that it reveals more about the plot function of narratives—by giving trauma form—than it says anything substantive about those who suffer. Additionally, even if one of the other fears associated with this acceptance of alternative histories of suffering is that it dilutes the real, or that it permits the anesthetization of postcolonial suffering, my question is whether some representation of trauma is not inherently better than an abandonment of representation altogether, since the first option serves, if for nothing else, a therapeutic purpose? What type of ethics must someone have in order to definitively say that the suffering of others is historically unfounded and dubious? Of course, one obvious answer is that there is an economy of suffering where what is most tangible also appears more treatable, or at least more approachable, and therefore efforts should go in that direction. But even this assumes that a certain ethical commitment, which I'd prefer to think of as faith, still lies with the witness/victim and not the resurfacing of an appeal for the colonial logic of visibility, or the denial of the humanity of the other. However, the mere existence of holocaust deniers, or even literary conferences where certain individuals have the audacity and lack of self-consciousness to insist that colonization has had some "positive" results for the colonized, makes me wary that the politics of visibility and objectivity will yield their intended purposes.

Doubt and Methodology

Aside from and postcolonial and trauma theory's mixed attachment to material reality, the other unavoidable problem that critics from the postcolonial camp linger on is the question of methodology—specifically on the reliance of event based trauma. In Irene Visser's work where she outlines some of the problematics in "postcolonializing" trauma theory, she points out that earlier notions of trauma were dependent on studies of PTSD, which provided the contemporary

basic framework for understanding symptoms of trauma.[114] In the early 1990s, for example, trauma theory was still using the American Psychiatric Association's formulation of PTSD, which at the time only included those who were directly affected by a specific traumatic event.[115] While the DSM has since changed the definition of PTSD to include secondary victims, witnesses, bystanders, etc., the fact remains that the official formulation was still a product of activists working on behalf of veterans of the Vietnam War, and as such, assumes the western model of PTSD as the default.[116]

One need not dive into details of some of these studies to see why this model might be perceived as inadequate; for while the suffering from trauma might be accepted as something that exceeds particularistic qualifications, the same is not true for culturally inflected modes of address, nor nonstandard templates for understanding symptoms of trauma, such as the type of racialized trauma that has been pointed out by Fanon. Put differently, it cannot be taken for granted that the manner by which one registers and defines trauma is seamlessly applicable across cultural contexts where the recognition of what constitutes trauma is not the same. This is especially true if one considers that the relationship an individual or collective has with culture(s) is not always voluntary, or that cultural practices and norms relating to somatic effects are more than colored robes where psychic effects are not simply difference of the same. In other words, to decolonize trauma as Visser and Steps have suggested, a culturally inflected definition must take place.

At the same time, Visser has noted that "for the critical praxis of literary studies, PTSD is a problematic concept" mainly because "in its present definition, and due to its multidisciplinary

[114] Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 273.
[115] Ibid, 272.
[116] Ibid.

history of origin, it is characterized by a lack of coherence and specificity."[117] Thus it seems that internal to the development of trauma, the push and pull between contextual specificity and generality also introduces analytical challenges, or as Visser says, "For literary-theoretical purposes, then, PTSD offers a potentially controversial, divergent spectrum of symptoms, together constituting an array of characteristics that would appear to be too diversified for a consistent understanding and interpretation of trauma in literature."[118] Yet this has not really discouraged those who are drawn to trauma's ethical appeal and who continue to apply it to their readings of literature.

Once more, the issue that resurfaces is not of the intent or ethics of listening, which are all fine and well, but the very framework by with the act, qualified as listening, that is of major significance for critics of trauma theory. How can one attend to a victim, or witness a witness, if this secondary or tertiary person witnessing assumes a universal ground for suffering? Would this not obscure non-traditional methods of retelling? The answer, which I presume to be the most reasonable in this circumstance is, of course, to allow the narrative to speak, by letting those who write postcolonial trauma narratives define their own understanding with trauma, without relegating some higher universal parameters. Alternatively, however, one might also ask whether there any other possible stances in regards to trauma as theory, and cultural, literary theory as a whole? Clearly, for both actual victims and literary representation of trauma, context is of importance, but is it not true that the point of witnessing is also to help give rise to other narratives and histories by introducing a different perspective?

To address this, I will return to one of Trezise's other chapters where the question of figuration, understood through literary representation, will provide some insights into some other

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

internal conflicts and paradoxes within trauma studies itself. Basing his critique on the purported distinction between what Freud suggested about the nature of trauma in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Beyond the Pleasure principle* with Caruth's own conclusions from reading Freud in *Unclaimed Experience* and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Trezise's main point of contention concerns Caruth's insistence on the literality of trauma, which is a divergence from what he understands as Freud's initial claim.[119] For Trezise, Freud's understanding of the "dream-work" is that it has the "wish-fulfillment" function, which representationally organizes the energy of stimuli so that a person will not be interrupted in sleep.[120] This "dream-work" is important because it is a dynamic mediation of the conflict between the id and the preconscious ego, whereby disturbing impulses of the id can only "manifest in the forms distorted by displacement and condensation."[121] Consequently, this means that by their nature, experiences of the dreams are implicitly figurative, or rather, regardless of the content, the dreams will have been mediated and, therefore, should be taken in their figurative representation. In the case of dreams symptomatic of traumatic neurosis (now called PTSD), however, trauma seems to halt representation by reintroducing the patient back into the accident or traumatic incident, and that is what interests Freud.[122]

Having read the same source materials, Caruth seems to take this return to the incident as a literal one, for which she is heavily criticized by Trezise. Here, Caruth writes:

> The returning traumatic dream startles Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits. Indeed, modern analysts as well have remarked on the surprising literality and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks, which resist cure to the extent that they remain, precisely, literal. It is this literality and its insistent return which thus constitutes trauma and points toward its enigmatic core: the

[119] Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 44.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, 43.
[122] Ibid.

> delay or incompletion in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event.[123]

It is this "absolutely true to the event" which brings the most unease to Trezise, since such purported literality in the experience of trauma seems to run counter to the experience of narrating witnessing, or witnessing witnessing, which is mediated and cannot be devoid of representation. Commenting on Lanzmann's traumatic reenactment in the film *Shoah*, Trezise writes:

> What lies before or beyond representation thus turns out to be doubly representational. The "literal" return of the event is figured twice over. And we can fairly ask, returning to Caruth, why the fiction of a nonrepresentational replication of trauma that is absolutely true to the event should retain its privilege when the theory provides no reasoned justification for it.[124]

The quandary thus can be boiled down to the question as to how is it precisely that Caruth can claim the traumatic event cannot be fully known, and at the same time, known as absolutely true in its reenactment or experiencing? Additionally, because the experience must be told at least in part on the account of external interlocutors, representation will always be suspect of distortion or betrayal, which also then demands that there exist some originary "right story."[125] In other words, for Trezise, the contraction mentioned does not simply constitute the gap of knowledge prompted by the experience of trauma, but that instead of a profound lack of explicative capacity on behalf of the theory put forth by Caruth.

The big issue with Trezise's take of Caruth's work, which I believe to be fundamentally flawed and irrelevant in considering artistic representation—such as the postcolonial novel—is that this double representation, is what amounts to the literary in literature. In other words, unlike a historical document, whereby the True is once and again the privileged goal, the point of writing something like a novel is inherently to push against that stubbornness of literality. Put differently, as the object of inquiry, when the narrativization of trauma is taken as access to the event (distorted

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[123] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1995), 5.
[124] Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 61.
[125] Ibib, 61.

as it may be), it will necessarily depend on exterior input from interlocutors, and what matters is in that instant is not whether a retelling is accurate in a historically verifiable sense, but how it is constructed in the moment of narration and its different potential iterations. Thus, the framing of trauma, similar to literature, cannot be detached from the history in which that trauma takes place, however, neither can that trauma be reduced to mere historical framing, which would give false meaning to experiences that are otherwise meaningless outside the context of recall.[126]

Indeed, and without any desire to reproduce an aesthetic of trauma, it is difficult to not affirm something productive at play, as heinous as that might appear; that nature of traumatic suffering is not immediately self-evident, but something that must be worked through, re-narrativized over time with no guarantee of recovery. It is for this reason, that even for those whose works on trauma contradict Caruth's aporetic model, such as Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, still find narrativization a powerful and therapeutic tool.[127] This is why, in my view, it is so important to support on the type of "unspeakability" upon which Caruth insists, and which Trezise questions, because unspeakability here does not mean silence, but rather, paradoxically, an impulse to continually speak out about that which does not readily lend itself to language and representation. If trauma confounds and resists representation, it is because the medium of language itself never feels as though it does justice either to the individual or to the individual's experience of the event; to presume otherwise, is to assume that among other things, the possibility of a transcendental signification in language, or that the experience of trauma itself were codified in some external registry against which language must confirm or deny.

If the belatedness of trauma produces "a temporality that has nothing to do with what the phenomenology of consciousness" as Jean-François Lyotard suggests, then what type of coherent

[126] Norman Saadi Nikro, "Situating Postcolonial Trauma Studies" 9, no. 2 (2014): 2.
[127] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* ([New York]: BasicBooks, 1992).

narrative technique would prove adequate to producing an event for which one is not fully present?[128] Moreover, and to bring about what I understand as the logical result of such argumentation, is that if "unspeakability" were not a given (as a 1=1 correlation), then what other need would there be for multiple stories, or retelling of certain stories with minor differences, and so forth? In other words, if a trauma victim could hypothetically know and speak frankly about their experiences with lucidity and accuracy, then there would not be much else to say about them, which would effectively produce a silencing effect insofar as it will hold such stories to be true, or mostly true and disregard further retellings.

Indeed, what incentives would there be to listen to more non-traditional accounts of trauma if the expected premise is already one in which all that could potentially be said is said? How does this gesture differ from that repulsive desire to appeal to logical historicism and its narrative confines? Solely for the sake of not repeating history? What a terribly dry and inspired literature this would make. Conversely, my own conviction, and different from Trezise's reading of the impossibility of representation, is that it is has nothing to do with veracity of silencing at all, instead it provides the necessary gap of knowledge and skepticism that requires, if not demands, continual listening in whatever qualified form such listening may take.

If it is not yet clear, the contradictions I have just described within trauma theory in relation to memory and the originary event also share their place in the heart of postcolonial theory's view of representation. This is to say that all postcolonial representation, regardless of the context, must reconcile with the different forms of "witnessing" to events for which they are both present and absent. On the one hand, like trauma, they must make an appeal to some historical curiosity by providing context and rationale, while on the other, they must also attempt the impossible for

[128] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the Jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 15-16.

attesting to that which is not yet known to them, or was known to them at the moment of experience, precisely because of the immediacy of the experience.[129]However, like everything else about the colonial experience, it is only in the displacement and belatedness between the colonial and postcolonial that certain actions can be read in terms of cause and effect. Therefore, it is only in this belated ponderance over past events that give rise to "meaning," as an explanatory effect.

If we are to ask, for example, "how would a novel like *Riz Noir* do justice to the victims it describes and narrates?" then we have already gone astray in terms of presuming some codified ethics for listening to postcolonial literature—as though listening automatically and implicitly denotes utility or pragmatic resolve. This would be a very conditional view of listening, and one that finds a better home in a war tribunal or courtroom than in literature. Instead, a better question would be to ask what this narrative offers, in its working through the traumatic experience, about the limit of what could be known and why it is necessary to continually think of the postcolonial condition as a testament to such limits? If this view appears to be a skeptical and pessimistic one, it is because it shares the same conviction with trauma theory that listening opens the way to healing yet does not guarantee it. Is this not the spirit of working within the postcolonial sphere where praxis is always met with skeptical optimism?

It is this tough but popular and pragmatic stance of trauma theory, which I believe to be the other reservation from postcolonial scholars, since much of postcolonial theory prides itself upon the notion of redemptive or restorative praxis. To import a aporetic model of trauma that seems to paralyze or pathologize individuals without verifiable results runs counter to those previously mentioned goals.[130] In other words, my other presumption is that a major deterrent for postcolonial thinkers when it comes to accepting trauma theory is the fear that it reinforces some

[129] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 6.
[130] Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," 274.

of lack of resolve within their own field—this is to say, if the truth of the postcolonial condition is that it is yet to be fully understood in its lasting psychological effects, as it is still currently refers back to the originary abuse of colonization, what use is there for importing theories that affirm a frighteningly similar paralyzing politics of recovery? On the surface, it would seem that this does no more than make everyone a helpless victim of colonialism, which is not at all the case universally. However, maybe the harsh reality that must be confronted for those working in postcolonial theory, regardless of their position towards trauma, is that what we presume to know is never the whole story—lest we, too, are quick to determine like the French physicians in Algeria, that what cannot be determined in exactitude is the same as fanciful delusions.

This isn't to say that nothing fruitful or explicit could be known, since colonial archives and modern society still do provide, at least in theory, the material traces by which we might apprehend the colonial project via its logic, economics, and distribution/application of biopower. Be that as it may, however, to extrapolate from whatever determinacies these material traces may provide to say something about individuals; is to privilege the structural elements of colonialism rather than the personal or interpersonal. In other words, we are no longer dealing with literature. Obviously, a robust critique of any body of literature would ideally blur the strict lines between the aforementioned categories, but the question then still remains, that if the rejection of trauma theory in postcolonial literary criticism is that it lets us know too little, then we ought to ask ourselves whether it was ever just to impose the same truth function on the literary in the first place? Further, given the way that certain models trauma insists on the implication of others, whether through the transference of trauma to interlocuters or by way it producing a community of survivor, it poses a transhistorical view of suffering that seem contrary to colonialism's desire

for historical specificity. Indeed, it is not that postcolonial studies and trauma cannot cohabitate, but that, as Visser points out:

> …this transgenerational, psychohistorical, timeless model of trauma can […] only be sustained if a discursive relation is enabled with the historical particularity that is intrinsic to postcolonialism's cultural and political research agenda. Equally necessary for a postcolonial trauma theory would be a rethinking of the concept of transmissibility, which has been central in trauma studies since the 1990s.[131]

This second point is of importance, since formal colonies have been maintained until recent memory, and thus the emphasis has been on first-hand accounts rather than of transmission—as though those who were born in the "post" can no longer feel the lasting impact of the colony. However, if we take the other view, which sees the postcolonial condition as the indefinite aftermath of the colonial, where the effects may not surface immediately and where the impact may takes place across generations, then transmissibility is also a question of temporality. This is to say, in order to think of the postcolonial condition as a living phenomenon where trauma invariably plays a part, one must consider temporality, either in representation or otherwise, as the defining feature, rather than just another element.

What About Temporality?

By now, I hope to have outlined some of the major concerns regarding the importation of trauma into postcolonial readings, or in "postcolonializing" trauma theory, particularly on the premise of cultural difference and historicism. What's left to accomplished, however, is to map out the difficulty in which this postcolonializing of trauma does for reading temporality of postcolonial novels. Here, postcolonial temporality should not be understood in any radically novel way that cannot be thought of otherwise—but that is not the point. What's important is that postcolonial notions of time, however incomplete, are premised on an obsessively disjunctive or ambivalent temporality, a result of having to wrestle with the dark side of modernity's claim to

[131] Ibid, 275.

progress.[132] From its inception, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity has proven to be one of the most formidable obstacles postcolonial scholars face in attempting to theorize a more accurate account of real world situations where such borders are less than fictitious. Beyond the teleology of development, however, one also cannot forget the other important legacy of modernity which fall under the same enlightenment logic of progress; the exportation nationalism as the culmination of a historically specific phenomena. Indeed, theories of postcolonial subjectivity cannot seem to do away with a temporally inflected notion of nationalism, as it is also tasked with writing against the historicist tendency of seeing a nation as an "empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural identity."[133] If colonial independence means something positive for a people seeking self-governance and self-determination, then whatever positive notion it instilled is not extricable from ideas of progress as conditioned by capitalist modernity. Even the promise autonomy by way of colonial emancipation is itself limited because it has generally taken the homogenous national form. This is why in writing about the narration of modern nations, Homi Bhabha insists:

> If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities – migrant or metropolitan – then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic. And such cultural movements disperse the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society. The secular language of interpretation needs to go beyond the horizontal critical gaze if we are to give 'the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity' its appropriate narrative authority. We need another time of writing that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic 'modern' experience of the Western nation.[134]

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[132] Nissim Mannathukkaren, "Postcolonialism and Modernity: A Critical Realist Critique," *Journal of Critical Realism* 9, no. 3 (October 29, 2010): 306.
[133] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 201.
[134] Ibid, 202-203.

Western nation or not, "lived historical memory and subjectivity" prove difficult for postcolonial writers and theorists because there is very little stable ground upon which one can stand to narrate, not only because no such totalizing unity exists, but because the very act of writing the nation produces its inherent temporal contradictions.

Taking another look at *Riz Noir*, this narrativizing contradiction can best be understood by the way the novel moves between the capture and suffering of the two sisters, Tan and Tao, and that of the development of the Vietnam war. Here, the retelling of Madame Nhu's obsession with the silk make by the sisters' mother, should be seen as a visual analogy for the development a southern Vietnamese feminine aesthetic, which has for a long time stood as the symbol of the former nation.[135] Surely, for Moï's novel, the South Vietnamese nation, like the two girls, are both in their adolescent stage, and it is precisely for the fact of being in good favor with this regime that the two sisters would eventually be captured. This is perhaps, why, the novel reads as a disjunctive collection of memories that do not seem to be resolved, for how might one produce linear narrative of nation building without omitting the very possibility that such narrations are always incomplete? Indeed, as Ernest Gellner points out, it is through the back and forth between the material conditions that allows for self-realization and narrating said self-identity, which reveals nationalism as a will towards self-actualization—ever unfolding in time—rather than a pre-existing nation that produces the drive for community.[136]

Indeed, it is this question of narrating a national temporality which leads Bhabha to ask, "How do we plot the narrative of the nation that must mediate between the teleology of progress tipping over into the 'timeless' discourse of irrationality? How do we understand that 'homogeneity' of modernity – the people – which, if pushed too far, may assume something

[135] Moï, *Riz Noir*, 55.
[136] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 55-56.

resembling the archaic body of the despotic or totalitarian mass?"[137] Certainly, and as Bhabha himself proposes, in order for "homogeneity" to not devolve into a violent form of national socialism, one ought to start by questioning that very narrative of progress as necessarily leading to some eventual holistic unity of a people or culture.[138] In the case of Riz Noir, the individual experience of the two sisters do not represent the entirety of the nation as much as it represents the process by which the modern Vietnamese nation is formed. Reading trauma in this novel means that one recognizes the inseparability of individual trauma with that of a postcolonial society attempting to narrate itself, often with total disregard to the irrelevant question of positive legitimacy. Once more, like witnessing witnessing, Moï's text aims less at a True past than it does at producing an alternative history through which one might better understand the present. Further, that to account for postcolonial trauma—different than the Eurocentric, event based trauma so vehemently despised in postcolonial studies—the verifiable backdrop of the nation is not expected to exists, but rather is produced by processing the trauma that constitutes that nation's formation.

If the encounter between trauma and postcoloniality does anything different for our notion of temporality, therefore, it is not simply that of complicating our notions of what is speakable or representable, or when precisely is the "proper" occasion to speak, but also whether the content articulated could ever be taken as the product of a complete and synchronous account of all that was and is. For in order to reproduce a coherent account of the colonial experience, whether in literature or testimony, one must necessarily speak from that nebulous other time, where it is at once possible to produce a narrative totality for the present reader or listener, with the knowledge that such totalities are always incomplete.

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[137] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 204.
[138] Ibid.

This is the challenge reading or writing about postcolonial literature, to accept its account as the simultaneous testimony of an incomplete and unknowable history while also cohabiting within said history. Put differently, what I find engaging and worthy of further inquiry about the multiplicitous presentism that trauma theory offers, which corresponds exceedingly well to the postcolonial demand for a non-linear, albeit disjunctive and non-synchronous time, is that it represents the present as the enunciatory space of a certain historical narration—one that is a process and always lacking. This is to say that if the spirit of postcolonial scholarship is to bush back against the pretenses of the enlightenment's claim of all knowledge is possible, whether in regards to history, philosophy, nature, and so forth, then the aporetic model of trauma can be a reminder that postcolonial literature need not reproduce a semblance of totality or telos in order for it to be valued as another opening to another history. In brief, the double time of narration for which Bhabha seeks, I propose, lies at the present intersection between trauma as method of listening to what cannot be "known" in history, and what nonetheless finds itself in need of an address. Indeed, if one conceives of the postcolonial novel through this lens of a traumatic address, then the present is not when the address takes place(or when a work is written), but the moment in which its contents find a community of readers to partake in its history—which is to say, an indefinite and dividual present.

In reference to the previous chapter, and similar to the alignment between the postcolonial as the minoritarian position, the present I am describing here is constituted not by the cutting off the past, but as a contemporaneous temporality where past and present are woven up in an eternally unresolved intimacy. Thus, what's important in considering this emerging present, akin to thinking the subaltern or minoritarian voice within the novel, is not so much if it can speak—I think Spivak was clear on that point—instead; it is a matter of how such a voice might come about, or better

yet, how listening, interlocution, and narrating might help that voice articulate itself, albeit always mediated. But is trauma theory the only vehicle by which such notions of temporality could be thought of within the postcolonial context? In other words, is it not possible to think of postcolonial presentism in its own terms without having to import other models of time beyond itself?

The answer, I would assume, is that there are certainly alternative models, however, what is unique to this juxtaposition is precisely the attunement to a radical otherness/alterity, and how to address the continual history of suffering at the heart of thinking the postcolonial condition. To phrase this another way, what the aporetic model of trauma adds to postcolonial readings of temporality is a notion of care—a type of unconditional listening to the everyday suffering—where history is not relegated to the past, but as the specious present where the past reoccurs within the act of narration, and where that narration also need not come solely nor directly from the colonized individual to be valid. What's more important, however, is that this attunement also has the capacity to extend to practices of reading at an institutional level, whereby what is included in the pedagogical cannon no longer needs to adhere to the *politique du jour* for its relevancy, and further, to question the limits of the canon itself as a promise and guarantee of its historical significance.[139]

Returning to Anna Moï's novel, perhaps some of the most provoking questions are not what type of trauma, whether intergenerational or personal does the novel attempt to represent, but rather, how does such a form of representation elucidate the nature of postcolonial trauma as a continually unfolding process? What relevancy does such a novel, whose content is both culturally and historically specific, have for the contemporary reader, who may not have participated in the

[139] I approach this more in a later chapter, but the idea is that literary institutions tend to value works either on proven critical and aesthetic worth, or the relevancy to new works expound some aspect of zeitgeist. Consequently, those works whose content refer to past events and are perceived of little immediate, political importance, such as those on the experience of colonialism, then get relegated to the realm of historical value, which makes it seem as though that chapter of history is no longer relevant.

same cultural formation at the time in which those formations take place? A facile answer to any of those questions, regardless of their content, must first address the problem of readership—that is, in what context would such a novel be read? As a writer residing in a country that no longer has French as one of its current, major spoken languages, despite the language's historical and cultural significance, can one still say it has a community of listeners as with witness testimony? With these practical issue of listening in mind, thus, there seems to be no "appropriate" time and place in which such a novel could be read. But it is by recognizing this limit of the national framework, also limits the community of listeners—that push francophone Vietnamese writers like Moï to expand outwards and onwards, and to reconsider notions of identity and territory, since neither what is French nor Vietnamese self-evident, totalizing categories in and of themselves.[140] This view of a necessary transnational identity is made clear in an analogy Moï makes about how she and the Vietnamese artist, Marcelino Truong, both come to inhabit their names after having met some twenty years prior with another name, saying, "Entre Marcelino, qui a fini par se réconcilier avec l'exotisme, et moi, qui revendique la « sauvagerie », la connivence se rétablit autour de la duplicité, une fois connaissance prise de nos identités mouvantes."[141]

Indeed, one cannot understate how these notions of non-essentialist identities, which bend, shift, and are ever evolving, engender questions about one's notion of time and place. For Moï, this was most succinctly stated in an interview at the Centre National du Livre where she describes herself and her writing in the following manner:

> Je suis très concernée par la question de l'identité et de la destinée: comment se structure-t-on à partir d'une histoire personnelle avec ses secrets et ses non-dits? Comment gère-t-on sa mémoire martyrisée? Pourquoi les chemins lumineux que nous revendiquons bifurquent-ils parfois vers le malheur, et comment les individus résistent-ils? Mes

[140] Pham Van Quang, "Les écrivains vietnamiens francophones aux frontières incertaines," *Présence Francophone: Revue internationale de langue et de littérature* 79, no. 1 (December 1, 2012): 129.
[141] Anna Moï, "Meurtres sans Préméditation," *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (January 2018): 75.

> questions sont tournées vers le future, loin de la nostalgie, même si les réponses sont continués dans le passé. La destinée de beaucoup de Vietnamiens s'est brisée malgré une volonté acharnée de bonheur: la guerre est venue emporter toutes les ambitions eudémonistes; c'est ce deuil que j'évoque dans *Riz noir*.[142]
>
> I am very concerned by the question of identity and destiny: how is one structured on the basis of a personal story with its secrets and its unspoken? How do you deal with your martyred memory? Why do the Bright Paths we claim sometimes branch off into Misfortune, and how do individuals resist? My questions are future-oriented, far from nostalgia, even if the answers are continued in the past. The destiny of many Vietnamese was shattered despite a relentless desire for happiness: the war came to take away all eudaemonist ambitions; it is this mourning that I evoke in *Black Rice*.

Certainly, Moï, like many other postcolonial writers, cannot help but engage with the question of memory, but at the same time fear what such notions might signify. The clarification of her questions being aimed at the future, while at the same time disassociating herself with the nostalgia of the past places her within the immediacy of the incomplete present and the difficulty of its construction. If we consider, for example, the question "comment se structure-t-on à partir d'une histoire personnelle avec ses secrets et ses non-dits?" then quite immediately, what comes to mind is not the importance things that can be said about the war or of suffering, but rather precisely what is left unsaid which brings the fullness of narration into question.

In other words, the postcolonial present for Moï is itself a question of construction and narration, where revelations of what may or may not have transpired come about, and a present that always seeks for answers within the recesses of the ever fruitful past. This is, perhaps, why in all four parts the novel titled, La capture (the capture), L'enfance (Childhood), L'année du signe (Year of the monkey), and Au bagne(In prison), analogies of past experiences are interspersed throughout, as though to remind us of what this present telling consists and to imbue it with some grounding. In my reading, this was why in the midst of her imprisonment, Tan goes back and tells the story of the prison's construction in 1862, as well as the story of the Frankish king Fredegund

[142] Ton-That, "Anna Moï's Riz Noir," 22-23.

and Brunhilda, as though those very acts from the 6th century led somehow to the building of the prison, then France's colonization of Vietnam, and eventually their own imprisonment as a sort of historical entanglement destined to be.[143] Her sister Tao, upon hearing this story where Fredegund's victorious return to Saint-Saëns resulted in the opera *Frédégonde*, responds "comme nous bientôt," to which Tan sharply replies, "Non, nous sommes filles de Dragons" "(No, we are daughters of Dragons)." [144] What's important about Tan's correction of her sister is not to preserve some sense of national identity or to give causal power to the Vietnamese myth of origins, such that those origins would qualify as "the event," but to remind her how such originary legends do very little for their present as she then says, "Des guerrières, nous le sommes. Mais pour toute carapace, nous n'avons que notre peau" "(Warriors, we are. But for shells, we only have our skin)." [145] Indeed, stripped of its explicative cloak, history in the face of on-going suffering and trauma is only ever a form of comfort in narration.

However, unlike the body's most dynamic but integral organ, the skin, history only seems to surface at the moment in which some notion of explanative dept is necessary, as if history must have left a mark. While a postcolonial reading might read this emphasis on skin as a marker of anthropological difference, or of inhabitation of the self under the weight of colonialist typographies, a traumatic framing might suggest that this bare skin, as the surface that comes into contact with the world, is the literal site whereupon history acts, but also leave no trace. To live with only bare skin, or to recognize that all one has access to is the texture of said bare skin, is to see the present as a site of a lingering absence whose traces continually haunts its victim.

[143] Moï, Riz noir, 109-114.
[144] Ibid, 13.
[145] Ibid.

The promise of trauma theory for the postcolonial context, thus, is one where the encounters with the past and present is not taken as distinct temporalities, but rather as the eternal present condition for which trauma is repeated revealed, in innumerable iterations. For what is the postcolonial condition if not the reckoning of a looming past that does not cease to reveal itself even within the post? If this reads somewhat like a recapitulation of the belatedness of an event to consciousness, or as a transferable concept of a knowledge becoming, this is because its structure is not so different from the literature becoming as promised by minoritarian literature. What's also important, however, is that trauma's other promise, especially the brand offered by Caruth and company, is that it calls for a presentism that is afforded by the production of community—this is to say insofar as colonial trauma can be relayed, retold, re-represented, it will always hold a certain political relevancy.

Such is the case with stories like *Riz Noir*, which, is not the testimony of someone having been in prison, but of the fabrication of Moï on behalf of her friend. On the back cover of the novel where Moï describes the work, she writes:

> …Au-delà de certains faits réels, j'ai tenté de donner à voir et à sentir le Vietnam de mon enfance. Ce roman m'a été en partie inspire par l'histoire authentique de Tan, que j'ai connue ay lycée, et de Tao, deux sœurs de quinze et seize ans arrêtées, tortures puis internées dans le bagne de Poulo Condor… Le livre leur est dédié, ainsi qu'à toutes les femmes vietnamiennes, filles de dragon selon la tradition, fille d'eau et de feu, fragiles et invincible"[146]
>
> …Beyond certain real facts, I tried to show and feel the Vietnam of my childhood. This novel was partly inspired by the authentic story of Tan, whom I knew in high school, and Tao, two fifteen and sixteen year old sisters arrested, tortured and then interned in Poulo Condor's penal colony... The book is dedicated to them, as well as to all Vietnamese women, dragon daughters according to tradition, daughter of water and fire, fragile and invincible.

Once again, in telling this story, Moï herself does not pretend pass herself off as someone who experienced the site, nor does she insist that all of what is told real, in a certain sense. Quite

[146] On the back cover.

differently, Moï places the novel within that double framing between individual and collective historiography, where the novel is at once an address to both the memories of her personal friend, as that of that other colonized minoritarian figure, the figure of the Vietnamese woman. In encountering and narrating this confounding trauma of her friends, Moï thus partakes within the trauma and offers it, in the postcolonial tradition, as a story of suffering which has its basis in reality, but which refuses to comply to a demand for historicity. For what good would such a work do for those who have gone through this painful experience, and who continue to suffer its consequences? In other words, if one is to read Moï's literary work within the framework of postcolonial trauma, the power of the retelling lies in the way it implicates the reader and herself, and to remind us of the lasting suffering of others, rather than to document a period in Vietnamese history. And while it is true that entirety of the colonial enterprise cannot simply be reduced to trauma, it is equally true that one cannot address colonialism and its aftermath without considering the profound traumatic impact of the experience of subjugation. If trauma is the experience of survival, or the experience of having escaped death—postcolonial literature, regardless of its country of origin, must invariably address how survival will always be marked by an absence of logic within the present of narration. Further, what this juxtaposition of trauma and postcoloniality affords, is a temporality in which belatedness is the condition of survival and, therefore, that suffering cannot be discarded or rejected on the premise of inaccurate or non-objective.

In conclusion, the fear of succumbing to the liberal conceit regarding individual suffering and the possessive grammar that follows should be taken seriously, especially when it is translated into to the postcolonial field since what is individual is always assumed as allegorical—individual as nation. What's also important to keep in mind, however, is that such a perspective still retains as Western lens on individual suffering, insofar that the liberal individual is seen as the embodied

death of the spirit of community; whereas in postcolonial literature, the power of testimony and narration lies precisely in the recuperation of the individual voice within a communal context, given that the legacy of colonialism is the reduction of the individual subject to abject other, to merely colonized bodies of history. In other words, the starting point for engaging with collective trauma within the postcolonial context requires a re-examination of the individual subject, who is not wholly comprehensible through the logic of liberal individualism, but whose dividual existence is also not self-explanatory through the optic of systematic control as brought about by colonialism. If the fear in recuperating the dividual subject hinges on the anxiety and anticipation of historical erasure, then the answer lies not in the rejection of trauma's ahistorical ground. There is enough inventory within world's colonial archive to produce more materialist histories by which one could verify, but even those accounts will always be lacking since psychic impact does not always leave a visible wound. This is why postcolonial scholars continue to titter-totter between Marxist and Freudian critiques. Quite opposite, then, if there is to be an ethics of listening to the postcolonial other, it has to conceive of the other's suffering as unconditionally valid, which is to say neither historical exactitude nor verifiability can be privileged as the arbiter of truth and history, but that trauma itself is already an opening to a history. Moreover, there must be an insistence on postcolonial condition itself as a narration of our global present, where regardless of when or how an impact occurs, and despite multiculturalism and world literature having gone out of trend, trauma's belatedness and calls for community reminds us that history is not simply what was, but still is.

Chapter 3

Configuring the Future in Marguerite Duras, Pham Duy Khiêm, and Kim Lefèvre

"…But origins always come to meet us from the future."

--Martin Heidegger

While Vietnamese francophone literature makes up only a small portion of French studies in North American academia, in recent years there seems to have been a surge of interest from scholars as traditional French Studies programs look more towards the Francophone world. Building on Yack Yeager's *A Vietnamese Novel in French*(1987), which was responsible for inaugurating the field in the United States, works like Natalie Chau Nguyen's *Vietnamese Voices: Gender and Cultural Identity in the Vietnamese Francophone Novel* (2003), Karl Ashoka Britto's *Disorientation: France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality* (2004), Ching Selao's *Le roman vietnamien francophone: Orientalisme, occidentalisme et hybridité* (2011), as well a number of articles and dissertations, all stand as testaments to how this sub-field has developed over the years. It is interesting, however, that when Jack Yeager inaugurated this field, it already seemed to have been a thing of the past. In the conclusion he writes:

> In South Viet Nam in the mid-1970s Francophone culture was no longer a collective phenomenon […] the use of French still persisted, however, in certain businesses, though English was much more important commercially […] The present state of affairs is far from clear […] as for the Vietnamese living in Paris, they will eventually be absorbed into the cultural mainstream, diluting the uniqueness of their culture and background. Already there are people of Vietnamese ancestry who, having been born and raised in France, speak French as the primary language, and very little, if any, Vietnamese. This process appears irreversible and seems destined to put an end to Vietnamese Francophone literature. Surely people carrying Vietnamese names will continue to write in French, but they will no longer bring the same cultural background into their texts […] Whatever the status of the language may be or may become, the peak of Vietnamese Francophone literature appears to have passed.[147]

[147] Yeager, Jack Andrew. *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism*. (Hanover, NH: Published for the University of New Hampshire by University Press of New England, 1987), 162.

Far from being optimistic, Yeager's conclusion could be summarized as 1) the era of Vietnamese Francophone has already passed its apogee without a comeback in sight and 2) the culturally specific context that allowed for Vietnamese Francophone to flourish is no longer a reality. At the same time, Vietnamese francophone novels themselves, by nature of genre, are often framed and spoken about in the past tense, making it difficult to imagine them as an ongoing corpus. The question that arises then; is what does one make of a field when the moment of its constitution coincides with the demise of the object of study? By this, I do not mean that the works produced are gone, but rather the colonial conditions in which these works come about are no longer present. What, then, happens to a literary corpus when it ceases to be a living archive? Put differently, what is the future of Vietnamese Francophone, if there are no significant Vietnamese audience to read it, or authors to write it?[148] This question of futurity is what I am after.

Whatever the answer, For Yeager, it's clear that the decline in both the production and readership of this literature in no way reduces its validity or seemingly urgent relevancy.[149] Indeed, as Yeager affirms, "being grounded in a historical moment or a specific culture does not lessen their(the novels') value."[150] However, I would also add that given the literature's culturally and historically specific timeframe, not emphasizing any notion of temporality, and futurity in particular, misses out on the very external forces the shape this body of work. It is curious, then, that many of the interventions since Yeager's text, have skirted around this futural element, and have tended to more general trends of postcolonial critique, namely: cultural hybridity, national

[148] This is not to say that there are no French speakers in Vietnam--there are still a small percentage of the population that still does, however it is miniscule, and to this day Vietnam remains part of the Organization International de la Francophonie. That said, the sizeable bilingual population that would have been the target audience of this literature is no longer there. It is for this reason Yeager stated, "The Foreign Languages Publishing House in Hanoi does print books in French, but none of these would qualify as creative literature written directly in French. Given these circumstances, Cung Giu Nguyen, who currently lives in Nha Trang, would have a small audience at best in his home country were he able to find a publisher," Ibid., 162.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.,163.

allegories, or colonial nostalgia as the main critical modes. My question; is why this is the case, when what marks Vietnamese Francophone as distinct, is precisely the specificity of its temporal framing and impending finitude?

In this chapter, I will take up this notion of futurity as hypothetical; that is, can one read some of these novels, which have thus been labeled as nostalgic, or backwards looking, in relation to a concept of the future. My suspicion is, yes, of course. But what *type* of future, is really the question. To do this, I will rely on Lee Edelman's notion of reproductive futurism, whereby the capacity for conceiving of the future is not limited to the reproduction of the same political schema of the present, but as perpetually anti-programmatic.[151] The three novels I take up are; Pham Duy Khiêm's *Nam et Sylvie*(1957), Kim Lefèvre' *Retour à la saison des pluies*(2004), and Duras' *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*(1950).[152] In comparing these three works, my main contention is that all three novels use the nostalgic mode not as an obsession with the past, purely to reminisce, but as method of reframing the country's colonial history in order to re-orient the future. The type of queer futurity I see in the novels, therefore, are attempts seeing the past not as failures, but as a deviation and departure of a given trajectory. Given that an intervention with this literature cannot be done without the criticism and theorizations that accompany it, the first two segments will attempt to give a sketch of the context out of which this chapter has arisen. The first segment will deal the category of Francophone literature in its broader context, while the second will deal with the rhetorical and theoretical implications this categorization has on Vietnamese francophone as a sub-category.

[151] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.
[152] To not cause confusion, I will refer to Phạm Duy Khiêm's real name when referring to the author rather than his non de plume, Nam Kim.

The Problem of a Post-colonial Francophone

In a 1993 paper titled, "Co-operation and conflict in la Francophonie," Jean Philippe-Thérien argued that "conflict is an inherent component of international co-operation," in reference to the diverging interests of the member countries within the Organization international de la Francophonie, or OIF.[153] As an organization whose aim is to unify all the respective member countries (mostly former French colonies) through financial aid, cooperation, and a number of seemingly beneficial agreements, it is also one of the few organizations which stresses the French language as part of this community. Indeed, as Philippe Thérien pointed out, "French-speaking countries have structured and internationalized an institutional framework for this loyalty [to the French language] to a very high degree" and, therefore, "La Francophonie cannot be limited to cultural co-operation […] because it has become increasingly difficult to isolate culture in general from political and economic activity."[154] The resulting problem, as one might expect, is a socio-political circumstance in which a former colonial language would be used as the cultural and political adhesive, in an era where those former colonies want to assert their cultural identity. How, then, does one recognized the newly independent states, each with their own nationalisms, while also clinging on to the traces of the former empire? It is nothing short of untimely. It is no surprise, therefore, that despite the OIF's public stance as an organization that prioritizes cooperation and mutual aid, its efforts have been labeled as acts of neocolonialism by some.[155]

In the literary camp, the designation of francophone is no less contentious among writers, many of whom hail from the same former colonies that make up the OIF, as made clear by the

[153] Thérrien, Jean-Philippe. "Co-Operation and Conflict in La Francophonie." *International Journal* 48, no. 3 (1993): 492.
[154] Ibid, 495.
[155] Among others, this double perspective on the role of the OIF is noted by Jody Neathery-Castro and Mark Rousseau in their article, "Does French Matter?: France and Francophonie in the Age of Globalization," wherein the centrality of France and the French language is argued to be both a form of advocacy for developing nations, as well as a form of linguistic and economic neocolonialism.

failure of the signed manifesto by the 44 francophone writers in 2007, which championed for a "littérature-monde en français" "(World literature in French)."[156] In line with other decolonizing gestures, the stance of these authors' was to decouple the French language from the national encapsulation of the hexagon, like the English did with anglophone, to make it a truly something transnational.[157] Although, the movement seemed promising at the beginning, the lack of direction and concrete resolution ultimately led to a fizzling out of what was otherwise a necessary critique of the exclusionary politics of francophone literature. Like the participating members of the OIF, the problem that plagues francophone writers is this simultaneous desire for a shared but differed identity from France within a post-colonial world, or the gap between unity and diversity.[158] Yet, because each writer has their own attachments to the French language and culture, defining what a global Francophonie is meant to do, or the purpose it should serve, would be a fool's project doomed from the onset since what kept the movement together was precisely this relationship to the French language. The larger question, therefore, is whether francophone literature be any more than the reified, postcolonial shadow of the French empire?[159]

Of course, this is not an issue that is exclusive to francophone literature, but is rather emblematic of the condition brought about by decolonizing project of postcolonial studies as a whole—this is to say, that with the proliferation of all the particular, national literatures, where

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[156] Of the 44 signatures, Ana Moï was the only signing author who is of Vietnamese origin.; "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français," *Le Monde.fr*, March 15, 2007, https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html.

[157] In recapping their point, the signatories affirmed the need to dispose of the denomination of francophone since, in their words, "Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n'écrit en francophone. La francophonie est de la lumière d'étoile morte" (No one speaks francophone, nor do they write in francophone. Francophonie is the light of a dead star) (N.P.).

[158] Jacqueline Dutton, "World Literature in French, Littérature-Monde , and the Translingual Turn," *French Studies* 70, no. 3 (July 1, 2016), 404.

[159] In highlighting this issue with the classification Francophone literature in her work on Vietnamese Francophone, Ching Selao has stated, "La francophonie littéraire doit dès lors être envisage du point de vue de la multiplicité et de la diversité, dans la mesure où ce sont des littératures francophones qui s'érigent contre un concept de nation, d'où la nécessité de parler des littératures en français et non de littérature francaise" (25).

cultural difference touted and highlighted, one of the concerns that arises is there is still common ground upon which one could speak of Literature more broadly? Put differently, are all the minority literatures doomed to the ghettos of the insurmountable, cultural difference parading as their own aesthetics, or worse, relegated as one trick ponies in the way that Fredrick Jameson categorizes Third World literature.[160] For the francophone writers, their weapon against this ghettoization is the insistence of language choice and the insistence on the "littérature-monde," which allows them to have equal footing against the backdrop of colonial history. However, this gesture disregards how the centrality of the French language makes it impossible as a neutral literary medium and it also assumes that world literature itself, regardless of whatever language in which it is written, is also not without its shortfalls. If one were to take David Damrosch's understanding of world literature, for example, where worldliness is achieved by a mode of circulation and translation, then, many "littérature-monde" texts would also fall short of such a designation, either by circulation or by translation.[161]

One need not rehash through all the discourses regarding world literature and translatability to see that the problem here, at least in my understanding, is one that can be attributed to concerns about interpretative methodology and geographical categorization. Indeed, from the perspective of world literature, francophone, anglophone or whatever inclusive, catch-all category, it seems that the supposed multiculturalist tolerance is only sustained insofar as there is still indeed some common grounds for comparison, and that somewhere in these defined literary spaces, one can still attempt to encounter some form of negative difference. In world literature, for example, it is the concept of world, which assumes an equality of difference, that binds the various writings within the global market, whereas with *littérature-monde en français*, it is dual concept of world

[160] See Fredrik Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."
[161] See David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?*.

and French that provides the common ground while differentiating it from its English counter-part. In either case, both "world" and global market, have been structured in a way that disproportionately disfavors the global south, given that the qualification of difference itself has been monopolized by western institutions in the name of criticism. As Natalie Melas and others have pointed out, this is an issue that has come about time and time again within the field of comparative literature where, historically, the standard for the measure of difference was indeed a European one.[162] In the case of francophone literature, that standard is still unsuccessfully detached from the centrality of France, and in particular, of Paris. Because of this arrangement, one can see how the existence of a field like Vietnamese francophone is only possible with the implicit acceptance of 1) Francophone as a viable categorical determination and sustains difference and commonality 2) Vietnamese as a self-evident marker of difference, which could be sustained within this larger literary system. More important, however, is the assumption that, as a category and in form, Vietnamese francophone might be compared to other francophone literatures such as those coming from the Maghreb, West Africa, or elsewhere.

Indeed, it is this titer totter between respecting the singularity of culturally specific objects and their position, as well as circulation within the larger cosmology of other literatures, which makes literary criticism in francophone and postcolonial literature particularly contentious. It is also, perhaps, due to these predicaments that the analysis and discussions of works by postcolonial authors must always be accompanied by some form of high theory with a heavy emphasis on some strand of continental philosophy in order to validate it within the same ranks as other contemporary

[162] Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 6.

Western or Metropolitan works.[163] It is as if cultural difference and postcolonial, third-world aesthetics must either be accounted for because of some cultural aporia that simply cannot be approximated otherwise. In other words, theory becomes the common ground upon which difference can subsumed and compared. Here, the center of Pascale Cassanova's disputed *Republic of Letters* is not just Paris, but the fortress of high theory located in European, North American, and to a small extent in more recent years, specific institutions in East Asia. [164]

In these discussions, the implicit question that gives way to analysis is always, "how are we to appreciate this work as Literature?" This is a pertinent question since most attempts at criticism for literatures in the Global South are also simultaneously an exercise of redemption and cultural didactics as made necessary by the legacy of colonialism and the resulting the global division of labor. With this in mind, the realm of aesthetics for postcolonial literature seems endlessly trapped within the double bind, where the price of a work's legibility beyond its own context is always that of marketable difference, subsumed under the economy of exoticism, distortion, or perpetual stereotypes.[165] To be clear, the problem I am pointing towards is not the usage or application of theory, as such, given the broadness of what the term theory might entail, but rather the way certain theories have been deemed more accepted than others within postcolonial discourse for certain literary traditions. When I refer to Vietnamese Francophone as

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[163] Here, among other works, I am thinking specifically of Pheng Cheah's *What is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* where he suggests that one might read postcolonial literature as world literature on the grounds that literature opens up worlds. Although I hold similar sentiments, what I am more interested in is demand for Cheah theorize something as grand as a world in order to perform his reading of the postcolonial texts. To me, this gesture reveal more about the institutional demands that are placed upon postcolonial works to render themselves intelligible, rather than the works themselves.

[164] Although it has since been hotly contested, Cassanova's *Republic of Letters* did hold sway in the way it argued how the unequal systems that allow certain literatures to procure fame through its relationship with the metropole, and in particular, Paris. See. Chapter 3, "World Literary Space."

[165] Although the stakes are rather different, here, I am loosely thinking back to the problems that led Gayatri Spivak to write *An Aesthetics Education in the Era of Globalization*, wherein her conviction for the future was not the rejection of lessons from European enlightenment, but rather reanalyzing these lessons in order to arrive at their productive undoing. In this same gesture, I do not reject the double bind of postcolonial aesthetics, instead, I, too, feel that a reevaluations of them can also be a useful practice in understanding their function.

a tradition, therefore, I am not ignoring the tension that exists in the name, but rather I am explicitly and knowingly acknowledging the complexity with which such a designation implies.

The Practical and Theoretical Chokehold of Vietnamese Francophone

In Karl Ashoka Britto's *Disorientation: France, Vietnam and the Ambivalence of Interculturality*, he sought to further the study of Vietnamese francophone by building on Jack Yeager's *The Vietnamese Novel in French*. Like Yeager, Britto's conviction in carrying out the project was that such works were highly self-conscious works that were reflective of their colonial and postcolonial situations.[166] Accordingly, Britto offered a close reading of several key texts in order to highlight what they each had to offer, not as historical curiosities, but as works of literature, properly called. Throughout his five-chapter book, what becomes clear of Britto's analysis is the centrality of themes like memory, history, interculturality, and nostalgia. The same could be said about Ching Selao's more recent *Le roman vietnamien francophone: Orientalisme, occidentalism et hyrbridité*, where some of these similar themes can be found. Elsewhere, comparable analyses and terms describing this corpus can be found.[167]

While these studies have indeed opened up the field of Vietnamese francophone, my concern is that, perhaps, the critical modes which have made the field noticeable to a larger audience, such as the aforementioned nostalgia, national allegory, and cultural hybridity, also frames this literature as expressively backwards looking. In other words, as merely concerned with the passing of the colonial experience, rather than with the future. This is especially concerning as

[166] Karl Ashoka Britto, *Disorientation: France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 6.
[167] Two examples where similar themes can be found are: Lily Chiu's "The Return of the Native: Cultural Nostalgia and Coercive Mimeticism in the Return Narratives of Kim Lefèvre and Anna Moï," Jack Yeager's "Writing from Exile: Pham Van Ky's Imagined Returns to Viet Nam."

the criticism continues hone in on what is already a limited number of novels.[168] Beyond this, if one is to look more broadly at Vietnamese history throughout the 20th century, with the inclusion of the Vietnam war and the resulting refugee crisis, terms like nostalgia and ambivalence seems to dominate in discourses about Vietnamese, and overseas Vietnamese literary and cultural production, whether it is about the country or their own experience with it. As, Jane Bradley Winston has put it in the introduction to *Of Vietnam: Identities in Dialogue*:

> The events of the past two centuries have made "Vietnam" one of the early twenty-first century's most insistent cultural, imaginary, and discursive tableaux. Formerly it represented an object of colonial, personal, familial, cultural, and/or nationalist desire. Walked on, over, and through by some, inhabited and then abandoned, willfully or not, by others, it stands today in individual and collective psyches in France, the United States, Vietnam and its diaspora, as a lost object of desire. As such, it provokes an increasingly loquacious discourse on its subjects, as writers, artists, and filmmakers attempt to capture and retrieve, finally and at long last, the essence of their respective object of desire—Viêt-nam, Vietnam, Indochina. Shaped by these imagined contours, the patterns laid out by this prolix discourse on/of Vietnam reveal that even its most innovative representations continue to be shaped by strategies of division developed in the course of that country's attempted conquest and defense. They show, that is, that Vietnam continues to be figured as a dividing space between past and present, East and West, colonial and postcolonial eras, natives and diaspora. Caught in each particular community's "past," it remains divided from its peers, fragmented, unable to access the plethora of signifiers, identities, and productions that exists, and will only be perceived in transcultural, transnational, and translinguistic dialogues.[169]

What makes Winston analysis of the situation pertinent is that it suggests the inescapability of artists and writers from this game of signifiers when approaching Vietnam or Indochina. In this view, Vietnamese francophone writers, by nature of their writing language, cannot move past the very shadow of history that give way to their own writing. Moreover, because of the channels by which their works are accepted and received, which are always referring back to the country of

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[168] On the point of a limited corpus, it also needs to be said that the majority of the novels written during the colonial period(roughly 25) and shortly after (between 1920s-1960s) are also out of print and, therefore, it seems that further conversations about works which are not accessible, and which rely on some of the same theoretical apparatus might dull future conversations about these works.

[169] Jane Bradley. Winston and Leakthina Chan-Pech Ollier, eds., *Of Vietnam: Identities in Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1.

Vietnam, criticism of these works cannot be detached from the country's over-determined past. It is for this reason, in an effort to reimagine this literary corpus, that I believe it is crucial to think about futurity within these novels instead.

What is at stake otherwise, from my view, is the relegation Vietnamese francophone's value to a singular, or at least a few limited, theoretical modes of reading under the guise of an colonial/postcolonial aesthetic. A postcolonial one trick pony. In my own encounters with these texts, while I do not deny the significance the role that nostalgia plays in informing a particular history, nor do I think a total rejection of the allegorical is necessarily the best method for understanding authors like Pham Duy Khiêm, Anna Moi, or Linda Lê, and etc.... however, it appears that such modes of reading trap these works within an orientation towards an undifferentiated past, which might no longer be productive. Even for authors like Marguerite Duras, who often comes up in conversations about colonial Vietnam and who would not properly be considered a Vietnamese Francophone writer, also seems to get trapped in this predicament of colonial nostalgia.[170] However, given Duras' international fame and her positionality as a white, female colonist, nostalgia à la Duras is often read through the lens of imperial nostalgia, which despite its category, is still about the rhetoric of nostalgia.

It is also worth mentioning that unlike other former French colonies like Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, etc…Vietnam was only part of the French empire for less than a century, from the late 1800s to 1954. Within this time span, access to a French education and language was only available limited, privileged few—mainly urban elites and colonial functionaries. The result, thus, is a very long-lasting cultural imprint within Vietnamese culture and society on a large scale, but a very

[170] Among the many works written about Duras, Panivong Norindr's *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature*, provides one of the most critical accounts of Duras' participation in this colonial nostalgia for Indochina.

smaller number of fluent speakers in comparison to the total population. This limited access to a formal French education, the distance from the metropole, as well as the subsequent wars and the resulting diaspora, which caused many French speakers to leave the country, makes it doubly difficult for both the production of and further circulation of Vietnamese Francophone texts. Despite this, however, many writers did produce prolific work, and some still continue to do so today.[171] In this way, the continual valorization and insistence on criticism that relies the corpus's relationship to the past, denies both the contemporaneity of some of the text and the continuity of those who carry-on from the same tradition today, albeit reduced. I would also argue that part of the necessity in insisting on the vitality of this literature is predicated on the very real possibility of its finitude—or, to put another it differently, the timeliness of recent criticism surrounding Vietnamese francophone is brought about by the very untimeliness of its existence. It is for this reason that the question of futurity out to be at the forefront, given that it is embedded within the very production of the literature itself.

Additionally, while it has been necessary in the past to make a clear distinction between Vietnamese francophone literature, which are works written by Vietnamese and mixed authors, and French colonial literature, which are works written by colonists living in Vietnam, perhaps it is time to reconsider some of these boundaries. After all, like any other colonial contexts, whether it was the English or the Spanish empire with their own colonies, the literary history of both France and Vietnam since the nineteenth century have been shaped by their mutual entanglement. As Natalie Barnes has proposed in her work, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature* (2014), categories of metropolitan French literature like the *écriture féminine* or the *nouveau*

[171] Towards the end of his book, Yeager refers to a few remaining writers in Paris and Vietnam. However, given the time between when he published his book and now, very few works have been published since.

roman were shaped specifically by this encounter with the colony of Indochina.[172] In this way, my inclusion of Duras in this analysis is not an oversight of the categorical distinctions, but rather a deliberate attempt to draw new bridges between the French colonial and Vietnamese Francophone divide in order to show how porous and interconnected these fields truly are. Moreover, on the level of content, these themes relationality, hybridity, and cultural ambivalence, or their impossibility are at the very core of Vietnamese Francophone. In the next section, I will show how this plays out via the trope of romance.

Colonial love, or Wishful Thinking

As far as postcolonial tropes go, romance is by far one of the most prevalent. This is certainly as true in other contexts as it has been for the case of Vietnam. On the indigenous side, early novels like *Le Roman de mademoiselle Lys* (1921) by Nguyễn Phan Long, *En s'écartant des ancêtres* (1939) by Trịnh Thục Oanh and Marguerite Triaire, *Vingt Ans* (1940) by Nguyễn Đức Giang, and *Bach Yên ou la fille au cœur fidèle* (1946) by Trần Văn Tùng, are just some examples of how romance was privileged by writers as a way of working through the changing relations brought about by colonial modernity. In the case of *Bach Yên*, for example, Nguyễn Giáng Hương has noted that within this romance novel, Trần Văn Tùng managed to capture the spirit of the cultural shift by placing the urban space of Hanoi as the place of Western modernity.[173] Indeed, romance novels played a significant role in shaping the discourses of colonial modernity as it introduced cultural conflict as a wedged that separated heteroromantic unions. Here, Occident and Orient are taken up as romantic figures whose irreconcilable differences are what drives the

[172] Leslie Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 3.
[173] Giang-Huong Nguyen, "L'Espace métropolitain dans 'Nam et Sylvie' de Phạm Duy Khiêm et 'Des Femmes assises ça et là' de Phạm Văn Ký," Billet, *France-Vietnam : un portail entre les cultures* (blog), accessed August 29, 2018, https://vietlitfr.hypotheses.org/26, 65.

development of the narrative. And as Ben Tran has pointed out, the proliferation of print culture, the increase in the rate of literacy, due to the new Franco-Annamite schools in this "post-mandarin" movement, as well as romance novels, also profoundly affected the concept of gender and masculinity in colonial Vietnam.[174]

On the colonist side, aside from Duras, other works such as *Homme jaune et femme blanche* (1937) by Christiane Fournier, or *Les civilisé* (1905) by Claude Farrère (Pen name Frédéric Charles Bargone), showed that heteronormative relations between colonizer and colonized were not only a way of providing readers with a captivating drama, but also as a way of commenting on a social problematic that produced anxiety for both colonial authorities and natives alike. The problem of miscegenation explored in these books is of grand significance since it dealt with the very real existence of mixed-race children whose presence in the colony blurred and endangers the very stabilizing racial hierarchies between the French colonizers and the indigenous population. Not only this, these mixed raced children, who were often abandoned by their French fathers and who grew up outside of the French cultural milieu, caused much anxiety to colonial authorities who saw these Eurasian children as potentially susceptible to political deviance.[175] The logic is that should these Eurasian children grow up with the "corrupted" Vietnamese culture and engage in anticolonial activities, it would cause a great crisis in white authority.[176] For a colonial regime that depends on racial difference as one of its main forms of legitimacy, there could be no greater threat.[177] However, given how widespread the situation was, this marking of the body politic left

[174] See. Chapter 1, "Authoethnography and Post-Mandarin Masculinity."
[175] Christina Firpo, "Crises of Whiteness and Empire in Colonial Indochina: The Removal of Abandoned Eurasian Children from the Vietnamese Milieu, 1890-1956.," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 3 (2010): 587.
[176] Ibid.
[177] According to Christina Firpo, because of how alarmed colonial authorities were with the situation of Eurasian children in the colony, several Eurasian protection societies were set up to keep these children essentially out of sight. These societies depended on the metropolitan French legal system to justify their removal of such children from their Vietnamese mothers. The July 24th 1889 law, or the *Décheance de la puissance*, for example, declared that the state could claim parental rights if one or both parents had physically or morally abandoned the child (591).

obvious consequences within both French statecraft and the material culture from and about the colony. Whether it is about drawing out the gender dynamics or sexual/moral differences along racial lines, the narratives produced in these social contexts seem to inform aspects of colonial life that both draw upon and escapes official history.

Indeed, as Isabelle Tracol-Hynh points out on her work on prostitution in French Indochina, that despite the profound impact of these engendered encounters, unlike Anglo-Saxon scholars, French social scholars have, until more recently, neglected these aspects of gender and sexual relationships within the colonies.[178] Yet, more than just to uncover hidden colonial narratives, for me, what is at stake in turning to these novels is a chance to meditate on how they explore complex, unarticulated temporalities of the colonial/postcolonial encounter and the type of futurity inherent within these romantic relationships. That is, no matter the novel, all of these narratives refer to only one kind of colonial relationship; failed, heteronormative ones between colonizer and colonized. Inasmuch, all these novels are dealing with futurity by way of spelling out different iterations of cautionary tales of miscegenation.

In Lee Edelman's *No Future*, where he argues that queer futurity is about negation of the political status quo, he says that, "truth, like queerness" is "irreducibly linked to the ''aberrant or atypical,'' and in this way "finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good. to what chafes against ''normalization.''"[179] In other words, for Edelman, queer futurity is not simply a negation only if that negation only ends up affirming some positive social value, or a reification of another system, instead, the very value of queer negation "resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social,

[178] Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "Between Stigmatisation and Regulation: Prostitution in Colonial Northern Vietnam," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12 (2010): 73.
[179] Edelman, *No Future*, 6.

and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself."[180] To put it differently, this process of queering futurity need not be an affirmation on the inherent good or bad, but only instead as a dispossession in the belief of the social order. It is an absolute negation of reproductive futurism. With this notion of futurity in mind, what perspective, might we gain from reading failed amorous relations in Vietnamese francophone?

It is in this question that I look towards Kim Lefèvre's *Retour a la saison des pluies*, Duras' *L'amant*, and Nam Kim's *Nam et Sylvie* as meditations on the role of romance in articulating some possibility of what I call postcolonial futurity, that is a postcoloniality whose meaning is not guaranteed. Not only do the three novel address temporality through the lens of the colonial versus postcolonial, they all do so by situating futurity within the trope of an failed interracial unions. The writers of each of these novel, also speak to this colonial, anthropological gradient between the native (Kim), the colonist (Duras), and the child of this legacy (Lefèvre). In this section, I will briefly outline the plot of each novel, then elaborate on how romance is conceived in each work before drawing out their conceptions of postcolonial futurity.

Published in 1957, Nam Kim's *Nam et Sylvie* is a poetic narrative that recounts an intimate relationship between two lovers whose names make up the novel's title. Nam, is an Indochinese student who came to Paris to study at the Écoles Normale Supérieure in the 19390s, where he met his lover Sylvie at a dance held at the *Maison des étudiants de L'indochine*. Told retrospectively from Nam's point of view, the novel unfolds in a series of letters exchanged between the two character with interjections from an older Nam living in postcolonial Vietnam. Given Nam's precarious status as a foreign student, the complications brought about by the interracial relationship, which later results in Sylvie's abortion, the couple eventually splits and Nam returns

[180] Ibid.

to Vietnam. On the surface, Kim's novel is fairly typical and does not stray too far from some of its predecessors; It is a heterosexual, colonial relationship that ends poorly due to external factors, over which neither of the lovers have any control.[181] Yet, where it stands out is the way it explores postcolonial temporality with those same familiar tropes of the failed romantic union. According to Karl Ashoka Britto, what complicates the novel are precisely the temporal disjunction, wherein the events of the past are interlaced with those of the present.[182] Here, Britto writes:

> In a sense, Nam et Sylvie straddles the colonial/postcolonial divide, its complex structure evoking a double temporal frame: on the one hand, that of the colonial period, embodied in the letters and journal entries written in the 1930s; on the other, that of Nam's retrospective narrative, filtered through the backward gaze of postcolonial remembrance.[183]

Because of this double framing, where the narrator Nam must reconcile with his feelings towards the past, the novel projects all the causal elements of the story in to this abstract bygone time. Here, the present is only a surface, from which memory might be laid out in order to process it. Nam, who was an Indochinese student at the time, now writes as a citizen of a postcolonial Vietnam, who can't seem to shake off the past.[184] This is clear from the very first line of the novel where the reader is presented with a brief but concise end to the couple's relationship, and Nam's last hours in France which reads, "Il y a plus de vingt ans, au moment où, mes études achevées, je m'apprêtais à quitter Paris et la France, je voulus revoir Sylvie, avec qui j'avais rompu depuis plusieurs mois" "(More than twenty years ago, when, my studies had completed, I was preparing to leave Paris and France, I wanted to see Sylvie again, with whom I had broken up several months ago)."[185] Nam then goes on to say, "je la revis, mais la rencontre fut sans lendemain. Trois semaines après, dans

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[181] Britto points out that Sylvie's name was not the character's own true name, instead it was a name she had invented only for Nam. Here, he suggests that it was most likely inspired and taken after Gérard de Nerval's 1853 novella, *Sylvie* ("History, Memory…" 145). They two works are similar in that Sylvie was also a tragic story of unattainable love and which also utilized different temporal disjuncture.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid, 138.
[185] Nam Kim, *Nam et Sylvie: roman* (Paris: Plon, 1957), 1.

la nuit qui précédait mon départ, je me mis soudain à lui écrire, alors que raisonnablement je n'avais plus rien à attendre d'elle" "(I saw her again, but the meeting was short-lived. Three weeks later, the night before my departure, I suddenly began to write to her, when reasonably I had nothing more to expect from her)."[186] In this retelling, not only is the relationship over between the couple, but Nam also makes clear that any hope of rekindling the relationship was also extinguished from the very beginning. Because of this, it is not hard to see why Britto would analyze the novel through the framework of nostalgia, nor why others such as André Lebois, when presenting Pham Duy Khiêm with an honorary doctorate at the University of Toulouse in 1957, would do the same.[187]

What significant about this breakup is that is sets up other kinds of departure; of Nam's physical departure from France and from his youth. Here, Nam recounts:

> Aucun homme ne peut, sans une certaine mélancolie, s'éloigner pour toujours peut-être d'un lieu où il a beaucoup vécu, qu'il s'agisse ou non d'un pays comme la France, d'une ville comme Paris. Si par la même occasion il se sépare de ses années d'étudiant et de sa jeunesse, ce n'est pas une tristesse vague qu'il ressent, mais un dérchirement secret".[188]
>
> No man can, without a certain melancholy, move away forever perhaps from a place where he has lived a lot, whether or not it is a country like France, a city like Paris . If at the same time he separates himself from his student years and his youth, it is not a vague sadness that he feels, but a secret heartbreak.

Moving between the general sadness of departure of a place to a more concrete melancholy of leaving behind a certain time of his life, Kim sets up a logic of separation that ties together multiple spatial-temporal dimensions. The "dérchirement secret" that Nam points to marks the finitude of the departure, and the limit between his former and current self. By setting the novel up in this way, Kim manages to reverse the order of typical colonial romances, wherein the tragic

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[186] Ibid.
[187] In his essay Britto states his thesis as such: Through a closer analysis of Phạm Duy Khiêm's postcolonial novel, I will explore these questions in an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the complex bonds linking memory, nostalgia, and the construction of colonial history ("History, Memory..." 137).
[188] Kim, *Nam et Sylvie*, 3.

disentanglement of the family unit is not the climatic point of arrival, but instead the point of departure. In other words, the end of their romantic history is also the beginning of another history.

Published in 1957, just two years after the official birth of South Vietnam, Kim's opening of the romantic narrative mirrors the free will politics of colonial independence by placing the reader in *media res*. In the same way that Vietnamese history does not begin or end with formal separation from France, neither does Nam's separation from Sylvie produce a clean slate from the past. This conscious decision to move away from traditional trajectory, which generally leads up to colonial independence is productive, therefore, because it undoes the telos of many *foundational fictions*—as if to say, independence is not deliverance.[189] For Nam's recount, the independent nation-state is no longer the goal post from which all actions must derive their meaning, instead, meaning is constructed from examining the very ashes of this former rupture. Here, my reading differs from Britto in that while I recognize the role of nostalgia as a way of approximating the past, I also see this foreclosure as a form of priming alternate futures. Futures, which are made possible by the interpretive act that does not depend on the perfect heteroromantic union, as demanded by reproductive futurism. In other words, the condition of possibility for Nam's narrative is made possible precisely because of this initial breakup with Sylvie, and allegorically, the story of Vietnam as country, is made possible by its departure of being a French colony.

Indeed, this rupture is further highlighted when Nam talks about his return to Vietnam, stating, "Ajoutez pour l'Annamite—on dit: Vietnamien maintenant—qui avait le courage de retrourner ver les siens en ces temps-là, une lourde apprehension, presque une angoisse, qu'il faut être né indigène des colonies pour comprendre" "(Add for the Annamite—we say: Vietnamese

[189] I am referring to Doris Sommer's work *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, where she argues that the consolidation of national identity and romantic fictions about heterosexual relations went hand in hand to produce productive citizens.

now—who had the courage to return to his own people in those days, a heavy apprehension, almost an anguish, that one must be born a native of the colonies to understand).”[190] Here, Nam’s anguish of the return is shadowed by an unease that links one type of political subject to another; between “l’Annamite” and “Vietnamien.” The shift in nomenclature, while signaling a new nationalist orientation, also brings about questions the validity of nationalist overdetermination. Nam’s brief mention of this shift, without imbuing it with much fanfare, marks the change as simply a matter of fact, as if it were merely an accident of history. Like the history of colonial Vietnam, independence marks only an event, rather than a realization of some preordained fate. Because of this, for Nam, all the separates his past and present, is indeed a name, and therefore nothing is lost. The past in other words, was not a self-contained truth and the present retelling a delineation, instead, the past, like the present, are both subject to new interpretive regimes brought about by the unfurling of time. As Britto affirms, “If the novel can be read as a nostalgic text, the sources around which the retrospective narrative builds its nostalgia turn out to be always already constructed themselves. In a sense, there is no moment of originary fullness to be lost.”[191]

Consequently, if there is truly no fullness to which one can return, then, the choice to ponder over this rupture must indeed serve some other purpose than one of restoring the past. That is, one does not dwell in the past for the past itself—to recreate its conditions and possibilities to negate all other alternatives—but instead, as a way to engage with the possibilities of constructing the present and the future in non-determinate ways. Just as Nam insists that the past never really disappears towards the end of the novel, “rien n’est jamais tout à fait fini, dans le monde du coeur” “(nothing is ever quite finished, in the world of the heart),” so too can one take this present as the

[190] Kim, Name et Sylvie, 3.
[191] Britto, “History, Memory, and Narrative Nostalgia,” 144.

non-arrival of the nation-state.[192] Put differently, in *Nam et Sylvie,* the trope of romance offers a specter of a queer futurity by a non-closure of the past, and at the same time offers no guarantee of a symbolic union. There is neither resolution from the beginning nor the end of the novel, instead, each end is only another beginning.

This colonial love story without resolution is also the hallmark of Marguerite Duras' *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950). Set in French Indochina, Duras' novel tells the story of a French family who finds themselves at the whims of the colonial government and the elements. After the death of the father, the mother, which the reader only knows as the *la mère*, tries against all odds to raise her two children in a parcel of land that refuses to be tamed. The seawall to which the name of the novel refers, is an attempt by the mother to build infrastructure against the rising sea water. Of course, as it goes, these efforts result is the loss of much resources and the sea comes again and again to reclaim the land. Much of the drama revolves around the trials and tribulations of the mother who, without much resources or luck, tries to raise the two children on her own while debtors are on her back. The two siblings, Joseph and Suzanne, are raised alongside the native children and have a very idyll life in the countryside by the city of Ram. One of the native characters, Monsieur Jo(M. Jo), who is also the son of a rich plantation owners in the colony, tries to pursue the younger sister Suzanne without success, while Joseph, the angry, older son, acts out in contempt of their situation and his sister's suitor. As the novel goes on, the family's luck does not turn around, and their colonial dream ends when the mother eventually dies. Right before the mother's death, Suzanne loses her virginity to a planter neighbor's son, Jean Agosti, with whom she has no intention of marrying, and who also had no intention of marrying her. Joseph, perhaps the character that demonstrated the most ardent resentment towards the colonial administration,

[192] Kim, *Nam et Sylvie*, 242.

leaves the family's guns with the local as a way to take out revenge on those who brought about the family's misfortune. The novel ends with both siblings, along with Agosti, loading the coffin and leaving the property to never return.

While there are many possible readings of this novel, ranging from ecological to racial critiques, I think it is equally interesting to read it as a romantic amorous mis-encounters. Indeed, like Kim's *Nam et Sylvie*, Duras' novel also paints a portrait of people who seems to have fate against their side. Of the several key characters described, none seem to truly happy with their personal situation, nor that of the colony, as sadness and poverty seem to be a reoccurring theme. Even love, which is central to Duras's novel, is still characterized by a mixture of anguish of unfulfilled desires. These unfulfilled desire seeps into all aspects of the character's lives in various ways. For the mother, it is the disappointment that her dreams of wealth and security were never fully achieved. Not only did her husband die, but the property she purchased never managed to turn a profit. For Joseph, who spends much of the novel hunting and running off, it is about never getting the figurative bounty of the hunt that is the colonial dream. As with Suzanne, her desires were always deferred in order to appease those around her. Kevin O'Neill notes this by commenting that much of what Suzanne does is against her nature, in the sense she always places him before herself and, thus, effectively lives in his shadow.[193] It is for this reason, even when she finally lost her virginity to Agosti, it seemed to pass as though it were another *fait acompli*. In all these cases, however, it would appear that much of the resentment the family harbors, stems from a departure of their reality with their expectations.

Yet, the novel also operates on a multitude of departures that cannot be singularly attributed to any one instance, since it can also be said that the death of the father or the move from France

[193] Kevin C. O'Neill, "Structures of Power in Duras' 'Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique,'" *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 45, no. 1/2 (1991): 47–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/1346923, 55.

were also forms of departure of a particular trajectory. In this way, unlike *Nam et Sylvie*, which seems to emphasize the moment of Nam's departure from France as the moment that marked a before and after of the narrative, Duras' novel takes departure as constant of colonial life. Even at the end of the novel, it is quite possible to read the mother's death and the parting of the siblings as both a departure and a new beginning, although much less optimistic. As Claire Lindenlaub reminds us in her work on spatiality and temporality in *Un barrage*, the novel was indeed a way of addressing her past, but more specifically with her bother Joseph's death.[194] Here, she writes:

> En effet, l'écriture immémoriale de Duras transforme la négativité du souvenir en la réintégrant dans une image inversée de libération. Ainsi, elle ne peut raconter l'histoire de son frère qu'en accordant, au Joseph du roman, le courage d'affranchir sa soeur Suzanne du rêve colonial de leur mère. *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* retrace donc la douleur de Duras tout en la transfonnant en libération de Joseph. En face de la destruction et de la folie subies, Duras reconstruit sa mémoire ensanglantée à partir de sa terre nourricière.[195]
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> Indeed, Duras' immemorial writing transforms the negativity of memory by reintegrating it into an inverted image of liberation. Thus, she can only tell the story of her brother by giving the Joseph of the novel the courage to free her sister Suzanne from their mother's colonial dream. *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* thus retraces the pain of Duras while transforming it into the liberation of Joseph. In the face of the destruction and madness suffered, Duras reconstructs his bloody memory from his nourishing land.

In *Un Barrage*, all endings are beginnings, and no singular trajectory concludes with absolute finitude, always leaving the possibility of something other intact. Because of these non-determinate ends, temporality in the novel often appears circular or outside of linear conventions of time, as Lindenlaub remarks, "Ce sont des brèches intemporelles par lesquelles la narration échappe au temps linéaire" "(They are timeless breaches through which the narration escapes linear time)."[196] Indeed, like her brother Joseph's death, which Duras would turn into a form of liberation, so too would the refusal of the characters to play along with the charade of a perfect

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[194] Claire A. Lindenlaub, "Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique: Autoportrait et Lieu Mnémonique," *Women in French Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 88–99, https://doi.org/10.1353/wfs.1996.0010, 89.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid, 90.

family a form a new vision of the family. As such, the novel figures a form of queer futurity not only by refusing to replicate and reproduce the colonial family unit, but instead to show the absolute disentanglement of familial relations.

Taking the perspective of departure as a refutation of the larger colonial biopolitics, we might also take the mother's illness and depression as a warning sign of the family's demise. As the head of the family without a father figure, here, la mère's role is that reifying the colonial order within the home, yet, even that proves futile as neither the land nor her children yields to her will. In one of the final scenes when Agosti visited the mother with Suzanne after the two just had sex on his family's pineapple farm, the mother tells him, "mais il fait tellement de fautes d'orthographe que ça me rendre malade" "(but he makes so many spelling mistakes that it makes me sick)."[197]

Given her occupation as a French teacher, one might read such a passage with a slight of dark humor, however, it is also possible to read such a statement, which would otherwise seem dramatic, as another figurative nail on the coffin of their colonial dreams. If prescriptive grammar is a form of social engineering and a code for the pre-existing social order, Joseph's complete disregard to the orthographical elements of his letter is an outright rejection of that very same social order. The grand irony at play, is that as a French teacher, the role of the mother is to reproduce the ideological state by way of disseminating that grammar. Yet, even her own children reject the terms of reproduction. Put differently, if grammar and orthography represent the materiality of the social order, where there is a formula and rationale for a right and a wrong, Joseph's improper writing and lack of attention is both the rejection of the colonial system and the embodiment of how impoverished and delineated their lives have become.

[197] Duras, *Un Barrage*, 347.

To further this notion of departure as deviation, and that which offers an alternate futurity, we might also look at the death of the father in *Un Barrage*, as another turning point in the novel. In a more traditional narrative, the father's death usually signals a clearing where the male child takes the helm. Yet, in Duras' tale, the oldest son, Joseph, refuses to take his role as the head of the family upon the father's death. Instead, he rejects the Oedipal role by reenacting this departure of the father figure; constantly leaving the family and disappearing without a word. He would do the same upon the death of the mother. Suzanne, the young female figure whose life is meant to mirror that of Duras herself, also rejects any notion of responsibility placed upon her. Like Joseph, Suzanne does not accept any notion of a reproductive futurity as she is neither interested in children nor having a permanent romance. This is evidence by her indifference to the male figures that cross her path, such as M. Jo or Jean Agosti. Having turned down both of these suitors, Suzanne denies the colonial convention placed upon female colonists; to be a reproductive machine. In this way, for Suzanne, the non-reproductive future is already enacted by the present departure from the norms in which she lives.

This idea of departure not as a negation, but as delineation of a certain trajectory is also a core aspect of Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison de pluies*. Written as an autobiographical text, this "novel" is often read as Lefèvre's sequel to her other work, *Métisse blanche* (1989), where she delves into her own childhood memories as a Eurasian child born in colonial Vietnam.[198] The question of racial identity, which represents the main concern of the first book, is also apparent in *Retour*. In terms of framing, the book is broken up into two sections; "Le Passé Réssurgi" "(The

[198] While both *Métisse blanche* and *Retour à la saison des pluies* were both written as autobiographies, Jack Yeager has noted that critics have often not come to a consensus between that categorical difference in such works, and it is for this reason that her text stands a great example of such ambiguity ("Kim Lefèvre's *Retour*…" 48).

past resurrected)," which outlines her personal history and the reasons for her return, followed by, "Le Retour," which recounts her journey back to Vietnam.

Akin to the first two novels, *Retour* does not take the past as that which is distinct and inaccessible from the present, but rather as an alternate trajectory that occasionally surfaces, as demonstrated by the section title, "Le passé réssurgi." Here, the past not simply surfaces as a first encounter with the present, but resurfaces, as if to remind the narrator of the continual slippages and porousness between past and present. Even the title *Retour à la saison de pluies*, already implies an initial departure, otherwise there cannot be a return. By the same token, the return in the title does not refer to a place, but to a season, once more effacing facile distinctions between time and place. The return, therefore, is not a negation of the originary departure, but added dimension to the experience of departure itself.

Lefèvre wastes no time is setting up *Retour* and the amount of time the hast flown by, right from the opening of the novel she writes; "Les dés sont jetés, j'ai enfin pris la décision de retourner au Viêt-nam. Après trente ans d'absence" "(The die are cast, I finally made the decision to return to Vietnam. After thirty years of absence)."[199] With this brief opening, Lefèvre juxtaposes the her long absence in Vietnam with her seemingly quick decision to return, as if to reject the present by way of shifting course. The text opens, thus, with a return that is another departure, yet recontextualized within the history of the prior trajectory. She then quickly adds, "Trente ans, c'est une mesure, une quantité. Mais pour moi, c'est une plage qui s'éntend entre mes vignt ans et aujourd'hui. C'est une vie. Ma vie" "(Thirty years is a measure, a quantity. But for me, it is a range that extends between my twenties and today. It's a life. My life)."[200] Here, time is an ocean, a vastness whose limit is only measured when encountered with the shore. For Lefèvre, time and

[199] Kim Lefèvre, *Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: B. Barrault, 1990), 13.
[200] Ibid.

memory might be measured in the number of years, however, it's continuity is not reducible to that number. The image of a beach that spans the years connecting her current self with her former self, offers readers another kind of memory; a life, her life. It is an image that incites notions of continuity and reverberation as the figure of a beach is often used as both the cite of departure and return for voyages. As in Duras' and Kim's text, departure here is not a definitive cut-off, instead it is an extension between what was and the new horizons of possibility.

This image of moving water is further emphasized in the following section, when Lefèvre writes, "Menée ailleurs que sur le sol vietnamien, flottant à des milles de l'endroit où j'ai pris ma source. Comme un long fleuve dont l'amont serait si éloigné qu'il me paraît à présent enveloppe de brume. Et lorsque ma mémoire s'y reporte, il m'arrive de douter de sa réalité."[201] From beach to river, the image of water, the source of life, becomes the conduit for personal memory. An originary source of history. For Yeager, these liquid metaphors all points to the place of origins as the word for country in Vietnamese is *Đất nước*, or "land-water."[202] It is, as he puts it, "a move to integrate herself into her history," into the history of Vietnam from which she has been excluded for her mixed heritage. However, aside from the desire to enact some primordial connection to the source, it is also worth noting that the figure of the river carries much symbolic weight within the Vietnamese cultural milieu. The expression, to cross a river (*sang sông*), generally implies a completed act that cannot be reversed, such as taking someone's hand in marriage. [203] Within Vietnamese popular culture, there are innumerable references to one lover crossing the river while leaving the other lover behind. These two banks of the river, although not impossible to traverse,

[201] Ibid.
[202] Jack Yeager, "Kim Lefèvre's Retour à La Saison Des Pluies: Rediscovering the Landscapes of Childhood," *L'Esprit Créateur* 33, no. 2 (1993): 47–57, https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.1993.0008, 52.
[203] There are many examples of this figure of the river as an impasse and a reminder of what could have been in popular Vietnamese culture such as Tôi đưa em sang song by Y Vũ & Nhật Ngân, Đừng Trách Sáo Sang Sông by Hồng Xương Long, Người Đã Sang Sông by Nguyễn Nhất Huy, and others.

represent an obstacle that should make the subject question their past, such as poor romantic decisions or missed opportunities. It is rather interesting, then, that Lefèvre would open her text with this image of the river, which is at once a source, as well as a reminder of that initial departure that makes her question her past.

The decision to deploy the figure of liquid for both time and memory is an interesting one, as none of these elements can be neatly defined. Like a liquid, memory can shift and alter depending on its conditions. For Lefèvre, the memories of the past are as continuous and liquid as the present that shapes her perspective of it. In this regard Yeager has commented on the text:

> If *Métisse blanche* seemed to hold the past at some distance, albeit temporal, in *Retour* Kim Lefèvre tries to excavate this same past and examine it carefully. In doing so, she immerses herself, returning physically to the site of childhood, an essential act in this exploration. But, like the literary genre she had chosen to record it, her personal history is not easy to limit and define. The work of memory and dream has transformed her story. Fog and haze mask the past, making it difficult to remember with clarity a life lived so long ago.[204]

Indeed, at its core, this text holds the past as a form of living archive while simultaneously doubting whether memory, the tools by which one excavates said past, is very truly reliable. This is a decisive matter since the past, as we have mentioned, is never as concrete as one hopes, and much less so when the stakes are that of personal subjectivity.

It is also worth mentioning that while I read this text within the romantic mode, it is not a romance novel in the traditional sense. Unlike *Nam et Sylvie,* where the main plot recounts a failed relationship or *Un barrage*, where romance is turned on its head as something treacherous with no real offspring, *Retour* is the poetic aftermath of that forbidden colonial encounter. However, as a mixed child of a French father and a Vietnamese mother, Lefèvre's autobiographical text is marked by a crisis of identity, where romantic union is not the end goal, but the originary cause of her present narration. In this way, far from a budding romance, readers are left with a text that begins

[204] Yeager, "Kim Lefèvre's Retour à La Saison Des Pluies," 48-49.

with a similar point of departure to the other two novels; a reconciliation with the futurity of colonial love. Juxtaposed together, the three works offer different but similar accounts of the romantic trope that is no longer tied to a telos of reproduction, but rather, as a departure towards a non-reproductive future.

The Always Already Queer Future

In his chapter "History, Memory, and Narrative Nostalgia: Phạm Duy Khiêm's *Nam et Sylvie*," Karl Ashoka Britto opens the text with a quote from Khiêm himself addressed to André Lebois saying, "Notre besogne à nous, cher confrère, ne consiste-t-elle pas à créer des nostalgies et des rêves, pour les autres bien sûr, mais aussi pour nous-mêmes?"[205] Here, the questions of whether dreams and nostalgia are important are not raised, instead, the highlighted question is whether we owe it to ourselves to create our own nostalgia. Laden in Khiêm's question is the very conscious acknowledgement of the ways in which the past, and the very ways in which we look and feel about it, is indeed an act of creation. Nostalgia, in other words, a form narrative that allows individuals and even whole societies to take control of how they want to see themselves. After all, the weight of nostalgia has less to do with confronting some past reality than it does with producing an affective history through which we can understand ourselves in the present.

Because of this construction, to speak of nostalgia as purely a preoccupation with the past would be to have an incomplete view. Similar to history, without the pretense of facticity, nostalgia proudly recognizes itself as a construction of a non-linear continuity. In this way, speaking of nostalgia for the past is not to (re)produce some extant reality, as though to rescue it from another time and to animate it in the present, instead, it has nothing to do with reality at all. Indeed, like the development of nationalism, nostalgia is the creation of an alternate history in which the past

[205] Karl Ashoka Britto, *Disorientation: France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 109.

events are imagined and narrated to meet the conditions of the speaking subject. And only within this small space that one might say all nostalgic retellings of the past tied to its future present narration. However, what this requires is that the subject sees themselves as someone existing in a history prior to their own, and that any act of narration is always already(toujours-déjà-donné/immer schon) in the past.[206] Therefore, the subject must recognize themselves as existing in a temporal simultaneity that is always already open to a possible futures, and that all acts concerning the past and present is already inherently bounded to the future to come.

This always already present nostalgia is paramount to the understanding of the postcolonial condition since from the nationalist standpoint, colonial independence isn't just the grand moment of liberation, but also it legitimizes the *raison d'être* of that imagined community, and thus a new beginning for the nation's history. Yet, as history has shown, independence and decolonization are two separate beasts, and having the former does not guarantee the latter will be successful. After all, history is a web and one cannot extricate the newly formed state from the very people who witness its formation. Franz Fanon made a clear point of this in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he insists that "decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder," as past and present cannot be neatly separated.[207] Surely, one desires change, yet, it cannot be achieved by way of "a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement."[208] For thinkers such as Fanon, change is only possible by unspeakable violence and political vigilance, especially when colonial institutions persists in the minds of the formerly colonized. The task of decolonization, therefore, is not limited to a change in government and in

[206] Also can be found elsewhere, one of the more known uses of this concept is done by Martin Heidegger in Being and Time when he speaks about knowledge of being. For Heidegger, "being" is the self-evident concept," yet, it is shrouded in enigma since every relation to it is already defined by our existence within being (44). Taken in light of the postcolonial condition, like the conundrum of the always already of being, every understanding of it cannot be detached from the colonial past that proceeded it.
[207] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.
[208] Ibid.

the psyche of its personnel, but also a change in the national narrative. To inaugurate a new history, thus, the nation must leverage the production of nostalgia towards its mythical past, as well as its providential future. It is only in this bifurcation of past and future narratives that the newly independent nation can position itself within its imaginary timeline. In my view, this bond between nationalism and nostalgia is always already embedded within futurity. As such, if one desires to reconfigure postcolonial thought in a way that considers the past in terms of new potentialities, one must do so by radically queering one's understanding of the role of nostalgia, as well as what qualifies as a radically different future.

Returning to Lee Edelman's now canonical, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, one of the central figures for thinking about non-reproductive futurity is that of the child.. In Edelman's own words, he writes:

> That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention. Even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes, as a "fight for our children -for our daughters and our sons," and thus as a fight for the future. Though not properly a political project as such, it is certainly a provocation that demands the reconsideration of what it means to have a notion of the future.[209]

In other words, within the normative narrative of political reproduction, the child figures as the link of potentiality and also, of purpose and guarantee of a future. The child is at once the product of a certain social order and the promise of its continuity. For Edelman, then, thinking of queer futurity it is not about partaking in the narrative movement toward a viable political future, rather, it is to think the queer figure as something "that comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form."[210] In other words, it is a challenge to pre-existing forms without a proposal of a prescribed one, which would run

[209] Edelman, *No Future*, 2.
[210] Ibid, 4.

counter to its intent. How, then, might we think of these three novels in light of a futurity without the same body politics that demands a reproduction of the present? Moreover, how the figure of the child represented within the nostalgic mode of the novels?

In the case of *Nam et Sylvie*, the novel's author personal biography can give us a glimpse of why his narrative is radically defiant to the status quo of his time. *Nam et Sylvie*'s author, Phạm Duy Khiêm, was born to an educated family in Hanoi on April 24th, 1908.[211] His father, Pham Phạm Duy Tốn, was already a well-known progressive journalist and writer at the turn of the twentieth century when Vietnam's literature was going through a period of modernization.[212] As part of the privileged few among Vietnamese colonial society, Khiêm attended the Franco-Annamite school, Albert-Saurraut de Hanoï and was the first "Annamite" to pass the baccalauréat in *lettres classiques*, which would later allow him to study at Louis-le-Grand in October 1928.[213] From there, he went on to study at the École Normale Súperior alongside his more famous friend, Leopold Senghor.[214]

In many ways, Khiêm represented the ideal colonial subject from the standpoint of the empire. He was the son of a literati, hard-working, fully enculturated within the French cultural milieu. For the French empire, he represents the pedagogical achievement of the colonial enterprise--The ideal westernized native, who, while deeply attached to Vietnam, sees France as the *mère-patrie* guiding Vietnam into the future. For the Vietnamese, most of whom were barely literate at the time, Khiêm was the embodiment of the bicultural, privileged class that everyone

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[211] Though often left out of critical works about Khiêm, it is worth mentioning that his brother Phạm Duy Cẩn, generally known as Phạm Duy, is also one of Vietnam's most prolific song writer of the twentieth century alongside Văn Cao and Trịnh Công Sơn.

[212] Montira Rato. "The Representation of Peasants in Vietnamese Literature." *Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform*. Edited by Philip Taylor, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004, 329.

[213] Jean-François Sirinelli, "Deux etudiants 'coloniaux' à Paris à l'aube des années trente," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 18, no. 1 (1988): 77–88, https://doi.org/10.3406/xxs.1988.2917, 78-79.

[214] Ibid, 78.

wished their sons could turn out to be. In other words, for both the colonizer and the colonized, Khiêm's position as the ideal future subject of the colony was something to be reproduced. [215] At the same time, however, because of his upbringing, and later political career as the South Vietnamese ambassador to France, it was difficult for him to articulate a radical politics of futurity in public.[216]

It is to this point that Britto asks, "[c]an the intercultural subject be understood as more than a site of cultural contestation, as anything other than a confrontation between incompatible binary opposites?"[217] Of course, as those who have tried to work on Khiêm have discovered, it difficult to trace out a clear political ideology not only because of limited materials, but also because, as Julia Emerson puts it, "he refused to be pigeonholed," which resulted in his obscurity.[218] The result, therefore, is the ideal colonial subject, who was born and raised to take his place within the empire, in order to reproduce the state, refusing to take sides. Though he might not think it radical himself, to me, this ambivalence can be taken as a challenge to the reproduction of the state, even as a functionary within that state.

Turning to the novel, this refusal to reproduce a positive politics, stemming from a perennial ambivalence, is also why *Nam et Sylvie* does not conclude with a perfect union. Published in 1957, three years after the Geneva Conference, which solidified Vietnam's independence from France, it is hard to not read *Nam et Sylvie* as a poetic reflection on loss and

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[215] Khiêm became a part of the Ngô Đình Diệm government in 1954 as Secretary of State and later as Chargé d'Affaires. Later that same year, he was assigned as the High Commisioner (Haut-Commissaire) of South Vietnam to Paris, and from there as the country's first ambassador to Paris until 1957. Julia C. Emerson, "Phạm Duy Khiêm. A Man Apart," *Moussons. Recherche En Sciences Humaines Sur l'Asie Du Sud-Est*, no. 24 (December 1, 2014): 114-115.

[216] Although the novel was well received when it was published and was awarded the Prix Louis Barthou by the Académie Française, he had used the pseudonym Nam Kim given his then position as ambassador and felt that some of the book's content was not suitable. Emerson, "Phạm Duy Khiêm. A Man Apart," 115.

[217] Britto, *Disorientation*, 5.

[218] Emerson, "Phạm Duy Khiêm. A Man Apart," 107.

separation.[219] Nam, the nostalgic protagonist, who sits and contemplates from the other side of the colonial world, laments both the loss of a relationship and that of the couple's unborn child. As a rather forward nod to hope and futurity, the termination of the pregnancy mirrors the aborted dream of colonial ambivalence and harmony. There could not have been a possibility in which the territories of Vietnam would have been in harmony under French colonial rule if the politics of race and domination had stayed the same. That dream had to die for both states to move on. And in terms of the analogy, in what world would this child be born if their very existed is outside of the law? Here, nostalgia provides access to the past, not only to remember, but as a way to recontextualize, since the aborted child is what allowed the couple to follow their own futures. The need for nostalgia, in other words, validates this alternate route of history; A history that refuses to reproduce a system out of sheer libidinal drives. Here, Britto reminds us, "it is crucial to recognize that these intertextual references are not deployed by the narrator in his retrospective attempt to give form and meaning to his past experience; rather, the story he assembles is one in which the young Nam looks to these texts to find reflections of a loss that has not yet occurred."[220] Loss, therefore, provides the narrative condition, but does not prescribe what goes beyond it. His anticipatory nostalgia, in other words, already invites a future to come, one that is undetermined.

The same can be said for Marguerite Duras, for whom ambivalence and disillusion goes hand in hand when she tries to paint a tableau of the colonial world. As a poor, white colonist born in Indochina, who did not live in France until 1933, she represented a minority within a minority.[221] Born to school teachers who came to the colony in the hopes of finding prosperity, Duras' family's

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[219] Commenting on the André Lebois' speech when presented Pham Duy Khiem with an honorary doctorate for the University of Toulouse in 1957, Britto remarked how such commentary displayed a type of unabashed colonist nostalgia that permeated through-out. This open lament, which spoke more to the sort of French imaginary of Indochine than what took place in the colonies, surely has an effect on the way Khiem's novel is read (*Disorientation* 112).

[220] Britto, "History, Memory, and Narrative Nostalgia," 145.

[221] Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, 111.

fortune quickly turned when her father, Henri Donnadieu, died in 192.[222] While her race positioned hierarchically above the *indigène*, her family's finances put her in uneven footing with the rest of colonial society. As Natalie Barnes puts it in her work outlining the Duras' cultural *métissage*, "Raised by native servants, schooled only intermittently, and having local children as playmates, the Donnadieu children—Marguerite and the second brother, Paul, in particular—were to a large extent socialized in Vietnamese."[223] Because of this upbringing, Duras' life represented an alternate reality to the one sold by the colonial administration for would be colonists. Indeed, this reality of a cultural *métis* is what Barnes would argue to be one of the most influential factors in Duras' writing as an adult.[224] Like Khiêm, Duras was raised bicultural and her circumstances complicated her position as both insider and outsider. Also like Khiêm, Duras' biography and life trajectory, with her move back to France and self-appellation as a Marxist, also reflects a rejection of a politics of reproduction.

Taking inspiration from the misfortunes of her personal life and her deeply anticolonial stance, the characters in *Un barrage* cannot dare not to dream of a happy ending, nor is there any happy births to signal the reproduction of the same politics. Jane Winston affirmed this refusal by saying that Duras "..did not seek to maintain the social structure it supports," and that "*The Seawall* in fact ends with a call for violent change, as a white French colonial man teaches Asian neighbors revolutionary tactics."[225] Indeed, at the end the novel, when the mother has died and the family is in complete financial ruin, Suzanne and Joseph both leave the bungalow because there was nothing left for them. The land would not yield and the seawall cannot hold back what nature will reclaim

[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid, 112.
[224] Ibid, 113.
[225] Jane Winston, "Marguerite Duras: Marxism, Feminism, Writing," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 3 (1995): https://doi.org/10.2307/3208892, 348.

as her own. Duras' narrative, thus, rejects at every turn the possibility of reproduction and thereby leaves it open to a radically different future than the one into which she was born.

This theme of a queer future through the figure of the child is also evident in Lefèvre's *Retour*. Just as Khiêm and Duras's radicality lie both in their personal biography and narrative, so too does Lefèvre's recount of her own becoming a story of refusal of any preordained trajectory. Born of an interracial union in 1935, Lefèvre's personhood, some ways represents the alternate possible future at which *Nam et Sylvie* failed to arrive. Raised mostly by her Vietnamese mother, to the colonial government, her birth and parentage was already considered an aberration. Not to mention, because of Vietnamese society's own conservative views about racial mixing, she also suffered prejudice from the side of the colonized. However, by the time Lefèvre published *Retour* in 1990, that world was already a thing of the past. Lefevre's retelling of her story, therefore, is in some ways both nostalgic and therapeutic. It is, in my eyes, a way of molding nostalgia to fit the contours of the present, and to allow another future to arrive. This sentiment is most succinctly expressed at the end of the "novel" when she writes:

> Un diction vietnamien dit: "La vie est comme un miroir: il vous renvoie votre image quand vous en êtes proche, il vous oublie quand vous êtes loin." Ainsi du miroir de ma vie passé. Il m'en restitue quelques reflets tandis que je suis présente, mais lorsque je quitterai ce pays mon image s'effacera et je ne laisserai plus de trace dans ce paysage d'eau où il recommence à pleuvoir.[226]
>
> A Vietnamese saying goes: "Life is like a mirror: it reflects your image back to you when you are close to it, it forgets you when you are far away." So with the mirror of my past life. It restores some reflections of it to me while I am present, but when I leave this country my image will fade and I will leave no trace in this landscape of water where it starts to rain again.

In an gesture that seeks to bring closure to her past, here, Lefèvre's ending to this text reveals what readers have suspected all along—that the future, or whatever form of futurity that was imagined

[226] Lefèvre, *Retour à la saison des pluies*, 222.

requires an a radical openness, one in which one must accept the indeterminable. In other words, in line with Edelman's argument towards a queer futurity, it is not about inscribing or enacting something positive into the world by reproducing what once was, as to make the yet-to-come tangible. Nor is it about reliving the memories of the past, in order to reproduce the present. On the contrary, it is to cede oneself to the unknown that only non-presence can bring about. Now as an adult *du troisième age*, Lefèvre's nostalgia towards her past childhood is one of acceptance. From this perspective, it makes sense that in the final lines, Lefèvre switches from the conjugated present of her presence(présente), to the future. A future where once she leaves(quitterai), her image will be erased and will no longer leave a trace (s'effacera/laisserai), and in doing so leaves the future radically queer.

Race and the Futurity

In *Race and the Education of Desire,* Ann Laura Stoler sets out to read *Volume I* of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* to address why, for Foucault, "colonial bodies never figure as a possible site of articulation of nineteenth century European sexuality?"[227] This question comes about in what seems like an effacement of racial and imperial discourses within Foucault's written work, as it is related to nineteenth century sexual discourses of repression. Here, Stoler argues that race plays a far more central role than it had been discussed or explored at the time.[228] Though it should come to no surprise that the technologies of sex and race are inseparable within European imperial formation, Stoler's provocation laid the groundwork for much of our contemporary understanding of these matrixes. Stoler furthered this line of thought in *Carnal knowledge and Imperial Power* when she argued that imperial power was held by those very clear demarcations

[227] (Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), vii.
[228] Ibid, viii.

of race within the colonial world.[229] Returning to questions posed in *Race and the Education of Desire*, here, Stoler sought to further understand, in her own words, "why Foucault's elusive and suggestive treatment of race still remains so marginal to what colonial historians take from him today."[230] This is especially poignant in the chapter "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: Cultural Competence and the Dangers of Métissage" where Stoler delves into the politics of progeny and *métissage* in colonial Indochina.

Drawing on a 1898 court case where a half French, half native boy was sentence to prison, but was denied clemency based on his mixed parentage and cultural "abandonment," Stoler pointed to something significant in colonial racial distinction; rather than a birth right, in the eyes of empire, Frenchness was ordained the noticeable "physical features of race and "mortal certainty."[231] For the young Nguyen Van Thinh *dit* Lucien, the incapacity to read or speak French meant, in the eyes of the court, that he was culturally abandoned by his father, Icard, and was thus deemed a *vulgaire annamite*.[232] Frenchness, in other words, was a categorizing feature that included both racial attributes, as well as cultural and linguistic competency. To lack one or the other, therefore, is to lack the very basic requirements by which one is recognized as having mixed privileges, in the eyes of the law.

Turning our attention back to the topic of queer reproduction vis-à-vis Edelman, what Stoler's work point towards is precisely the politics of permissible, or politically recognizable reproduction. Race within this colonial world, the seemingly well-defined category for citizenship, is in fact a much more complex tension between perceived morality and social capital than about

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[229] Catherine Hall, review of *Review of Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, by Ann Laura Stoler, *Social History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 552.
[230] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 141.
[231] Ibid, 95.
[232] Ibid, 86.

pure anthropological difference. Put differently, the significance of the Icard and Nguyen Van Thinh case isn't that the ruling was unjust, an absurd view given the context, but that it is indicative of the politics of reproduction which undergirds colonial hegemony; that there is only a drive toward reproduction of a certain kind. This was important considering that most of these mixed raced children were the direct product of French servicemen and local prostitutes/domestic workers, which goes against official moral codes.[233] Reproduction, therefore, is not necessarily an inherent good, if it also does not reproduce the same structures of race that secures France's colonial futurity.

Though race and futurity are themes that permeate throughout *Nam et Sylvie,* there are several key instances worth highlighting. The first instance occurs when Nam is invited to a debate at the university:

> Pour le soir du 1er juin, j'étais invité à participer à un débat où "un écrivain d'Indochine", Éliane Tournier, devrait présenter son roman: *Elle blanche et Lui jaune*. Elle y connait les mésaventures d'une Française épousant à Hanoï un homme de ma race—ce qui ne me laissait pas indifférent, malgré l'invraisemblance d'une union de ce genre à l'époque. Éliane Tournier n'était d'ailleurs pas une inconnue à la Maison: elle nous avait honorés d'une conférence; elle avait même assisté à un de nos bals, au cours duquel elle confia à notre directeur "son étonnement devant le spectacle de tant de Françaises dansant avec des Annamites."[234]
>
> For the evening of June 1, I was invited to participate in a debate where "a writer from Indochina", Éliane Tournier, should present his novel: *Elle blanche et Lui jaune*. She knows about the misadventures of a Frenchwoman marrying a man of my race in Hanoi—which did not leave me indifferent, despite the improbability of a union of this kind at the time. Éliane Tournier was no stranger to the House: she had honored us with a conference;

[233] In her work on prostitution in the French protectorate of Tonkin(northern Vietnam), Isabelle Tracol-Huynh noted that in 1929 64.7% of the European civilian population in Tonkin lived in Hanoi and the port city of Hai Phong. In Cochonchina (Southern Vietnam), 87% of the European population lived in Saigon, most of which were men. This concentration of male colonists not only made the gender and power dynamic more stark, it also culminated in a material culture that propagated the colony as a "sex-paradise." Among post cards that exoticized the far-away colony, there was also the song "La petite Tonkinoise," with its suggestive lyrics, which further highlighted the role of native women as prostitutes. So widespread was this practice that the Vietnamese word "con gái," (little* girl) later became francisé to "congaï," understood as prostitute/concubine and described as femme-enfant (child-woman) (75-78).

[234] Kim, *Nam et Sylvie*, 24.

> she had even attended one of our balls, during which she confided to our director "her astonishment at the spectacle of so many French women dancing with Annamese.

In this scene, the subject of race takes center stage not only as a marker of difference, but whose very transgression represents a perversion of cultural norms and colonial power structures. By highlighting this writer as "un écrivain d'Indochine," Nam frames the very perspective by which others would have perceived this woman *d'outre-mer*—as if French, but once removed. What's more significant, is that this perversion takes on the scandalously opposite dynamic as the one generally accepted as the norm within the colony; between a native man and the French woman, as seen by the book she wrote and the surprise towards the racial dynamic she to which she remarks.

Of course, this fictive Éliane Tournier, was based on no other than the aforementioned, Christiane Fournier, and her 1933 novel *Lui jaune, elle blanche*, which Julia Emerson summarizes in saying:

> In this unconvincing, even bizarre, intercultural bodice-ripper with an improbable plot, a young French girl marries a Vietnamese communist, and, because she is unable to produce a child, is branded "the demon of the Occident." Various murders ensue including that of the French girl, which supposedly leaves the way clear for the husband's concubine to conceive. The author portrays the husband and other natives as being barely human.[235]

The novel's plot, though certainly a reversal of the traditional narrative of clandestine relationships between a French man and an Annamite woman. Here, not only is racial difference upheld by highlighting the mistreatment of the white, female figure, but also by the demonizing of the "barbaric" natives who always return to their own kind. On top of this, in one fell swoop of segregationist didacticism, the dead-end of the relationship is spelled out by the white female's explicit incapacity to bear this mixed child. Thus, the colonial trope of white women needing protection from native men, but not the other way around, is once more reified as just cause for

[235] Emerson, "Phạm Duy Khiêm. A Man Apart," 111.

the colonial enterprise itself. For this reason, Nam is quick to state his disdain for the novel and expresses on the following:

> *Elle blanche et Lui jaune*, l'ouvrage d'Éliane Tournier, était tendancieux et injuste pour les hommes jaunes. En réalité, si une union de ce genre devait forcément échouer, c'était surtout parce qu'elle se heurtait aux préjugés et à la politique des Français de là-bas; les coutumes de nos ancêtres et les défauts réels ou supposes de notre race ne pouvaient jouer qu'un rôle secondaire: je le démontrai aisément, devant l'amphithéâtre comble. Mais si sûr de moi que je fusse, je n'avais point compté sur le succès que j'obtins, sur la sympathie vive et spontanée des auditeurs dont l'un, s'adressant à ses voisins, fit tout haut cette remarque: "pour quelle femme parle-t-il ce soir?"[236]
>
> *She White and Him Yellow*, the work of Éliane Tournier, was tendentious and unfair to yellow men. In reality, if a union of this kind was bound to fail, it was above all because it came up against the prejudices and politics of the French people there; the customs of our ancestors and the real or supposed faults of our race could only play a secondary role: I demonstrated it easily, in front of the packed amphitheater. But however sure of myself I was, I had not counted on the success I obtained, on the lively and spontaneous sympathy of the listeners, one of whom, addressing his neighbors, remarked aloud: " for what woman does he speak this evening?

Small victory withstanding, the experience was nonetheless humiliating for Nam who had to speak from the position of the Annamite, as if he were charged to defend the entire race (les hommes jaunes). What's also important about this intertextual reference to Fournier's novel is the centrality of the child figure, or lack thereof.

Evoked as if it were a *casus belli* against all yellow men, here, the non-child or the incapacity to reproduce, symbolize the ultimate future that awaits such undesired unions—no future at all or at the very least, one that is predestined to fail. In an attempt to address Fournier's perverted text with his own, Kim takes a radical stance refusing to offer a counter narrative via the birth of a mixed-race child. Indeed, rather than giving in to a reactionary politics of reproduction, Kim's text rejects the figure of the child. Yet, rather than condemning the white, female figure as infertile, and the birth of a child the necessary conclusion to this love narrative, Kim's refusal takes the form of a deliberate, and mutually agreed upon, abortion. In other words, the queer futurity

[236] Kim, *Nam et Sylvie*, 27.

presented is the rejection of birth for the very explicit purpose of self-preservation. For what type of future would the birth of this *métis* child have brought them? [237] As such, although both characters lamented the death of this to-be child, a symbol of the future, it also afforded Nam and Sylvie a new life. In other words, here, it is the non-child that guarantees the future and not the other way around.

Shifting our attention to Duras' *Un barrage contre le pacifique*, the figure of the racialized child, or here—racialized children—also plays a significant role in framing a queer futurity. Whereas in *Nam et Sylvie* queer futurity took the form of a deliberate abortion, here, readers are presented with children whose lives have already taken a detour. Like Duras' own unfortunate childhood experience with her siblings, Joseph and Suzanne, were raised in an impoverished setting among other native children. This meant that while they were technically French, their experience and proximity to the locals made them culturally mixed, which, as we have seen, meant that they, too, were ostracized by the colonial government. Simply put, Joseph and Suzanne represent the children whose futures were supposed to be better off than those of their parents under imperial rule—For what other reason would a family from metropolitan France move to a far-flung colony on the other side of the globe if not for better economic opportunities and the means to raise their children? Yet, to everyone's chagrin, not only does the family become more impoverished and debt ridden, but the children themselves reject to continue their parents' legacy.

In the case with Suzanne, the character stand-in for Duras whose virginity and hand in marriage to M. Jo could have saved the family from complete financial ruin, she rejects the marriage proposal. Not only this, as a white female colonist whose role to the empire was that of

[237] In thinking about what would happen should they not go through with the abortion, Nam writes, "Mais comment me defender de penser que si les préjugés de son milieu avaient moins pesé sur elle, si elle n'avait pas cédé à son amour propre et à la crainte d'avoir honte devant sa mère et ses relations, il ne lui eût pas été impossible de garder notre enfant sans encumber ma vie?" (Kim 119).

a womb, Suzanne also refused to have anything to do with the men who courted her. Take the following exchange, for example, where M. Jo offers Suzanne a diamond ring after their brief courtship:

> --Combien elle vaut?
> M. Jo sourit comme quelqu'un qui s'y attendait.
> --Je ne sais pas, peut-être vingt mille francs. Instinctivement Suzanne regarda la chevalière de M. Jo. le diamant était trois fois plus gros que celui-ci. Mais alors l'imagination se perdait…C'était une chose d'une réalité à part, le diamant; son importance n'était ni dans son éclat, ni dans sa beauté mais dans son prix, dans ses possibilités, inimaginable jusque-là pour elle, d'échange. C'était un objet, un intermédiaire entre le passé et l'avenir. C'était, une clef qui ouvrait l'avenir et scellait définitivement le passé. A travers l'eau pure du diamant l'avenir s'étalait en effet, étincelant. On y entrait, un peu aveuglé, étourdi.[238]

> --How much is it worth?
> Mr. Jo smiled like someone who expected it.
> "I don't know, maybe twenty thousand francs." Suzanne instinctively looked at M. Jo's signet ring. the diamond was three times bigger than this one. But then the imagination was lost… It was a thing of a separate reality, the diamond; its importance was neither in its brilliance nor in its beauty but in its price, in its possibilities, unimaginable until then for her, of exchange. It was an object, an intermediary between the past and the future. It was a key that opened the future and definitively sealed the past. Through the pure water of the diamond the future was indeed spread out, sparkling. We entered it, a little blinded, dazed.

In an unromantically, somber exchange, Suzanne does not see M. Jo's offer of the ring as an amorous gesture. Her haste towards the ring's value, as Duras spells out, has more to do with self-preservation—an intermediary object between past and future, the key to a different life—than it does with any allusion of love ever after. However, this future came at a price. As Kevin O'Neill puts it:

> Monsieur Jo mistakenly and quite naively believes that what he desires in Suzanne will be satisfied in seeing her(naked). The means by which he attains this goal are of no importance, since her feelings for him have little to do with the object he believes he desires; thus he resorts to the easiest and most natural solution for a man of his class: economic exchange. In effect, he simply wishes to buy her. By seeing Suzanne, Monsieur Jo hopes to possess her, to acquire a certain dominance to which wealth feels entitled. But Suzanne's power over Monsieur Jo does not lie in the physical mysteries hidden by her clothes; after all, we can safely assume that this man, who has been to school in Paris, has

[238] Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, 126.

> seen many beautiful women. Suzanne's appeal clearly lies in her impenetrability, a sort of mystery that falls outside any economic solution.[239]

Put differently, what's powerful about Suzanne's cold indifference to M. Jo is that it is a blatant rejection of his attempt to buy her. It is for this reason O'Neill points to John Berger's distinction between nakedness and nudity, in order to argue that while he bought her nakedness in the hopes of it becoming nudity via the "owner-spectator" effect, Suzanne's naked body remains a mystery because she readily gives it to him.[240] For Suzanne, all she gave in exchange was her nakedness, but never her nudity. In other words, rather than reproduce the system of economic dependency that humiliated and financially crippled her family, Suzanne refused to be a mere product of consumption. Indeed, as Carol J. Murphy notes; sexual desire in Durasian novels are generally associated with erotic prods, where at a figurative level, "money as satiation of desires is inscribed in the novel's tale—and critical tally—of a state-sponsored "prostitution," or promotion of the colonial adventure in Indochina as investment for profit."[241] However, having lived to see her parents make one terrible investment after another, Suzanne's uncooperative stance towards marriage affords her a different future; one that is her own.

Another significant aspect of this exchange, particularly on the subject of racial futurity, is that M. Jo is a wealthy Chinese man. To accept his proposal in marriage, therefore, Suzanne would also have only played out the same politics of racialized prostitution in the reverse. Turing down M. Jo's offer, therefore, was also to decline the dynamic of the racial disparity between them, which was only mitigated by economic means. To put it another way, race was not for sale. More importantly, however, the most queer aspect of Suzanne's character is that she refuses any

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[239] O'Neill, "Structures of Power in Duras's *Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique*," 48.
[240] The distinction between the two terms here is that "nakedness" is what one sees of themselves, while nudity is what the other sees. See. Chapter 3 in *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger.
[241] Carol J. Murphy, "Going With the Flow: Duras's Changing Economies of Desire," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 19, no. 5 (October 20, 2015) https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2015.1092237, 535.

marriage, at all. This is evident by the end of the novel, in the scene right after she loses her virginity to the neighbor, Jean Agosti on his family's pineapple farm, Suzanne tells him plainly, "J'ai jamais eu l'intention de t'épouser."[242] And, thus, the novel ends with both a refusal to recast racial difference as a way of reconciling economic disparity, as well as any allusion to a normative union—even with her own race—as a means to securing a different future.

Turning our attention to Lefèvre's *Retour*, race and futurity also play a central role in the development of the narrative. As a sequel to her previous work, *Métisse blanche*, where she explored more directly the difficulties of growing up as a Eurasian child, *Retour* looks more towards the implications of a mixed future. After all, what separates the first and second narrative, is precisely the time that has elapse since her initial departure from Vietnam and her eventual return. Here, as in the Icard case that was previously mentioned, race isn't just a matter of skin color, but also of language and acculturation. It is for this reason that when Lefèvre visits the Vietnamese consulate for her visa, she is uncertain about how to address the office staff, asking herself, "allais je m'addresser aux hommes derrière le guichet en vietnamien moi aussi?"[243] As soon as she spoke, however, the words come out in French, and the men misidentify her: "'Je voudrais un formulaire pour une demande de visa s'il vous plait.' Voilà. Je m'étais exprimée en français." Mais eux m'avaient tout de suite identifiée. 'Viêt Kiêu à?' Pour Vietnamien résidant en France?—Non, je suis française, je voudrais un visa de touriste."[244] Despite its air of banality, this bureaucratic encounter with the state reveals how racial categories are negotiated. For despite having asking for the form in French, the men quickly identify her as a *Việt kiều*, a Vietnamese person living abroad.

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[242] Duras, Un barrage contre le Pacifique, 354.
[243] Lefèvre, *Retour*, 120.
[244] The term *Việt kiều* is often designated to overseas Vietnamese who have left the country and have residency aboard, while those born abroad are called *Người Việt Hải Ngoại*; Retour, 120-121.

Caught off-guard, Lefèvre's immediate reaction was then to affirm her legal status as a French citizen. However, that was not their question and upon leaving, Lefèvre spirals into an identity crisis, saying, "J'étais sortie immédiatement, sans même dire merci ou au revoir. Dans la rue j'avais marché très lentement, la tête vide. Je m'étais sentie mal à l'aise comme si j'avais menti à ce fonctionnaire. Dès que je me trouvais officiellement devant un Vietnamien je ne savais plus qui j'étais, mon identité devenait floue et la peur d'être rejetée me reprenait."[245] For the reader, what this statement reveals is the complexity with which one self-identifies racially. More than that, however, is that such complexities are not set in stone, but rather triggered by the very encounter with the state, which demands a proper and official classification.

Despite being a *métisse,* Lefèvre's traumatic past of ostracization for her mix parentage quickly makes her recoil into the skin that makes her feel most safe. In claiming her Frenchness, she saves herself from any potential rejection that might arise. At the same time, because she knows this is not the full truth, she falls into despair about her identity. As it is elsewhere, here, fear of rejection form the very basis for what sustains colonial notions of race. The irony of all this, though, is that by recoiling to the French identity, which has kept her safe, Lefèvre risks missing the chance of reconciling the very thing that has kept her from moving forward. Her future, in other words, is and always has been tied up to how she saw her own race, on top of how others saw her.

Lefèvre's anxiety towards her mixed status has precedents, of course, as it recalls countless other stories of short-lived sexual encounters between French officers and doll-eyed, native girls. For Lefèvre's mother, her daughter's existence is a reminder of her dishonor, and as a burden she must bear. And it is through this burden that Lefèvre's mother identifies herself with the main

[245] Lefèvre, *Retour*, 121.

character in the Vietnamese epic poem, *Truyện Kiều* (The Tale of Kieu) by Nguyễn Du. In this classic example of Confucian filial piety, often considered the most significant work of Vietnamese literature, Du's recounts the story of a beautiful girl, Kiều, who sold herself to a scholar in order to help her family after a series of misfortunes.[246] Though the story ends well, Kiều had to endure rape and forced prostitution, among other things, which left her traumatized and unable to be intimate with her lover. On this Lefèvre writes:

> Et comme pour donner un sens à son infortune, elle commença à identifier son destin à celle de la belle et malheureuse Kiêu—personnage central du célèbre poème de Nguyên Du.[247] Elle en savait des centaines de vers qu'elle récitait de mémoire et qui lui tenaient lieu de philosophie et de morale. Elle en avait un adapté à chaque circonstance, soit pour justifier les épreuves qu'elle devait endure, soit pour critique mes défauts ou louer mes efforts. Mon enfance et ma jeunesse entières furent nourries, je dirais même bercées, de la mélopée pathétique du récit des infortunes de la belle Kiêu. Elle avait perdu son fils, elle n'avait plus de protecteur, elle était seule avec une enfant à charge et pas n'importe quel enfant: une bâtarde, une métisse. Son faux pas était inscrit sur le visage de sa fille. Elle n'avait plus d'honneur, ses compatriotes ne voulaient plus d'elle: pour eux, elle était devenue une "femme à soldats."[248]
>
> And as if to make sense of her misfortune, she began to identify her destiny with that of the beautiful and unfortunate Kiêu—the central character of Nguyên Du's famous poem. She knew hundreds of verses that she recited from memory and which took the place of philosophy and morals. She had one suited to every circumstance, either to justify the hardships she had to endure, or to criticize my faults or praise my efforts. My entire childhood and youth were nurtured, I would even say lulled, by the pathetic melody of the tale of the misfortunes of the beautiful Kiêu. She had lost her son, she no longer had a protector, she was alone with a dependent child and not just any child: a bastard, a mixed race. His misstep was written on his daughter's face. She no longer had honor, her compatriots no longer wanted her: for them, she had become a "soldiers' wife."

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[246] Another lines of similarity drawn between Lefèvre's mother and Kiều is the marriage to a well to do Chinese man, who she does not love in order support herself. Here Lefèvre writes, "Elle rencontra donc cet homme de sept ans son aîné, sévère et froid, et qui cependant était amoureux d'elle. Il était chinois, il gagnait bien sa vie, il pouvait à coup sûr lui procurer la sécurité dont elle avait besoin. Elle le trouvait laid et, à vingt-deux ans, sa sensibilité se rebellait à l'idée d'une union physique avec un tel être" (87).

[247] Though there are diacritic marks on both the author's name, Nguyễn Du, and the name of the story, *Truyện Kiều*, Lefèvre leaves them out here in her telling.

[248] Considered the most significant work in Vietnamese literature, *Truyện Kiều's* full title is *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* (斷腸新聲/A New Cry From a Broken Heart), and was written in *lục bát* (6-8) meter. Borrowing the plot of the Chinese novel *Jīn Yún Qiào* (**金雲翹**), It has been said that The Tale of Kieu has been read as an analogy of the author's personal attatments to Vietnam's political climate, where there was conflict between the different ruling families. See. Keith Taylor's introduction to Tale of Kieu, translated by Vladislav Zhukov.; Lefèvre, *Retour*, 85.

In describing her mother's tragic, quixotic self-identification with the fictitious Kiều, Lefèvre paints the mother figure as someone who found themselves at the margin of society—Not just any society, but a Confucian society in which a single mothers are seen as transgressors of decency. To make matters worse, the bastard child is a *métisse*. If a child out of wedlock made someone "indecent," then a mixed child makes them a "whore." Like Kiều, Lefèvre's mother feels like she was tricked into prostitution, then only to be rejected by those closest to her. What's at stake, thus, in a story of a mother who did not see her daughter as an asset helping her on the path to a brighter future, but as a liability whose face reminds her of her past faux-pas. In such a way, the child figure that Lefèvre have of herself, the one she relays to us, was not a symbol reproductive futurism at all. On the contrary, if it meant anything, given the mother's precarious financial situation, it would have been the lack of children that made her more eligible, and ultimately, offered a better future.

Here, same as in *Nam et Sylvie* and *Un Barrage*, the figure of the child, as guarantor of the future and the self-imposing *raison d'être,* is radically queered by a total rejection of children as the answer to their problems. In all three narratives, there is a disjuncture between what is traditionally understood as the benefits to having children, and the political implications, versus the cruel reality in which those children are actually raised. In fact, what the three narratives demonstrate rather piercingly is that not having children really would have ameliorated their situations. To be clear, I am not saying that children are in and of themselves burdens, only that the future in these novels depended on both the failure of the colonial mixed-race romances, as well as the absence of the child figures.

This realization that not having children might have been a better choice was so deeply understood and ingrained in Lefèvre's mother that even Lefèvre felt it in their mother-daughter relationship. In a powerful scene where Lefèvre, after years apart, finally speaks with her mother

on the phone, she recounts, “J’entends ‘maman’ comme si ce mot avait été prononcé par une autre bouche. Il me semble qu’il y a des siècles que je n’ai pas dit cela. Durant des années je me suis considérée comme quelqu’un qui n’a plus de parents, comme une orpheline” “(I hear 'mom' as if that word had been spoken by another mouth. It seems like centuries since I said that. For years I considered myself as someone who no longer has parents, as an orphan).”[249] In this rather gut-wrenching admittance, Lefèvre states what many other mixed raced children certain have felt in Vietnam; abandonment—To feel like an orphan despite having a mother. It is a feeling that follows her, that haunts her dreams, as we see a few lines later where he mother stops speaking, Lefèvre writes:

> Allô?
> Pas de réponse. Mais je perçois un grésillement dans l’appareil: c’est donc que nous sommes en communication, que le lien n’est pas coupé. Mais alors, pourquoi est-ce que personne ne répond? Voilà, elle est partie, elle a disparu, dissolue dans la brouillard comme la dame de mon rêve. J’éprouve brusquement le même sentiment de panique que dans mon cauchemar[…] Je parle si mal ma langue maternelle à présent, elle a dû le remarquer, sans aucun doute.[250]

> Hello?
> No answer. But I perceive a crackling in the device: it is therefore that we are in communication, that the link is not cut. But then, why is no one answering? Well, she's gone, she's disappeared, dissolved in the fog like the lady in my dream. I suddenly experience the same feeling of panic as in my nightmare […] I speak my mother tongue so badly now, she must have noticed, no doubt.

From the fear of rejection and abandonment to her nightmare and, finally, to her anxiety about her Vietnamese, Lefèvre poetically expresses an anguish that few other could. An anguish that not only she felt, but also many others, such as the Amerasians who had to be evacuated after the

[249] Lefèvre, *Retour*, 114.
[250] Ibid, 115-116.

Vietnam war. [251] Of the lucky few mixed-race children that were able to leave before the height of the war in 1968, Lefèvre had no allusions about her place in the world. Her birth was a disappointment, and her childhood was an endless wave of shame for being different. And it is here one might ask what sort of future would have befell her had she produced her own child in the same circumstance? Once more, in both the colonial and postcolonial context, race undergirds futurity insofar as it determines who had rights and who didn't, or who had a life worth living and who did not. For Lefèvre, her race is what caused her past trauma, at the same time, it was only by reconciling with this past that allowed her to move forward and onward with her life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to sketch out a literary space that is Vietnamese Francophone, or more accurately, the temporality of Vietnamese Francophone. It is, as all other literary groupings that have come before it; a product of its time. At the same moment, there are elements within this corpus that dared to be extravagantly different. Sadly, with these works, artistry is often overlooked by the draw of colonial historicity. Lost in the ever looming shadow of the Vietnam war, these residues of a different colonial world tends to be overlooked by their seemingly more urgent postcolonial brothers and sisters. On the surface, the three Vietnamese Francophone novels that we have seen share similar narratives of tragic romances that end in failure. One might even read them allegorically along the lines of independence, as many people would. There is nothing wrong with this. However, embedded in the text, are other dimensions and lessons with which it is worth spending time. As I have demonstrated throughout this extended text, none of these novels let the claim of written history be their defeat. In other words, their nostalgic mode does not

[251] Though estimates differ, according to Irene Felsma and Kirk Felsma, by 1986 when they published their article, around 3,700 Vietnamese Amerasians made it to the United States through the Orderly Departure Program, with an estimate of 12,000-15,000 still remaining in Vietnam. See. "Vietnamese Amerasians: Identification and Identity."

paralyze their politics nor does it affirm the past as a foreclosure. Indeed, there is something radically queer about the way time and temporality has been perceived and expounded within these three novels.

In borrowing Lee Edelman's notion of queer temporality as a non-reproductive future, where reproduction also means the reproduction of systems and modes of being, I argued that all three works offered another vision for what one might call futurity. In all three works, futurity was cut apart from its traditional relationship with the figure of the child as a symbol of progress. In fact, in all three novels, there seems to be a consistent theme in which a producing a child becomes the protagonists' downfall. In Nam Kim's *Nam et Sylvie*, it was through aborting the child that Nam and Sylvie got to live out their lives. In Marguerite Duras' *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, it was rejecting marriage and having kids is what freed Suzanne from being tied to the land. Lastly, in Kim Lefèvre's autobiographic novel, because she was born out of wedlock, it was only by the native mother letting go of her mixed race child that allowed the two to flourish. Indeed, in all three novels, temporality is queered by repositioning the end points of their narrative. The future isn't just more of the same, but a reality that is entirely other. In all three works, liberation takes the form of an opening to another life. Yet, to arrive at this opening, all the protagonists must revisit their past, to free themselves from the cycle of history that produced them. And, thus, with these Post-colonial, Vietnamese Francophone novels, the nostalgic mode plays an important roles in character development, as well as offering different ideas of other possible futures. Because not all things in the past are foreclosed, and the future is what you make of it.

Chapter 4

Trapped In Time: Abad, Balmori, and The Philippines' Forgotten "Golden Age"

While some Hispanic Studies scholars might be aware of the corpus of Filipino writings in Spanish, others are often surprised to hear that the Philippines even had a Golden Age in Fil-Hispanic writing(1898-1941), which, till more recently, has been largely ignored. This is due, in part, to the fact that focus of colonial Philippines have disproportionately emphasized the founding fathers like José Rizal, Pedro Paterno, Isabelo de los Reyes, and other *Ilustrados "*(Enlightened ones)" whose lives and works revolved around the wars of independence.[252] Indeed, these male intellectuals, often considered the "brains of the nation," were dedicated to producing a Filipino nationalism that was intimately tied with their love for Spain and her culture.[253] However, when Americans arrived in the islands after they had declared victory against Spain in 1898, many Filipinos writers began to choose English as their language of expression. This shift not only changed the way Filipinos regarded the Spanish language, which at the time was beginning to fall out of favor beyond the ruling class, but it also produced a literary landscape in which postcolonial writing in the Philippines would exist as three main, separate corpuses; in Spanish, English, and Tagalog.

It is no wonder, then, when Antonio Abad wrote his novel, *La oveja de Nathán*(1928) "(Nathan's Sheep)", or when Jesús Balmori wrote *Los Pájaros de Fuego*(1945) "(The Birds of Fire)," despite being the height of Fil-Hispanic writing—hence Golden Age—so few Filipinos still spoke Spanish that these novels would be largely overlooked. Not to mention, with the arrival of

[252] Wystan De la Peña (2011b): "Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898–1941)", in: *Pilipinas Мипа! Филиппины прежде всего!: К 80-летию Геннадия Евгеньевича Рачкова*, San Petesburgo: MAE PAH, pp. 125.

[253] Resil B Mojares, *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de Los Reyes, and the Production of Modern Knowledge* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006).

WWII the Philippines, and Manila in particular, there were so much death and damage that whatever was left of the Spanish speaking population became even smaller.[254] Indeed, even now, this Fil-Hispanic literary history is still ironically foreign to many Filipinos that scholars such as Wystan de la Peña has noted, "For those of the current generation studying Philippine literature who are lucky to touch on Philippine letters in Spanish, the denomination of "Golden Age" for this period only comes across as a historical abstraction." And that "for them, there is nothing "golden" to the period except for its label."[255]

Going against De la Peña's take, I would argue that while the Fil-Hispanic literature of this period might not resemble other references to a literary Golden Age, such as Spain's or Italy's, it is nonetheless a remarkable body of work that might be fitting of the name. Moreover, there is a unifying thematic of nation building and liberation that weaves these works together in a cohesive way. Aside from this, the existence of the corpus also invites many questions about language, identity, and subjectivity within the postcolonial condition, which have yet to be fully articulated. My interest in this area, then, not only has to do with the timing of this literature, which is at once colonial and postcolonial—due to the American presence—but also what this timing might offer us a broader understanding about the post in postcolonial subjectivity.

Indeed, if a Fil-Hispanic Golden Age could only take place after the Philippines' independence from Spain, when Castilian was eclipsed by English, then there is something crucially important about the temporality and its contribution to the formation of the Filipino subject. One might well be content by saying that such writings were the last effort of a dying tradition, or that it was an excess of elitist nostalgia for a time that never was. Yet, such a

[254] Between the Japanese occupation of the Philippines from 1942 to 1945 and the Philippine Campaign of 1944-1945 Manila suffered so much damage that it became of the Capitals most affected by the war, alongside Berlin and Warsaw. In Manila, the colonial Spanish city, Intramuros, was essentially completely destroyed.
[255] De la Peña (2011b): "Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898–1941)", 125.

perspective would be an utter denial of how deeply and culturally significant Castilian was to the development of the modern Philippines. In other words, writing in Spanish was not simply to write as though it were interchangeable with any other language, which would have been English or Tagalog in this case, but rather as a decisive mode of expression that is at once deeply rooted in a particular literary tradition and as a conscious political act. It is an form of self-proclamation that was differentiated by the paradoxical usage of the former colonial language to encounter the new one.

My argument in this chapter is that rather than a mere ahistorical, aesthetic regression, literary production in Spanish during this period demonstrates a deliberate attempt of producing a complex, postcolonial society where notions of time and culture are constantly unsettled. Through the reading of Antonio María Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* alongside Jesús Balmori's *Los Pájaros de Fuego*, I posit that postcolonial temporality in the two novels can be understood as a delineation from a nationalist trajectory of one nation one state and that the postcolonial condition described in these novels . Further, that what makes the postcolonial condition in these novels is precisely this possibility of situating oneself within a given history, while proclaiming another. In my view, this deliberate deployment of literary language to produce a new politics is not incongruent with the ideals of postcolonial modernity, but is itself indicative of the postcolonial condition wherein language choice is part of the anti-colonial tool kit. In both novels, the anti-imperialist politics is always dependent on a relationality with another empire. As such, novels and plays were less about producing cultural objects made for consumption and financial gain than they were about defending Philippine cultural sovereignty and resistance.[256] My goal is twofold: firstly, to bring

[256] See "Theatrics of Resistance" in Adam Lifshey's *Subversions of the American Century: Filipino Literature in Spanish and the Transpacific Transformation of the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 44-81.

critical attention to these two often overlooked literary works and, secondly, to engage with their notion of postcoloniality, which appears trapped in time, yet offers another understanding of Philippine postcolonial history.

Language as Politics

Spanish and Portuguese speakers are often surprised upon learning that they share some of the very same vocabulary as many people residing in the Philippines. A simple YouTube search of the Chavacano language quickly reveals a number of videos showing how this latinized creole is still very much present in the southern parts of the archipelago.[257] From songs to books to street signs, and more recent efforts to maintain the language's vibrancy in the region, there does not seem to be a shortage of speakers, at least in Mindanao, and specifically in Zamboanga City. For Spanish speakers, it is entirely possible to listen to and understand songs and news broadcasts with minimal effort. Elsewhere in the islands, an abundance of Spanish loan words such as: *dinero*, *edad*, *ensalada*, *estupido*, and so forth, can be found well-integrated into the many official languages. Despite all this, however, the Spanish language as it is formally taught and spoken elsewhere around the globe, that is—the standard variety, is much less frequently heard. How did this happen? Was the Philippines not a Spanish colony for over three centuries? Why does the language not hold the same status as it does in other former Spanish colonies like those in Latin America?

Of course, there are already number of works done detailing the decline of the Cervantine language in Philippines, all of which I won't will not address, however, most agree that limited access to formal instruction, a limited number of native speakers as a result of not being a settler colony, and the arrival of Americans after the defeat of Spain all played a role. This new American

[257] For more information on this creole, see. John M. Lipski, "Chabacano y Español: Resolviendo Las Ambigüedades - John M. Lipski," *Lengua y Migración / Language and Migration* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–4.

presence (between 1898 to 1946), which coincided with the shifting political influence from Europe to the United States after the second World War, as well as shifting economic trends that made English the preferred foreign language, left Spanish education as an elite hobby, despite its deep roots within the country's modern, cultural development.[258] Admittedly, while this grossly reductive overview can serve as an expedient account for the social conditions of Spanish in the country, it is also necessary to recognize that languages, like the people who speak them, are always more complex than official history. This is especially in places like he Philippines where there are well over a hundred indigenous and creole languages. For the sake of exemplarity, I will refer to the Filipino-American historian, Vicente Rafael's, own experience growing up in this complex linguistic context, which he shares in *Motherless Tongues*:

> English is neither my first nor my second language, but serves as both. I speak it when I want to speak something else—that which I imagine to be my mother tongue[…]Born in Manila a decade after the Philippines had gained formal independence from three years of Japanese occupation, nearly half a century of U.S. colonization, and about 350 years of Spanish colonial rule, I grew up inhabiting a complicated linguistic landscape where the mother tongue often seemed like the other's tongue. I went to Catholic schools in Manila where the medium of instruction was English. At home, neither of my parents spoke in their respective native languages to any of their four children. Coming from different parts of the country with over one hundred languages, they spoke mutually unintelligible tongues. They communicated with us in the only language they had in common, a second language that they had learned in school: English […] Born in the mid-1920s, theirs was a generation removed from the Revolution of 1896 and the Filipino-American War of 1899-1902. Living under U.S. colonial rule *entre deux guerres,* they attended the colonial public school system, where English was enforced as the medium of instruction, while the vernaculars were repressed and denigrated. My father spoke Ilonggo, while my mother Kapampangan, though she had become fluent in Tagalog having gone to school in Manila. English was their lingua franca.[259]

Indeed, like many others of his time, Rafael's relationship to language was very much formed by a colonized education, without it ever being under colonialism proper. Setting a scene that seems to almost be inspired by the opening words of Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism,* where Derrida

[258] Miranda Stewart, *The Spanish Language Today* (London: Routledge, 1999), 10.
[259] Vicente L. Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

famously wrote, "I only have one language; It is not mine," Rafael's characterization of growing up in Manila is a classic example of linguistic (dis)possession.[260] English was his precisely to the extent that it came from someone else. Here, as much as in Derrida's account, the coloniality of language seeps further than what any institution, nor single language can properly account; it traversed between both the social and political sphere, while also acting as the dwelling within which Rafael found his being. The oneness of language, of English, was nothing but a farce. English, however, was not only the language of instruction and communication, as Spanish and Tagalog were also taught, albeit poorly and thus, "effectively marginalized."[261] Given this context, language choice is always a political act. In a linguistic milieu where what is native is deferred, and what is one's own must come from without, could there be an utterance that does not pass through some form of translation? For Spanish speakers and authors in the Philippines during the interwar period, the answer was negative to both. However, before I touch on Filipino writing Spanish, it is necessary to back track a bit for further context.

The Arrival of Castilian

As the story goes, Spanish contact with the Philippines took place on a fateful day in 1521 when, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese captain sailing under the Spanish flag arrived on the island of Cebu and claimed it for the Spanish crown. However, Magellan would die a month later after the indigenous king, Lapu Lapu, resisting evangelization, launched an attack against the newly arrived Europeans. After news of this defeat was brought back to Europe by Antonio Pigafetta, another expedition was sent a few years later from Mexico under the leadership of Miguel López de Legazpi, who would found the first permanent settlement in Cebu on February

[260] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mesah (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1.
[261] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 4.

13th, 1565. Yet, it would not be for another several hundred years until the Spanish language would be used as a weapon of emancipation by Filipinos. For critics like Adam Lifshey, the chance encounter between Magellan and Lapu Lapu was hardly something set in the stars, yet, at the same time, one cannot think of Filipino intellectuals of the nineteenth century, who wrote the majority of their works in Castilian, as distinct of that historical legacy which began in 1521.[262] Despite, this long colonial presence, however, the majority of the native population was never given direct and systematic access to the Castilian language, nor to a quality, public education that was non-religious in general, which left the linguistic legacy within the elite circles of mestizos, criollos, and *peninsulares*. Castilian, therefore, was both something foreign and familiar, domesticated but not quite. It was the lingua franca insofar as it was the language of power and law, but the colonial authorities, mostly ran by clerics, were very strict in making sure that the natives should not access the language for fear of dissent. It is for this reason that most of the literary and political corpus written at the time were done by exclusively the sons of elite Filipino families, often *mestizos* who had the resources to give their children an education in Castilian.

For Vicente Rafael, this duality between the foreignness and familiarity of Castilian in the archipelago is precisely what makes it desirable as the language of nationalism for the *Ilustrados* (enlightened ones). This foreignness, he argues, was desirable because it was the promise of something other, of an otherness that could be domesticated. [263] And it was through this technic of translation that Filipinos could see nationalism, via the Castilian language as something that "was as irreducibly alien as it was undeniably intimate."[264] They felt this way because they saw

[262] Lifshey, Adam. *The Magellan Fallacy: Globalization and the Emergence of Asian and African Literature in Spanish*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012, 1-2.
[263] Vicente L Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.
[264] Ibid, 4.

themselves as inheritors of Spain's own colonial legacy. Just as Spain was able to conquer and assimilate the different groups within its borders, such as the Basque, Galicians, Catalans, Valencians, Grenadians, etc…to produce the Spanish nation, so too, these intellectuals thought, could the Filipinos secure their own nationhood via the incorporation of the Castilian language. As such, Filipino intellectuals, did not see their nationalism as stemming from a primordial Filipino essence, but rather as part of their "condition of being endowed with the power to incorporate that which lies outside the nation."[265]

Indeed, here, Filipino nationalism functions as though it were the monolingualism of the other. It gave the promise of social and political emancipation, by offering an imaginary vesical through which to carry out the project of nation building, even if the enactment of that very promise depended on other forms of estrangement to oneself, and to one's country. It was in this context, thus, that Castilian would be doubly desired as the lingua franca, not simply because it was already a global language at the times, or that it was the language in which *ilustrados* like Rizal and Pedro Paterno were educated, but it that it was a foreignness familiar to all the different peoples of the archipelago—familiar because it had been in the Philippines for centuries, and foreign because it came from elsewhere. Castilian was theirs to the extent that it was an inheritance of the other, and it belonged to them(or at least some of them) as a promise of a nationalism to come. Thus, the logic is that if modernity requires a concept of nationhood, and if nationhood would be achieved by a common language, then that common language cannot only be a local one like Tagalog or any other local tongue, but one that would put the Philippines on the global map as a modern nation. In other words, Castilian offered the promise of an *imagined community,* as was recognized by Benedict Anderson.

[265] Ibid, 2.

While it might seem paradoxical that Filipino nationalism would be the nationalism of the other, this belief was widely held and accepted by many Filipino intellectuals of the nineteenth century. This is due to the fact that in the beginning of their movement, Filipino intellectuals such as Rizal, José H. del Pilar, Graciano López Jaena, and Mariano Ponce, all of whom made up the Propaganda Movement did not demand independence, but rather for colonial reforms and adequate representation in the Spanish Cortes.[266] This insistence on reform was well documented in their writings in newspapers such as *La Solidaridad*, which was originally based in Barcelona and Madrid, and which ran regularly from 1889 to 1895. As Vicente Rafael has commented, "Filipino nationalists at this time wanted to be recognized not as 'Filipinos,' for this meant in the late nineteenth century one who was not quite *indio* or Chinese, yet not quite Spanish," but as Spanish patriots, regardless of where they were.[267] This anxiety to assimilate into a Filipino identity within a larger Spanish identity is significant, as it is indicative of the general sentiment of many prerevolutionary thinkers, whose sense of self was very much informed by this sense of relationality, and indebtedness to Spain and her culture. The now famous 1984 painting by *Ilustrado,* Juan Luna y Novicio, entitled, "España y Filipinas," is perhaps one of the most recognizable visual analogies of this paternalistic relationship.

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[266] According to John Norbert Schumacher, "there was a reform movement…which lasted from about 1800-1805, and a good number of Filipinos in Europe never moved or dared to express themselves beyond that stage. But after 1885 at least, there was also a separatist movement, led chiefly by Rizal, but not confined to him. As time went on, the number of advocates of eventual independence had grown to the majority of the Filipinos in Europe and their supporters in the Philippines, those few except Rizal and Marcelo del Pilar dared to put their names to their writings. It is true that the professed goal was assimilation—extension of Spanish laws and government to the Philippines. As the readiness of manu later to collaborate with the Americans would show, this was undoubtedly all that some wanted, but for men like Rizal, del Pilar, Antonio Luna, and others, it was the only front behind which they could operate in the pursuit of their real goal, indedpendce of the Philippines from Spain." *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895 :The Creation of Filipino Consciousness, the Making of the Revolution /*, Rev. ed. (Quezon City :, 1997), viii.

[267] Vicente L Rafael, "Translation and Revenge: Castilian and the Origins of Nationalism in the Philippines," in *The Places of History: Regionalism Revisited in Latin America*, ed. Doris Sommer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 216.

Long touted as the propagandist's ode to *hispanophilia*, this allegorical painting, which was meant as a gift to Pedro Paterno, depicts two female figures representing Spain and the Philippines in their respective dresses with their backs partially exposed to the viewer. Spain, represented through a taller white, female figure, holds tightly around the waist of the Filipino figure while pointing and leading upwards and onwards, which one understands as the direction of "progress." Here, there is no room for irony in the explicit paternalism, only a stark commentary on the supposed benevolence of the colonial project, where a relationship with Spain is seen as crucial to the Philippines's future, and colonial reform the only reasonable path forward. Indeed, the painting, like its literary counterparts of the time, do not attempt to separate the two figures, since many Filipino intellectuals truly believed the civilizing promise of colonialism, despite being witnesses to the exploitative practices that occurred throughout their homeland.

Spain and her culture, in other words were not seen as antithetical to the notion of Filipino nationhood, but rather as intrinsically part of what nationhood entails and thus the task of the *ilustrados* was to prove to Spain that this loyal colony was worthy of her benevolence. This is why there was no apparent irony to the *ilustrados* when Pedro Paterno published what was considered the first Filipino novel, *Nínay: Costumbres Filipinas*, in 1885, or when Isabelo de los Reyes published *El Folk-Lore Filipino* in 1887, and José Rizal with *Noli Me Tángere* in 1887. While Paterno and Rizal's works were written novels, *El Folk-Lore Filipino* by Isabelo de los Reyes was a compendium of indigenous stories meant exhibit the local narrative traditions. Seen together, these early attempts of writing the nation was both an act of producing a national identity by turning the Philippines into an object of (self)ethnography.[268] Indeed, no longer would knowledge and literature of the Philippines be something narrated by others, as it was the case for many

[268] Irene Villaescusa-Illán, "Visions of Global Modernity in Hispano-Filipino Literature," *Other Globes : Past and Peripheral Imaginations of Globalization,* Palgrave Studies in Globalization, Culture and Society, 2019, 129.

centuries, but by Filipinos themselves in the master's tongue, which was now their own. More importantly, however, was that it was done in the literary genre familiar to those in the metropole; *costumbrismo*. Given its categorization as a literary genre that could impart knowledge of social conditions and local practices, *costumbrismo* became the choice writing style of many Filipino novelists of since it gave credence to the life they lived and the culture they saw worth describing.[269] With these efforts, Filipino culture and practices would be brought to the forefront in fiction as a both a politically motivated project of nation building and as a source of knowledge from below, which depended on the relationship between the local and the global, despite the fact that this early ethnography would be carried out exclusively by Filipino men.[270] Put differently, while it is not a point I will pursue further here, it is still worth mentioning that against their best intentions of trying to produce an all-encompassing image of the Philippines to the outside world and to themselves, it is undeniable that this earlier period of Filipino literary history was written exclusively from a male perspective, which would explain the reoccurring obsession with female, virgin figures as allegory of a pure body of the nation.

In line with their obsession with virginal women, the *ilustrados'* obsession with colonial reform was well evidenced in the most famous work of all the men; Rizal's *Noli Me Tángere*. Indeed, as a novel that tells the story of an elite mestizo, Crisóstomo Ibarra, who has come back from his studies abroad to help in the development of his country and to marry his faithful

[269] While *costumbrismo* was the de facto genre of choice for many early Filipino novelists, *modernismo* was also widely popular among Filipino poets at the turn of the twentieth century well into World War II. Balmori himself was well known for being a modernista.

[270] While I do not the a primary focus of this chapter, it is still important to point out that despite feeling as though the ilustrados were tasked with producing the nation among themselves, there was a very obvious lack of female perspective. This lack is not inconsequential nor unexpected given the nineteenth century colonial context, however, it did produce an allegorical coherency whereby, once and again, local stories often, if not always, focused on beautiful, young, and virginal women who suffer a tragic fates. Aside from Paterno's *Nínay*, there was also Rizal's folk-lore writing, *Mariang Makiling*, published after his death in 1916, which tells the story of Diwata, a precolonial goddess figure that would later be hispanized to resemble other trends of marianismo. See Resil B. Mojares' *Waiting for Mariang Makiling: Essays in Philippine Cultural History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002).

sweetheart, María Clara, *Noli* is undoubtedly a classic tale about nation building and the challenges that accompany this process. Crisóstomo, whose life was modeled not uncoincidentally after Rizal's own, was a handsome, Chinese mestizo from a family of means and whose greatest desire was to build a school and see his countrymen flourish. Education, and not necessarily revolution, he believed, would be what saved the Philippines. Yet, as it goes, Crisóstomo's efforts would be undermined by the cleric, Father Dámaso, who would make every attempt to spoil Crisóstomo's plans for the school, as well as his plans for marriage with Father Dámaso's own illegitimate daughter, María Clara. After Crisóstomo comes close to killing Father Dámaso, he is excommunicated from the church and later escapes the islands with the promise to one day return. Later on, it is revealed that the priest's objection to the marriage was based on his decision that his daughter should marry a full-blooded Spaniard, and the novel ends with María Clara joining convent never to be heard from again.

While this novel heavily critiqued the hypocrisy of the friars, their mistreatment of the natives, and their abuses of women, it fell short of an out-right attack on Spanish colonialism as a whole. As such, in many ways, the novel remains to be read as a direct, assimilationist plea for reforms in political representation, education, and the economy, rather than the abolition of the colonial enterprise.[271] This critical discourse developed even further in the sequel, *El Filibusterismo*(1891), when Crisóstomo returns in disguise as Simoun, a jewelry merchant who tries to incite revolution with his friend Basilio. After a series of events, readers find out that María Clara died while living in a convent, and the revolution ultimately fails. Much could be said about the sequel, yet, what's most relevant to mention here, is that the tone had evidently shifted from peaceful reform to violence for both the main character and its author. After the publication of

[271] Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, 68.

Noli, Rizal was already considered an enemy of the state, and so the publication of *Fili*, along with his participation in the civic movement, La Liga Filipina, only concretized his fate with the firing squad a few years after.

As expected, both books were banned by Spanish authorities for their anti-clerical and revolutionary content, which only made them more enticing as the literary materials to inspire the revolution. What is also important, however, was that the nationalism from which these books were conceived, and which the *ilustrados* hoped would further spring out from them, were inextricably mediated by an affirmation of Castilian as a type of technic of nation building. So, even as *Fili*'s tone had shifted from reform to violence, it was also important that it was still written in Castilian in order to give continuity and ferment this newly imagined community. Also important to note, is that access to this imagination was limited purely to the elites who had access to the Spanish language. Literature in Castilian, thus, played a key role for these founding fathers, as it was tangible, cultural proof that Filipinos were ready to author their own narratives about their lives and being. It is this nationalist adage, which explains why, despite several centuries of Spanish colonial presence, it would not be until the late nineteenth century when the works written in Castilian would truly become "Filipino" literature since no prior notion could have existed, and why conversations of Filipino in Spanish always seem to start with Rizal and Paterno rather than earlier. As Issac Donoso has phrased it:

> La literatura generada en lengua Española desde el período de 1565 a 1898—bien por españoles, por criollos, por mestizos, chinos o naturales—no es entendida como parte de la literatura filipina en tanto no tenga un valor nacionalista. De este modo todo un universo literario queda relegado a un cajón de sastre: "literatura colonial de Filipinas". Por el contrario, la influencia determinante que tal literatura tuvo en el devenir de las literaturas en lenguas vernáculas, sí es estudiada como parte consustancial del canon nacional.[272]

[272] Isaac Donoso Jiménez, "La Formación de La Historiografía Literaria Filipina," *Revisa Cultural Hispano-Filipina*, 2010, 108.

> The literature generated in the Spanish language from the period of 1565 to 1898—whether by Spaniards, Creoles, mestizos, Chinese or natives—is not understood as part of Philippine literature as long as it does not have a nationalist value. In this way, an entire literary universe is relegated to a mixed bag: "Philippine colonial literature". On the contrary, the determining influence that such literature had on the evolution of literatures in vernacular languages is studied as an inherent part of the national canon.

What is significant about Donoso's point is that it challenges the notion of the Filipino canon in Spanish as a given—that rather than canonizing what simply exists, almost all considerations of value were inherently bound to a nationalist vision of what the literary could or ought to achieve. Here, language might be utilized to describe what is beautiful, but it is also meant to prescribe and push towards a political future that has not yet come into being. In other words, the beginnings of what one understands as modern Filipino literature in Spanish was born out of a condition of necessity, rather than for art's sake. This is not necessarily a negative aspect of the literature, but it is what separate these early writers from those who came later of this Filipino Golden Age who, in my view, were no longer bound to the same nationalist project sought after by Rizal and his contemporaries. Hence, it is why I chose to focus on Antonio Abad and Jesús Balmori in this chapter, rather than those founding fathers.

What Makes The Fil-Hispanic Golden Age?

Writing about any Golden Age can be a bittersweet experience since one always knows that behind the glamour of such beautiful works of art and literature there is turmoil, and that the height of something, no matter how long lasting, always implies its eventual fall. For Fil-Hispanic literature, the Golden Age is referred to as such because it was the most prolific period for literary production, which would sharply decline after WWII. As Wystan de la Peña points out, this period was marked from the very beginning not by just one war, but two; the Philippine-American War which lasted between 1899 till 1902, and the cultural war the subsumed when American presence

presented new challenges to older customs and norms.[273] This was as true in daily life as it were in the literature which sought to capture the changing cultural attitudes. The Golden Age, which followed the nationalist stage (1880s-1902), only lasted between 1903 until the mid 1940s depending on who you ask. Yet, little would be written about this Golden Age writers by Filipino scholars precisely because of the language barrier. In regards to this lack or critical commentary, Jorge Mojarro Romero has aptly noted that despite the prolific production of the age, and aside from reviews that would appear every so often in newspapers and magazine, there were no major, systematic channel by which new works would be categorized and cataloged as they were being published.[274] Quite differently, writers who produced literature in English such as Nick Joaquin (1917-2004) or Francisco Sionil José, who is still alive today, had a much better public readership and critical engagement. For reasons like these, De la Peña notes that for several decades, the only reliable commentaries on the subject were Estanislao Alinea's *Historia Analítica de la Literatura Hispanofilipina (Desde 1566 Hasta Mediados de 196")*, published in 1964, and Spanish diplomat-turned-literary-historian Luis Mariñas' *La Literatura Filipina en Castellano* in 1974.[275] It would not be until 2000, when a newer, more comprehensive narrative would be brought about by Lourdes Brillantes, a retired University of the Philippines professor of Spanish with her history of Fil-Hispanic letters, *80 Años del Premio Zóbel*.[276]

Named after the prominent Filipino family of Spanish and German descent, Zóbel de Ayala, the Premio Zóbel was the first and only literary prize given in Asia to promote the Spanish language. Brillantes' contribution, thus, was bitter sweet since it marked the end of an era. Prior

[273] De la Peña, "Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898- 1941)," 119.
[274] Jorge Mojarro Romero, "El Estudio de La Literatura Hispanofilipina Durante El Siglo XX," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 66, no. 2 (2018): 656.
[275] De la Peña, Wystan, "Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898- 1941)," 123.
[276] Ibid.; An expanded version of this same publication appeared in 2006 titled, *81 Years of the Premio Zóbel*.

to ceasing to grant awards altogether, the Premio Zobél was already expanding its categories to include other genres, since there was a lack of submission, before giving out its last award to Lina Obieta De Sevilla in 2000. In recent years, more critical scholarship has come about in regards to the period's literature, most notably by scholars both inside and outside the Philippines like Issac Donoso, Adam Lifshey, Jorge Mojarro Romero, Rocío Ortuño Casanova, and a few others. However, the lack of national body that recognizes contemporary Filipino works in Spanish has made discovering other writers a task by itself. So, for now, most of the more recent criticism about the Golden Age period are indebted to preservation efforts like the Premio Zobél, which managed to maintain and broaden interest in some of the Philippines most significant works of the twentieth century.

The Writers and Their Works

The Fil-Hispanic literati at the time, which numbered in the handfuls, were mostly men who were associated with La Independencia, the then nascent body of what would be the republic of Emilio Aguinaldo (1869–1964).[277] According to De la Peña, some of the first major writers post-revolution were Fernando María Guerrero (1878–1929), Cecilio Apóstol (1877–1938), José Palma (1876–1903), Rafael Palma (1874–1939), Jesús Balmori (1887–1948), Manuel Bernabé (1890–1960), and poet-dramatist-essayist Claro Recto (1890–1960).[278] This group would be latter added on by a newer generation of writers born during the American period which included: the "novelist Antonio Abad (1899–1970), essayist and poet Enrique Fernandez Lumba (1899–1990), poet and fictionist Evangelina Guerrero Zacarías (1904–1949), fictionist Enrique Laygo (1897–1932), poet Flavio Zaragoza Cano (1892–1994), essayists Teodoro Kalaw (1884–1940), and Jaime

[277] As the first and youngest president of the Philippines, Aguinaldo was also the first president of a constitutional republic in Asia.
[278] Ibid, 119.

de Veyra (1873–1963).”[279] Together these writers would produce the major works which constitutes the Golden Age of Filipino literature in Spanish.

For De la Peña, the two best novelists among this group were Antonio Abad, who wrote: *El Último Romántico* (1927)(“The Last Romantic”), *La Oveja de Nathán* (1928)(“Nathan’s Sheep”), *El Campeón* (1939)(“The Champion”), *La Vida Secreta de Daniel Espeña* (1960), followed by Jesús Balmori, who wrote *Bancarrota de Almas* (1910)(“Bankruptcy of the Soul”), *Se Deshojó la Flor* (1915)(“The Flower Has Lost Its Petals”), and, finally, *Los Pájaros de Fuego* [Baltori 1945] (“The Birds of Fire”) with dozens of essays, short stories, *Comedias*, and a long list of poems between them.[280] As for poetry, Fernando Ma. Guerrero, Manuel Bernabé, as well as Jesús Balmori, would be considered among the best poets with Bernabé and Balmori on top.[281]

Being the second favorite genre among the Spanish-speaking elites of the time, poetry flourished during the Golden Age as it played an integral part of social functions where señores would recite lines of their favorite poems to señoritas. At seventeen years old, Balmori was the first to publish a poetry anthology in 1904 with Rimas Malayas (“Malay Verses”), which won him first, second, and third place in a contest held by the nationalist newspaper *El Renacimiento* in 1908, in commemoration of the death of Rizal.[282] Balmori would then publish *El Libro de Mis Vidas Manileñas* (“The Book of My Life in Manila”) in 1928, followed by *Mi Casa de Nipa* (“My Nipa Hut”) in 1941, which won him the grand prize in the US-sponsored Commonwealth Literary Contest in Spanish, and which was considered his best work in poetry.[283] Bernabé, who was second only to Balmori, won the Premio Zóbel for his 1925 Spanish translation of Omar Khayyam’s

[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.; The prize first prize was awarded to his poem titled “Gloria.”
[283] Ibid.

Rubaiyat. In the years following, Bernabé would share the same prize with Balmori for their Balagtasan, a Filipino debate in verse form, named after the 19th century Tagalog poet, Francisco Balagtas, and finally for his grand ode to Spain, *Cantos del Trópico* ("Songs from the Tropics") in 1929.[284] Indeed, in the Philippines, like elsewhere at the time, poetry became the medium through which old and new genres could intermingle, resulting in novel and exciting forms of hybridity that has yet to be replicated since.

Also worth mentioning were the many plays that were produced during this period, which, like poetry, were also an integral part of social life for Filipino elites. While plays have been introduced to the Philippines since the 1500s, many were religious in nature. For example, the first enactments were carried out by the Jesuit Pedro Aguarto in 1598 on the island of Cebú, and on Bohol in 1609, while the first recorded presentation in Manila was the *Comedia de la hermosura de Rachel* by Luis Vélez de Guevara (1579-1644) in 1619 for the celebration of the Immaculate Conception.[285] There were also popular non-religious plays such as the *moros y cristianos* genre from the island of Mindanao, which were romance plays that depicted amorous relations between Christians and Muslims.[286] Yet, similar to other Fil-Hispanic creations, theater also did not reach new heights until modern renovations took place in the nineteenth century and during the Golden Age. Two of the most notable plays according to De la Peña include Recto's *Sólo Entre las Sombras* (1917) ("Alone in the Dark") and *La Ruta a Damasco* (1918) ("The Road to Damascus"), which dealt with the negative aspects of Americanization of the country.[287]

While these big names deserved their fame and recognition, Rocío Ortuño Casanova, a former professor of the University of the Philippines Diliman, has pointed out that there were other

[284] Ibid.
[285] Romero, "El Estudio de La Literatura Hispanofilipina Durante El Siglo XX," 664.
[286] Ibid, 654-655.
[287] De la Peña, Wystan, "Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898- 1941)," 120.

notable but neglected authors such as Enrique Laygo, who won the Premio Zobél in 1925 for *Caretas*, Severino Reyes, known as a *gran zarzuelista,* for his musical comedies, Adelina Gurrea who won the Premio Zobél in 1935, and Evengelina Guerrero Zacarías who also won the Premio in 1955.[288] As in other cases, the end of the Golden Age was not the end of Fil-Hispanic literature, but rather a steep decline in production, which still goes on till this day. Casanova makes this clear in saying that there no new critical work about Fil-Hispanic literature that does not include a small section mentioning contemporary writers, no matter how short that section might be.[289] The current climate for this literature is, thus, complicated both for its complex and evolving history, but also because of the ways in which nationalist discourses and transnational movements have affected its methods of categorization and readership. In the following section, I will highlight the differences and similarities between Rizal's *Noli* and Abad's *La Oveja de Nathán*.

Abad's La Oveja de Nathán as Sequel to Rizal

In what might be read as a sequel to Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili*, Antonio María Abad's La Oveja de Nathán ("Nathan's Sheep") is undoubtedly a timely political narrative that questions the nature of power, language, and social relations within a postcolonial society. A winner of the Premio Zóbel in 1929, Abad's story continues the liberatory narrative started by the nation's founding fathers yet recontextualized under American occupation. In this section I will make the case that while Abad's novel takes after Rizal's works, it also distinguishes itself by reframing the question of domination under American rule.

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[288] Rocío Ortuño Casanova, "Introducción Temática a La Literatura Filipina en Español - Literatura Filipina En Español," *Cervantesvirtual*, August 25, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20190825120750/http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/literatura_filipina_en_espanol/literatura_filipina_espanol/#n26.

[289] Ibid.

Taking place during the first World War, the novel follows the life of Mariano Bontulan, a dedicated but impressionable linotypist from Cebu, who desperately wants to do good for his country and the world. Towards the beginning of the novel, Mariano found himself sympathetic to the cause of Germany and her allies, believing that their cause for war was a noble one, but would soon change his mind and alliances to those the United States. After consulting with his guide and mentor, don Benito Claudio de Hernán González, a man of means and influence who would play a crucial role in Mariano's political and personal development, Mariano then leaves the Philippines for the United States to train so that he could join the battle in Europe. After the Allies win the war, Mariano returns to the Philippines as a national hero, a role which he was never properly comfortable inhabiting. Once married to his lover Emilia Sikapat, the young couple, along with his mother, Ta-Titay, all move to Manila where he found a new civilian job as a typographer for *The Manila Daily Chronicle*, which is owned by William Doherty, an American who was less than secretive about the United States' imperialist, economic interests in the archipelago nation. Over time, Mariano realizes that the editorial work conflicted with his personal politics, but felt like his hands were tied given his financial situation, and the responsibilities that came with the child being on the way. In the end, Mariano sees independence from the United States and the only alternative and fights for this cause.

In terms of revolutionary politics, this novel is uncannily similar to Rizals'. Here, the trope of a well-intentioned, young male looking to better the world and his country is repeated, and structure of the hero's return to marry his sweetheart but finds trouble is hardly avoidable. Furthermore, as Josué Hernández points out, there is also a similarity in the novel's biblical starting point—whereas Rizal's *Noli Me Tángere* is referencing Jesus' famous phrase to Mary Magdalene to not touch him, Abad's title refers to the episode in the bible where a rich man robs the poor man

of his sheep as to not have to sacrifice his own flock, a poignant parallel to the United States' neocolonial, military practices where it would enlist soldiers from its overseas territories.[290] And while each author addressed the colonizers of their times—Rizal with the Spanish and Abad with the Americans, both grounded their narratives within the conviction that emancipation was the only way forward. In other words, both emphasized the movement from naïveté to political pragmatism.

Of course, there are many overlaps between the two novels. For example, both works rely the figure of an older mentor who pushes the protagonist on his journey towards political consciousness. In *Noli*, young Crisóstomo Ibarra had his Pilosopo Tasio(for Anastacio), the wise scholar living in San Diego who would offer him guidance. In *La oveja de Nathán*, Mariano's mentor and patron is Don Benito Claudio de Hernán González, who would not only offer him advice, but also challenge his beliefs throughout the novel. Indeed, it was Don Benito with whom Mariano first consulted when he decided to take sides on the issue of the Great War, and where his entry into the process of self-interrogation began.

Initially, for Mariano, the reasons for Germany entering the first World War were just because Germany was only defending itself from England and France, two colonial powers he saw as corrupt and impious.[291] Having read religious propaganda from La Liga Antipornográfica "(The Anti Pornography League)", Mariano was convinced that "Francia y, sobre todo, París era la sentina del mundo, adonde convergían todas las inmundicias y todas las aberraciones del pecado, Y la Humanidad necesitaba liberarse de la pesadilla de París" "(France and, above all, Paris was the cesspool of the world, where all the filth and all the aberrations of sin converged, And

[290] Josué Hernández, "La oveja de Nathán: Una novela filipina/Nathan's Sheep: A Philippine Novel by Antonio M. Abad," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* 4, no. 1 (March 25, 2014): 96.
[291] Antonio M. Abad, *La Oveja de Nathán: Una Novela Filipina = Nathan's Sheep: A Philippine Novel*, Bilingual edition. (Makati City, Philippines: Georgina Padilla y Zóbel, 2013), 4.

Humanity needed to free itself from the nightmare of Paris)."[292] After all, aside from the prostitution, drugs, squaller, and free thinking, Paris of the *Belle Époque* also had the reputation of being the place writers and artists went to live *la vie bohème*; all things that Mariano's fervent catholic upbringing rejected as degenerative. This idea was further instilled in him by Don Benito, who insisted that humanity had nothing to be ashamed of were Paris not exist.[293] Here Abad writes:

> ¡Inglaterra! ¡Oh, y cómo odiaba a esta nación! Hipócrita y explotadora, para Mariano Bontulan la "pérfida Albión," como la llamaban las novelas de Dumas que él había leído, era la verdadera promovedora de aquel conflicto, celosa de la preponderancia comercial, que Alemania iba adquiriendo en todos los mercados del mundo. Pero la suerte favorecía esta vez a Alemania, y después de Francia, Inglaterra se veía obligada a soltar sus colonias. Entonces India, con sus inmensos tesoros, Australia y acaso Canadá se decretarían independientes, y decretarían la muerte del imperio insular. Y libres ya de la opresión inglesa, ¡qué pacto tan hermoso pondrían hacer, de alianza defensiva, India, Australia y Filipinas![294]
>
> England! Oh, and how he hated this nation! Hypocritical and exploitative, for Mariano Bontulan the "perfidious Albion," as they called her in the Dumas novels that he had read, was the true promoter of that conflict, jealous of the commercial preponderance that Germany was acquiring in all the markets of the world. But luck favored Germany this time, and after France, England was forced to release its colonies. Then India, with its immense treasures, Australia and perhaps Canada would declare themselves independent, and decree the death of the insular empire. And now free from English oppression, what a beautiful pact India, Australia, and the Philippines could make as a defensive alliance!

Indeed, what's revealing about this passage is not the macro-politics about global trade, but rather that Mariano, as a Filipino national, saw himself politically aligned to Germany merely for being a world citizen who was against tyrany. Of course, shifts in Mariano's political ideals would occur several times throughout the novel mirroring the shift of the general attitude of many Filipinos towards American occupation.

What set this novel apart from Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili*, however, is that it has a broader view of what the new form of domination looks like. In a revealing passage where Don Benito

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[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid, 6.
[294] Ibid, 6.

challenges Mariano to rethink his adoration for the United States and its lofty promises of one day granting Filipinos independence, he exalts:

> ¡Y quién te ha dicho que esa libertad llegará algún día?—repuso implacable Hernán González. –Mi escepticismo no se funda en el carácter de los pueblos, sino en el carácter de los hombres. Antiguamente, las naciones más ponderosas emprendían en masa la conquista de otros pueblos, y los Guerreros que, con su brazo, ayudaron a dominarlas. El conquistador premiaba así a los que le ayudaron a asentar sus dominios en tierras extrañas…Estos modernos castellanos son los reyes del oro. Los gobiernos no pueden moverse sin contar con su apoyo. Un sistema de gobierno es hoy un vasto sistema financiero. Los gobiernos, lo mismo que las grandes empresas mercantiles, se capitalizan, y sus principales accionistas son los que, refugiados en los grandes palacios de la Quinta Avenida, o sentados a una mesa de trabajo en un banco de Wall Street, dirigen las operaciones bursátiles de los ministros o los presidentes, colocados por ellos en aquellos puestos para defender sus intereses. Y esos funcionarios públicos son los que impiden, guiados por los grandes capitalistas de gobiernos, que se haga justiciar a los pueblos, donde los tentáculos de su dominación han decidido clavarse para chuparles todo su jugo. [295]
>
> And who told you that freedom will come one day? —replied Hernán González relentlessly. -My skepticism is not based on the character of peoples, but on the character of men. Formerly, the most powerful nations undertook *en masse* the conquest of other peoples, and the Warriors who, with their arm, helped to dominate them. The conqueror thus rewarded those who helped him settle his domains in foreign lands... These modern Castilians are the kings of gold. Governments cannot move without their support. A system of government is today a vast financial system. Governments, like large commercial companies, are capitalized, and their main shareholders are those who, sheltered in the great palaces of Fifth Avenue, or sitting at a work table in a bank on Wall Street, direct the stock market operations. of ministers or presidents, placed by them in those positions to defend their interests. And those public officials are the ones who, guided by the great capitalist governments, prevent the justice of the peoples, where the tentacles of their domination have decided to penetrate to suck all their juice.

Describing the shift between the old and new ways of colonizing, Don Benito makes clear what distinguishes the Spaniards from the Americans. Unlike the former colonizers who had a face and a name, the American enterprise in the islands is hidden behind faceless investors. In this new era of American peace, or the new "castellanos," the reality is that state interests is inextricable from the financial interests from Wall Street which funds the overseas projects and investments.

[295] Ibid, 132.

For Mariano's tired mentor, what's worse about this new enemy is that it can no longer be thought about as a monolithic country, which could be easily discerned, but instead because "El gobierno de Filipinas está capitalizado…por los grandes 'trusts'" "(The Philippine government is capitalized…by the big trusts)," with its "pretexto de darle lecciones de democracia y civilización" "(pretext of giving him lessons in democracy and civilization)."[296] In other words, with this new enemy it is much harder fight head on. Here Abad goes further in saying:

> Los especuladores surgían de todas las esquinas, como los hongos. Lo mismo en Manila que en los más remotos municipios del Archipiélago, corredores de toda clase de negocios, vendiendo acciones de compañías, cuyo capital nunca bajaba de los cien mil pesos, daban la impresión de que efectivamente el país acababa de tener un despertar económico, y se organizaba económicamente, para hacer frente a las futuras responsabilidades inherentes a la vida independiente, que se acercaba a pasos de gigante.[297]
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> Speculators popped up from every corner, like mushrooms. The same in Manila as in the most remote municipalities of the Archipelago, brokers of all kinds of businesses, selling shares of companies, whose capital never fell below one hundred thousand pesos, gave the impression that the country had indeed just had an economic awakening, and it was organized financially, to face the future responsibilities inherent to independent life, which was approaching giant steps.

Of course, for some Filipinos, the arrival of the Americans did bring a fresh attitude. Indeed, having spent centuries under Spanish colonial rule, where land rights were restricted to a particular class, and where social mobility was dictated by a racially codified caste system, American capitalism seemed to offer all sorts of possibility—at least on the surface. At the same time, because this new relationship only benefited a select few, it ended up being more of the same. So even as there were new export industries for fibers like abacá, copra, maguey, the reality was still an exploitative labor market, short sighted investments, racketeering and swindling, which ultimately resulted in business failures.[298] Freedom in this context, needed to be rethought not only in terms of

[296] Ibid, 132.
[297] Ibid, 408.
[298] Ibid, 411.

citizenship and autonomy, but also to what degree citizenship and autonomy was dependent access to capital. Put differently, bonded labor had not disappeared under American rule, it only changed in name.

This becomes evident in a later part of the novel when Mariano becomes employed by an influential American investors, Mr. William Doherty, who owns the *Manila Daily Chronicle*. Mr. Doherty, who represents the voice of American interests in Manila via his newspaper, is fond of Mariano and sees the young nationalist an as an astute worker, and would later introduce him to Mr. Edwin Moore, another financially accomplished American who now considers the Philippines his home, and whose politics towards Americanization differs greatly from Mr. Doherty. For Mariano, the complicated relationship he has with Mr. Doherty is representative of the relationship between the Philippines and the United States, where financial investments also meant a certain expectation for political alliance. As for Mr. Moore, Mariano felt closer to him as he had long identified himself as being part of the Filipino nation.

Also a former soldier, Mr. Moore was excited to speak to Mariano about the war in Europe and to share his sympathy for the Filipino plight for freedom, admitting, "yo espero que mi país sabrá redimir sus promesas con honor. Yo sé que sos dignos de vuestra libertad, y América no os la negará."[299] This sympathy would leave a mark on Mariano, as it contrasted with the tone of the pro-American editorials he composed for the *Manila Daily Chronicle*, which seemed more like an extension of United States propaganda than a force of good will; "sus editoriales…se resentían de sus ideas imperialistas, de cierta encubierta hostilidad a la causa de los Filipinos, de la que muy a menudo se mofaba con desdén olímpico" "(his editorials…resented his imperialist ideas, a certain covert hostility to the cause of the Filipinos, which he very often mocked with Olympian

[299] Ibid, 392.

disdain)."[300] Of course, Mariano's feelings of suspicions were not wrong, as readers find in a later chapter that the Chronicle was, in fact, an American corporation that traced the guidelines which would later be "followed by the first American Governor-Generals."[301]

Convinced that his day job was out of line with his desires for a true independence, and the well-being of his fellow Filipinos, Mariano was finally about to admit the charade to himself, while describing the United States' accent to power, "Raro es el hombre que, al cometer una villanía, no procura antes tranquilizar su propia conciencia con un sofisma, con una justificación, que tampoco justifica. Para engañar a los demás, el hombre necesita antes engañarse a sí mismo" "(Rare is the man who, by committing a villainy, does not first try to calm his own conscience with a sophism, with a justification, which he does not justify either. In order to deceive others, a man must first deceive himself)."[302] For Mariano, the editorial work, which was supposed to represent the means to a positive end, namely propagating information in order to provide for his family, never brought the type of personal liberty he had hope, nor did it seem to be a positive force for Filipino autonomy. Even worse, in order to lie to others, he also felt like he had to lie to himself. Surely he will now be able to pay for the construction of his chalet in Manila for his wife and child—an apt metaphor for nation building—but at what cost to his soul and countrymen? Like the status of the country's independence, here, the answer is not so clear.

To make matters worse, for people like Mariano's employer, Mr. William Doherty, these sort of injustice was but a means of securing the Philippines as the economic gateway to China, which meant that formal freedom, must be indefinitely deferred. To Mr. Doherty, "Responsibility without authority" made no financial sense, as it would only drains the United States without any

[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid, 455.
[302] Ibid, 444.

possibility of reaping the profits from previous investments.[303] Yet, for Mariano, the justification for this continued work in order to keep his house and home, no longer sufficed as the gold he made felt like it was poisoning his blood. And it was from this point on that Mariano no longer held doubts about whether he could maintain a passive resistance. Since to continue this work was to hollow out the riches of his own country and undermine Philippine sovereignty.

Another example of this material exploitation, is the cost of Mariano's newly purchased automobile. Having been introduced to this American made machine by his friend, Felipe Ponce, a young fellow with whom he has had few encounters prior to the later part of the novel, Mariano was hesitantly excited about the possibility of owning a car. But because he had received a raise at his job, Mariano decided that such a purchase was justifiable and also affordable if he took out some of his savings. However, once it became obvious that the cost of owning and maintaining the vehicle might cost him his house, he regretted this decision gravely.[304] Here, just as metaphorical as it is literal, American commodities come at a cost. And the cost of having access to such luxuries meant that Mariano needs to leverage his morals with his bank account. The house, which one reads and he basic unit and metaphor of the nation, is opened up as leverage for this imported commodity that is both a blessing and a burden. The question, then, is an obvious one; if the great war hero Mariano could fall for such short sighted desires, which could bring disastrous results of the livelihood of his family, what hope might there be for the less discerning when it comes to opening the nation to the American lifestyle?

Those who have read Rizal's *Fili* and *Noli* might rightly recognize the similar shift among the main characters from a reformist attitude towards a more direct revolutionary stance. Yet, to me, what distinguishes Abad's novel is that unlike Rizal's Crisostomo, Mariano does not come

[303] Ibid, 465.
[304] Ibid, 558.

from endless wealth. Indeed, unlike some of the founding fathers who came from mestizo families and whose sympathy for the Spanish was tied to their bloodline colonial inheritance, Mariano is a working class native who pushed his way up the social ladder. Because of this class consciousness, Mariano's ethical decisions are premised on both a sense of nationalist justice and financial pragmaticism. In working for Mr. Doherty, Mariano not only provides intellectual labor to the new rulers of the land, the fact that it is a newspaper also means that Mariano has a direct impact on the way the American presence should be viewed. In other words, he is contending with the very rhetoric of domination in the language of the new colonizers. In a sense, *La Oveja de Nathán* answers the question of "what comes after independence?" by displaying in full what the real ethical binds are for those who do not come from wealth in the time of revolution. To me, this is what makes the novel stand out; an earnest attempt at qualifying the notion of freedom as more than just the achievement of statehood. Indeed, Abad's novel picks up where Rizal's leaves off since liberty and responsibility are coterminous, and that what follows revolution is not the promise land, but an opening to new dangers.

In the same way that Mariano's car came with the promise of better mobility but ended up costing more than he could afford, so too is the postcolonial condition only a promise of freedom and the guarantee that the state would not succumb to more insidious forms of servitude. For Mariano and his family, notions like liberty and freedom cannot be taken as a given as it was during the revolution. Instead, as it became clear after WWI, any notion of existential freedom must be qualified within its own socio-political context. Under American rule, the freedom to participate in a global market might appear as a step forward on the surface, however, the reality of wage labor in a neocolonial state reveals that the nation-state is already obsolete as a defense for this new enemy. In terms of genre, then, the transition between Rizal to Abad had to rely on

the same tropes in order to maintain continuity. Yet, the novel also went beyond by pushing the types of questions this then seemingly outdated genre could have asked. In the next section, I will show how Balmori take's this Fil-Hispanic tradition even further, by reconcealing these same questions during the second World War.

Balmori's Los pájaros de fuego as sequel to Abad

In this section, I will offer a summary of the novel then explain how *Los pájaros* differs from those that came before it, and the ways in which it frames Fil-Hispanic culture as the culture of the elites. As the only Fil-Hispanic novel written about World War II, as it is happening, Balmori's *Los pájaros de fuego: novela filipina de la Guerra* is a fundamental text that has been largely ignored by critics.[305] Indeed, as the last major Fil-Hispanic work—since the Spanish speaking population of Manila would be decimated enemy bombing during WWII—the novel's content and its status as a cultural object raises more questions than it answers. There are reasons for this, of course. Despite having finished the manuscript in 1945, Balmori's novel was not published until 2010 by the Instituto Cervantes de Manila.

Originally hidden by Balmori in a glass bottles that he buried in his garden, the manuscript was subsequently purchased by the Filipino government and the microfilm of the novel stayed in the library of Ateneo de Manila university, effectively disappearing from public view.[306] In all

[305] Several critics, including Isaac Donoso Jiménez, had originally believed that Balmori's was the only Fil-Hipanic work written during and about WWII, however, Irene Villaescuna Illán has recently found several others including: Benigno del Río's Siete dias en el infierno en manos de la gestapo nipona (Seven Days in Hell in the Hands of the Japanese Gestapo, 1950); Fíame (Trust Me, 1946) by Mariano L. De la Rosa and María Paz Zamora-Mascuñana's Nuestros cinco últimos días bajo el yugo nipón (Our Last Five Days Under the Japanese Yoke, 1958). Irene Villaescusa Illán, "Translation Strategies in Jesús Balmori's Los Pájaros de Fuego. Una Novela Filipina de La Guerra (1945)," in *Transcultural Nationalism in Hispano-Filipino Literature*, ed. Irene Villaescusa Illán, Historical and Cultural Interconnections between Latin America and Asia (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 157.

[306] Adam Lifshey, "Allegory and Archipelago: Jesus Balmori's 'Los Pájaros de Fuego' and the Global Vantages of Filipino Literature in Spanish," *Kritika Kultura* 0, no. 17 (August 1, 2011): 6.; Irene Villaescusa Illán, "Translation Strategies in Jesús Balmori's Los Pájaros de Fuego," 158.

those years, it seemed that the only scholars who had access and read the novel were Estanislao Alinea, Florentindo Hornedo, and Alfredo S. Veloso. Veloso would eventually translate it, though that would not be the version to which most readers would have access.[307] Indeed, as Adam Lifshey points out, even half a century later, as late as 2006, the writer and former Spanish professor, Lourdes Castillo Brillantes could only point out the fact the there is still a novel by Balmori that has yet to be published.[308] Even then, the 2010 publication was not meant to have wide commercial distribution and public consumption. Instead, the novel was published mainly for archival purposes and is not available for purchase in book stores in Manila or elsewhere online.[309] To make matters worse, this edition is printed (including commentary), entirely in Spanish, a language that very few Filipinos could read today. As such, the only few who would have had access to the novel, were Fil-Hispanic scholars such as those previously mentions, and myself. Sustained critical analysis of Balmori's last novel, therefore, has been limited until fairly recently, with Lifshsey's being probably one of the more robust and accessible one, as it was published in both *Kritika Kultura* and subsequently edited as a book chapter.

In his book, Lifshey mentions several positive commentaries of *Los pájaros de fuego* from the few researchers who have analyzed it, such as Alinea's, who thought that this was Balmori's most accomplished prose, and Donoso Jiménez's, the published version's editor, who thinks this is Balmori's "cardinal work."[310] Of course, not all who read it thought it was a masterpiece, such as Florentindo Hornedo, who thought that the novel's title "promised more than it delivered."[311]

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[307] Though this detail is mentioned in a footnote of the annotated edition by Isaac Donoso Jiménez and the Instituto Cervantes, I was not able to find the purported translation by Veloso. Regardless, the point stands that the novel for all intents and purposes, out of reach of the public. Jesús Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego: novela Filipina de la guerra*, 1a edición de Isaac Donoso Jiménez. (Manila: Instituto Cervantes, 2010), LXIX.
[308] Lifshey, "Allegory and Archipelago," 6.
[309] Adam Lifshey, *Subversions of the American Century: Filipino Literature in Spanish and the Transpacific Transformation of the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 136-137.
[310] Ibid, 137.
[311] Ibid.

Of course, my own views of this work is more ambivalent, since while it may not be the most accomplished work of the Fil-Hispanic tradition, it terms of renovating the genre, it is certainly revealing and indeed offers a high level of artistic expression that is distinctively of the Philippines. For Lifshey, this novel is undoubtedly significant, though, as "it is also a landmark of America, written by an American national in an American property about the conflict most central to the American century."[312] Although seemingly hyperbolic, I would agree with Lifshey's claim, since the novel was indeed written when the Philippines was still directly subject to American rule, and the contents of the novel itself, much like *La oveja de Nathán*, explicitly deals with Filipino characters who find themselves in the midst of personal and national conflict much larger than themselves. Prior to diving into the novel, however, I will provide a brief summary of the plot.

Centering around the Robles family, a wealthy aristocratic bunch for whom Spanish is their native language, the novel unfolds as a romantic melodrama that seems to get worse and worse. At the head of the family is Don Lino Robles, who is a self-proclaimed Nipponophile and his brother Don Ramón. Having lost his wife, prior to the start of the novel, Lino oversees his two adult children Natalia, and Fernando, both of whom have their own significant others, Martha and Sandoval. Readers also learn of Don Lino's one time love affair with a Japanese woman, who would later abandon the broken aristocrat via a letter in the mail. Don Lino's daughter, Natalia, like the many virginal, female figures who came before her in other novels, represents the ideal Filipina aristocrat daughter who readers should already know will suffer a tragic end. As for Don Lino's son, Fernando, takes the figure that has been around in Fil-Hispanic narratives since Rizal; a young, passionate, and upright Filipino male who, of course, is a patriot to his country, faithful to his lover, and a devout follower of Christ. To round out the cast of the novel, the family also

[312] Ibid, 136.

has a nationalist German doctor, Fritz Von Kauffman, who would turn against the family in the later part of the story, and the Natalia's Italian music tutor, Bruno Anselmi, who tries to be her suitor, but who Natalia would fiercely reject. Along with the family's two Japanese gardeners who later turn out to be spies of the Emperor, these two secondary characters reproduce, on an personal scale, the larger international conflicts and ties among the Allies and Axis of powers. Interestingly, however, American characters are almost entirely absent, save for the passing mentions of American politicians and a military parade at the beginning of the novel.[313]

In terms of structure, the novel is considerably shorter than the Fil-Hispanic works, especially compared to *Noli,* and is broken down into four parts with each one having about five sections. On a thematic level, the novel retains much of the same tragic elements, such as the death of the main characters and betrayal of the hero my those closest to him. As with other Fil-Hispanic novels, all the main characters are idealists, with Don Lino having the upmost faith that the Japanese would never dare to invade the Philippines while the United States had the country under its eyes. While his son Fernando, who thought that by joining the military, he would be able to protect his home and country. Of course, Fernando fails to do this as he would later die from a from a loose bullet, while his sister would Natalia would die from a violent gang-rape in the family's mansion.[314] Don Lino, who overhears Japanese soldiers violating his daughter was in the other room, also eventually dies from unbearable grief. Finally, the family doctor, the music teacher, and Natalia's husband all die from Japanese bombings. The only two remaining characters alive by the end of the novel are Don Ramón who has no one to carry on the family name, and Marta, Fernando's wife, who is now a widow with no heir.

[313] Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego*, 25-26.
[314] Ibid, 174-175.

Because *Los pájaros* is one of the few examples of its kind, especially in terms of the gory content matter, it is rather difficult to compare it to others works. Sure there are some surface level similarities about oppression and betrayal, never before has there been this much bloodshed and destruction. Here, revolution is not the main theme, but instead it is the barbarity of warfare. Even to consider the work on the premise of aesthetics alone would require considerable attention to the pragmatic limitations, and historical contexts of its author. After all, Balmori was not only writing about the war, he was living in the middle of it. Here, Lifshey has points out:

> Rhetorical strategies of any traditional kind were sure to be incommensurate to the acute realities of the 1940s in the Philippines, particularly the hyperstylized discourses with which Balmori had built a poetic career. How to depict the documentable macro of the War via the imaginary micro? How to bear witness to social tragedy on a colossal scale while entertaining the private reader of any novel? Given the various liquidations of Filipinos and Filipino contexts in the War, Balmori could not have hoped for the immediate audience for his novel, but he still faced the task of representing the possibly unrepresentable. Moreover, he wrote under immense duress, and this too surely conditioned his decision in diverse ways. Had his manuscript been found by Japanese soldiers, torture and execution surely would have befallen him.[315]

Indeed, Lifshey's acute recognition of the author's circumstances should be taken seriously, as it frames the narrative work within a very unique historical event. It is a literary work is attempting to address a catastrophe as it unfolds. For Balmori, the stakes of writing the novel were high even though he knew that many would not get a chance to read it. From city-wide bombings, to rape of women and children, to public executions, to widespread looting, and, finally, the systematic extraction of vital resources like food, which left countless dead; what occurred in places like the Philippines, Vietnam, China, and Korea, and Taiwan, etc… seems to escape all possibly of human understanding. The issue at hand is not that such acts cannot be described—the existence of this very novel contradicts that claim—but any representation of the tragedy, regardless of how well thought-out its accompanying aesthetics, would still raise eyebrows about presumptions on the

[315] Lifshey, "Allegory and Archipelago," 11.

dignity of human life and the role of art. When Theodor Adorno wrote, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," he did not mean that it was impossible to write poetry as such, but that any desire to incorporate such human tragedy into the cultural industry is an insult to human life.[316] In this sense, Balmori's work is not an intentional anesthetization of suffering, but an artistic compulsion aiming for meaning in the midst of chaos. In thinking of this complex situation, Lifshey has pointed out thatt:

> When enemy soldiers toss infants up in the air and bayonet them with glee on the way down, what is the representational duty of the novelist? This is not a hypothetical question: such horrors occurred repeatedly. What is the appropriate strategy to account, via fiction, for such sickening truths not yet historical but contemporary? Is the story best told via recreations of the giant figures astride the stage, MacArthur and Quezon and Hirohito? […] Should the story pattern itself on the particular wartime experience of a small set of everyday people in Manila? This would be a miniaturist approach, but then the problem would be that the very real presence of the Philippines of a hyperbolic context would be largely elided."[317]

Of course, as a witness to this major catastrophe in which life appears to be as is precarious as it is fleeting, the notion that aesthetics could somehow approximate the finitude of life is deeply troubling.[318] This is perhaps why the tone of the novel might appear too romantic for the scenes it is describing, and why it is difficult categorize this novel, since any aesthetic critique must account for the context in which it is written. In my own reading, the sort of romantic mode is meant to counteract the otherwise incredibly sobering text. In other words, rather than to diminish or highlight the violence, Balmori chooses, instead, to adopt a romantic mode, which has been a fixture of Fil-Hispanic novels till this point, in order to provide a sort of cultural continuity. In other words, if this truly were to be the last Fil-Hispanic novel written by a Filipino writer, which

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[316] Theodor W Adorno, *Prisms: Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1967), 34.
[317] Lifshey, "Allegory and Archipelago," 12.
[318] Though there might be objections in comparing the Holocaust to what happened in the Philippines, even the novel's editor, Isaac Donoso Jímenez, has made similar claims in his article for *Studi Ispanici*. See, Isaac Donoso Jiménez, "Los pájaros de fuego: Japón y el holocausto filipino en la obra de Jesús Balmori," *Studi Ispanici*, no. 33 (2008): 217–35.

might very well have been the thought of Balmori as he wrote it, than it should double down on the mode of story-telling that has made the genre what it was. Yet, because the novel is dealing with circumstances never before seen, it also marks the work as distinct from the previous Fil-Hispanic works.

If one were to compare *los pájaros de fuego* to Abad's *La oveja de Nathán*, the similarities between the two texts shine as brightly as the two work's differences. Despite one novel dealing with the aftermath of WWI and the other with the then present violence of WWII, both works maintain the same Fil-Hispanic figures, which by now should be familiar; the selfless, male native figures who want to defend the Philippines by signing up for war, idealist protagonists who think world powers would never let them down, obviously evil antagonists who are always foreign, and virginal, tragic female leads who will for sure die pure and broken hearted, not to mention the absolute faith in God. In both novels, the allegorical method takes center stage as it allows for the nationalistic positioning of the tragic hero, who, in true Fil-Hipanic fashion, just happen to be the oldest male, just like in *Noli*. Taken together all of these elements make Balmori's text seem like an extension of Abad's and a fitting example in terms of the Fil-Hispanic tradition. What is worthy of mentioning, however, which makes it distinct from *La oveja de Nathán*, is its positive attitude towards the American occupation of the country.

Certainly, unlike Mariano Bontulan, who sees how asymmetrical and detrimental a relationship with the United States was for his country, Don Lino and his family lived as an extension of an dying, Hispanicized-Filipino aristocracy that believes in and support the American occupation of the archipelago. From their inherited land wealth, to the fact that they speak Castilian exclusively among themselves, the Robles' view of Filipino independence from the Americans' is seen as the loss of a necessary protection which would destroy their financial and political

livelihood. This is evident at the beginning of the novel, when Fernando is driving to visit Marta and encounters the military parade, noting "Marchaban nuestros soldados confundidos con los de América. Eran los guardadores del honor, los defensores de la patria. Algún día, quizá, muchos de ellos caerían ensangrados por defender estas banderas(The US and Philippine) que llevaban ahora en alto, restallando juntas, confundiendo sus pliegues, besándose en el viento como dos enamorados" "(Our soldiers marched confused with those of America. They were the guardians of honor, the defenders of the country. One day, perhaps, many of them would fall bloodied defending these flags (The US and Philippine) that they now carried high, snapping together, confusing their folds, kissing in the wind like two lovers)."[319] This willingness to see soldiers of both nations as a cooperative effort to their mutual benefit effectively glosses over the type of interventionist and exploitative practices described and criticized in *La oveja de Nathán*. Additionally, in witnessing this event in Luneta Park, where Rizal himself was executed by the firing squad, and where the new President, Manuel L. Quezon, was speaking, there seems to be a suggestion that this relationship was, perhaps, destined to be.[320] It is as if by taking place in the same location where Rizal died that Rizal himself would approve of this partnership.

Of course, one can understand why the novel might employ this tone as the Robles' elite socio-economic situation is one that is familiar to Balmori's, who also came from the same social class. Indeed, Balmori was known to have favored the Spanish-era aristocracy to the newly Americanized upward mobile working class.[321] This is evidenced in his two earlier novels, in which he criticized the changing Filipino society, but in *Los pájaros de fuego*, rather than to pick on this new class, he instead further romanticized the inherent goodness of native characters who

[319] Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego*, 26.
[320] Though the name of the president in the novel is not made explicit, Donoso Jiménez's reading insists that it should be understood as Quezon speaking. See footnotes. Ibid.
[321] Lifshey, *Subversions of the American Century*, 140.

are pure, and who perform traditional roles like Fernando's wife, Marta.[322] In other words, Balmori was an upper-class traditionalist who preferred the social hierarchy produced in the Spanish era, and which was protected in the American era, but not the new professional class that also accompanied American rule.

Also particular to this novel, is an overt idealization for Japanese cultural achievements via Don Lino, which would later serve as a point of contention when those achievements resulted in the Japanese bombing of the Philippines.[323] Balmori makes a point that this support of the Americans by Filipino elites is not done out of ignorance, rather it is a selective, and calculated self-interest. Indeed, later in the novel, the narrator clarifies Don Lino's stance towards independence in saying, "Don Lino, al igual que varios ricachones filipinos, no simpatizaba con los americanos, ni estaba conforme con su política de independizar al país[…] la independencia suponía la ruina del pueblo filipino[…] El pueblo no estaba, ni estaría en mucho tiempo preparado para tan grande responsabilidad" "(Don Lino, like several wealthy Filipinos, did not sympathize with the Americans, nor was he in agreement with their policy of making the country independent[…] independence meant the ruin of the Filipino people[…] The people were not, nor would they be for a long time prepared for such a great responsibility)."[324] Taking the same protectionist stance as the earlier *ilustrados,* the issue of independence here is once more posed as a matter of "opportune" timing. So, while there is an implicit appreciation for American military and economic presence, it is clear that such appreciation, or tolerance, is seen as crucial for the prolongation of the same aristocratic families that have been around since the Spanish colony.

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[322] Ibid.
[323] Irene Villaescusa Illán, "Translation Strategies in Jesús Balmori's Los Pájaros de Fuego," 156.
[324] Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego*, 134.

Unlike Mariano Bontulan, who grew up with very little and who had to build his own wealth, the Robles hold no shame in their inheritance and desire to maintain the Philippines' class divisions since it also meant a form of cultural continuity. Had they existed in the same place and time, it would not be a surprise that Don Lino would have looked down at Mariano for his strive towards upward mobility, which was changing the way Philippine society has been for centuries. In other words, in the midst of changing times, the Robles' only desire is to maintain their timeless aristocratic existence. And the reason why they see this as a good thing is because they see Filipino culture as a product of cultural mélange, which is owed both to Spain and the United States. Of course, the only types of Filipinos who would have have strong contact with either of those cultures, were the elites themselves. This is demonstrated in the same section where the narration turns into an ode of Spain's colonial presence, "España…ella nos había envuelto en una civilización que amalgamada al cabo de tres siglos con la importada por América, hizo de nuestro pueblo lo que ningún otro pueblo ser Oriente pudo ser, y nos formó una raza de hombres Fuertes, aptos, dignos."[325]

From there, the ode expands on the arrival of the Americans, as though the Philippines were the luckiest and most exceptional of all Asian colonies to constantly have a larger power to which to attach itself, "España puso los cimientos formidables de nuestra estructura nacional y América coronó más tarde el edificio con sus modernas galas y sus adornos prácticos. A las dos les debía Filipinas su orgulloso pasado y su triunfal presente""(Spain laid the formidable foundations of our national structure, and America later crowned the edifice with its modern finery and practical trappings. The Philippines owed both its proud past and its triumphant present)."[326] In tracing out this romanticized vision of the country's colonial history, the narration places the

[325] Ibid, 27.
[326] Ibid.

Filipino elites at the center of the national narrative. Indeed, for aside from this Spanish-speaking ruling class, who else would have had access to the same cultural and financial capital to truly call themselves inheritors of both empires? Further, what this vision of the Filipino nation entails, is nothing other than a very particularistic view of a society in which there was still a considerable gap in social and economic equality. To me, it seems fitting that Balmori's novel would be the last major work of the Fil-Hispanic tradition, since unlike the revolutionary gesture still present in *La oveja de Nathán*, *Los pájaros* seems only to concern itself with the dying out of an obsolete social class—one that on the surface gestures towards the greatness of Philippine society, while at the same time is fighting very hard against the country's social progress. Because of this, one can hardly say that the work is representative of Philippine culture of the American period as a whole, however, it does capture brilliantly the ways in which postcolonial society had to deal with the various ideologies of progress.

From a wider perspective, the Fil-Hispanic tradition, from between Abad to Balmori, does have narrative consistency insofar as there are repeated tropes and familiar plots. Yet, upon closer inspection, the mélange of physical presence of American troops, and the haunting presence of Hispanic culture have a way of realizing itself in surprisingly different ways that troubles the notion of cultural uniformity. Because of this, we can also appreciate Balmori's novel in the way it critiques of a particular, stagnant class within Filipino society, which were rapidly becoming obsolete in the midst of social change and absolute destruction. The political and ideological contradictions that one finds in the novel, therefore, should not be seen as an artistic shortcoming without resolve, but as a reflection of the very limit of political imagination of a given time. In other words, the point of the novel isn't to glamorize the Robles family and by extension this ruling class. On the contrary, even as the novel employs this romantic tone, at times touching on nostalgia,

it is still a valid commentary on how it is possible that certain aspects of the country was able to stay in power. As in every postcolonial society, there will always be remnants of the ruling class, nonetheless, it's important to remember that the underlying current in *Los pájaros de fuego*, regardless of the pro-American stance, is still a discourse on Filipino independence and, as such, secures its place thematically among other Fil-Hispanic Golden Age works stemming back, once more, to the eternal hero, Rizal.

The bearing of Postcolonial time.

Though at this point, it has become clear that both Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* and Balmori's *Los pájaros de fuego* represent important, though different takes on post-coloniality and imperialism, it is less clear what other significant contributions they hold to conversations about postcolonial time. Current criticism on the novels, while being significant for their reading, tend to also only address these questions only in passing. On the one hand, for Lifshey, Balmori's novel is another example of the trend within Fil-Hispanic literature to utilize "the allegory of a family melodrama to address the global dimensions of WWII," which reduces the long duration of the conflict to a short, digestible timeframe, while on the other hand, Villaescuna Illán, argues that "Balmori's novel addresses the potential negative effects of uncritically taking other culture(s) as a model for the future of the Philippines or, in other words, the novel's concern with the limits of transculturation."[327] Building her critique off of Lifshey's work, Illán's take on the novel seems, to me, the only extended critique which is moving in the direction of a discussion on temporality, albeit different from my own.

My goal in this section, therefore, is push the discussion further, by making the case that both of these novels reveal something about crucial about the understanding of postcolonial

[327] Irene Villaescusa Illán, "Translation Strategies in Jesús Balmori's Los Pájaros de Fuego," 159.

temporality, which is the unsettling of a nationalist time where there are no singular visions of what form the state should take. In the case of the Philippines, where colonial independence was differed by neocolonial occupation, what makes the postcolonial condition is precisely the competing ideologies towards what makes the modern state. In other words, to me, both novels can be situated as postcolonial attempts for critiquing the very processes of statecraft and cultural formation. To make my case, it is first necessary to determine the postcolonial status of both novels.

Originally published in 1928, almost three decades after the Philippine's formal separation from Spain, Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* is not often thought of as a quintessential postcolonial work, since the country was still under American rule making it postcoloniality, only of a certain kind—which is to say, it is the prolongation of one form of colonialism embedded within another with no end in sight. But because it was only occupation and not "real" colonialism, for most of the novel, the main political thrust seems to be a politics of non-compliance with the American enterprise rather than a full-scale revolution. Indeed, throughout the novel, none of the characters never actually mention a direct revolt, instead only their dissatisfaction and disappointment in regards to how the Americans are delaying the promises of the Jones Law. As such, all anti-imperialist critiques were just that; critiques. In this spirit of non-violent, social critique, *La oveja de Nathán* offered an anti-imperial stance by situating itself within the then established tradition of narrative dissidence.

Of course, to do this, Abad had to resort to Castilian, to maintain its legitimacy in line with the works of the founding fathers. What's important to recognize about this deployment of the former European language, is not so much that most Filipinos spoke Castilian at the time—they did not—but that, like the founding fathers, Abad recognized the power in using otherness in the

Philippine context to establish a projected nationalism. Put differently, I would argue that, despite appearing as a cultural regression, the use of Castilian in *La oveja de Nathán* is a way of producing the national other. Here, in face of the Americans and their English, Abad's novel with its erudite characters, is an attempt at asserting cultural legitimacy that is both local and foreign—it is a way of making Filipino identity visible by framing it as a cosmopolitan society that is capable of enunciating itself—no longer by force, but by deliberate choice. At a time where English was becoming the common tongue replacing Castilian, Abad's novel is a figurative stake in the ground that marks Philippine cultural resilience. As such, the novel seems incongruent with the times, precisely because it wants to reject the very legitimacy of the historical time frame in which it is written and published. To this point, Benita Sampedro has made similar remarks about Fil-Hispanic tradition as a whole, commenting:

> El caso de la literatura escrita en español hoy en día en Filipinas, al igual que el de la que se escribe en Sahara Occidental, es el resultado de un impulso similar. Ambas optan por reapropiarse del legado lingüístico colonial como una de sus varias estrategias de resistencia anticolonial (ya sea política o cultural), lo que solo en apariencia resulta paradójico.[328]
>
> The case of literature written in Spanish today in the Philippines, as well as that written in Western Sahara, is the result of a similar impulse. Both choose to reappropriate the colonial linguistic legacy as one of their various strategies of anti-colonial resistance (whether political or cultural), which is only apparently paradoxical.

In a manner of speaking, it would make sense then that this choice to take the third route of Castilian and not English, the *language du jour*, or Tagalog—a return to some native identity—affords Abad to a literary voice that appears as both inside and outside—inside because it is within the country's cultural tradition and outside because it was no longer the only medium of artistic

[328] Benita Sampedro, Rocío Ortuño Casanova, and Juan Ramón Nieto del Villar, "Tríptico Sobre Las Últimas Publicaciones Literarias Filipinas En Español," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 4, no. 1 (2014): 274.

expression. In other words, here what seems paradoxical is only a soft strategy of political contestation, which can be used to orient the trajectory of the nation forward.

What's also important in this deployment of Castilian is its claim on the country's historical trajectory. Indeed, rather than to move on to English, which might very well be read as adopting another master's language, here, there is a sense that Abad is also attempting halt the train of history by buckling down on a cultural formation that was centuries in the making. If we take the position of literary creating as a form of world making, then the very act of writing the novel is itself an attempt to trap the culture within a particular world view. In doing so, the novel is both a time stamp of a particular society as well as a cultural product which contributes to the future of the society in which that novel is written. After all, what makes postcolonial society different is invariably this capacity to choose one's form of self-expression and to build on top of the pre-existing cultural materials. Yet, like in colonial modernity, where the cultural formation of the country is in continual flux, so too is the cultural realm of postcolonial society a space where national cultural is continually contested. And because the political stage at the time was often contentious, aligning oneself within one historical, cultural tradition is a sure way to situate oneself in a particular history in order to not be swept away by the wars or larger powers. This is why, Mariano, in thinking about the tragedy of the Great War, insists that it was not in vain, "la pasada guerra no ha sido inútil e improductiva […] no todo ha de llegar a la vez […] cada cosa ha de llegar a su tiempo si quiere afincarse en el corazón de la Humanidad""(the last war has not been useless and unproductive […] not everything has to come at the same time […] everything has to come in its own time if it wants to establish itself in the heart of Humanity)."[329] Indeed, as part of Mariano's world view, progress and cultural development is linear and progressive. The war was

[329] Ibid, 520-522.

necessarily productive to him because it allowed for this new era in which progress of mankind could be carried out. In order for the New Man to arise, one must necessarily accept the idea of progress as being possible. Thus in order to not see the Philippines as being continually trapped in an endless cycle of new colonialism, Mariano must maintain the belief that the development of history is also possible.

Interestingly, however, this claim of linear progress—well discussed and scrutinized in the 19th century—is also recontextualized within Abad's novel as a contested philosophical outlook between an optimistic Mariano and a perpetually skeptical Don Benito. Indeed, just as soon as Mariano makes this claim, Don Benito retorts in saying:

> Si, como tú afirmas, la Humanidad de hoy está fabricando los moldes de su propio porvenir, y habiendo cabido a los pueblos pequeños el papel de míseros peones, ¿es lógico acaso, esperar que los que vivimos en una soberanía extraña, podamos participar de los beneficios, que supone el advenimiento de un porvenir, moldeado para el exclusivo de los pueblos conquistadores? En otras palabras, estando inspiradas las nuevas ideas en el más genuino egoísmo, ya que los beneficios se han reservado para sí los grandes y poderosos, ¿qué porvenir nos queda a los pequeños, sino el de la esclavitud y sumisión? Revísese la conducta de las naciones ponderosas desde la terminación del conflicto y se verá que, si antes había egoísmo, esclavitud, opresión y explotación del débil y desvalido, el porvenir no presenta mejores garantías.[330]
>
> If, as you affirm, today's Humanity is manufacturing the molds of its own future, and having assigned to small peoples the role of miserable pawns, is it perhaps logical to expect that those of us who live in a strange sovereignty, can participate in the benefits, which supposes the advent of a future, molded for the exclusive one of the conquering towns? In other words, since the new ideas are inspired by the most genuine selfishness, since the benefits have been reserved for the great and powerful, what future remains for the little ones, if not that of slavery and submission? Review the behavior of the powerful nations since the end of the conflict and it will be seen that, if before there was selfishness, slavery, oppression and exploitation of the weak and helpless, the future does not present better guarantees.

For Don Benito, the fate of small nations who do not make cultural claims and who do not put a stake in their own history, much like the grand conflicts of history, are also trapped in what is best

[330] Ibid, 522-524.

described as an eternal reoccurrence of the same. From a historical consideration, Don Benito's fear seems justified given his country's political situation spanning back the past three centuries. At the same time, for Mariano, in the same way the first World War was not a lost cause, neither then was the country's past colonial history. This is why when leaving dinner with Don Benito, when his companion José Baluyot asks whether he was worried about the fate of the Philippines, Mariano responds by referring back to Leonidas at Thermopylae and Napoleon at Austerlitz.[331] Once more, by placing himself in line of a history of great uphill battles, Mariano assumes the history of the Philippines as that of the underdogs.

In this way the opening up of the postcolonial world does not necessarily mean a predetermined defeat, instead it is the opening of new possibilities of existing differently. Thus on a higher level, the fact that Abad is using Castilian to make this anti-imperialist work is not so remarkable. On the contrary, it is a form of conferring his own country's history within a historical timeline, in a cultural milieu where what is backwards and forwards is not so clear. Postcolonial temporality in this case, can be seen as an opening to a history, and the choice of using one imperial language as opposed to another, beyond a civilizational claim, is arguably the surest way to orient one's own view of the formation of the national culture to come. In my reading of *La oveja de Nathán*, it is this concern with the undecipherable future that makes the novel a provoking meditation on the postcolonial condition since the "post" is neither strictly an indicator of an "after," nor the guarantee that no future submission will arise. True to Don Benito's concern in the previous quote, once free from the grasp of one empire, the colony is free for itself as well as free to be the vassal of another. Independence, in other words, is the recognition of a new kind of vulnerability where protection always comes with conditions and those in need of such protections

[331] Ibid, 527.

can never be the ones to decide the terms. And, perhaps, this is the cause of Don Benito's skepticism towards a more egalitarian society without conflict, given that Filipino independence, both in the novel and in history is only ever nominal in the way it was executed. Abad's novel is postcolonial, therefore, because it aims at describing this very aspect of coloniality whereby one's time is never one's own, but always invocated in the temporality of the other.

Turning our attention to *Los pájaros de fuego*, the situation is more complicated, but no less interesting in the way that the "post" of postcolonial is understood. As a novel that tries to document the impossible horrors of WWII in the pacific, and which never saw the light of day when it was written, any impact it might have had can only be speculative. Yet, the fears and concerns of the novel particularly in terms of the country's future are important for understanding how people reacted to the war at the time, and remain relevant to this day. Positioning the Philippines as a small, powerless country that cannot exercise its own autonomy, Balmori's work voices the same concern as Don Benito in *La oveja de Nathán* who believes that the reliance on an external power could never bring full deliverance. This is fully demonstrated by Don Lino, who, despite being a Nipponophile and as someone who held great respect for the Japanese people assuming they would never invade the archipelago, would eventually be attacked along with his family.

Continuing in the same tone as Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* with grand allegorical critiques, Balmori's novel adds another layer of the nationalist narrative by adding on imperial Japan amongst the list of foreign powers. As the last major novel of the Fil-Hispanic Golden Age, it frames the Philippines at the nexus of not only two competing global powers, but three; Spain, the United States, and Japan. In *Los pájaros*, while Spain still holds an important cultural position, there seems to be a radical shift towards East Asia and Japan as the next world stage. For

Villaescuna, who reads the novel's different stances on the relationship with the Japanese empire as indicative of conflicting ideologies of the time, Don Lino's failure to see the Philippines as culturally significant on its own was indeed a betrayal to the Filipino people.[332] More than a nationalist critique, the reason this is true for Villaescuna has to do with a failure of Don Lino, who could not see the Philippines as capable of inhabiting the coevalness(existing *in* time) of other nations and thus, always in need of someone else to lead it.[333] My question here, however, is why would he? As part of an upper-class, Castilian-speaking, conservative family who went about their days as though it were still the mid 1800s, the Robles' class position cushioned them from the harsh realities that were already becoming apparent to everyone else. Moreover, the fact that families like his could maintain their power and status, was due to an American agenda to not disrupt the social order in the country. The battle of Manila came as a surprise to the Robles, because they were out of touch with the times.

Towards the end of *Los pájaros de fuego* when the bombing of the city begins to slowly ceases, and Don Ramón sits in their mansion and contemplates the fate of his country, the narrator paints his realization as such: .

> Pobre patria. Pobre pueblo. Pobre Filipinas. Ya estaba, nuevo Prometeo, encadenada a la roca asiática, sin que sus gritos de dolor y espanto pudieran alejar al miserable buitre que comenzaba a corroerle las entrañas. El trajín de sus cadenas y el lamento desesperado de su alma se perdían en el vacío, en la oquedad del tiempo y de la historia.
>
> Vana la sangre vertida por Rizal para formar la aurora de nuestra libertad. Vano el Código de honor redactado por Mabini como un legado de fervor patriótico. Vanas las heroicas gestas be Bonifacio, Luna, Jacinto, del Pilar y tantos otros soldados inmortales en los campos de batalla. Vanas las dos enormes civilizadores, la de España y la de América, que engalanaban fastuosamente el espíritu y la vida de la raza. Vano todo sacrificio, todo el amor, toda virtud…Una noche tenebrosa de ulular de fieras y una espada clavada en el corazón de Filipinas, había reemplazado el luminoso día. Ya estaban la guerra, el hambre, la peste y la muerte cabalgando triunfales en nuestras tierras. Ya estaban aquí los japoneses.[334]

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[332] Villaescusa Illán, "Translation Strategies in Jesús Balmori's Los Pájaros de Fuego," 160.
[333] Ibid, 175.
[334] Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego*, 149.

> Poor country. Poor town. Poor Philippines. She was already, new Prometheus, chained to the Asian rock, without her cries of pain and fright being able to drive away the miserable vulture that was beginning to corrode her insides. The movement of his chains and the desperate lament of his soul were lost in the void, in the hollowness of time and history.
> Vain the blood shed by Rizal to form the dawn of our freedom. In vain the Code of honor drawn up by Mabini as a legacy of patriotic fervor. In vain the heroic deeds of Bonifacio, Luna, Jacinto, del Pilar and so many other immortal soldiers on the battlefields. In vain the two enormous civilizers, the one from Spain and the one from America, who lavishly adorned the spirit and life of the race. In vain all sacrifice, all love, all virtue... A dark night of howling beasts and a sword stuck in the heart of the Philippines, had replaced the bright day. War, famine, plague and death were already riding triumphantly in our lands. The Japanese were already here.

Going back to the origin myth of Prometheus to anchor the Philippines within a historical continuity, then later to the country's founding fathers, Don Ramón's lament is not the recognition that the war itself is indifferent to human life, but falsely that the calamity in which they find themselves is the fault of the Japanese, who effectively destroys the Filipino civilization that was built. Here, as in other places in the novel, Spain and the United States are once more reified as builders, and as civilizations that have contributed to the Filipino nation, while Japan and its allies, represented by Kauffman and Anselmi, are painted as the antithesis.

Although this scene is of course tragic, I also find that the sense of doom Don Ramón exerts is less concerned with the destruction of the islands themselves than with the destruction of his specific class of Hispanicized Filipinos. Indeed, it is hard to not read this section a narcissistic lament of what seems to be, at least for the Robles, the end of the highest culmination of Philippine culture which their family represents. By placing the fate of their family within the same historical trajectory as those of the Rizal and Bonaficio, Don Ramón's reflection of their circumstances confounds and projects the familial unto the national, as though the Philippines—and by extension Fil-Hispanic culture—would end with the death of his own family. Indeed, this is perhaps what I would attribute to one of the major flaws of the novel, not its failure to paint a broad picture of the older aristocracy, but the shortsightedness in political imagination insofar as its unwillingness to

shed the old for the new. The Robles aren't just another rich landowning family, they represent the very social apparatus through which American dominance is carried-out and supported.

More than shortsightedness, then, there even seems to be a desire for regression to earlier times according to Lifhsey:

> The novel gives off the impression that Balmori, though writing in the middle of the all too real 20th century, felt more comfortable with the middle of an imaginary 19th century[…] *The Birds of Fire* is nostalgic for a nonexistent, static time when landed Filipinos succeeded outside of any colonial order, when mute peasants accepted their lot, when all sexpots were virgins, when priestly power was pure, and when no evil empire prowled […] Given the disinterest of Balmori in reformulating sociopolitical orders, it remains unclear in the novel who might take the place in the postwar Philippines of the Robles and the rural aristocracy for which they stood. In historical reality, no one did. The surviving members of the class scooped up the land and the capital of the dead and maintain their position today. But Balmori was not invested in the future in any case. The novel ends with a coda that looks backwards to Columbus, not forward to a Philippines that would become independent just a year later. *The Birds of Fire* is essentially an eschatological text, a processing through fiction of the wrenching social end of a useless Spanish-speaking elite nearly half a century after Spain itself has been ejected from the islands.[335]

For me, what's interesting about Lifshey's take is that is points precisely to this idea of being frozen in time—that by their very particular class distinction, the Robles themselves were always already disjunctive to the social order in which they lived. It is no surprise then, that when reality came knocking at their door, none of the Robles knew how to respond. Even in their postcolonial country, Don Lino and his children continued to live as though it were still a Spanish colony where God and king were the law of the land.

For me, this is what distinguishes Balmori's novel from the rest of the other novels leading up to it. At a time in which the revolutionary politics should have been at its height, Balmori instead retreats back to the same ahistorical romanticism reminiscent of Pedro Paterno's Nínay. What's more, on a meta level, one might also see the novel's delayed publication as a mirroring of the novel's framing of Filipino society—in that both were the product of another time—despite the

[335] Ibid, 149.

fact that Balmori wrote the novel during the middle of the war. In this way, the text is similar to the other Fil-Hispanic novels because it follows some of the same character typographies, yet, because of its outdated world view, it reads as completely tone deaf to the world surrounding it. As such, any consideration of the text purely within a nationalist time frame, would only see it as a failure to introduce a more progressive stance on freedom and liberty when it is needed most. One the other hand, as Lifshey himself suggests, that if the novel were read as an American text—that is, to detach it from the purely Filipino, nationalist timeline—given that the Philippines were already essentially an overseas US territory, then this regression, in political, thematic, and linguistic terms, would be seen as incredibly subversive, as its global implications have the capacity to make us rethink American literature more broadly. [336]

The other important point here is that this perceived lack in a sharp political critique, does not mean an absence of any critiques, nor should it hinder people from appreciating this work for what it is. Yes, there are some aspects which might make one question whether there is any radicial anti-colonial critiques in this novel, given that it gesture more towards the disappointment of betrayal and lamenting the destruction of the ruling class. At the same time, there are also other moment's in which, that destruction is tied to the desire to fight for one's country, such as when Fernando, who represent the ideal Filipino aristocratic male, joins the anti-colonial fight rather than escape with his would be wife at the end of the novel.[337] With his heroic farewell, "¡Adiós, Marta, adios! ¡Voy a morir!" "(Goodbye, Martha, goodbye! I'm going to die!)," followed by the narrator saying he would die matter-of-factly, "¡Iba a morir, sí!" "(He was going to die, yes!),"

[336] Ibid, 157.
[337] Lifshey, *Subversions of the American Century*, 151.

Fernando becomes, through this narration, the very ideal Filipino his character canonized since Rizal's *Noli*.[338]

What's important to keep in mind, however, the way one reads this novel is also entirely affected by the context in which the novel found or presented. My point thus, is that if one is to find value in the novel, then there has to be other consideration of how and when a novel is read, and to what end such a reading might serve. If one looks to the Fil-Hispanic tradition, and *Los pájaros* in particular, for some radical decolonizing politics, there will only be disappointment. This is not Fanon flying a red battle flag. However, since that is not the only measure by which postcolonial literature might derive its value, perhaps it should not be a quality that is expected from Balmori's work.

Of course, as with any other novel, context is king. For Lifshey, "the ultimate eradication of the Robles bloodline implies grimly that the hereditary landowning class have been annihilated by the war," and so the novel is "a work of mourning for an oligarchy now apparently as powerless as the empire that had produced it."[339] However, if one reads Balmori's text as the then contemporary rejection of cultural and political democratization brought about by American occupation, as Lifshey also does, which did not aim at acting out positive change, then the neat diametric, valued alignment between conservatism and the democratization of Filipino culture cannot hold their hierarchy. In other words, the conservatism of the Robles family is a response to both the disappearance as well as the arrival of another culture, none entirely separate from the other—the work is not entirely pro-Spanish, and is staunchly anti-American, making it entirely Filipino.

[338] Balmori, *Los pájaros de fuego*, 190.
[339] Lifshey, *Subversions of the American Century*, 149.

The reason I find Lifshey's argument convincing is not simply that it recontextualizes Balmori's work within a larger network of political discourses, chiefly of WWII and American literature, but that it does not take the temporal elements as dismissible qualities. Instead, Lifshey engages directly with the overstated skepticism, and long held presumptions of Fil-Hispanic writers like Balmori by reading the textual objects within their own terms, and the specific way they imagine the country's historical timeline, which has generally leaned conservatively and has everything to do with the aesthetics deployed, rather than by standards meant for Spanish Peninsular literature.[340] I cannot stress how significant this is, not only for Balmori, but for most of the Fil-Hispanic tradition, which always seems to be compared by the same metrics as other literatures in Spanish, stemming back all the way to Rizal.[341]

Indeed, the type of class and racial hierarchies in the novel are worthy of critique, and Lifshey does a rather adequate job at pointing them out where applicable, but it is equally important to recognize how old aristocratic families like the Robles really did exist, and were extremely influential in shaping a vision and politics of the country, for better or for worse. Fil-Hispanic

[340] Beatriz Álvarez Tardío, "El privilegio de subvertir: la literatura hispanofilipina," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 4, no. 1 (n.d.): 42.

[341] In her work outlining the harsh criticism and prejudices held against Rizal, Beatriz Álvrez Tardío has said, "Las novelas de Rizal no alcanzaron reconocimiento literario en el momento de su publicación. La crítica que recibieron estaba contaminada por una perspectiva colonialista y eurocéntrica, con una evidente ausencia de rigor en su análisis. A lo largo del siglo pasado, e incluso en la actualidad, estas reacciones y críticas primeras han seguido pesando en todos los estudios sobre su narrativa. Probablemente debido a su actitud, aquellas palabras han sido repetidas y citadas una y otra vez. Esta repetición ha servido para que, más de un siglo después de su publicación, todavía se plantee el análisis literario de las novelas de Rizal a partir de la formulación de preguntas semejantes a las que se hacían en el siglo XIX, sin tener en cuenta que los presupuestos a partir de los cuales estas preguntas se hicieron responden a una posición colonialista cargada de paternalismo hacía la literatura filipina" "(Rizal's novels did not achieve literary recognition at the time of their publication. The criticism they received was contaminated by a colonialist and Eurocentric perspective, with an evident lack of rigor in their analysis. Throughout the last century, and even today, these initial reactions and criticisms have continued to weigh on all studies of his narrative. Probably due to his acrimony, those words have been repeated and quoted over and over again. This repetition has served so that, more than a century after its publication, the literary analysis of Rizal's novels is still proposed from the formulation of questions similar to those that were made in the nineteenth century, without taking into account that the assumptions from which these questions were made respond to a colonialist position loaded with paternalism towards Philippine literature)" See, Beatriz Álvarez-Tardio, "El Problemático Lugar de José Rizal Dentro de La Literatura Española," in *Entre España y Filipinas: José Rizal, Escritor. Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, 2011), 127–48.

writers didn't write about these families because they had a fetish for an outmoded life. They wrote about them because many of the writers themselves were part of this living legacy. From this view, when the bombing of the archipelago took place, writers like Balmori could be said to be morning the very real possibility of his own death and not just the abstract class to which he belonged. Additionally, even as the characters in the Robles family or their European employees are portrayed rather simplistically, and perhaps too romantically, the different concerns they raise about freedom should, at the very least, complicate the picture of a singular postcolonial milieu worthy of dissection—if we take the allegory seriously, then the simplicity of the characters signal a clear desire for a less complicated political dynamic in which people are who they say they are, and honor still meant something. How dare someone wish for such things in the middle of a world-wide war? Put it differently, just because *Los pájaros de fuego* ends in tragedy and does not offer an optimistic vision of a future, or any future at all given that most of the characters are dead and none of the women successfully produce an heir, does not mean that the work itself offers no possibility of further reading.

To me, *Los pájaros de fuego* is not meant to push the boundaries of the Fil-Hispanic genre, nor was it meant to radically reimagine social politics within the country towards a different future. Instead, it is simply another iteration, a remix of a pre-existing type of novel within the tradition that was witnessing its own extinction. The Robles, like the publication of the novel itself, and perhaps the Fil-Hispanic tradition of the Golden Age, are remnants of another time that exists along its own temporal logic, which does not adhere to the teleological nationalist narrative. Surely it follows a formula that has already been established, but there are also moments suggesting that not everything is recycled. As Benite Sampedro reminds us:

> La tradición en la que se inserta su producción no opera bajo la lógica de la ruptura, sino a través de una invocación de la continuidad (en el ámbito de la soberanía lingüística más

> específicamente, pero no exclusivamente). Los conceptos de nostalgia colonial, influjo neocolonial, o trauma poscolonial servirían solamente en su caso, y en el de otros escritores filipinos, para constatar el proceso de agotamiento de esas mismas categorías.[342]
>
> The tradition in which his production is inserted does not operate under the logic of rupture, but through an invocation of continuity (in the field of linguistic sovereignty more specifically, but not exclusively). The concepts of colonial nostalgia, neocolonial influence, or postcolonial trauma would serve only in his case, and in that of other Filipino writers, to verify the exhaustion process of those same categories.

In the case of *Los pájaros de fuego*, the continuity of the tradition is embodied by writing in Spanish about the very catastrophic destruction of most of that legacy. Balmori's novel looks towards the past because its present was heading towards non-existence—I would be surprised if the text were to encounter the same circumstances with optimism. So while works like Balmori's are all certainly products of their own particular socio-historical context, they are also not necessarily contemporaries of their time because of the circumstances of their troubled existence. In other words, the tradition to which they belong already seems to feel out of synch with the nationalist time, which is why we should not be surprised that *Los pájaros de fuego* is written as though it were from the mid 1800s.

For me, the regression of *Los pájaros de fuego* reveals a double desire for one segment of a culture to remain alive and relevant, even when such regression is undoubtedly what further exacerbates their sense of irrelevance and anachronism. In this way, any reading of the work, which dismisses its very unique conditions and context, misses entirely the point of such a novel. Beyond this, to read and critique the novel purely on its political viability, as a way to defend its worth as a piece of postcolonial literature, places undue burden on what art in general is supposed to ideally achieve. As Adorno previously proclaimed, "once culture itself has been debased to 'cultural

[342] Sampedro, Ortuño Casanova, and Nieto del Villar, "Tríptico Sobre Las Últimas Publicaciones Literarias Filipinas En Español," 280.

goods', with its hideous philosophical rationalization, 'cultural values', it has already defamed its *raison d' être*."[343] I believe this is the case not just for Balmori and Abad, but also equally true for many of the novels of the Golden Age that had little to no readership. The existence of these works was always untimely, and their authors knew it—so to continue to qualify them by any non-distinct qualification of post-coloniality, or with more familiar trajectories of independence that is not their own, is to miss the point entirely.

Conclusion

For lesser known traditions like the Fil-Hispanic Golden Age of the Philippines, there is a lack of a social and political script. It cannot be overstated how, despite the number of works and authors, and the tradition's long standing history within the archipelago, few will have read the works, or have sufficient context to properly appreciate the artistry that was attempted. Even for those who see Filipino literature in Spanish as something archaic or as missed attempts of cultural assimilation, this literary corpus still provides something akin to a claim of being in the world. The reproduction of older styles, replayed tropes, and romanticized characters do not mean there is no sense of personal affirmation, but rather demands that those wills and affirmation surface within particular aesthetic boundaries that not necessarily legible on the surface. If there is a sense that this literature is trapped in time, it is because the country itself was subject to a precarious political situation, where the abrupt shift in power divided the cultural development and institutions to question themselves. And, indeed, one ought to ask how could it have been any different given that this former colony only had a few years to develop a sense of self and identity, much less to do through literature, and in a language that was never accessible to most of the country's inhabitants? To look back at authors like Balmori and Abad with discerning eyes is not necessarily

[343] Adorno, *Prisms: Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, 22.

a bad thing, yet to believe they were not imaginative enough, or worse, not brave enough, misses the very point of what it means to be nominally independent and postcolonial country. Independence has nothing to do with being unable to conceive of doubt, or to have false ideas about what is the right political decision, especially when there are external forces like the United States, which maintains a looming presence within these narratives. No, independence is a sort of chimera that is brought about by the postcolonial condition, which is not the absence of shackles, but the opening to an endless field full of traps, trenches, roads that lead nowhere, and loops that sometimes have no exit.

This, I believe, is what makes works of the Fil-Hispanic Golden Age feels like it is trapped in time; It does not have the same flair afforded by the revolutionary spark of the Rizal generation, but also had no clear path of moving forward because of the pragmatic concerns of the language in which it is written. To add on top of this, the deliverance promised by the United States was supposed to offer another possibility of a future to the Filipino people, yet even to this day, the relationship between the two countries could hardly be spoken about separately, especially when the exportation of labor with nurses and troops, the constant sex tourism that targets minors, and exploitation of overseas companies all continue to be an issue. How, or perhaps why, I would ask, would the authors of the Fil-Hispanic tradition welcome such a relationship when their present presented nothing but doubt about the direction of their country? To appreciate the works, the concerns of the writers, and their seemingly apparent cultural conservatism, one needs to take seriously the temporal constraints of their production, and ways in which they themselves felt as being both in and out of their nationalist time. Timing, in other words, is not a fanciful adage of this literature, but the very aspect that define it. To neglect these temporal factors is to forsake the

postcolonial condition as a non-static temporality of unitary desires and orientation—If there were an orientation, under the confines of post-coloniality, it is not one that could be known.

Toward a conclusion

An Untimely End

While the maxim that "Literature speaks," may hold true across the board, the question of whether one is able to listen is what defines the search for alterity in postcolonial literature. For me, this question on the capacity of listening is dependent on a variety of factors, including not just the language of the writing, but the hidden and visible layers of the colonial experience that colors the narratives at hand. Often, we take for granted the temporal element in which a piece of writing is produced and read, as if the literariness of a work is somehow not contextually bound. Conversely, by this very same boundedness to a grounding sociopolitical context, it does not mean that works are non-generative, when read outside of nationalist context, or do not yield fruitful readings. For me, the temporality of the postcolonial novel is at once what the author imagines as the processes of historical development in relation to culture, as well as the actual historical events that limit and frames a piece of literature's circulation. It is necessary to hold this double meaning in place, as despite being connected, the fact that something is produced by no means implies the possibility of its readership. For minor literatures, or marginal literatures at the cross sections of different fields, this question of readership is at the center of the discussion of speaking and listening. By engaging with the postcolonial context of Vietnam and the Philippines in French and Spanish, where US imperial presence affects the ways in which language politics in form political participation and contestation, I hope to have given a more complex perspective of the push and pull factors that have provided the conditions of these corpuses.

Part of the inspiration and drive for this dissertation came from the impulse of not wanting to lose a part of my own country's history. As someone who came from the rather

privileged legacy of a country where education was long withheld from the masses, literacy, to me, should never be taken for granted as the norm. At the same time, in engaging with this literary history, I became much more staunchly aware of how the politics of subjugation under the colonial enterprise still frame our relationship to literary languages.

In the case of Vietnamese Francophone literature, the mere attachment to the French language already imbues the literature with a more favorable lens—by way of associations—than with Fil-Hispanic literature. Here, as elsewhere, context is important, since within the United States, the politics of language prestige, mixed with our skewed notions of civilizational attainments when it comes to race, has positioned the Spanish language in a way that makes it appear less regal. I won't delve much further into this issue here, however, the point I want to make is that this issue of prestige in fact the legacy of the imperialist enterprise, which still inform our notions of taste and civility. While for some, this may not appear as the case, especially in literary departments across American universities, I would argue that until texts like *Noli Me Tángere* by Rizal is assigned in Master's comprehensive lists or Ph.D. exams, rather than students learning second hand by reading Benedict Anderson, the pretense of open cannons should be avoided.

Through these four chapters, I aimed at bringing together a cohesive and generative collection of thoughts to address the question of "when is the postcolonial?" Far from a outlining a definitive answer, the conclusion to which I have arrived is that postcolonial temporality is marked by an affinity to a non-closure. This is applicable to the way some of these text draw on latent and traumatic histories, as well as how they imagine the future as the potential of arriving at other historical formations.

I recognize that the methodologies and texts chosen throughout the dissertation may have left certain aspects of this problematic unanswered, especially on the question of gender and other potential, overlooked elements that may inform or constitute the postcolonial subject. At a different time, another version of this dissertation would include two other chapters on Fil-Hispanic literature to flesh out some other important texts of the canon, which have also been left neglected. Of course, one of these chapter would also ideally broach the question of what it may mean for these culturally significant texts to be translated. For example, how might we a Fil-Hispanic text in English or French, or at which point it is still relevant to think of the problematic of the category of Vietnamese Francophone, should a novel ever be translated into, say, Spanish.

Of course, the grounding for all this is speculative, as there is no way to positively verify the social and psychological impact that these novels on their respective homelands, as the readership in these contexts cannot be presumed nor taken for granted. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, language choice in both of the mentioned contexts is both political and personal. They reveal as much about their countries' histories as they elucidate our understanding of the concerns of their authors. While the Vietnamese Francophone texts I read here tend to be more recent than the Fil-Hispanic examples, they all, nonetheless, share a common affinity by way of a divergent politics with their colonial language. In each of the texts, the presence and figure of the racialized other appears once and again. In my view, I have only touched the tip of what could be a more extensive elaboration of the politics of race, as they have been presented in these novels. At the same time, given that this would have been entirely beyond the scope of a singular dissertation on postcolonial temporality, I hope to have sufficed addressed the matter of race as necessary for the arguments I've made in each chapter. Ultimately, this dissertation was an attempt to encourage others to encage with literature with which they may not be familiar, all in

the hopes of expanding our knowledge of how the literary is understood from a different place and of a different time.

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