

WOMEN ADRIFT: FAMILIAL AND CULTURAL ALIENATION IN THE PERSONAL
NARRATIVES OF FRANCOPHONE WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the experience of alienation from family and culture as portrayed in the personal narratives of francophone women. The authors appearing in this study are Assia Djebar and Marie Cardinal, from Algeria, Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul, from Senegal, Marguerite Duras and Kim Lefèvre, from Vietnam, Calixthe Beyala, from Cameroon, Gabrielle Roy, from Canada, and Maryse Condé, from Guadeloupe. Alienation is deconstructed into the domains of blood, money, land, religion, education and history. The authors' experiences of alienation in each domain are classified according to severity and cultural normativity. The study seeks to determine the manner in which alienation manifests in each domain, and to identify factors which aid or hinder recovery.

Alienation in the domain of blood occurs as a result of warfare, illness, racism, ancestral trauma, and the rites of passage of menarche, loss of virginity, and menopause. Money-related alienation is linked to endemic classism, often caused by colonial influence. The authors experienced varying degrees of economic vulnerability to men, depending upon cultural and familial norms. Colonialism, warfare and environmental degradation all contribute to alienation in the domain of land. Women were found to be more susceptible to alienation in the domain of religion due to patriarchal religious constructs. In the domain of education, it was found that some alienation is inevitable for all students. Despite its inherent drawbacks, education provides tools for empowerment which are crucial for overcoming alienation. Alienation in the domain of history was found to hinder recovery due to infiltration of past trauma into the present, while empowerment in this domain fosters optimism and future-oriented thinking.

Each domain offers opportunities for empowerment, and it is necessary to work within the domains to create a safe haven for recovery. Eight of the nine authors experienced at least a partial recovery from alienation. This was accomplished via cathartic release of negative emotions. Catharsis is achieved by shedding tears, talking, or writing about the negative experiences. The personal narrative was found to be especially helpful in promoting healing both for the author and the reading audience.

Key words: alienation, culture, family, post-colonialism, blood, money, land, religion, education, history, Mariama Bâ, Calixthe Beyala, Ken Bugul, Marie Cardinal, Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, Marguerite Duras, Kim Lefèvre, Gabrielle Roy

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine l'aliénation de la famille et de la culture représentée dans les récits personnels des femmes francophones. Les auteures examinées sont Assia Djébar et Marie Cardinal d'Algérie, Mariama Bâ et Ken Bugul du Sénégal, Marguerite Duras et Kim Lefèvre du Vietnam, Calixthe Beyala du Cameroun, Gabrielle Roy du Canada, et Maryse Condé de Guadeloupe. L'aliénation est déconstruite dans les domaines du sang, de l'argent, de la terre, de la religion, de l'éducation, et de l'histoire. L'aliénation de chaque auteure est classifiée selon la sévérité et la normativité culturelle de l'expérience. Cette étude cherche à déterminer la manière de laquelle cette aliénation se présente dans chaque domaine et à identifier les éléments qui aident ou entravent la guérison.

Dans le domaine du sang, l'aliénation se produit comme résultat de la guerre, des maladies, du racisme, du traumatisme ancestral, et des étapes importantes de la ménarche, de la perte de la virginité, et de la ménopause. L'aliénation relative à l'argent est liée à la discrimination endémique contre les classes sociales inférieures, souvent provoquée par le colonialisme. Quelques auteures ont souffert d'une vulnérabilité financière aux hommes, selon les normes familiales et culturelles. Le colonialisme, la guerre et la dégradation de l'environnement contribuent à l'aliénation dans le domaine de la terre. Il a été déterminé que les femmes sont plus vulnérables à l'aliénation dans le domaine de la religion à cause des constructions patriarcales. Dans le domaine de l'éducation l'aliénation est inévitable pour tout élève ou étudiant, mais l'éducation offre beaucoup de stratégies essentielles pour surmonter l'aliénation. Aliénation dans le domaine de l'histoire entrave les efforts de surmonter le traumatisme à cause de la transmission du traumatisme du passé qui s'infiltré dans le présent, mais l'émancipation dans ce domaine permet à l'individu d'accepter un passé douloureux et d'avancer vers un avenir bénéfique.

Chaque domaine offre des occasions pour l'émancipation, et il est nécessaire de travailler dans le cadre de ces domaines pour créer un abri en sécurité pour la guérison. Huit des neuf auteures ont ressenti au moins un rétablissement partiel de leur

aliénation. Cela a été accompli par moyen d'une catharsis des émotions négatives. La catharsis est réalisée par moyen des larmes, de la parole, et de l'écriture au sujet des épreuves vécues. Le récit personnel est particulièrement utile pour encourager le rétablissement pas seulement pour l'auteur, mais aussi pour le lectorat.

Mot clés: l'aliénation, la culture, la famille, le post-colonialisme, le sang, l'argent, la terre, la religion, l'éducation, l'histoire, Mariama Bâ, Calixthe Beyala, Ken Bugul, Marie Cardinal, Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, Marguerite Duras, Kim Lefèvre, Gabrielle Roy

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Chapter One—Alienation and the personal narrative

1.1 Our ancestors ... the Gauls? or What would Vercingetorix do?

To fight the Empire is to be infected by its derangement. This is a paradox; whoever defeats a segment of the Empire becomes the Empire; it proliferates like a virus, imposing its form on its enemies. Thereby it becomes its enemies.

--Philip K. Dick (1981, 235) (1)

According to the majority of French history books, the history of the French people began with the Gallic resistance to Rome, led by the young king Vercingetorix. Yet almost nothing is known about Vercingetorix aside from what was written about him by his enemy, Julius Caesar. He may have been as young as seventeen when he began gathering his army of freedom fighters to defend his homeland. Although he came closer than anyone ever had to defeating the Romans, his efforts still ended in failure and he was executed in Rome in 46 B.C.E. after languishing for years as a prisoner of war. History gave him little further attention until Napoleon III resurrected his story in 1864, in the hopes of unifying the French people and shoring up his own precarious political situation. A statue of Vercingetorix was erected near the village of Alise Sainte-Reine, a statue whose face bears a remarkable likeness to that of Napoleon III (Schofield 2012).

Under the rule of Napoleon III, France's overseas Empire tripled in size (Milza 2004). At this point the French were behaving a lot like the Romans, and the question has to be raised—would Vercingetorix have endorsed the Second Empire? Or the first? What political position would he have taken in response to the French invasion of Algeria? Would he recognize himself in the comic books of Astérix and Obélix? When we think of displaced indigenous people, we often think of the diasporas of more recent history, such as the aboriginal people of Australia, the African Bushmen, and the Native Americans. It is easy to forget that prior to the expansion of the Roman Empire, much of Europe was populated by indigenous people. Although this era was far from a bucolic golden age, the people of ancient Gaul generally lived life according to the

rhythm of nature and weren't particularly interested in chopping down sacred forests to make way for roads, all of which led to Rome (Aldhouse-Green 2010).

Gaul was conquered, and its culture was almost completely submerged by Roman influence. Vercingetorix was conquered twice, first by Caesar, then by Napoleon III. Rather than allowing him the dignity to die in defeat, the colonizer romanticized him, admired his virtues, saw himself in them and transformed his memory into a tool of jingoism. It is possible that Vercingetorix had more in common with the colonized school children of the francophone world who developed such a profound resentment to the phrase "Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois" (2), than he did with the emperor who appropriated his likeness.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter comes from a science fiction novel in which the protagonist makes the startling realization that "the Empire never ended", and subsequently takes on the task of unearthing the truth beneath the bedrock of lies upon which his society is built. Dick comments in a different book "It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity." (Dick 1968, 156) This was certainly the case for Vercingetorix, who is now forced to exist as a caricature of himself in comic books, amusement parks and patriotic tales told to school children.

According to the official version of history the Visigoth invasion brought about the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 C.E. (Ferreiro 1999). But did the Empire really end? If those who fight the Empire become the Empire, and if the subjects of Rome were so thoroughly assimilated prior to the fall that they continued to behave like Roman subjects after 476, how can one say that the Empire ended? The French language is derived from Latin, and has been exported to every continent by the French Empire. Empire building is a skill handed down by the Romans. The influence of the Roman Catholic Church is felt around the globe, but the animistic spirits revered by the Druids are all but forgotten. Did the Empire end or did it just transform? Whether the Empire calls itself Rome, France or some other name, it should be judged by its acts. Those most qualified to do the judging are the people who have to live (and die) with the consequences of those acts.

Vercingetorix is such a person, but he was not able to tell his own story. In 1901, Camille Jullian, a French historian published his book *Vercingétorix*. Through careful historical research and examination of archeological evidence, Jullian managed to fill in a number of details about the life of Vercingetorix, although he still had to rely heavily on Caesar's narrative. However, even the most thorough research has failed to reveal the real name of this leader from ancient Gaul. Vercingetorix is not a Gallic name. It is Latin, a title meaning "chief of a hundred kings". Certain aspects of his life speak for themselves, and they tell the story of an alienated individual, and an alienated people. When his father Celtill died trying to unite the Gallic tribes, the task fell on the shoulders of Vercingetorix. The desperation apparent in his scorched earth strategies illustrates the lengths to which he and his people were willing to go to protect their ancestral lands from outside invaders. Gallic society in general and Vercingetorix in particular were not without their faults. The young hero of Gaul was not above forming a temporary alliance with Rome when it was expedient to do so, as the chapter in Jullian's book titled "Vercingétorix, l'ami de Caesar" illustrates (Jullian 1901, 71-86). The Gallic tribes engaged in warfare against one another and against the neighboring Germanic tribes. There is evidence that they may have collected tributes. However, these conflicts were localized to a particular region. They did not spread across an entire continent, eradicating every indigenous culture in their path. Nothing could equal the Roman Empire as a machine of conquest.

History has silenced the real Vercingetorix, and Julius Caesar was at best a hostile witness. For most of human history, the recording of personal memoirs was reserved for people like Julius Caesar, those with political power, those who were considered important to history in their own lifetimes. The countless people who lived and often suffered under their leadership were unable to share their experiences. Their stories died with them, and historians are left with the task of interpreting the subjective and often self-serving accounts of historical VIPs. It can be argued that all writing is subjective and even self-serving. However, if many writers share their own differing viewpoints regarding events and circumstances, readers can examine a variety of accounts and attempt to achieve a more balanced perspective.

Things began to change with the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. An exponential increase in the amount of personal experiences which could be shared via the written word became possible. The Western world has seen rapid advances in literacy rates as educational opportunities have become available to more people. Although progress has been painfully slow in some areas, particularly Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations reports an increase in literacy rates in all regions of the world since 1985 (UNESCO 2013, 10). Although those in power have always sought to control the educational systems to prevent the spread of subversive ideas, free thought and speech have become increasingly difficult to contain. The floodgates have opened and a wealth of dissenting opinions can finally be heard. People have begun to question the propaganda, and those in power are increasingly expected to justify their actions. This new atmosphere of accountability has come about in large part because a few ordinary individuals pioneered the idea of sharing their own life stories.

1.2 The origins of autobiography and feminism

Telling the story of another person's life is a tradition dating back to the ancient world. World literature begins with the mythical accounts of men such as Gilgamesh and Homer, men who may have really existed, but whose exploits have been exaggerated and fictionalized to the point of separating them from the rest of humanity. The tradition of creating the heroic myth continued into the middle ages, the era which gave us the most celebrated of the chansons de gestes, *La chanson de Roland*. This epic poem describes the heroic exploits of Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, with an abundance of fictionalized embellishment.

As literature continued to evolve, authors began depicting their heroes and heroines in more realistic ways. *La Princesse de Clèves* was published in 1678 by an anonymous author who was later revealed to be Madame de Lafayette. Women were largely excluded from intellectual pursuits at that time in history, and in a foreword to the book de Lafayette expressed concern that the story would not be taken seriously if her true identity were known. She referred to herself simply as "l'auteur", and hid behind the

masculine pronoun “il” (de Lafayette 1996, 67). Although this work is considered to be France’s first historical novel, de Lafayette referred to the work as an “histoire”, rather a “roman”. Aside from the protagonist, most of the characters are real historical figures from the French court of Henri II, circa 1568. The work is fiction, but the plot is realistic, and gives the reader a look inside the lives (and minds) of members of the French royal court. The story is highly psychological and introspective, a complete departure from earlier works. Although the narration is in the third person, the total omniscience of the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings, as well as the frankness of the dialogue and correspondence throughout the text make this story an important transitional work in French literature, and a step closer to the introspective first-person autobiography.

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who pioneered this new genre with the publication of *Les confessions* in 1770. The title is a nod to Saint Augustine, who completed his own autobiography *Confessions* in 398 C.E. Augustine’s work is considered the first autobiography of the Western world, and it focuses specifically on his conversion to Christianity and subsequent religious experiences and insights. Despite the familiar title, Rousseau’s *Confessions* was the prototype for a completely new genre of literature. This was the first work in which an author sought to provide an account of the life events which shaped his personality. In the introduction to the first part of *Les confessions*, Rousseau describes the work as “le seul monument sûr de mon caractère, qui n’ait pas été défiguré par mes ennemies” (Rousseau 1770, 3). He promises to be as accurate as possible in the portrayal of his life, and he is not always kind to himself in doing so. Although analysts have discovered numerous factual inaccuracies within the work, it was to Rousseau, life as he remembered it, and therefore true.

What motivates an individual to engage in what many would consider a purely narcissistic endeavor? What is the value in writing hundreds of pages about oneself? At the time Rousseau began writing his autobiography, he was suffering from feelings of isolation and persecution. As Peter Abbs points out, this first autobiography was born out of feelings of alienation: “Rousseau longed to understand himself, to narrate himself, to analyze how he had become what he was. He wanted especially, to locate his

integral nature as it was before it had been deflected and corrupted by an alien and alienating society” (Abbs 2008). Rousseau’s philosophical works predate his autobiography, but the theme of alienation is prominent throughout his entire body of work, starting from the macro level of humanity and moving inward to his own soul. In the opening passage of part two of his *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, it is easy to see the frustration and estrangement from society, which would later be revealed as full-blown neurosis:

Le premier qui, ayant enclos un terrain s’avisait de dire: Ceci est à moi, et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile. Que de crimes, que de guerres, de meurtres, que de misères et d’horreurs n’eût point épargnés au genre humain celui qui, arrachant les pieux ou comblant le fossé, eût crié à ses semblables: Gardez-vous d’écouter cet imposteur; vous êtes perdus, si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et la terre n’est à personne (Rousseau 2002, 37).

Rousseau identifies property ownership as the first cause of strife, with ripples reverberating throughout history and affecting everyone who came afterward. The lust for land, wealth, sex, etc. manifests as desire within the individual. Rousseau theorized that a desire which can’t be fulfilled is often satisfied with a “supplement” (Rousseau 2012). Jacques Derrida later expanded on this concept in his own research. He saw the existence of a supplement as a potentially dangerous situation, since the subject may remain permanently ignorant of the existence of the supplement and the authentic desire will never be fulfilled. Writing, itself, is a supplement, in that words serve as a symbolic representation. However, the critical self-examination required to write a personal narrative leads the writer to identify and acknowledge the source of the desire, thus re-establishing authenticity of self (Derrida 1964).

Almost as soon as *Les confessions* was published, other prominent writers began producing their own autobiographies. At this time, with few exceptions, writing was still the domain of men. One of these exceptions was Olympe de Gouges. De Gouges was a playwright, but is best known for her 1791 treatise *Déclaration des droits de la femme*

et de la citoyenne. She bravely spoke out against the social injustices of her time, particularly slavery and discrimination against illegitimate children. She was bitterly resentful of her arranged marriage to a man she did not love. It was only the premature death of her husband which allowed her to move to Paris and pursue her writing career. She included elements of the unhappy marriage in her semi-autobiographical novel *Mémoire de Madame de Valmont contre la famille de Flaucourt* (de Gouges 1995). She claimed that women had gained nothing from the Revolution and urged them to fight for equal rights and protections under the law (de Gouges 1791). Her literary career was cut short, as the controversial nature of her writings and social activism led to her execution during the Reign of Terror (Mousset 2007). It would be very a long time before the political changes she sought would come close to reality.

Aurore Dupin was born eleven years after the execution of Olympe de Gouges. A remarkably free-spirited individual, she found the life of a socially acceptable woman intolerably restrictive. She changed her name to George Sand, donned men's clothing, and took to the streets of Paris living a life of scandal and adventure which would later be included in her four-volume autobiography (Sand 1855). Few women of her time would have gotten away with her behavior, which included separating from her husband, engaging in numerous extramarital affairs, and smoking cigars in public. As the illegitimate daughter of a nobleman and a commoner, who provided her with a liberal upbringing, she was uniquely situated to move freely throughout all levels of society, although she didn't truly belong anywhere. By disregarding social convention, she was able to live an authentic life, although she did so amidst the scorn of a disapproving society.

In addition to her autobiography, Sand wrote a number of novels populated with female characters whose quest for personal identity often involved cross-dressing and adopting more masculine characteristics (Ghillebaert 2009). Sand's novels foreshadow Carl Jung's theory on the anthropomorphic archetypes of the animus and anima (Jung 1912). Exploring a more androgynous lifestyle allowed Sand and her fictional

characters to connect with the internal animus and complete the process of individuation, or fully integrating aspects of the personality into a well-functioning whole.

Sand was a contemporary of Gustave Flaubert, and his masterpiece work *Madame Bovary* provides an interesting contrast. Although Emma Bovary's gender-bending behavior is more subtle than that of Sand or her characters, Charles Baudelaire referred to her as "une bizarre androgène" (Baudelaire 1961, 652), and theorists have long pointed out the submissive nature of Emma's husband Charles, who progressively loses his identity in his endless efforts to please her. Mario Vargas Llosa sees the work as foreshadowing the disillusion of modern times:

In Madame Bovary we see the first signs of the alienation that a century later will take hold of men and women in industrial societies (the women above all, owing to the life they are obliged to live): consumption as an outlet for anxiety, the attempt to people with objects the emptiness that modern life has made a permanent feature of the existence of the individual (Llosa 1975, 139).

While Emma Bovary remained trapped and disillusioned in an inauthentic existence, which ultimately led her to take her own life, George Sand remained optimistic. Despite the criticism she endured, and the painfully slow progress in the realm of women's rights, she said to her critics:

Le monde ne m'en tient pas compte; mais je marche toujours; je puise mon courage à une source inépuisable, ma loyauté. Un jour il me connaîtra sans doute, et si ce jour n'arrive pas, peu m'importe, j'aurai ouvert la voie à d'autres femmes (Sand 2013).

Sand's life and work did pave the way for later feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote a four-volume autobiography of her own. However, for a long time, the feminist cause remained focused on the interests of white, European women.

1.3 Alienation in the francophone world

As the pioneers of French feminism were just beginning to gain a foothold in Europe, French explorers and settlers were leaving their mark all over the world, and French rule was being imposed on millions of people who had never set foot in Europe. For these people, the French flag was a symbol of oppression, not of “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité”. Cultural alienation became a part of life for every family in the French Colonial Empire. The term alienation comes from the Latin “alienus” which meant “of another place or person”, which in turn came from “alius”, meaning “other” or “another”. An alienus in ancient roman times could refer to someone else’s slave (Gregory et al, 2010). The modern derivative of this word seems particularly applicable to the French Colonial subjects.

For families affected by French colonization, a sharp line of demarcation existed between the time before the French came and the time after the French came. Nothing was ever the same afterward. One can only imagine the growing sense of despair among the elders as those who could remember the *before* time slowly came to be outnumbered by those who were too young to remember life before the French. The younger generation was contaminated by the Other. Even if the Other could be removed, there would be no way to bring back the old way of life. It was simply lost. The younger generation, struggling to survive in a world of superimposed cultures and contradictory expectations, found no easy answers to the question “Who am I?”

Answering that question is the primary task of adolescence, according to Erik Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development. This theory identifies eight psychological conflicts which individuals must resolve at various stages in the life cycle, with the Identity versus Identity Confusion conflict occurring roughly between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Failure to resolve this conflict results in a weak sense of self, feelings of alienation, and inability to resolve subsequent conflicts (Erikson 1959). It was Erikson who coined the term “identity crisis”, but James Marcia expanded upon the concept in his own theory of identity development. Marcia’s theory is characterized by a negotiation process between the individual’s sense of self and the expectations of

others, particularly family members. Marcia identifies four stages of identity development, and only those who remain in the first stage Foreclosure, are able to establish a personal identity without creating friction between the self and others. Remaining in this stage is not desirable because the individual never connects with her authentic self, and allows others to choose her path in life. Continuing through the final three stages of identity formation (Identity Diffusion, Moratorium and Identity Achievement) requires thorough and honest self-examination and cannot be accomplished without experiencing some degree of alienation (Marcia 1993).

Successful identity formation is challenging under the best of circumstances, but if competing cultural values are present, the process becomes much more complicated. Young people are burdened with many tasks, such as getting an education, finding a job, and determining what contribution they can make to society. They may have a sincere desire to honor the traditions of their ancestors and speak the language of their grandparents. But the Other seems to be here to stay, and the Other may have some interesting things to offer. Some degree of assimilation is inevitable, but how much is necessary? How much is enough? How much is too much? No two people under the same roof are likely to agree, and negotiations can be difficult. Conflicts often arise among family members, when one person's experience with the Other is inconsistent with the experiences of other family members.

The individual who values a friendship with a member of another culture may find herself defending the Other to members of her own household. Likewise, the person who attempts to preserve her native language and traditions from outside influences is also placed in a defensive position, with the family home serving as battleground. As Franz Fanon said in *Peau noire, masques blancs* "Dans tous les pays du monde, il y a des arrivistes; 'ceux qui ne se sentent plus', et il y a, en face d'eux, 'ceux qui gardent la notion de leur origine'" (Fanon 1952, 53). Fanon is often harsh in his assessment of his own people, as the charged language in this quote indicates. By donning the "white mask", members of the black race unwittingly become complicit in their own subjugation. There is only a short distance between "arriviste" and "collaborateur".

The motives of the “arriviste” are not difficult to comprehend. Since the Other came, he feels *less than*. He envies and imitates the Other to compensate for the feelings of inferiority which come with each interaction. The counterparts to these “arrivistes” try to cling to old traditions, and stave off the inevitable cultural erosion for as long as possible. Although members of the persecuted group may rally together in opposition to the colonizer, this creates a group identity based on victimhood. In both cultures, there is a concern of infiltration, a tendency to scan members of one’s own group for traits perceived to have been acquired from the morally inferior Other, and to turn on any man, woman, or child who appears tainted.

Generally the people who are most vulnerable to this scrutiny are women and children. Women, who have traditionally served as the primary custodians of social and cultural values within the home are expected to maintain absolute loyalty to established traditions. Children often find themselves at the center of family strife as they attempt to integrate lessons learned at school with the traditions valued by their family of origin. School is where the colonizer wields the greatest degree of influence, and as much as children want to be loved by their parents, they also want to be accepted by their peers. Many children compensate for an alienating home life by trying to excel at school. This can have long-term benefits, but it can also exacerbate alienation among family members. The colonial school system introduced the French language to native children, creating a generational divide between them and their parents. For many colonial children, the French language became a source of alienation from the lullabies they had heard as infants and the stories their parents told them about the history of their land and people.

Family life is challenging under the best of circumstances, but families who are part of an oppressed cultural group are particularly vulnerable, as the stress of an intruding culture can rarely be kept outside the walls of the family home. The well-being of a society can often be assessed by the well-being of an individual family. In her autobiographical novel *Une si longue lettre*, Mariama Bâ asserts: “Ce sont toutes les familles, riches ou pauvres, unies ou déchirées, conscientes ou irréfléchies qui

constituent la Nation. La réussite d'une nation passe donc irrémédiablement par la famille" (Bâ 1979, 130). As a microcosm of collective society, the greater the number of individual families in crisis, the greater the collective crisis for society as a whole.

Just as an individual can suffer from a crisis of identity, so can an entire ethnic group. It is possible for alienation to become endemic to a community following a prolonged period of oppression. The term "ethnostress" has been introduced to describe the specific type of alienation experienced by native people who find themselves oppressed by an outside culture (Tribal Sovereignty Associates 1992). Even if the oppressive forces are removed, ethnostress tends to remain a part of the community's psychological makeup for generations to come.

In his article "National liberation and culture", Amilcar Cabral illustrates the daunting task faced by post-colonial societies trying to rebuild their world:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture (Cabral 1994, 56).

When one considers the fact that a colonizer's departure usually leaves a country in economic ruin, depleted of natural resources, with its citizens suffering from a collective case of post-traumatic stress, this seems like an impossible task. Joseph Murphy, in his article "Environmentalism and imperialism: why colonialism still matters", outlines the economic and environmental problems which tend to linger in societies with a legacy of colonialism (Murphy 2009). There is much rebuilding to do and little resources, infrastructure or morale to do it. Societies emerging from colonial oppression inevitably experience a collective identity crisis, the effects of which are felt individually by each of their members.

Regarding the development of cultural identity, Edward Said emphasizes that this process is often characterized by a lack of self-examination. He remarks a tendency to compare the collective Other unfavorably to one's own group, creating a dichotomy between "us" and "them" (Said 1978). On a global scale or in a single neighborhood, getting along with one's neighbors requires focusing on similarities rather than differences. However, this practice is often contrary to instinctive, human tendencies. In any type of trans-cultural encounter, if all parties are not committed to treating one another with mutual respect, conflicts inevitably develop, and one group will gain the upper hand. The dominant culture, by imposing its own customs and traditions, seeks to deny members of minority groups the opportunity to develop an authentic sense of self, effectively forcing them to remain in a state of Identity Foreclosure.

Julia Kristeva identifies the phenomenon of "abjection", in which subjective and group identity are solidified through excluding anything which threatens individual or group boundaries. Kristeva stresses that abjection begins in infancy, as one of the child's first tasks is to differentiate the Self from the maternal body (Kristeva 1982). With this in mind, it is not surprising that many of the authors in this study describe complicated relationships with their mothers, characterized by difficulty separating from them emotionally.

There is an archetypal symbolic connection between the physical mother and nature. In her book *The death of nature*, Carolyn Merchant asserts that prior to the Enlightenment period, Europeans perceived nature as the benevolent mother of all things. The predominant philosophy was organismic in nature, emphasizing the interdependence of all living things. This metaphor was gradually replaced by the notion that nature was a force to be subdued and dominated, dissected, and exploited in the extraction of its resources (Merchant 1980). The political and economic changes that resulted from this philosophical shift have had worldwide historical ramifications. The article "Ethnostress, disruption of the Aboriginal spirit" asserts that Aboriginal peoples were traumatized by the arrival of Europeans who believed in their own superiority and right of conquest. This violation and exploitation of the natural (maternal) environment, and the concept of

land as a commodity, proved destructive to aboriginal notions of kinship and familial systems (Tribal Sovereignty Associates 1992).

The French word “la terre” calls up images of the maternal feminine, whereas “la patrie”, despite being a feminine noun is derived from the Latin “patria”, meaning “terre des aïeux” which itself comes from “pater”, meaning “father”. It is a word with strong political connotations, related to the word “patriotisme”, and is often used in military recruitment propaganda. The expression “la mère patrie”, generally refers to “un pays dont une colonie dépend”, and seems to be a blending of these two notions, an almost sinister effort to encourage the perception of the state as both mother and father (cnrtl.fr).

Postcolonial theorists tend to symbolically identify the colonizer as masculine and the colonized as feminine. Female members of the colonizer’s society are placed in an ambiguous role, stripped of any power associated with their status as colonizer, while male members of the colonized society are left emasculated, and unable to effectively fulfill their duties as husbands and fathers. Female colonized are therefore left to fend for themselves, and the only clear winners in this scenario are the male colonizers. It is noteworthy that many of the authors in this study had fathers who were physically or emotionally absent. These authors experienced a sense of alienation from their physical fathers as well as from their homelands. The vacuum created by the absent parent begets desire within the alienated individual, often creating the need for a supplement.

Autobiographical writing is a supplement which was chosen by each of these authors, and there is ample evidence that this activity brought about at least a partial resolution to the alienating trauma they endured. In an effort to maintain her sense of belonging within the family and community, the alienated individual often accepts the censure imposed by others and takes on the task of editing her own words and behavior to conform to the perceived expectations of family members and society. The authors in this study all go through the process of *unlearning* this behavior. Each woman must sift

through the critical voices internalized in her youth to tell her story in her own authentic voice.

1.4 The authors

The nature of autobiography has changed significantly since the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and George Sand, as writers began to introduce fictional elements into autobiographical works to create a narrative which is true to the emotional nature of the experiences portrayed, even if some of the details are known to be factually inaccurate. The literary term "autofiction" was introduced by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe the type of writing in which fiction is used in the search for self. It is acknowledged that subjective bias is inevitable in any type of linguistic communication. This is not considered a problem in the genre of autofiction, in which emotional truth takes precedence over factual accuracy. As Susan Cohen writes in her article "Fiction and the photographic image in Duras' 'The lover;'", "The selected, imagined past is the past" (Cohen 1990, 60). Kim Lefèvre says of her autobiographic novels:

Si je passais devant un tribunal pour jurer, dire si c'est la vérité ou non, je ne pourrais pas le faire, parce qu'à la fois, c'est vrai, et à la fois j'ai emprunté pour dire des choses qui sont encore plus vraies profondément que la réalité de ce qui s'était passé (Nguyen 2001).

By giving the narrator license to create autofiction, autobiography becomes art, and the narrator is liberated from the skepticism of debunkers and the evidentiary requirements reminiscent of a courtroom. The importance of this cannot be overstated, because historically, the testimony of a "stranger" was regarded as suspect in a court of law. The Other was not considered trustworthy. In Jewish law, Maimonides lists ten categories of people who are not qualified to act as witnesses: women, slaves, minors, lunatics, the deaf, the blind, the wicked, the contemptible, relatives and interested parties (Maimonides, *Yad, Edut* 9:1). Even in modern times, according to some interpretations of Islamic Law a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's (United Nations 2014). In ancient Greece the testimony of slaves was only admissible in court if it had been

extracted under torture (Gagarin 1996, 1). Despite these requirements, no one is more qualified to give witness to a life than the individual who lived it. Many of the authors studied here have endured a lifetime of injustice, in some cases enough to meet the Greek standard.

Despite the fact that the dominant culture exerts some control over any writing which passes through its hands, these authors have managed to speak with an authentic voice and share their personal experiences of alienation. Sharing one's personal story is a courageous act, one which invites criticism and judgment from the Other. This act of reaching out is one of the final stages of healing, as the author seeks to help other women triumph over their own alienating life experiences. Empowerment of the individual creates opportunities for the empowerment of others. Writing takes on a political significance, and indeed, many of the authors examined here have become political activists for the culturally disenfranchised.

The women in this study come from diverse backgrounds and have had a variety of life experiences, so few generalizations can be made which would apply to all of them. However, they all come from French-speaking areas outside of Europe, they have all chosen to write autobiographical or semi-autobiographical narratives about their lives, and alienation is a recurring theme in each of these narratives. I provide a brief introduction to each author and her homeland below.

1.4.1 Maryse Condé, Guadeloupe

It is estimated that over 75% of the population of Guadeloupe is of African descent. The majority of these individuals had at least one ancestor who was forcibly removed from his African homeland and transplanted to the other side of the globe to work as a slave. The modern inhabitants of Guadeloupe speak a language, which for most people, calls up images of Europe. They are French, legally, although they do not quite fit the French profile. It is not only the color of their skin which sets them apart; it is the collective alienating trauma experienced by their displaced ancestors, which makes its way through succeeding generations and begs to be resolved. No successful rebellion for

independence ever occurred in Guadeloupe, no forcible removal of the French, as happened in Haiti. Slavery officially came to an end in 1848, but the people of Guadeloupe continue to struggle against inequality (newworldencyclopedia.org). The cost of living is higher, wages are lower, and unemployment rates are more than double those of metropolitan France (Eurostat 2014).

Maryse Condé, (born Marise Boucolon in 1937), is primarily known for her novels, which take place in a variety of historical settings. In her collection of memoirs *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*, she recounts memories of her childhood in Guadeloupe. She was the youngest of eight children, from a financially comfortable family. Maryse struggled to understand why her well-educated, professional parents were treated as second-class citizens when they visited Paris. Her older brother explained to her that their parents were “aliénés”, a concept she struggled to understand:

À minuit, à force de coller tous les indices entre eux, je finis par bâtir un semblant de théorie. Une personne aliénée est une personne qui cherche à être ce qu'elle ne peut pas être parce qu'elle n'aime pas être ce qu'elle est. À deux heures du matin, au moment du prendre sommeil, je me fis le serment confus de ne jamais devenir une aliénée. En conséquence, je me réveillai une tout autre petite fille.
(Condé 1999, 16-17)

During a lengthy stay in Paris with her family, Maryse had a teacher at the Lycée Fenlon who encouraged her to share with the rest of the class a book authored by someone from her country. This was during the 1950's and there was little in the way of francophone Caribbean literature. With the help of her older brother, she found the novel *La rue Cases-Nègres* by Joseph Zobel, a writer from Martinique. It was this book which opened her eyes to the tragic history of the black race and the ancestral trauma of her own family. Zobel led her to other writers such as Franz Fanon, Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire. Her university studies at the Sorbonne coincided with a period of intense enthusiasm among supporters of the Négritude movement in Paris, and her involvement with this movement set her on a lifelong path of political activism.

1.4.2 Gabrielle Roy, Manitoba, Canada

Between 1755 and 1764, during the French and Indian War, approximately 11,500 Acadians were forcibly removed from their homes in present-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Maine. Many Acadians died during deportation or by attempting to resist it. Those who survived were scattered throughout Canada, the United States of America, and Europe. The majority were eventually assimilated into local populations. A few returned to Acadia, but were required to take an unqualified oath of allegiance to the British government. A few of these groups of displaced Acadians managed to form communities in their new lands and preserve some of their cultural traditions (Hebert 2009).

Gabrielle Roy grew up hearing stories about her Acadian ancestors, who were forcibly removed from their home and re-settled in Connecticut. “Ainsi a commencé notre infortune,” her mother told her (Roy 1984, 25). Her ancestors later returned to Canada, settling in Quebec, which is where both of her parents were born. They later relocated to the village of Saint Boniface, a francophone community in Manitoba. The Canadian government considered the members of this community a nuisance due to their insistence on speaking French outside of Quebec. Roy provides an interesting contrast to some of the other authors in this study. She was not an indigenous person, displaced by a colonizer and neither were her parents. They were immigrants. The story of the forced relocation of her ancestors had been handed down for several generations, and by the time Roy heard it during childhood, her mother was no longer able to specify their true country of origin, saying only “C’est embêtant à préciser” (Roy 1984, 26).

Roy was a prolific writer, best known for her novel *Bonheur d’occasion* (1945). She is considered one of the most important francophone Canadian writers in literary history. She acquired a great deal of fame and recognition during her life, but the struggles she experienced prior to her literary success are what she chose to focus on in her autobiography. The title, *La détresse et l’enchantement* (1984), is similar to that of Maryse Condé’s memoirs, and the two women have several things in common. Like

Condé, Roy was the youngest child in a large family, and her older siblings thought she was spoiled. Both women had fathers who were well into old age and mothers who were over the age of 40 when they were born.

Unlike the Condé family, the Roy family was plagued by poverty due to Gabrielle's father being fired from his job a few weeks before he was scheduled to retire, a victim of cultural and political discrimination. It is obvious in Roy's work that she felt a very close connection to her family, particularly to her mother, with whom she lived until the age of 27. She anguished over the conflict between filial obligations toward her aging and impoverished mother and mentally ill sister, and her desire to travel the world and foster her own personal growth. In choosing the latter, she expressed a deep belief that her own self-improvement would directly benefit her family and community.

1.4.3 Assia Djebar and Marie Cardinal, Algeria

One of the assumptions of this study is that the nature of the interactions between two cultural groups during the period of initial first contact leaves an imprint on the lives of everyone in both groups for generations to come. The interactions between France and Algeria are among the most violent in human history, and that violence left a profound mark on the two Algerian authors examined in this study. France officially conquered Algeria in 1830, but military incursions for land acquisition continued for many years afterward.

Among other testimonies, Lieutenant-Colonel de Montagnac wrote on March 15, 1843, in a letter to a friend:

Voilà mon brave ami comment il faut faire la guerre aux Arabes. Tuer tous les hommes jusqu'à l'âge de quinze ans. Prendre toutes les femmes et les enfants. En charger les bâtiments, les envoyer aux îles Marquises ou ailleurs; en un mot, anéantir tout ce qui ne rampera pas à nos pieds comme des chiens (de Montagnac 1885, 299).

As abhorrent as the above quotation is, the war which ended the French occupation 130 years later may have been even more violent. One person in nine out of the Arab

population died in that conflict (Evans 1991). The other eight almost certainly spent the entire eight years of the war living in fear. The end result was an entire nation suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. How many people had to kill someone to survive the war? In order to kill another human being, one must find a way to convince oneself that they aren't real human beings. They are different. They are Other. The Other that I have to kill cannot be my friend, my neighbor, or my child's teacher. Yet the Other, whoever he or she is, feels exactly the same horror and alienation in the face of violence. The animosity which lingers between the French and Algerian peoples is a testimony to the degree of violence which has characterized the relations between these two cultures. Recent efforts to normalize relations between the two countries offer a glimmer of hope for a political rapprochement, but the prevalence of racial and cultural intolerance in the general population continues to hinder reconciliation on a personal level.

Both Assia Djébar and Marie Cardinal grew up in Algeria. Cardinal (born Simone Odette Marie-Thérèse Cardinal in 1928) was a pied-noir, aka French Algerian. Although she identified with the physical landscape of Algeria, she knew herself to be a French citizen, a Catholic, and a member of the dominant culture. The Arabs around her were interesting and exotic, but she felt no pressure to don a veil and convert to Islam. To the local Arabs, it may have seemed that she had an easy life. However, Cardinal suffered a great deal of psychological trauma during her youth, which manifested later as physical illness. She wrote of her seven-year journey through psychoanalysis in *Les mots pour le dire* (1975). Her family left Algeria during the war, and twenty-five years passed before she was able to return. She wrote of her return to Algeria in *Au pays de mes racines* (1980).

Assia Djébar, (born Fatima-Zahra Imalayen in 1936) was not a citizen, but a subject of France, a Muslim, an Arab. The presence of the French was a constant threat to her traditional way of life. As the only Muslim girl in her school, Assia had to negotiate a mine field of conflicting expectations at school and at home, where any miscalculation would result in censure. Like Cardinal, Djébar paid a high price for her progressive

political viewpoints. Her novels have created significant controversy in her native land and, to date, none of her books have been translated into Arabic.

Assia Djébar takes the genre of autofiction to a new level in her collective autobiographies, such as *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985) and *Vaste est la prison* (1995), in which she blends autobiographical material with the first person narratives of other women, thus transforming her personal history as an Algerian woman, into an archetypal narrative of the Algerian Woman, and giving a voice to those who are unable to speak for themselves (Geesey 1996). Djébar wrote extensively about her conflicted feelings about writing in the language of the colonizer, and acknowledges that writing itself is a departure from the oral tradition of her native culture. Despite these limitations, Djébar distinguished herself as one of the pre-eminent writers of North Africa. She was a member of the Académie Française from 2005 until her death in 2013 (Devarrieux 2015).

1.4.4 Marguerite Duras and Kim LeFèvre, Vietnam

The French intervention into the area of modern-day Vietnam began as early as the seventeenth century with the establishment of missionary outposts led by the Jesuits. Military troops were sent in to protect the missionaries, who encountered resistance from the local population. Over time the military presence increased and trade relations came to favor France. French Indochina was officially formed in 1887 and designated as a “colonie d’exploitation économique” by the French government. Compared to Algeria, there were relatively few French settlers in French Indochina, making Marguerite Duras a member of a very small minority. Uprisings and rebellions against colonial rule broke out from time to time but Vietnam did not gain independence until 1954 (Taylor 2013).

Marguerite Duras and Kim Lefèvre had completely different life experiences growing up in Vietnam. As a member of a French colonial family (albeit an impoverished one), Duras enjoyed certain privileges as a member of the dominant culture. This did not protect her from domestic abuse, which she endured at the hands of her mother and

older brother. Born Marguerite Donnadiou in 1914, Duras had no memories of her father who fell ill and returned to France where he later died. His wife chose to remain in Vietnam with their three young children. As a lonely adolescent, she became romantically involved with a Chinese merchant who was several years older than her. This relationship is depicted in several of her works, often in contrasting ways. Duras was a pioneer in the genre of fictionalized autobiography. She once stated that all of her novels were autobiographical (Garis 1991).

In her book *Marguerite Duras: fascinating vision, narrative cure* (1991), Deborah Glassman details how Duras' characters are often unable to forget the past or embrace the present. The distinction between Duras' characters and Duras herself is an important one, since this study focuses on autobiographical narratives. How much fictionalizing is allowed before the work ceases to be autobiographical? Duras is the writer who pushes us to ask and answer this question more than any other. In the opening pages of her best-known novel *L'amant* (1981), she laments the fact that a photograph was not taken of her at the age of fifteen, crossing the Mekong River on a ferry. She describes herself in the third person, attempting to remember her hair, her dress, her shoes, and the type of hat she was wearing. The details seem to shift, and she ultimately has to leave them out or fill in the gaps from imagination. Yet the source of this imagination is nothing less than her own feelings about the events. Duras is as skilled as any writer at truthfully portraying the raw pain which haunted her all of her life. Although her novels are among the most fictionalized of autobiographies they may also be the most emotionally true.

Kim Lefèvre is the only biracial author examined in this study. She was born Kim Tran in the mid 1930's, the illegitimate daughter of a Vietnamese woman and a French officer, who never acknowledged her. Her dubious paternity created a horrific childhood for her. At times even her life was in danger due to her biracial status. It is hard to imagine what kind of life she would have had if she had not excelled academically and left Vietnam. Poverty and violence were a part of her daily existence, and during a time of extreme hardship, her mother was forced to abandon her at an orphanage at the age

of six. They were reunited a few years later. Lefèvre was constantly aware that her very existence made life extremely difficult for her mother.

For Lefèvre, the colonizer was both the source of her problems and the solution to them. Her conversion to Catholicism gave her a new perspective on spirituality, which helped her cope with her alienating life circumstances. It also gave her a wealthy, but disinterested godmother, who funded her education. This eventually allowed her to leave Vietnam and move to France. Nevertheless, both her religion and her education contributed to her alienation from her family. Her autobiographical novel *Métisse blanche* (1989) describes the many hardships she endured growing up. Lefèvre also demonstrates that such difficulties do not always spell doom for familial relationships. Despite the alienating experiences which came between them, she shows no resentment and a great deal of love for her mother and half-sisters. Her reunion with them and her return to a far more welcoming Vietnam after a 30-year absence is depicted in *Retour à la saison des pluies* (1990).

1.4.5 Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul, Senegal

The French conquest of Senegal was accomplished incrementally over a period of approximately two hundred years. It is probable that French ships were trading at coastal cities in West Africa as early as the fourteenth century. The Portuguese captured Gorée Island in 1444. Later on, the establishment of the slave trade paved the way for colonial conquest. The area of modern-day Senegal was a frequent source of conflict among European powers, competing to establish territorial dominance in West Africa. During the nineteenth century, France conquered a vast amount of territory in the region, and in 1904, the area which later became Senegal, officially became a part of French West Africa, or Afrique Occidentale Française, with Dakar as its capital (Shillington 2005).

Thus, the Europeans have had a more or less constant presence in the area throughout much of history, and the vast majority of encounters between the local African population and the Europeans have been characterized by exploitation. Factionalism

was endemic prior to the establishment of the French colony due to the fact that the local population was comprised of a multiplicity of tribes and languages. Another layer of factionalism was imposed after the arrival of the French. Among the native Africans, there existed a broad spectrum of experiences with the European colonizers. Those living in the most remote interior regions of the continent had fewer encounters with the Europeans and thus fewer immediate disruptions to their daily lives. However, those living in coastal regions and larger cities had more regular contact with the colonizer and saw their way of life change more rapidly.

In Senegal, there existed an interesting policy, which was introduced in 1848, under the Second Republic. While the majority of natives living in French West Africa were considered subjects of France and not citizens, those born in the cities of Dakar, Saint Louis, Gorée and Rufusique enjoyed the full rights of French citizenship. Or at least that was the idea. In reality, the inhabitants of the four communes, called “originaires” were prevented from exercising many of these rights by social and legal barriers. Those who managed to get an education and move up the social ladder (called “évolués”), still faced substantial discrimination. These individuals later formed the backbone of the decolonization movement in the mid-twentieth century (Diouf 1998).

The two Senegalese authors examined in this study had vastly different life experiences, although they were both affected by polygamy. Ken Bugul (Mariétou Mbaye Biléoma), who was born in Ndoucoumane, Senegal in 1947, grew up in a polygamist environment. Her father was an elderly marabout or holy man with two wives. She was abandoned by her mother at a young age, although the two women reunited later. In her autobiographical novel *Le baobab fou* (1982), she describes her difficult childhood in Senegal and her experiences as an alienated young woman in Europe. Having received a scholarship to study in Belgium, she arrived in Europe with big dreams for her future. However, once there, she lost interest in her studies and drifted into a life of drugs and prostitution. The alienation she felt while in Europe was clearly a result of her status as outsider. As a beautiful young African woman, she was treated as a commodity, valued for her exoticism and not for her personal attributes.

In 1980 she returned to her native village and became the 28th wife of an elderly marabout, an experience she described in her book *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable* (1999). She was harshly criticized by many feminists for voluntarily becoming a part of a harem. However, she describes this as a healing experience, and an opportunity to shake off some of the European indoctrination which did not resonate with her:

Ainsi le Serigne m'avait offert et donné la possibilité de me réconcilier avec moi-même, avec mon milieu, avec mes origines, avec mes sources, avec mon monde sans lesquels je ne pourrais jamais survivre. J'avais échappé à la mort de moi, de ce moi qui n'était pas à moi toute seule. De ce moi qui appartenait aussi aux miens, à ma race, à mon peuple, à mon village et à mon continent (Bugul 1999, 167-168).

Unlike Ken Bugul, Mariama Bâ (born in 1929) rejected polygamy as promoting inequality among the sexes. She grew up in Dakar in a traditional Muslim home, but she thwarted tradition by receiving a college education and working as a teacher, raising nine children on her own after her divorce. The divorce came about due to a collision of values which took place in Bâ's life when her husband took a second wife, as permitted by his Muslim faith (Henderson 2002). The confidence and financial independence Bâ enjoyed as a result of her education conflicted with the Muslim traditions she had grown up with, and were incompatible with the resignation society expected of her following her husband's betrayal.

Her semi-autobiographical, epistolary novel *Une si longue lettre* (1979) tells of the aftermath of her husband's abandonment. The main character Ramatoulaye, who is recently widowed, writes a long letter to her lifelong friend Aïssatou. At the time of her husband's death, Ramatoulaye is still emotionally devastated by his decision to take a second wife. She chose to stay in the marriage, despite the fact that her husband had abandoned their home and children in order to be with his new wife. Aïssatou had already endured the same ordeal in her own marriage, but unlike Ramatoulaye, she chose to get a divorce. Since Bâ, herself, chose divorce, it is as if she is writing the letter to herself, allowing herself the opportunity to explore the path not taken by

speaking through the voice of Ramatoulaye. She even gave the character Aïssatou the surname Bâ (McElaney-Johnson 1999).

Through writing, Bâ managed to partially resolve the conflict between her commitment to family solidarity and her commitment to maintaining her own dignity. On many occasions, Ramatoulaye seems to be addressing a much larger audience than Aïssatou. In these passages, one hears the voice of Bâ reaching out to others in the hope of promoting a change in the way men and women interact. Mariama Bâ died prematurely after producing only two short novels, but her influence on the world of literature and feminism is vast (Henderson 2002).

1.4.6 Calixthe Beyala, Cameroon

Cameroon was claimed by Germany during the nineteenth-century Scramble for Africa, but was later divided between Great Britain and France and, as a result, French and English are both official languages, although there are over two hundred tribal languages spoken in the region. The Cameroonian people are as diverse as those of any African nation and therefore, the influence of colonialism has manifested in a variety of ways (Shillington 2005).

Calixthe Beyala was born in 1961 in Cameroon, shortly after it became an independent nation. She is a best-selling author of many novels, having received the Grand Prix de Littérature de l'Académie Française. In 1996 she was found guilty in a High French Court of plagiarism. She felt that the accusations were nothing short of racial hatred, and her defense centered on the intertextual nature of traditional African stories (Hitchcott 2006). Her trial brings up an interesting question: what constitutes plagiarism for those writers who grew up in a culture which values the oral tradition, in which stories belong to everyone?

The first book Beyala published after the trial was the autobiographical novel *La petite fille du réverbère* (1998). The hostile attitude which pervades this novel has been interpreted as her defense against the accusation of plagiarism. Yet much of the hostility seems justified when the reader enters the world of the juvenile narrator called

“Tapoussière”, a nickname which literally means “filth”. Shortly after her birth, her strong-willed grandmother took her away from her mother and burdened her with the impossible task of reviving her native village, which had been abandoned by its inhabitants. “Cet enfant a été conçu pour satisfaire mon désir de reconstruire mon Royaume” (Beyala 1998, 29). Fortunately Tapoussière has an iron will to match that of her grandmother, and manages to maintain her sense of personal identity. Much of the novel revolves around her heartbreaking quest to find out who her father is and get him to acknowledge her.

At times it seems inconceivable that any child would interact with adults and meddle in their affairs as if she were her equal as Tapoussière does. Tapoussière is routinely dismissed by the adults in her community, but that doesn’t stop her from challenging their hypocrisy. Throughout the novel, she vacillates between innocence and cynicism. The novel ends on a triumphant note, as the narrator receives a scholarship and prepares to leave her home to continue her education. She sheds her insulting nickname and receives from her community, the title “La Petite Fille du Réverbère” because of her habit of sitting under the street light at night to study. She learns the identity of her father at the same time she realizes that she no longer needs or wants him.

1.5 Research methodology

Every corner of the world has experienced the destruction of war, conquest, assimilation, and cultural alienation. Every living individual has an ancestral history of alienation, diaspora and cultural malaise. For the most fortunate, these traumas are several generations removed, but for countless others the pain is fresh and felt acutely every day. Colonialism and imperialism have impacted every corner of the globe. Although this study focuses on women writers of the francophone world, the issues presented are global in nature and pertinent to humanity as a whole.

Due to the broad scope and multi-faceted nature of this topic, I feel that an eclectic analytical approach is called for. One factor complicating this research is the fact that

many authors in this study are members of multiply oppressed groups, and are therefore subject to some level of exclusion from each of them. This dilemma has been explored in recent years by theorists such as Trinh T. Minh-Ha and bell hooks, but current research on this topic can do little more than acknowledge the problem. Maryse Condé, upon reading Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*, stated that she felt the book had been written for her (Condé 1999, 120). Yet in that very book, Fanon says, regarding women of color: "Nous n'en savons rien" (Fanon 1952, 180). Ironies such as this illustrate the need to approach this research from multiple angles in order to achieve a more balanced perspective.

This research is based on the premise that a strong sense of personal and group identity is necessary for a healthy self-esteem, and that the process of identity formation is hindered in members of marginalized groups, increasing feelings of alienation from the family as well as the community. Alienation can manifest in a variety of forms, but for this research, I am focusing on alienation within six domains: blood, money, land, religion, education, and history. The domains of blood, money, and land were identified in a passage written by Marie Cardinal, in which, referring to the Arabs, she stated: "Nous partageons tout avec eux. Sauf le sang, l'argent, et la terre" (Cardinal 1975, 127). Works by other authors corroborate these domains of exclusion set forth by the dominant culture. By deliberately excluding members of the alternate culture from these aspects of life, domains of alienation are created, and an arena is established in which the majority of interactions between cultures will be characterized by conflict. By examining each of these domains in detail, a better understanding can be gained of the effects of alienation as experienced by the women in this study.

Cardinal's remark about the things not shared invited the question "What *is* shared?" What is this nebulous "everything" to which she refers? Religion and education are the first two things to come to mind, although, regarding these institutions, there is a fine line between sharing and imposing. History is also shared by all participants. A distinction must be made between history as the record of past events, which can be controlled and manipulated by the dominant culture, and history as the aggregate of

past events. If there is an imbalance of power among cultural groups, the distance between the first type of history and the second is likely to be significant, creating alienation for those affected. The dominant culture controls the lines of communication and tends to skew information in favor of its own interests for as long as possible. However, over time, members of oppressed groups are often able to get their individual and collective stories into the historical record.

I will begin by identifying significant references to these six themes in each text and determining whether each woman experienced alienation in that particular domain. I will also categorize each woman's experience of alienation in the various domains as normative or non-normative. Normative alienating experiences come from life events which are within the boundaries of expected human experiences, such as mild sibling rivalry or the death of an elderly parent. Non-normative alienating experiences result from life events which are unexpected and outside the realm of typical human experience, such as the premature death of a parent or living in a war zone. Some experiences will be difficult to categorize, especially since some life circumstances, such as polygamy, are normative in one culture or family and non-normative in another. When I encounter such instances, I will refer to demographic and biographic data in order to determine what could be considered normative for that individual in that particular setting. It is expected that some authors will experience alienation in all six domains, while others will have a primary domain of alienation, with little or no alienation in other domains.

Literary analysis is not a hard science, and not every alienating experience will fall neatly within one of the domains. Some experiences will overlap and fall into multiple domains, and some may not fit into any category. For experiences which fall into multiple categories, I will determine which domain is most prominently represented. If an alienating experience cannot be placed in any of the six domains, it will not be included unless there is a significant reason for doing so, which will be explained. In assessing each author's degree of alienation within each domain, I will cite examples from the text(s) and categorize the level of alienation as non-existent, mild, moderate,

severe, or extreme. I will determine to what extent these experiences increase or decrease feelings of alienation between the narrator and her family and between the narrator and her native culture.

If an author does not experience alienation in a particular domain, I will determine whether this helped her to overcome alienation in other domains. It will not be possible to examine every reference to alienation in every text, so I will identify instances of alienation which are both significant to the domain being examined, and representative of the overall tone of the work in question. This study is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of any individual author, but rather to locate convergent experiences among a group of authors with the following traits in common: the French language, feelings of alienation, and a desire to tell one's story.

Due to the disparate nature of the domains, each one will require a slightly different theoretical model. Since all of the authors are women with affiliations outside of hexagonal France, feminist and postcolonial theory will be a constant throughout the study. The Self vs. Other dichotomy, which also permeates each of the domains, lends itself to binary deconstructionist analysis, as do the concepts of male / female, colonizer / colonized, etc. In examining the effects of alienation across the thematic domains, I will use the criteria set forth by Erikson to determine each woman's level of progress from alienation to belonging in the family and community. Erikson's theoretical model is comprised of a series of normative psychological conflicts occurring at various stages of the life cycle. Successful resolution of each conflict is necessary to the formation of a healthy personality and the acquisition of basic virtues (3). As alienating events are deconstructed, we will consider the author's stage of life and attempt to determine the degree to which the alienation hindered the successful resolution of the conflict at hand. When alienating events threaten the author's personal identity formation, we will refer to Marcia's theoretical model to determine whether the author was able to successfully reach the final stage of Identity Achievement.

There are limitations to each of these models, and in some cases it will be necessary to draw upon the research of other theorists in order to understand the authors' diverse

points of reference. For example, neither Erikson nor Marcia devoted significant attention to issues of sexuality, which is a prominent theme in some of the works studied. Marie Cardinal spent seven years undergoing Freudian psychoanalysis, and we would be remiss not to examine her work through a psychosexual lens. Likewise, both Erikson and Marcia failed to address the unique challenges faced by members of multiple ethnic groups. Walker Poston (1990) and Maria Root (2003) were the first researchers to publish theories of multiracial identity development (4) and I feel that their models are better suited to the analysis of Kim Lefèvre's works.

It is expected that the authors will exhibit differing levels of alienation and recovery based on a variety of internal and external factors, which will be identified and explored. Some methods of analysis will be employed sporadically. For example, ecocritical theory, which is highly relevant to the chapter dealing with alienation and land, is unlikely to figure prominently in any other chapter. The nexus where these theories converge is where I hope to see the emergence of new insights on the problem of alienation.

1.6 Anticipated impact of study

My hope is that this research will further the understanding of how familial and cultural alienation are inter-related with the hope of benefiting those who are affected. Trans-cultural interactions are increasing due to improved transportation and communication technology. Political and economic interests and even the tourist industry are all contributing factors. The human capacity for tolerance has not kept pace with these advances, and many women have succumbed to alienation and despair. By analyzing how various women narrate their personal journeys through alienating experiences, I hope to gain a better understanding of how the process of telling one's story via the written word facilitates healing for the author as well as those in her circle of influence, including the reader.

Note on Quotations

Quotations of three lines or less will be embedded within the text, while quotations of four or more lines will be indented.

Notes

- (1) Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) was an American writer and philosopher. He is particularly well-known for his science fiction novels, many of which have been made into movies. His novel *Valis* (1981) is part autobiography and part science fiction. Like the protagonist, Horselover Fat, Dick was convinced that the Roman Empire never ended. He claimed to have had a steady stream of paranormal experiences beginning in 1974. There has been speculation that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia or temporal lobe epilepsy. Whether or not he was delusional, Dick's stories of alienation and postmodern dystopia have demonstrated a remarkable prescience of a world he did not live to see.
- (2) This phrase originated with Ernest Lavisse, a French historian who authored the primary textbook on French history used by students throughout the francophone world for several decades. The phrase "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois" first appeared in a dictionary on pedagogy in 1888, during a period of intense French nationalism (Buisson 1888). Although little remains of Gallic culture, the members of the Gallic tribes who occupied the region of modern day France outnumbered the Roman conquerors and are, to a large extent, the *genetic* ancestors of the French. However, for the children of the colonies, who were neither the genetic nor the cultural descendants of the Gauls, it is not difficult to understand why this phrase became such a locus of ill will. In his article "L'histoire africaine et nos ancêtres les Gaulois" Jacques Binet describes the shortcomings of French pedagogical theories vis-à-vis colonial students whose notions of history are steeped in the oral tradition (Binet 1967).
- (3) The eight conflicts which make up the Erikson model are listed below along with the approximate age at which each conflict is encountered and the basic virtue

which accompanies successful resolution (Erikson 1959):

- i. Trust versus Mistrust (infancy to age 18 months) – Hope
- ii. Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt (18 months to 3 years) – Will
- iii. Initiative versus Guilt (ages 3 to 5) – Purpose
- iv. Industry versus Inferiority (ages 5-12) – Competency
- v. Identity versus Role Confusion (ages 12-18) – Fidelity
- vi. Intimacy versus Isolation (ages 18-40) – Love
- vii. Generativity versus Stagnation (ages 40-65) – Care
- viii. Ego Integrity versus Despair (age 65+)—Wisdom

(4) Poston's identity development model specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by biracial and multiracial individuals (Poston 1990). His model consists of five developmental stages, listed below, which will be used in the following chapter in the analysis of Kim Lefèvre's experience:

- i. Personal Identity
- ii. Choice of Group Categorization
- iii. Enmeshment / Denial
- iv. Appreciation
- v. Integration

Maria Root's model takes into account a variety of contributing internal and external factors, such as the degree of family functionality, traumatic experiences, and individual temperament (Root 2013).

Chapter 2 – Alienation in the domain of blood

...the life of every creature is its blood...

--Leviticus 17:14

2.1 Introduction

Alienation within the domain of blood goes all the way back to the biblical story of Abel, whose blood still had a voice even after his death. Blood is synonymous with life, but also with death. It is the closest thing to the essence of self. Every blood cell contains the genetic code of the individual who carries it. No other substance on Earth has as much emotional and symbolic baggage attached to it. For that reason, it may be the most powerful domain of alienation. People think of blood in different ways depending on whether it is inside the body, flowing through the veins or spilling out of the body following an act of violence. The loss of blood is almost always accompanied by pain, and there is often a sense of injustice attached, and a desire for vengeance. Lacan noted the tendency to view one's own internal blood as positive, while the enemy's blood is only celebrated when it is shed: "On verra dans le sang l'objet honni lorsqu'il est de l'Autre, l'objet sacré lorsqu'il a la charge de définir l'être même de l'ethnie" (Blanchet 2012).

Free will can be applied to many things in life, but rarely to matters pertaining to blood. One does not choose the type of blood coursing through one's veins, nor the genetic ancestors who contributed to its makeup. No soldier going into battle knows whether his blood will be spilled on the field by the end of the day. The moment of birth, with all its pain, joy and blood, comes when it will. Blood represents many things, most of all, life itself, but also the possibility that life can be taken away at any moment. Quality of life is also a consideration—people said to have tainted blood, usually due to genetic factors or health problems beyond their control are subjected to all types of discrimination by those who fear being contaminated themselves (Wailoo 2006). This

lack of control over the most vital life substance creates a variety of risks for alienating experiences.

There are several sub-domains of blood-related alienation which will be discussed in this chapter. For example, most women have vivid memories of their first menstrual period. The experience may be positive or negative, but it is inevitably accompanied by changes in personal relationships. The monthly menses and any “female problems” as a result of irregularity therein create cause for health-related alienation exclusive to women (Lander 1988). Loss of virginity is another occasion in which blood is shed, and the circumstances in which this occurs determine whether the woman experiences alienation or intimacy. Although this is not generally the case with men, many societies take ownership over the woman’s virginity, with someone other than the woman herself choosing when and how this blood will be shed (Ghanim 2015). Most of the women in this study are mothers and some have been affected by abortion—two other types of bloodshed unique to women.

Women are not immune to the bloodshed that occurs during acts of war or terrorism. Although they are less likely to wear a uniform and fight on a battlefield in an official, government-sanctioned capacity, women have always played a significant role in warfare. They work as spies and freedom fighters. They keep things going at home, doing the customary work of men who are far away. As the mothers, daughters, wives, sisters and lovers of the men in uniform, they experience anxiety and loss. The civilian experience of war can be every bit as bloody and traumatic as it is for soldiers fighting on the front lines (Summerfield 1996).

The blood shared between family members can be a source of alienation or a source of comfort. The feeling of belonging to a tribe, of sharing traditions and physical traits with one’s family gives a sense of unity and belonging to an individual. These blood ties connect an individual to the past and the future. The ritual of the marriage ceremony serves to unite people of different blood into the same clan, creating a sense of belonging for those involved. For this reason, children born outside of wedlock are prone to experiencing alienation, especially if the child is biracial (Collins 1998, 69). If

the father is Other, the child's very existence is a reminder of how far the Other has managed to intrude—even into the homes of formerly “pure” families. The child, aware of the hostilities projected onto her, but perhaps unaware of the reason, may internalize these experiences which manifest as low self-esteem.

It is even possible for traumatic memories and associations to be passed on from one generation to another. The concept of racial memory was once unique to Jungian psychology, but has recently been validated by research in the field of genetics (Dias and Ressler 2013). The idea that children are born with remnant genetic imprints of the sufferings of their ancestors is troubling for those who desire a brighter future for their children. However, if negative experiences can be transmitted genetically, it seems plausible that positive ones can as well, and the authors examined here make an effort to do so through their personal healing work, especially that of writing.

2.2 Une femme n'a qu'un seul trésor

For those who are lucky, childhood is a time of innocence and the sight of blood is limited to the occasional minor scrape or cut acquired during play. For many girls, the first menstrual period is the first time they experience a substantial amount of blood coming from their bodies. Menarche is a time of stark transition. It marks the death of childhood, and like any other type of death, it comes at the moment of its own choosing. When it does come, relationships abruptly change and new rules are imposed on adolescent girls, creating scenarios rife with alienation. Although the timing and circumstances surrounding the beginning of menstruation are outside the control of the girl in question, those around her tend to make judgments about whether menarche is occurring too early, too late or on schedule. At an age when she is the most painfully self-conscious, a girl's most private bodily functions may be used as a public assessment of whether she is conforming to societal standards. Contrary to logic, for a girl going through puberty, increasing maturity often results in a loss of independence, as those around her seek to protect what some cultures would consider her most valuable, if not her only asset—her virginity.

In many cases, girls receive little or no orientation to the onset of menstruation and menarche comes as a surprise, resulting in fear and shame at the first sight of blood. Kim Lefèvre was terrified when she got her first menstrual period. She was convinced that she had an internal injury and would slowly bleed to death. Her mother, however, was delighted about the event. As she busied herself sewing cotton pads for the weeping girl, she enumerated her new expectations of her daughter—“parler d’une voix douce, avoir des gestes plus lents, baisser les yeux avec modestie, surtout devant les hommes, en un mot, construire ma féminité” (Lefèvre 1989, 124). Kim still felt very much like a child, unprepared to sacrifice all the juvenile pleasures she still enjoyed, and did not understand how things could change so drastically from one day to the next. Despite her resistance, from then on, her younger sister was required to follow her as chaperone any time she left the house. As Kim’s mother told her “Une femme n’a qu’un seul trésor, c’est celui de sa virginité” (Lefèvre 1989, 125).

In many traditional cultures, it is not the lack of sexual experience, but rather the bloody proof of such which is of value. Many cultures define virginity as the presence of an intact hymen rather than the absence of prior sexual activity. Many young women, having heard endless exhortations from family members about the shame of losing one’s virginity lack a clear understanding of what virginity is. Kim Lefèvre’s mother horrified her with stories of young women forced into becoming prostitutes after being rejected by their husbands who had discovered that they were not virgins. The possibility of losing her virginity inadvertently or of the man being wrong terrified her. “La peur de perdre ma virginité me rendait malade. Je faisais des cauchemars où un homme grand et âgé, muni d’un sabre, me chassait à coups de pied en criant: ‘Elle a perdu sa virginité!’” (Lefèvre 1989, 125). The one crucial piece of information which is often left out is how one goes about losing one’s virginity. Kim mistakenly believed that she had lost her virginity by looking deeply into a young man’s eyes.

The pressure to preserve virginity comes from society as well as the family. As a young teenager, Marie Cardinal was horrified at the exuberant rejoicing during the wedding ceremony of a thirteen-year-old Arab girl to a much older man when the bloody sheet

was displayed proving her virtue. It was this sight which clarified the indoctrination she had received during the preparations leading to communion, which had left her so afraid of her impending womanhood. “Terreur de ne plus être vierge. Cauchemars. Une plaie, du sang. C’est par cette blessure-là que se vérifie la pureté...” (Cardinal 1980, 71-72). Perhaps out of fear of this wound and a desire to keep her blood inside of her for as long as possible, Marie failed to menstruate at all until the age of twenty. Her experiences will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The increased scrutiny as well as the lack of information about sexuality can be very disorienting for a young woman, who may come to feel that something is inherently wrong with her. For young women living in societies which place a high value on virginity, the wedding night can be a frightening and alienating rite of passage, especially since the bride herself may have played no part in choosing the marriage. In such cultures, marriage is usually a business transaction negotiated among men with a woman’s virginity the focal point of the negotiations (Fan 2014, 29).

Ken Bugul describes this process in traditional Senegalese culture in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*. A female relative, usually a paternal aunt is charged with the task of verifying the young woman’s virginity, usually through a combination of humiliating physical examinations and intrusive questions. No matter how seriously “la Badiène” takes her job, one can never be certain until after the wedding ceremony, when the groom confirms or denies the bride’s virtue: “C’était la bonne nouvelle alors, la bonne nouvelle qui sauvait l’honneur de la famille et des générations futures” (Bugul 1999, 49).

Ironically, Bugul did not experience this first hand. The scene described above relates to another character, Rama, whose father gave her as a reluctant young bride to the elderly Serigne. Bugul married the Serigne as a mature woman of her own free will, but expresses regret about her inability to offer him “un corps frais, pur” (Bugul 1999, 153). She speaks cryptically of the loss of her own virginity, saying only “...ma virginité qui me rattachait à toute une génération de mœurs et de traditions s’était envolée avec mon professeur d’histoire” (Bugul 1982, 73).

The anxiety leading up to the wedding night confirmation of virginity serves to curtail the independence of girls long before they get married. “Que de jeunes filles n’avaient pu apprendre à monter à vélo ou à cheval, parce que la mère avait peur qu’elles ne perdent leur virginité!” (Bugul 1999, 77). A woman who loses her virginity against her will is not likely to receive clemency. Although none of the authors in this study report personal experiences of rape, there is an ever-present anxiety, a hyper-vigilance, regarding the danger of sexual violence. Once this fear has been imposed upon a young woman, it is always present, and serves as a powerful tool for controlling women and restricting their movements in society. Marie Cardinal identifies women, rather than men, as the origin of this fear:

Une peur inventée par les femmes, enseignée aux femmes par les autres femmes. Peur de notre vulnérabilité, de l’incapacité absolue où nous sommes de nous fermer complètement. ... Quelle femme peut empêcher un homme qui le veut vraiment de la pénétrer et de déposer en elle sa semence étrangère? Aucune (Cardinal 1975, 248).

The young woman who fails the bloody sheet test brings shame upon her entire family and is often so humiliated that she commits suicide. Historically, a woman who failed to produce blood on her wedding night could even be subjected to religiously-sanctioned execution at the hands of the men of her community:

If a man takes a wife and, after lying with her, dislikes her and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, “I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity,” then the girl’s father and mother...shall display the cloth [that the couple slept on] before the elders of the town...If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl’s virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father’s house and there the men of the town shall stone her to death (Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

This biblical passage demonstrates an obvious overlap between alienation in the domain of blood and alienation in the domain of religion. No such blood sacrifice is required or even possible for the groom.

Despite the intense pressure to preserve virginity, some young women discard it quite casually. In *L'amant*, Marguerite Duras describes the loss of her virginity at the age of fifteen to her Chinese lover, who was several years older than her. It is a scene in which traditional roles are reversed. She seems to be exploiting his emotional vulnerabilities, expressing a desire for an almost anonymous sexual encounter. He cries, believing that she does not really love him. Afterward, she is surprised, but not upset by the sight of the blood on the sheet. Only after this act of intimacy, does she confide in him about her family problems: "Je dis que ma mère va mourir, que cela ne peut plus durer. Que la mort très proche de ma mère doit être aussi en corrélation avec ce qui m'est arrivé aujourd'hui. Je m'aperçois que je le desire" (Duras 1981, 51).

The idea that her sexual activity would hasten the demise of her mother increased her desire, as if she wished that the blood on the sheet belonged to her mother. This is understandable, considering the domestic violence which characterized Marguerite's home life, and her powerlessness to protect herself. In a society in which a girl's primary responsibility is to guard her virginity, failure to do so may be the only act of defiance accessible to the alienated young woman. In Duras' case this strategy backfired. Her mother had wrongfully accused her of promiscuity and beaten her brutally prior to the loss of her virginity, but after the fact, she showed nothing but apathy, thus undermining Marguerite's attempt at rebellion.

The primary goal of preserving a girl's virginity is always a favorable alliance through marriage. For the family members who are so determined to get the young woman to the marriage bed with her virginity intact, the happiness of the woman the day after her wedding is of little concern. In her novel *L'amour, la fantasia*, Assia Djebar describes her wedding to her first husband and her first night with him. The wedding took place in Paris, far from her homeland of Algeria. Her father was absent, as was her brother who was in prison for his participation in the Algerian resistance movement. The wedding

was rushed because the French police were looking for the groom, also a resistance fighter. This political intrusion into the narrator's personal life as well as the absence of so many family members and customs associated with a traditional Arab wedding creates a feeling of unease for the narrator.

Describing the loss of her virginity on her wedding night Assia says "Comment transformer ce sang en éclat d'espoir, sans qu'il se mette à souiller les deux corps?" (Djebar 1985, 123). At the moment when her blood was shed, she felt a resistance, *un refus*. The next day on the metro, she looks at the other women and wonders why no woman ever tells what she knows of love "l'amour, c'est le cri, la douleur qui persiste et qui s'alimente, tandis que s'entrevoit l'horizon de bonheur" (Djebar 1985, 124). Although the life of a newlywed is usually filled with hope, Assia sees the loss of her blood on her wedding night as the opening of a wound which will never heal, foreshadowing the fact that this marriage would eventually end in divorce.

If, as Kim Lefèvre's mother said, a woman's only treasure is her virginity, what is her value once her virginity is gone? In a traditional society, after a woman is married, her primary value is her ability to produce children. The alienating counterpart to menarche is menopause, which marks the end of a woman's fertility. Ramatoulaye, the protagonist in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* describes the emotional devastation she experienced when her husband took a younger, second wife: "J'étais abandonnée: une feuille qui voltige mais qu'aucune main n'ose ramasser" (Bâ 1979, 77). As a discarded first wife and mother of twelve children, Ramatoulaye has little hope that another love will come to her at this stage of her life. She takes comfort in her children, her friendships with other women, books, movies, and music. She sees her situation as a common plight among women and a cause for solidarity:

Alors que la femme puise, dans le cours des ans, la force de s'attacher, malgré le vieillissement de son compagnon, l'homme, lui, rétrécit de plus en plus son champ de tendresse. Son œil égoïste regarde par-dessus l'épaule de sa conjointe. Il compare ce qu'il eut à ce qu'il n'a plus, ce qu'il a à ce qu'il pourrait avoir (Bâ 1979, 62).

Despite the difficulties of going through menopause, many women find themselves suddenly liberated of the obligations imposed by society and free to pursue interests of their own choosing. Many women make use of this time to reflect back on their lives and experiences. For many of the authors in this study, middle age is a productive time of life, especially with regard to their careers as authors.

2.3 Une femme indisposée

In her book *Images of bleeding: menstruation as ideology*, Louise Lander outlines the evolution of the perception of menstruation in European and North American society. When the male-dominated medical industry took over the traditional institution of midwifery, societal attitudes regarding menstruation came to reflect the male status quo. Attitudes toward menstruation have tended to fluctuate with societal expectations of women. When women were economically expendable, menstruation was used as an excuse to exclude them from higher education and the world of commerce. When female participation in the workforce came to be expected, menstrual pain and discomfort became a disruption to productivity, a nuisance which had to be dealt with through medical intervention. Menstruation has generally been considered a weakness inherent to women. Each time a woman got her menstrual period, it represented her failure to perform the task she was truly meant for—pregnancy (Lander 1988). Despite the discomfort of menstruation, the “monthly visit” women receive beginning in adolescence can be a source of solidarity among women. Menses, childbirth, etc., are a source of girl talk from which men are excluded, giving women a world unto themselves.

For Marie Cardinal, this was never the case. For her, menstruation was a source of isolation. Shortly before Marie was expected to begin menstruating, her mother abruptly gave her a litany of new rules of conduct. Her tomboyish behavior would no longer be tolerated. Her friendships with the Arab children who lived on her family’s property had to be terminated. Her whereabouts had to be known at all times. If she were caught spending time with a boy her mother did not know, she would be sent to a convent within twenty-four hours. Regarding menstruation itself, she was told “c’est

sale et il faut que personne ne s'en aperçoive" (Cardinal 1975, 113). Her mother went on to explain that she was only trying to prevent her daughter from repeating her own mistakes, the primary one being marrying her ex-husband, Marie's father. As mentioned in the previous section, menarche was severely delayed for Marie. When she finally began menstruating at the age of twenty, the bleeding was sporadic, but by the time she was thirty, blood was pouring from her in a steady stream and doctors could offer no solution other than a hysterectomy and antipsychotic drugs.

She found herself increasingly unable to live a normal life or care for her three small children. "J'avais des histoires à raconter, des anecdotes. Mais l'histoire qui m'habitait, 'la CHOSE', cette colonne de mon être, hermétiquement close, pleine de noir en mouvance, comment en parler?" (Cardinal 1975, 9). Cardinal is lucky that she was perceptive enough to make the connection between the bleeding and the "histoires à raconter", a realization which may have saved her life. Unable to speak in the traditional way, the pain inside her, "la Chose", expressed itself as a continuous flow of blood. As the problem persisted, her world became smaller and smaller:

L'itinéraire de ses sorties était devenu de plus en plus court. Et puis, un jour, elle n'était plus allée dans la ville. Ensuite elle avait dû restreindre son espace à l'intérieur de la maison. Les pièges se multipliaient. Les derniers mois, avant d'être livrée aux médecins, elle ne pouvait plus vivre que dans la salle de bains (Cardinal 1975, 15).

Cardinal's use of the third person in this passage is indicative of her disassociation and loss of control of her life. As she looks back on this time of her life, she cannot see this woman as herself. Curled up in a fetal position "entre le bidet et le baignoire", she could no longer do anything except bleed and suffer. As the illness progressed, her family closed in around her, "Non pas seulement pour me protéger mais aussi pour se protéger elle-même" (Cardinal 1975, 19).

Her healing began when she found the will to refuse the treatment offered by traditional doctors and took charge of her own health. She declined the recommended

hysterectomy, and literally escaped from the psychiatric hospital where she was being treated. Looking at the other psychiatric patients, she saw that “la Chose” was inside them as well, controlled by medication perhaps, but still very much there. It was her desire to be healed completely, and she refused to accept anything less. Feeling that traditional medicine had failed her, Marie turned to psychoanalysis.

One of the most fundamental precepts of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis is the notion of “penis envy”, the unconscious desire of all girls to have a penis. A Freudian theorist would regard genital bleeding as a perception by the unconscious of the vagina as an open wound, seeming to confirm castration as a punishment for infantile masturbation. The onset of puberty would provoke sadness in a young girl who might still be harboring a latent desire to “grow into a boy” (Simmel 1945).

Many medical texts in the 1950s blamed inept mothering for a daughter’s difficult transition through puberty:

A mother who has not herself accepted the feminine role will tend to disparage those attitudes, characteristics and spheres of activity which are feminine and will emphasize the ordeal inherent in woman’s lot. Thus she fortifies her daughter’s penis envy and prepares the ground for her reluctance to accept the feminine role. This may account for faulty attitudes toward menstruation, marriage and motherhood (Kroger 1951, 63).

Although modern feminists may scoff at the notion of penis envy as well as the “blame the mother” approach presented in the above quote, it is important to note that Marie Cardinal experienced a remarkable degree of recovery through psychoanalysis. In this particular case, one would be remiss to overlook the role Marie’s mother played in the development of her symptoms. Her seven-year-journey through psychoanalysis revealed an intense early preoccupation with bodily functions which seems to correspond with Freud’s stages of psychosexual development. Almost immediately after beginning psychoanalysis, the bleeding stopped. Words poured from her in place of the blood.

Marie was a few years into her therapy before she could tell her therapist about the deepest wound of her childhood—the event she refers to as “la saloperie de ma mère”, an incident which demonstrates that verbal abuse can be every bit as damaging to a child as physical abuse. Domestic violence will be discussed more in a later section, but the type of abuse Marie endured at the hands of her mother leaves no scars or bruises visible to others, allowing the abuser to maintain her status in the community. If the victim of such abuse shows signs of mental distress, the abuser can dismiss these reactions as a defect or neurosis on the part of the victim, thus gaining allies in the community who confirm her status as a “good” mother of a “damaged” child. Marie’s mother was even able to administer such abuse on a public street in Algiers in full view of others. It was here that her mother told her that her pregnancy with Marie, occurring “en plein divorce” had not been planned or wanted and that she had made repeated attempts to induce a miscarriage.

Là, dans la rue, en quelques phrases, elle a crevé mes yeux, elle a percé mes tympans, elle a arraché mon scalp, elle a coupé mes mains, elle a cassé mes genoux, elle a torturé mon ventre, elle a mutilé mon sexe (Cardinal 1975, 135).

Ce que j’ai appelé la saloperie de ma mère ce n’était pas d’avoir voulu avorter, sa saloperie c’était au contraire de n’avoir pas été au bout de son désir profond, de n’avoir pas avorté quand il le fallait; puis d’avoir continué à projeter sa haine sur moi alors que je bougeais en elle, et enfin de m’avoir raconté son crime minable, ses pauvres tentatives de meurtre. Comme si ayant raté son coup elle le reprenait quatorze ans après, en sécurité, sans risque d’y laisser sa propre peau (Cardinal 1975, 141).

This pivotal incident sheds light on every other interaction Marie describes between herself and her mother, even those interactions which occurred prior to this event. It is as if Marie’s fight for survival within the womb never ended. Her efforts to please her mother consistently fell short, and Marie perceived these failures as a threat to her life. The physical loss of blood, which could have resulted in her death, was only the most superficial manifestation of her pain, which began even before her birth. Her birth itself

might be considered a botched abortion, and she aptly describes her healing as a rebirth, dedicating *Les mots pour le dire* “Au docteur qui m’ai aidée à naître.”

2.4 Bloodshed

Words like “bloodcurdling”, “blood-thirsty”, and “blood-lust” all signify the degree to which blood is synonymous with violence and warfare. Violence has been a part of the human condition since the beginning of history, as the story of Cain and Abel reminds us. However, with the advent of modern technology, warfare became far more efficient. World War I is generally regarded as the beginning of modern warfare, and many of the soldiers were severely traumatized. A new word was created to describe their affliction—shell shock. While doctors struggled to understand this malady, many of those afflicted were classified as malingerers and sent back to the front line, court-martialed or even shot. Corporal Henry Gregory, who served with the 119 Machine Gun Company describes a typical case of shell shock in his personal diary:

It is heartbreaking to watch a shell-shock case. The terror is indescribable. The flesh on their faces shakes in fear, and their teeth continually chatter. Shell-shock was brought about in many ways; loss of sleep, continually being under heavy shell fire, the torment of the lice, irregular meals, nerves always on end, and the thought always in the man's mind that the next minute was going to be his last (Gregory n.d.).

By the end of World War I ten million soldiers were dead and twenty million wounded. Although the history of Europe is as bloody as that of any continent, it had been a long time since Europeans had experienced such a violent and precarious existence firsthand. They had enjoyed a few generations of relative peace and safety, in which to improve their standard of living. The rapid technological advances which characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to a sense of optimism about the future. This *Belle Époque* came to an abrupt end with the eruption of the First World War. Wide-scale societal alienation suddenly came to the forefront of Western consciousness. Most of the population was educated and capable of writing about

these experiences, which created new avenues of artistic and literary expression. Sigmund Freud introduced his theories of psychoanalysis and the repressed unconscious, and philosophies such as existentialism arose in response to the feelings of hopelessness and despair experienced by the lost generation. Europe had scarcely recovered from this conflict when the Second World War broke out. Speaking of the European reaction to the atrocities of the Holocaust, Aimé Césaire remarks:

Il ne pardonne pas à Hitler, ce n'est pas le crime en soi, le crime contre l'homme, ce n'est que l'humiliation de l'homme en soi, c'est le crime contre l'homme blanc, et d'avoir appliqué à l'Europe des procédés colonialistes dont ne relevaient jusqu'ici que les Arabes d'Algérie, les coolies de l'Inde et les nègres d'Afrique (Césaire 1955, 12-13).

Writers like Césaire sparked a great deal of controversy and debate regarding human rights (Ischinger 1974). Although the pioneers of such movements as La Négritude were subjected to persecution, attitudes slowly began to change, and members of the subaltern began to tell their stories in ever-increasing numbers and the level of dialogue between races began to increase.

Although writing about one's personal experiences with violence can be a healing experience in the long run, it often has the immediate effect of opening up an old wound, as the writer is forced to relive the original trauma. This is especially true if the writing is done in the language of the people who inflicted the trauma:

Tenter l'autobiographie par les seuls mots français, c'est sous le lent scalpel de l'autopsie à vif, montrer plus que sa peau. Sa chair se desquame, semble-t-il, en lambeaux du parler d'enfance qui ne s'écrit plus. Les blessures s'ouvrent, les veines pleurent, coule le sang de soi et des autres, qui n'a jamais séché (Djebar 1985, 178).

Languages evolve along with the people who speak them. The history, geography and beliefs of a people are all connected to the subtle nuances of a particular language (Kirby et al 2007). Words circulate in a society as blood circulates through the veins of

the human body. With the introduction of a foreign language, the elegance and dexterity, as well as the linguistic shorthand which comes so easily when speaking a native tongue is lost, and the speaker is left fumbling, clumsily trying to approximate what she longs to express clearly.

In her novel *L'amour, la fantasia*, Djébar blends autobiographical information with the first person narratives of other women, mostly Arab, but some French, and historical accounts of the 1830 conquest of Algiers, as well as the war for the liberation of Algeria which occurred 130 years later. For Djébar, her homeland's bloody history is inextricably linked with her own life story, as well as the life stories of other women who lived there. In her description of the battles between the French and Algerian peoples, she uses language which provokes images of intimacy:

Dès ce heurt entre deux peuples, surgit une sorte d'aporie. Est-ce le viol, est-ce l'amour non avoué, vaguement perçu en pulsion coupable, qui laissent errer leurs fantômes dans l'un et l'autre des camps, par-dessus l'enchevêtrement des corps, tout cet été 1830? (Djébar 1985, 26).

She suggests that the Arabs themselves, fell victim to this fascination with the enemy, questioning whether Agha Ibrahim, commander of the Algerian resistance fighters, had allowed the enemy to get too close out of a desire to touch them, battle face to face and mix their spilled blood, a miscalculation which resulted in the fall of Algiers. She describes the written accounts of the battles sent home by French officers such as de Montagnac (See Chapter One) as love letters. Djébar's experience of alienation in this domain is severe and non-normative. By connecting her own autobiography with the history of her people and the individual stories of other women, she shares in the pain of everyone who suffered as a result of the French colonization of Algeria.

Kim Lefèvre's childhood coincided with the Vietnamese struggle against French colonial rule. Her early years were characterized by frequent upheavals, as her family migrated between the northern and southern parts of Vietnam in an effort to stay out of the combat zones. On many occasions, she and her family were forced to seek shelter

from the bombardments of the French army. When she and her family were living in Thuy Hoa, Vietnamese soldiers forced all of the residents out of the village and burned it to keep the French from taking it. Kim and her family, along with the rest of the residents of Thuy Hoa became refugees. She describes her family's exodus, with the flames of their home still burning behind them:

La marche à pied vers l'incertain, la fatigue, la soif et la faim. La peur, toujours la peur. Peur de perdre ceux qu'on aime; peur des avions, des tanks; peur des balles perdues. Dans cette confrontation, nous sommes toujours gibiers, jamais chasseurs (Lefèvre 1989, 129).

Gabrielle Roy, during a visit to the Pyrenees walked into the village of Prats-de-Molo, which was overrun with Republican refugees fleeing the gore of the Spanish Civil War. Previously war had been an abstract concept to her, but this first-hand experience changed her perspective. "Ah Dieu! le spectacle que j'eus sous les yeux, dont le souvenir hante encore mes nuits avec des fragments d'horreur comme dans Guernica!" (Roy 1984, 487). The French government, as well as the inhabitants of neighboring villages gave as much aid as they could, but Roy describes their efforts as a drop in the ocean. The horror she experienced at the sight of so much suffering motivated her to write articles about what she had witnessed. However, no one would publish them, and the vast majority of these refugees died in anonymous misery. This experience was brief, but the trauma from this alienation stayed with Gabrielle for the rest of her life. I classify it as severe and non-normative. With World War II looming on the horizon, Gabrielle was forced to cut short her stay in Europe and return to Canada.

Calixthe Beyala's narrative illustrates the uncertainties of growing up in an unstable postcolonial environment. Although Cameroon was not at war, the country was highly factionalized and violence occasionally erupted among those with competing political interests. On one occasion, Beyala was awakened in the night by the sound of a screaming woman. Ignoring her grandmother's protests, she ran into the street and was horrified by the sight of numerous corpses, lying in a dismembered heap. Soldiers moved among the cadavers "comme des serpents", and local officials casually

dismissed the demands of outraged citizens for an explanation. Some outspoken members of the community openly called for a revolution. Although this event was extremely alienating for Beyala, it did help her to solidify her notions of social justice and to turn her attention outward: “Cette vision d’horreur me fit comparer ma souffrance de bâtarde à une graine de sable dans un désert de souffrance” (Beyala 1998, 141).

Although she is only a child, Beyala lashes out angrily against the local authorities: “C’est pas permis d’assassiner, du tout, du tout! criai-je. Personne ne peut fabriquer une vie, alors!” (Beyala 1998, 141). Although it seems likely that a child witnessing such an event would be too frightened and confused to confront an adult in this way, doing so *ex post facto* in her writing enabled Beyala to deal with the anger she felt as a result of her childhood alienation. Many authors describe the difficulties of dealing with their own anger as they journey through recovery. Just as men are discouraged from showing fear, women are strongly discouraged from showing anger. Rather than expressing anger, many women internalize it in an attempt to maintain the image of a “good” girl. The consequences can range from physical illness, as was the case with Marie Cardinal to low self-esteem, as was the case with Kim Lefèvre, who wrote about her intense anger regarding the injustices she had endured as well as the shame she felt for feeling such anger: “La violence des sentiments était, chez une femme, le pire défaut qui fût. Elle était considérée comme une indécence, voire une obscénité” (Lefèvre 1989, 216).

For women, even the most justified anger is condemned because it represents a threat to the power of the abusers who provoke such anger. The greatest violence many people endure is within their own households, an issue which will be addressed in the next section. Marguerite Duras endured extreme abuse at the hands of her mother and older brother. Marguerite was often the victim of unfortunate timing and the peace she may have been hoping to find by leaving Vietnam and moving to France was shattered by the eruption of World War II. In her book *La douleur* she describes her experiences working for a Resistance movement led by François Mitterrand and nursing her husband back to health after his stay in Bergen-Belsen. As horrifying as these memories of war

may seem, Duras saw little difference between the trauma of domestic child abuse and the trauma of World War II:

Je confonds le temps de la guerre avec le règne de mon frère aîné... Je vois la guerre comme lui était, partout se répandre, partout pénétrer, voler, emprisonner, partout être là, à tout mélangée, mêlée, présente dans le corps dans la pensée, dans la veille, dans le sommeil, tout le temps, en proie à la passion saoulant d'occuper le territoire adorable du corps de l'enfant, du corps des moins forts, des peuples vaincus, cela parce que le mal est là, aux portes contre la peau (Duras 1981, 78).

2.5 Bloodlines

Ideally the ties of kinship should be a comforting shelter against the slings and arrows of life. In a perfect world, a young person has loving grandparents from both sides of the family to tell her stories of her ancestral past. The child grows up feeling loved and accepted; parents die of old age, never outliving any of their children, secure in the knowledge that their descendants will continue the cherished traditions of their ancestors. Unfortunately very few families come close to this ideal. Families endure traumatic losses and upheavals. The intense emotions inevitably experienced as a result of family life create many risks for alienation. The family home, which should be a source of solace, can come to feel like a prison. The frequency with which such themes arise in literature validates Derrida's claim that "the birth of writing was nearly everywhere and most often linked to genealogical anxiety" (Derrida 1964, 124).

Of the nine authors examined in this study Gabrielle Roy may have had the most positive experience with her family of origin. She did not marry until the age of thirty-eight, and never had any children. As a result, her familial focus is primarily on her parents and siblings. Despite the hard times the Roy family endured, there was genuine affection. Her father was a kind man, but approaching age 60 at the time she was born. He had been severely abused as a child, and although he never abused his

own children, he was emotionally distant and prone to depression, and a profound sense of melancholy was transmitted to Gabrielle as a result.

Gabrielle experienced a mild degree of blood-related alienation due to her displaced ancestors. Her mother identified the displacement of her Acadian ancestors as the beginning of their problems. However, her family was nomadic by nature and seemed to have an innate desire to travel. Virtually everyone has at least one person in the family tree who suffered an involuntary geographic displacement. Since Gabrielle was separated by a few generations from this Acadian ancestor, this alienation can be categorized as mild and normative.

As the youngest of the family, she was subjected to some mild envy from siblings who felt that she enjoyed privileges they had not had. She had a sister who suffered from severe mental illness, a brother who struggled with alcoholism, and other siblings who lived their entire lives in poverty. Despite these difficulties, there was genuine love, and a true sense of belonging for all family members who tried to help one another through hard times. Her family was obviously a source of comfort for Gabrielle in her darkest hours. Although her memoirs are tinged with sadness when she discusses her parents and siblings, overall Gabrielle Roy's family ties were a benefit more than a hindrance, and the sense of belonging she felt due to these nurturing family ties helped her to overcome alienation in other domains which will be discussed in later chapters.

Unlike Gabrielle Roy, who remained childless, Mariama Bâ had nine children, which gives her writing a more future-oriented focus. Ramatoulaye, the protagonist of her semi-autobiographical novel *Une si longue lettre*, had twelve children. Recently widowed, Ramatoulaye is still trying to cope with the feelings of betrayal she experienced when her husband took a younger, second wife. As an educated modern woman, she had rejected the traditional arranged marriage and married the man she loved, despite her mother's warning that he would not make a good husband. Ramatoulaye looks back on her mother's advice regarding a woman's happiness "Une femme doit épouser l'homme qui l'aime mais point celui qu'elle aime; c'est le secret d'un bonheur durable" (Bâ 1979, 87).

Lost between her parents' generation, representing the traditional past and her children's generation representing an optimistic but precarious future, Ramatoulaye finds herself on shifting sands. "Privilège de notre génération, charnière entre deux périodes historiques, l'une de domination, l'autre d'indépendance" (Bâ 1979, 40). At the moment of her greatest vulnerability Ramatoulaye learns that her eldest daughter will soon become an unwed mother. She is heartbroken, but remains supportive of her daughter. Aware of her fragile health, her lack of support system, and the overwhelming needs of her children, she worries about their future. I categorize Mariama Bâ's alienating experience within the domain of blood as severe due to the intensity of her distress, but normative due to the frequency with which Senegalese women are affected by similar experiences.

In analyzing works of autofiction, it is often interesting to take a close look at what the author chose to change. Bâ gave her protagonist three extra children, which might indicate that she was overwhelmed as a mother. Calixthe Beyala was raised primarily by a sister who was four years older than her, yet this sister is absent from her autobiographical novel *La petite fille du réverbère*. Instead, her grandmother is her primary caregiver, although Beyala is frequently left to fend for herself. We might conclude that Beyala *felt* like an only child, and portrayed herself as such in her novel. Cut off from her genetic origins by her unknown paternity, it is up to Beyala to create her own identity. She closely examines the features of each man in the community, trying to see if she resembles one of them in some way. "J'avais quelque chose à exiger de l'humanité: un père" (Beyala 1998, 58). By searching for the self in the face of the Other, she fails to realize the power of her true self, and it is only when she abandons the search for her father that things begin to improve for her. When the mother who abandoned her at birth suddenly reappears, married to a wealthy man, with two small children in tow, she rejects Beyala a second time. Beyala finds role models in her community to take the place of her absent parents, particularly a prostitute named Madame Kimoto, who serves as a surrogate mother, but she ultimately has to learn to cope with life without the loving parents she longs for. This experience is severe and non-normative.

Beyala demonstrates remarkable resourcefulness in her attempts to reframe her illegitimacy in a more positive way:

Je pensais utiliser mon handicap à mon avantage: "Enfant bâtarde, enfant de la passion!" ou encore "Fille sans père, fille de la lumière!" Un slogan, à la manière d'une publicité qui permettrait aux enfants naturels de reprendre le dessus, ou du moins de regarder les autres dans les yeux (Beyala 1998, 138).

While Calixthe had to cope with the absence of family members, some of the women in this study have to cope with the presence of abusive family members. The conflict and alienation within the family home has the potential to escalate to the point of physical violence. Marguerite Duras describes the beatings she received from her mother and brother. The dissociative detachment which characterizes Duras' narratives indicates that she was never able to fully recover from her abusive childhood. Kim Lefèvre describes a childhood home permeated with fear and tension when her stepfather was present, with lighthearted moments occurring with her mother and sisters only in his absence.

In her book *Vaste est la prison*, which Assia Djébar describes as the most autobiographical of all of her novels, there is a particularly disturbing scene in which the protagonist confesses an emotional infidelity to her husband. He becomes enraged and beats her so savagely that it takes three weeks for her to recover. She describes covering her face with bloody hands, trying desperately to protect her eyes, since he seems determined to blind her.

In her book *Violence in francophone African and Caribbean women's literature*, Chantal Kalisa makes a distinction between "public" or "masculine" discourses on violence, that is to say, violence pertaining to slavery, colonialism, and the post-colonial era of corruption and dictatorships, and the "private" or "feminine", intimate type of violence, such as rape or physical and psychological abuse of women. She notes a tendency among francophone women writers to place this type of violence within the public sphere, thus removing the taboos, which have traditionally kept this type of violence

from becoming a part of the public discourse or “official” history (Kalisa 2009, 3). Although the focus of this study is autobiographical works, Mariama Bâ’s final novel *Un chant écarlate*, should be mentioned here. The title itself is a reference to blood, and the protagonist experiences such an extreme degree of alienation due to her husband’s infidelity that she murders their child and stabs her husband. This protagonist, who is in many ways a polar opposite to Ramatoulaye, the protagonist of *Une si longue lettre* and to Bâ herself, may represent Bâ’s attempt to express an anger which she could not allow herself to openly acknowledge.

All family ties, whether nurturing or abusive, are inevitably temporary. When a family member dies, alienation is a common experience among the survivors. It is the timing and circumstances of the death which determine whether the death is normative or non-normative. Both Maryse Condé and Marguerite Duras wrote about losing a beloved sibling at a young age. For Condé, it was her older brother Sandrino, the brother who had opened her eyes to the alienated status of her parents, the brother who had introduced her to Zobel’s novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*, the brother who had the potential to be a great writer himself, but died with this potential still trapped inside his cancerous body. For Duras, the death of the younger of her two brothers was so distressing that she wanted to die herself. This brother had also been a victim of the abuse meted out by their mother and older brother, and at times the two siblings had no one to turn to but one another. For Marguerite, the loss of this brother was even more traumatic than giving birth to a stillborn child: “Le corps de mon petit frère était le mien aussi, je devais mourrir. Et je suis morte. Mon petit frère m’a rassemblée à lui, il m’a tirée à lui et je suis morte” (Duras 1981, 128).

Although the non-normative grief associated with the death of a young person is horrific, even the anticipated death of an elderly parent can lead to feelings of profound distress. Gabrielle Roy experienced an intense grief first when her father died, and later following the death of her mother. Although both parents died during old age, and after an extended period of ill health, Gabrielle was left with a sense of unfinished business in both cases. With her father, she had failed to express the affection she felt toward him,

and with her mother, she had missed opportunities to visit and had been too late to provide needed financial assistance. Kim Lefèvre's second novel *Retour à la saison des pluies* is permeated with angst over her elderly mother's frail health. When she finally returns to Vietnam after a thirty-year absence, both women are saddened by the fact that another visit may not be possible prior to the mother's death.

Maryse Condé had an unhealthy attachment with her narcissistic mother, and virtually no attachment to her emotionally distant father. Even in her autobiography written after decades of introspection, Condé displays a noticeable lack of objectivity with regard to her mother. Although the mother's behavior is self-serving and often cruel, Maryse's primary feeling toward her is admiration. As the youngest child in her family, she describes a persistent feeling of anxiety that her mother could die before she is ready to cope with the loss. Angered by Maryse's academic and disciplinary shortcomings at the Lycée Fenlon, her father sent her a letter in which he informed her that she was "la honte de son nom" (Condé 1999, 147): "C'est de cette époque, je crois, qu'une réputation commença de me coller dans la famille, que je finis par accepter pour vérité: malgré toute mon intelligence, je n'arriverais à rien" (Condé 1999, 147).

Maryse failed her final exams that year, and her father punished her by refusing to pay for her to return to Guadeloupe for the summer. The unfortunate result was that her mother died before Maryse was able to go home, and she was unable to reconcile with the mother she had tried so hard to please.

2.6 Tainted blood

Few things can be more alienating to a child than feeling like an outcast in her own family. The societal norm is two parents of similar cultural background who love each other and are married. The further a child's situation is from this norm, the greater the potential for alienation. A child with an absent parent, from a despised race, is left to absorb all of the animosity those around her feel toward members of that race. Those closest to her, such as grandparents, who might soften the impact of societal abuse, may be among her worst persecutors, due to the shame and resentment they feel

toward the mother and child for damaging their social standing. Anyone considered to have tainted blood, blood that is different from other members of the family is subject to discrimination.

As an illegitimate bi-racial child, Kim Lefèvre was subjected to alienation both in her own household and in society at large. As the only bi-racial author in this study, her perspective is unique and therefore will be a focal point in this section. Lefèvre's father, a French officer, abandoned her mother when she was pregnant and her mother was forced to marry a man she did not love in order to establish some degree of respectability in her life. Kim's step-father was deeply resentful of her existence and her mother had to conceal any affection she felt for her eldest daughter in the presence of her husband. Kim felt unwelcome and even invisible in her own home. At a very young age, she internalized the judgment placed on her by others:

On mettait tout ce qui était mauvais en moi sur le compte du sang français qui circulait dans mes veines. C'était ce qui empêchait les gens d'éprouver une affection réelle à mon égard. Je les comprenais. Je les approuvais. Moi aussi, je détestais ce sang que je portais. Petite fille, je rêvais d'accidents providentiels qui me videraient de ce sang maudit, me laissant pure Vietnamiennne, reconciliée avec mon entourage et avec moi-même (Lefèvre 1989, 14).

In her essay "Métisse blanche: Kim Lefèvre and transnational space" Isabelle Thuy Pelaud identifies mixed race as well as race itself primarily as a social construct, far more significant politically than biologically. Pelaud sees the writing of Lefèvre, as well as other mixed race authors as creating a space between representations, or "decentering the hegemony" (Pelaud 2002, 124). The political appropriation of racial identity, the very blood and DNA of human beings, creates an officially sanctioned arena for the alienation of mixed race people. The emergence of mixed race literature in recent years may serve as a subversive element against these tendencies.

Perhaps more than any other author in this study, Kim Lefèvre experiences alienation in all of the domains examined. However, blood is her primary domain of alienation, and

this alienation is extreme and non-normative. The cultural repugnance toward those of mixed race status is indicative of the collective identity crises experienced by cultures with a history of invasion, as is the case with Vietnam. The existence of bi-racial individuals challenges the notion of separation and unity, Self and Other. “Le corps sain, le sang pur et d’origine, s’oppose ici à la substance grouillante, invasive des corps migrants, véritables repoussoirs spéculaires d’où se détache l’image idéale d’une identité à défendre” (Blanchet 2012). Individuals who are perceived to carry the enemy’s blood within their own veins must go to extraordinary lengths to prove their loyalty to the culture with which they identify, if they are even given the opportunity to do so. When anti-colonial sentiment was especially strong in their community, Kim’s mother would hide her in a large urn to keep her safe from strangers. This was a horrifying experience for Kim, who felt as if she were being buried alive and could not understand why she was considered an enemy.

If there is a weakness to the identity formation models proposed by Erickson and Marcia, it is that they failed to take into account the plight of biracial and multiracial individuals. Walker Poston and Maria Root were the first psychological theorists to offer comprehensive and positive models for identity development of multiracial individuals. Earlier theorists had failed to comment on the issue at all or had condemned biracial people to a marginalized social status. Poston offers a five-stage model of identity development (Poston 1990). In the first stage of Personal Identity, young children do not have an adequate understanding of race and their personal identity is not tied to their racial background. For someone like Kim Lefèvre, this can be a very confusing experience, as adults project their own racial hatred onto a child who is old enough to perceive the hostilities, but not old enough to understand the reasons for them. This stage is clearly portrayed in the first chapter of *Métisse blanche*, titled “Errances”, in which Kim describes the earliest years of her life in which she and her mother had no fixed residence and were forced to drift between the homes of various relatives who provided temporary shelter, but little hospitality.

In Poston's second stage of identity development, the child chooses a group categorization based on individual factors. For most of her early years Kim Lefèvre chose to identify as Vietnamese because her mother and sisters were Vietnamese. However, during the four years she spent in a French orphanage, she and the other biracial girls identified as French because they were indoctrinated to do so. She shed this identity rather quickly after being reunited with her mother. The third stage, Enmeshment / Denial, consists of guilt at not being able to identify with all aspects of the chosen heritage. Kim, in her poverty, had little access to mirrors, and often forgot that her European heritage was visible in her features. In *Métisse blanche*, she describes her shock and disbelief when she is shown a photo of herself: "Je pris douloureusement conscience de mon altérité. Mais, si brutale qu'elle fut, cette découverte eut au moins le mérite de me guérir de ma cécité intérieure. Je savais désormais que je n'étais pas pareille aux autres" (Lefèvre 1989, 155). Stage four is Appreciation in which the person learns to appreciate aspects of both cultures. Kim managed to achieve this as a teenager during her studies at a Eurocentric convent boarding school. The fifth stage of Integration occurred later in life when she renewed contact with her family in Vietnam and began interacting with the Vietnamese community in Paris.

Although Kim Lefèvre found that Europeans, in general, were more accepting of her biracial status than their Vietnamese counterparts, Ken Bugul, during her time in Belgium, encountered extreme hostility against the biracial fetus she carried in her womb. Facing an unplanned pregnancy just three months after her arrival in Europe, a very frightened young Ken sought an abortion. The doctor she turned to for help made no attempt to hide his disgust when he learned that the father of her baby was white: "Je suis absolument contre le mélange. Chaque race doit rester telle. Les mélanges de races font des dégénérés; ce n'est pas du racisme. Je parle scientifiquement. Vous êtes Noire, restez avec les Noirs. Les Blancs entre Blancs" (Bugul 1982, 72).

In addition to the verbal assault she received from the doctor, the abortion itself was very traumatic. It was this experience which sparked the first feelings of feminism in

Bugul. For her, gender came to take precedence over race. “Ma conscience féministe est née” (Bugul 1982, 76). For the first time, Ken looks around and sees the similar plight of women of all colors and the unequal balance of power between men and women. Unplanned pregnancies are universally the problem of women. Not only did a man get her into the situation, she was forced to go to a man for help getting out of it. She realizes that had she stayed in her own village in Senegal the pregnancy would not have occurred, and in the extremely rare event that a pregnancy has to be terminated, there are less violent methods available from which men are completely excluded.

Bugul sees the problem of premature pregnancy as a side effect of alienation and diaspora: “On ne voyait des filles mères que dans les exodes. Dans tout exode, il y a alteration de l'échelle des valeurs” (Bugul 1982, 77). Ken would later spend seven years working for the International Planned Parenthood Foundation. The alienation she experienced as a result of her abortion was severe, but normative. Part of the trauma she endured was the realization of how common such an experience was among women and how reluctant they are to discuss it.

Just as biracial individuals are seen to carry tainted blood, so are those who carry illnesses (Wailoo 2006). Kim Lefèvre suffered from both malaria and tuberculosis. When first diagnosed with tuberculosis, she had to hide the condition from others in the community, knowing she would be ostracized. In her own household, she and her belongings were quarantined from the rest of the family, reinforcing the belief that her blood was unclean and a threat to those around her. Marie Cardinal's family was torn apart by her father's tuberculosis, acquired after his lungs were damaged by mustard gas in World War I. He passed the infection on to his two eldest children, which ultimately killed one of them. It was this unintended consequence which led to his divorce from Marie's mother. She never forgave him for the death of her eldest daughter. She did, however, comply with a court order requiring Marie to visit her father regularly, in order to maintain the support payments she was receiving. Prior to each visit, Marie's mother reminded her not to let her father get too close. The havoc visited

upon this family decades after the end of the war illustrates the far-reaching collateral damage caused by warfare.

2.7 Blood as carrier of genetic memory

The effects of alienating trauma are clearly passed down from one generation to another. However, how much is caused by nature and how much by nurture? The children of shell-shocked soldiers who survived World War I were at high risk for alienation themselves, but how much of this is due to the father's compromised parenting skills and how much is due to the genetic imprint left upon his DNA as a result of his time in the trenches?

As a component of his Theory of the Collective Unconscious, Carl Jung postulated the idea of "racial memory" in which the wounds of the past, suffered by ancestors can be transmitted genetically through the collective unconscious. According to Jung, the Collective Unconscious is a level of knowledge that goes beyond the Personal Unconscious. The Collective Unconscious consists of a reservoir of beliefs, experiences and thoughts shared by ancestors over many millennia. Jung originally made this discovery through analysis of his patients' dreams. He noticed a shared symbolism among members of the same race (Jung 1916).

Although a traditional behaviorist might have cause to be skeptical of research based solely on dream analysis, Jung's theory seems to have been validated by recent research in the field of genetics. It has been demonstrated that a parent's experiences even before a child is conceived have a profound influence on the structure and function of the nervous system of subsequent generations, possibly contributing to phobias, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders (Dias and Ressler 2013) (1).

For the descendants of slaves and slave owners this idea may be profoundly upsetting, as it complicates the process of making a fresh start. Maryse Condé's parents prided themselves on having left behind the suffering of their ancestors: "...ni l'un ni l'autre n'éprouvaient le moindre sentiment d'infériorité à cause de leur couleur. Ils se croyaient les plus brillants, les plus intelligents, la preuve par neuf de l'avancement de leur Race

de Grands-Nègres” (Condé 1999, 18). Although her parents were unable to acknowledge the violence in their ancestral history, Maryse felt compelled to do so, and the circumstances of her life frequently required it.

In her book *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*, Maryse describes a bizarre experience in which she was bullied as a child by a girl named Anne-Marie, a “blanc-pays” who beat her savagely, saying “Je dois te donner des coups parce que tu es une négresse” (Condé 1999, 49). Maryse asked her parents to explain why blacks had to be beaten. Neither of her parents was able to talk to her about this uncomfortable reminder of the past, and an opportunity for intergenerational healing was missed when Maryse’s question was deflected. It was only decades later that she realized the “surnaturelle” quality of the experience:

Je me demande si Anne-Marie et moi, nous n’avons pas été, l’espace de nos prétendus jeux, les réincarnations miniatures d’une maîtresse et de son esclave souffre-douleur.

Sinon comment expliquer ma docilité à moi si rebelle? (Condé 1999, 51).

Although this alienating experience could easily fall within the domain of history, I choose to place it within the domain of blood because both parties seem to be acting out of instinct handed down from their respective genetic ancestors. Condé’s victimization at the hands of Anne-Marie lasted only a few days. On the day when Maryse decided to stand up to Anne-Marie and terminate the “friendship”, Anne-Marie was nowhere to be found. The abuse was of short duration, but could still be categorized as severe. Most people have endured at least one instance of bullying as a child, but since this abuse was justified solely because of Maryse’s skin color, I categorize it as non-normative.

The question arises—if it is possible for trauma, phobias and anxieties to be transmitted genetically via DNA, is it possible to transmit more positive attributes such as love, compassion and tolerance? Unfortunately the Nature Neuroscience study failed to ask this question let alone attempt to answer it. Research on this topic seems to focus on

the negative. Despite the lack of research, I think it is reasonable to assume that this is possible and to make decisions which affect future generations accordingly. There is a human tendency to move forward, no matter how difficult the past has been. The authors of this study tend to finish their works on a positive note, particularly when forgiveness is called for. Each author, after addressing her own emotional pain takes the next step of showing concern for others going through similar trauma. Some of them openly state this as a motive for writing. Marie Cardinal states that she went through the psychotherapy for herself, but she wrote *Les mots pour le dire* to help other women. Each author's progress toward recovering from blood-related alienation will be examined in the following section.

2.8 Conclusions

The authors examined in this study display a range of experiences of alienation within the domain of blood. For most girls, menarche marks the first major experience with blood loss other than the occasional minor childhood injury. Outside interest in this private event creates enhanced scrutiny around young women at a time when they are already self-conscious. The sensitivity or lack thereof with which the adults around the girl handle this event can aggravate or mitigate her experience with alienation. Kim Lefèvre had a particularly difficult time with menarche, although it was just one of her many experiences of blood-related alienation.

Marie Cardinal was so upset by “the talk” she got from her mother regarding menstruation that she may have subconsciously willed her body to delay menarche for several years. Menstruation itself can be an alienating disruption to a woman's life, albeit a normative one. For Marie Cardinal, menstruation, when it finally started was sporadic and irregular for several years before becoming a constant flow of blood for three years straight. This coincided with a bout of mental illness and the two conditions left Marie a prisoner in her own bathroom. This experience was extreme and non-normative, but she was able to make an incredible recovery with the help of conventional psychotherapy. Cardinal's case illustrates how essential it is that internalized pain find an outlet. The healthiest outlet is tears and words, but access to

traumatic memories may be blocked and a less healthy outlet such as physical illness may manifest.

Just as menarche can be alienating, the cessation of menstruation can also be an alienating event as a woman is reminded of the loss of her youth. For Mariama Bâ, this reminder was particularly harsh, since her husband was not there to console her through this transition. Struggling with his own mid-life crisis, he took a younger, second wife, as was permitted by his Muslim faith, leaving Mariama to care for their home and children all alone. She writes down her pain, and looks outside herself to a world of women suffering the same indignities. This alienation is severe, but normative. Her recovery is substantial, but incomplete. Her writing is tinged with sorrow, and her pre-mature death was likely linked to the stress she endured as a result of her difficult life circumstances.

Many of the authors examined here were affected by warfare. Both Marie Cardinal and Assia Djebar were traumatized by the Algerian War for Independence. Despite her 'pied-noir' status, Marie supported Algerian independence, and suffered alienation from her family as a result (Proulx 1998). Assia lost many loved ones in the war and her brother spent several years as a political prisoner. She describes an alienation from blood which is severe and non-normative. The ever-present violence in her country made a deep impression on her, but by giving voice to those who were unable to speak, she initiates the process of healing for herself and others.

Kim Lefèvre spent much of her childhood as a refugee, constantly vigilant of the violence which could erupt at any time. Her risk of being assaulted was enhanced due to her mixed-race status. Due to the intensity of her alienation in a variety of sub-domains, Kim's alienation is extreme and non-normative, but by leaving Vietnam to create a new life, she was able to recover from much of her childhood trauma. She achieved further closure by reconnecting with her family and revisiting Vietnam thirty years after her departure. She was able to reach the highest level of identity development according to the model set forth by Poston.

Gabrielle Roy had a brief, but intense encounter with refugees from the Spanish Civil War, an experience which undoubtedly heightened her sensitivity to violence and enhanced her writing from that point forward. Calixthe Beyala grew up in a region of political instability where localized violence was common. Nevertheless she threw herself into her studies, and left Cameroon, creating a successful career as an author. She has become an activist for women and children, and has provided assistance for orphaned children from Yaoundé and Douala (Hitchcott 2006, 144). Like so many victims of alienation, she has found solace in helping others in a similar plight to her own.

Marguerite Duras' experiences during World War II were severe and non-normative. She wrote that the war provoked the exact same feelings as she had felt living in her childhood home, being terrorized by her mentally ill mother and tyrannical brother (Duras 1984, 78). She suffered profound grief at the death of the younger of her brothers, the only family member she with whom she had had a bond of affection. Duras' blood-related alienation is extreme and non-normative, and she never achieved more than a partial recovery from it.

Even in the closest of families there is the potential for alienation and strained relations among family members. Although Gabrielle Roy experienced only mild and normative alienation from her family, she grieved deeply for her parents when they died, and felt intense guilt because her siblings had not achieved the same degree of success that she had enjoyed. Nevertheless, compared to the other authors in this study, Gabrielle was fortunate to have had such a loving family.

Both Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul experienced maternal abandonment, and Beyala had to cope with the additional burden of illegitimacy. For Ken, the departure of her mother, the lack of a personal bond with her elderly father, the racial discrimination and the abortion she endured, all created a perfect storm of alienation. Writing about these experiences, and her return to Senegal (which will be discussed further in a subsequent chapter) helped her to overcome the alienating trauma of her early life.

As if the experiences of one's own lifetime do not present enough alienating scenarios, there is evidence to suggest that the alienating trauma of one's genetic ancestors can influence one's emotions and instinctual behavior patterns (Dias and Ressler 2013). The mother of Gabrielle Roy identified the forced relocation of their Acadian ancestor as the beginning of the family's troubles. Despite the generations separating them from this event, an echo of suffering was passed down through the bloodline, a suffering which is subtle but very present in Gabrielle's writings.

Genetic memory is played out in even more dramatic form in an incident described by Maryse Condé, in which as a child she was savagely bullied by a white girl named Anne-Marie, solely because she was black. Looking back on the incident years later, Maryse was astonished that she took the beatings so submissively, since such behavior was contrary to her nature (Condé 1999, 51). As the descendant of slaves who would likely have been killed for resisting a beating, Maryse may have reacted instinctively, according to the genetic imprint left by the fear of her enslaved ancestors. After a few days, she made a conscious decision to defend herself and Anne-Marie abruptly disappeared from her life.

Although little research has been done on the impact of *positive* genetic imprints, each of the authors in this study seems to work toward leaving such a positive imprint.

Notes

- (1) In a study originally published in Nature Neuroscience, mice conditioned to fear the smell of cherry blossoms passed the fear of that smell on to subsequent generations, even though the offspring had had no prior experience of the smell (Dias and Ressler 2013).

Chapter Three—Alienation in the domain of money

The thing that differentiates man from animals is money.

--Gertrude Stein (1936)

3.1 Introduction

In 2004, two researchers at Yale University, a behavioral economist and a psychologist, successfully taught a group of seven capuchin monkeys the concept of money. Only a short time after the subjects came to understand that the small silver disks they were receiving could be traded for different types of food, their habits began to change. They began stealing the disks from one another and from the researchers. Some capuchins even began trading disks for sexual favors. None of the capuchins were observed saving their disks, but when the researchers introduced the concept of gambling, their behavior regarding risk and loss aversion made them “statistically indistinguishable from most stock market investors” (Dubner and Levitt 2005). The researchers concluded that much of human behavior surrounding money is biologically hard-wired and instinctual, influenced far more by emotion than by logic (Chen 2006). The introduction of money did much to destabilize this small community of primates. From a cognitive standpoint, the introduction of a fiat currency was an evolutionary leap forward. From a moral standpoint, it was at best, an evolutionary hiatus.

Just like the captive monkeys, modern humans have come to be manipulated on a daily basis as a result of their dependence on money. Every person on Earth, regardless of his or her personal financial status is, to some degree, enslaved by the economic system. The need for money shapes everyone’s behavior. Nevertheless, some individuals and groups have been conditioned to enjoy an illusion of economic freedom. Many people who live in communist and socialist countries feel that the expansive social safety net frees them from the economic perils of a free market economy, while minimizing the harsh restrictions on their economic activities. Market capitalists insist that they have economic freedom, while struggling to deal with an oppressive tax code

and the presence of powerful corporations who destroy competing small businesses. Also ignored are the countless people worldwide who support these systems by working for subsistence wages in mines, factory farms and sweat shops. Even in the wealthiest of countries, there are an extraordinary number of workers who struggle to earn enough to provide for their basic needs. The definition of “basic needs” varies depending on the median standard of living in the community. A flush toilet would be essential to the sanitation needs of anyone living in an urban environment, whereas someone living in a rural, indigenous community might even be disgusted by the idea of relieving oneself inside one’s dwelling place. However, everyone needs shelter as protection from the elements, access to clean water and food, and the financial ability to seek medical assistance in the event of illness. Even in the most prosperous cities of the first world, homeless people can be seen in the streets begging for food or sleeping in makeshift cardboard shelters.

Money woes are likely the leading cause of stress and anxiety world-wide. The monthly home mortgage payment, which hangs over the heads of families everywhere, serves as a constant reminder of the precarious nature of microeconomics. A single missed payment could be the start of a cascade effect ending in homelessness and destitution. Yet those who aren’t homeowners often save for years to amass a sufficient down payment to get on the mortgage treadmill themselves. The word “mortgage” comes from the Latin word “mort” which means death and “gage” a word of Germanic origin meaning wager (Barnhart 1988, 679). In French, as well, the word literally means “death wager” which may explain why French bankers have adopted the less threatening term “hypothèque”.

The most sinister aspect of the monetary control system is the fact that money is inherently worthless. The strength of a currency depends solely on the faith people have in it. Periodically people seem to wake up from the delusion that money has value, resulting in a sudden, collective loss of economic faith. This always spells disaster for a country, as illustrated by the currency collapses of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s and Zimbabwe in 2008-2009. Prior to the existence of monetary currency,

barter was the only available form of exchange. Tangible, real-world goods were exchanged for other tangible real-world goods. In the days of bartering, one could only covet one's neighbor's ox, ass, house, servant or spouse. The appearance of monetary currency created a psychological shift, due to its fungible nature. It became the perfect supplement. Possession of currency allowed the individual access to anything available to the imagination, not just those tangible and easily identifiable items necessary for immediate survival. People began to fantasize.

The fantasies have now become so elaborate that they have acquired a monetary value unto themselves. Forbes Magazine reports that in the first half of 2012, 1.26 billion dollars of real money was spent on digital goods and services by virtual reality gamers in the United States alone (Yung-Hui 2012). Worldwide, the number is believed to be several times higher and is growing exponentially at the time of this writing. Business is booming in the virtual malls and car dealerships of Second Life as gamers pay to provide their online avatars with a more luxurious lifestyle than they can afford for themselves. People take their virtual lives so seriously that theft of in-game property has even led to murder, and South Korea has dedicated an entire section of its police force to the investigation of in-game crime (BBC News 2005).

Players of these games, just like consumers in the real world seem to be pursuing a mirage of happiness, which always lies just a little further ahead, just beyond the next financial milestone. However, research indicates that as long as the basic needs for survival are met, more money will not increase happiness. Brickman and Campbell coined the term "hedonic treadmill" to demonstrate that human beings tend to adapt to adjustments to their life circumstances and return to a happiness set point which is, to a large degree, independent of external circumstances (1). Research conducted by Brickman in 1978 on lottery winners and paraplegics yielded surprising results. Although happiness levels fluctuated in the short term for people who won the lottery or became paralyzed, five years later lottery winners were no happier and paraplegics no less happy than they were before. Both groups returned to their original baseline level of happiness (Brickman et al 1978). The evidence seems fairly strong that a lot of

money won't bring greater happiness, but how does it affect other aspects of one's personality?

In 2013 Paul Piff, a researcher at the University of California at Berkeley published a controversial article which seems to demonstrate that having more money often correlates to selfish behavior and a lack of empathy. In research conducted by Piff, it was observed that people driving luxury cars were less likely to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks than drivers of economy cars, and that poor people were more likely to donate to charitable institutions that help the poor, while wealthy individuals chose to donate to already well-endowed art galleries, museums and universities (Manne 2014). Some of Piff's experiments seem to suggest that this change in mindset can occur in a matter of minutes. One such experiment involved rigging a game of Monopoly (2) so that one player had an unfair advantage. Although at first the advantaged player seemed embarrassed by the situation, within a few minutes he was gloating over his easy success. This behavior soon gave way to calculated and ruthless efficiency, as he attempted to bankrupt his opponent as quickly as possible (Piff 2014). Critics were swift to attack Piff, accusing him of liberal bias and claiming that his research was politically motivated. In his own defense, Piff responded that wealthy liberals behaved as badly as wealthy conservatives in his experiments, and expressed surprise at the volume of criticism of his research, which had been published in relatively obscure journals. No one including Piff is suggesting the existence of a one-to-one correlation between wealth and narcissism. There are plenty of wealthy philanthropists who have dedicated their resources to the benefit of others. Nevertheless, the results of his research are as intriguing as the heated responses to them.

Money is such an emotionally charged topic that bias is almost inevitable in any academic study on the subject. However, bias is permitted and even expected among philosophers. From Aristotle to Ayn Rand, every imaginable economic philosophy has been introduced. Although each philosopher tends to have strong and differing opinions about which economic system is the most satisfactory, each theorist seems to be in pursuit of a system which he or she believes to be the most fair, a system which gives

everyone an equal chance, while rewarding hard work and ingenuity. Economic systems can generally be categorized into four types—traditional, command, market and mixed. Societies with traditional economic systems are characterized by informal bartering systems, close-knit communities with high degrees of social satisfaction, ties to the land, and little waste, but also little accumulation of wealth. When a colonial presence is introduced, these economies tend to be phased out in favor of command economies. Command economies are tightly controlled, subject to corruption, and can lead to civil unrest, as people are left without the social benefits of a traditional economy and without the material benefits of market or mixed economies. Market economies are characterized by minimal government intervention, with the assumption that the natural dynamic of supply and demand will keep the economy stable. Mixed economies have characteristics of both market and command economies (Gemma 2014). Economic systems are complicated and sub-economies exist in any society. In spite of all the economic variations, no country has eliminated the problem of poverty.

Whatever philosophical ideas one has about money, there never seems to be enough of it to go around. For those who long for escape from economic anxiety, there seem to be few shortcuts available, no get-rich-quick schemes that actually work. With all the emotional attachments people have to money, it is not surprising that alienation in this domain is extremely common. Money is often used as a tool to control the behavior of others. On a large scale, countries can manipulate one another through economic sanctions. On a small scale, families can be torn apart by financial disputes, particularly when money is used as a supplement to replace love, safety or freedom. The authors examined here have experienced the humiliation of poverty and economic dependence on others, the daily grind of living from one paycheck to the next, the impotent rage of being a victim of theft, and even the desperate last resort of prostitution. However, in many cases these hardships are temporary. Most of the women in this study experience a shift in perspective due to their financial misfortunes and their own decisions about how to respond to them. How an individual handles money, whether he or she has a little or a lot, reveals a great deal about how he or she approaches other

aspects of life. This universal supplement provides a sort of prism through which every color of human behavior can be observed.

3.2 She works hard for the money

In the 1970s, writer and social critic Louise Kappe Howe popularized the term “pink collar job” to describe the service industry jobs predominantly performed by women. At the low end of this category are retail and table waiting jobs, while nursing and teaching are two of the more highly paid pink collar jobs (Howe 1977). Women in the work force have seen substantial gains in pay over the past several decades, but they still earn less than their male counterparts. This pay gap varies from one country to another, and attempting to pinpoint precisely how much of a pay gap exists is difficult. There are an unwieldy number of variables to consider which makes it easy for obviously biased researchers to skew statistics (Worstall 2015) (3). All of the women in this study have worked as authors, but most of them have had other jobs as well, and the majority of these jobs fall squarely in the pink collar sector.

Gabrielle Roy spent several years working as a teacher. Having grown up in poverty, money was her primary domain of alienation. Her father was laid off from his job a few weeks before his scheduled retirement, and her family never recovered from this setback. As the youngest of thirteen children, Gabrielle was aware of the extreme sacrifices her parents had made to provide for her education. One of the most traumatic memories of childhood was her emergency appendectomy. It was not the surgery itself which caused the trauma, but the knowledge that she had created an enormous financial setback for her parents. She dutifully remained at home with her mother after her father’s death and helped out financially until the age of twenty-seven. Gabrielle endured a painful internal struggle between filial duty and desire for freedom. For seven years she saved every penny she could for a trip to Europe. As the only one of her siblings to maintain steady employment during the Great Depression, her family considered her foolish and irresponsible to consider leaving her job in order to travel. When her mother suffered a severe (and expensive) health crisis shortly before her

scheduled departure, Gabrielle's long-held dreams seemed about to vanish. Yet when she confided in her mother's attending physician about her plight, he said to her:

Partez, partez avant que la vie ne vous enlise vous aussi comme elle a enlisé tant des vôtres... des miens aussi. ... Je guéris votre mère. Je la remets sur pied. Et vous, vous partez... Dans l'avenir, si vous le pouvez, et si je suis toujours de ce monde, vous me dédommagerez de la manière qui vous paraîtra juste (Roy 1984, 198).

Throughout her autobiography, Roy frequently remarks that good people tended to come into her life at the precise moment when she needed them most. Her life might have turned out quite differently if this doctor had given her a guilt-inducing lecture about personal responsibility and insisted on full payment for her mother's treatment. She might have spent her entire life as a schoolteacher in rural Manitoba. She might never have had the experiences which inspired her to write the novels which have been so influential to Canadian literature. Members of the working class with personal dreams and aspirations are often deluged with advice to play it safe, lest they risk losing what little they have. For the poor who do manage to improve their economic status, there is often a sense of having made those gains at the expense of others. Gabrielle Roy was plagued by such feelings, as were several other authors in this study.

Cultural expectations of women can vary tremendously. In many cultures it is extremely uncommon for a woman to be employed outside the home, especially if she is married or venturing outside the pink collar sector. The pioneering women who deviate from cultural expectations by working often have to cope with disapproval and jealousy from others in the community. Dual-income families were unusual in the traditional Muslim community in Dakar where Ramatoulaye, the protagonist of *Une si longue lettre*, taught at a university. The financial benefits she and her husband enjoyed as a result of her work created an alienating situation for her as the target of her envious sisters-in-law: "Elles oubliaient la source de cette aisance: debout la première, couchée la dernière, toujours en train de travailler..." (Bâ 1979, 34).

Her complaints about coming home to a second shift of domestic responsibilities resonate with working women in any corner of the world. However, she could only make such complaints in a letter to her friend in the United States. In her own community, she could never show weakness. As exhausting as it must have been to maintain a career as well as a home with twelve children in it, Ramatoulaye's situation would have been far worse if she had not had her own source of income. It was her career which gave her the financial independence to care for herself and her children after her husband took a second wife. Taking on Modou's responsibilities for paying bills was difficult, but at least she was able to pay them. Money was tight, but not so tight that she couldn't say no when she received a marriage proposal from Modou's brother, a man she did not love. Overall, the money she was able to earn by working made her less vulnerable and helped her to cope with other forms of alienation in her life.

Although in many cultures, women are accused of neglecting their children if they work outside the home, young girls who see their mothers as successful economic contributors often admire them as strong role models. Maryse Condé expresses a great deal of admiration for her mother who worked as a teacher. Her parents were middle-class professionals, but they both had to work to achieve this status. In their community it was unheard of for a woman not to have a job. "Dans notre milieu, toutes les mères travaillaient, et c'était leur grande fierté. Elles étaient pour la plupart institutrices et ressentait le plus vif mépris pour les tâches manuelles qui avaient tellement défait leurs mères" (Condé 1999, 31). This disdain for domestic chores suggests an accompanying disdain for those who do them, and illustrates a disturbing lack of solidarity among working women of differing classes.

Many of the lowest-paying pink collar jobs involve providing child care for middle and upper class children whose parents both work professionally. Unfortunately, this arrangement often leaves the children of these nannies and housekeepers to fend for themselves. Maryse Condé describes a particularly ugly episode in which the housekeeper who worked for her family failed to report one morning due to her

daughter's sudden illness. Maryse's mother fired the woman without a second thought. The young girl later died from the illness. In the following weeks Maryse became increasingly frightened by a boy who lurked around her school, terrorizing her with threats and obscene gestures. Her brother Sandrino was convinced that this was the son of the former housekeeper, who was angry and seeking revenge against their family. Maryse's parents dismissed Sandrino's theory, but her father walked her to and from school for a few days until the boy disappeared and both of her parents gave her a lecture which clearly illustrates their feelings about the poor: "Le monde se divisait en deux classes: la classe des enfants bien habillés, bien chaussés, qui s'en vont à l'école pour apprendre et devenir quelqu'un. L'autre classe, celle des scélérats et des envieux qui ne cherchent qu'à leur nuire" (Condé 1999, 35).

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of this story is that Maryse's mother, herself, came from an impoverished background. Through hard work, education, and a strategic decision about who she married, she was able to improve her social standing. Having advanced a few rungs on the socioeconomic ladder, she could not tolerate any reminder of her origins. This problem can also exist in reverse, when an individual, accustomed to a certain financial ease and privilege, is unable to adjust to a more frugal lifestyle when money gets tight. Unlike Maryse Condé's mother, Marie Cardinal's mother took no pride in working for money. She considered it beneath her. Marie Cardinal's family was financially ruined as a result of the Algerian War for Independence. Her mother was intelligent, well-educated, and had marketable skills as a nurse. In Algeria, she had donated her time and skills to benefit the Arab population, demonstrating an exaggerated sense of noblesse oblige. Later on in Paris, destitute and living in a squalid apartment, she continued to work for free, to the annoyance of her children, who were burdened with the task of financially supporting her.

The feeling of making a meaningful contribution, along with the ability to pay ones' own way in life can be an empowering component in recovering from alienating trauma. When Marie Cardinal entered psychotherapy she was going through marital and financial difficulties. Her therapist's insistence on payment upfront seemed to be yet

another obstacle. It was, in fact, a test of her level of commitment to her own recovery. The absolute necessity of having an income forced her to maintain at least part-time employment throughout her illness and to stay in contact with the outside world as she made her recovery. At the beginning of her therapy, she was contemplating divorce. Building a career allowed her to create an independent source of income, so that later her decision to reconcile with her husband was based entirely on emotional, rather than financial concerns.

Assia Djebar makes little mention of personal financial problems in the works studied here, and one can make the assumption that for her, alienation within the domain of money, if it exists, is peripheral to other forms of alienation. Assia was blessed with remarkably progressive parents who encouraged her natural intelligence. She excelled academically from an early age, and it is likely that the possibility of her foregoing a career would have been unthinkable. Much of her identity is connected to her career, which has been a mosaic of diverse and creative endeavors. However, all of this must be framed within the traditional Muslim society. Assia is intelligent, creative, and career-minded, but also consummately Arab. She comes from a culture which is traditionally authoritarian and patriarchal. Nevertheless, many things have changed in Assia's lifetime, particularly since the War for Independence. The women of Algeria now enjoy more freedom and equality than women elsewhere in the Arab world. Assia and women like her have played a significant role in bringing about these social changes. During the war, many Algerian women put themselves in harm's way by working for the National Liberation Front. Since then, they have worked tirelessly for the improvement of their country.

Women are still a long way from achieving full equality in the workplace. Almost every working person has, at some point, had to compromise his or her ideals or dignity in order to get or keep a job. The pink collar profession which is considered the oldest in the world epitomizes this phenomenon. The following section examines the vulnerability women face when their bodies become a financial commodity.

3.3 Can't buy me love

To the moralist prostitution does not consist so much in the fact that the woman sells her body, but rather that she sells it out of wedlock.

--Emma Goldman (1911)

When I was a graduate student at the University of Georgia in 2000, Mary Adams, wife of University President Michael Adams, became the first spouse of a UGA president to receive a spousal stipend as compensation for her contribution to the university. This stipend was in addition to her pre-existing accounts for travel and entertainment, use of the presidential mansion and private plane, and membership in the prestigious Athens Country Club. Many students were outraged, accusations of nepotism abounded, and crude remarks about what Mary Adams was really being paid for were occasionally heard at the student union. However, there were plenty of people who sympathized with Mrs. Adams. She did devote a considerable amount of time and energy to entertaining alumni and, as the wife of a university president, her extensive social obligations would have made it difficult for her to maintain outside employment. The mood on campus shifted from derision to levity when Mr. Adams, in defense of the stipend, commented to the student newspaper "She'll make considerably less than she would on the open market" (Basinger 2000). Within a few weeks, the dust had settled, students found new reasons to be outraged, and Mary Adams got to keep her stipend.

Despite the inappropriate comments, few critics of the stipend really equated Mrs. Adams activities with those of a prostitute. The true conflict was one of class. Cash-strapped students were eating noodle soup every day while the university president, already earning twice as much as the President of the United States, was planning to divert some of their tuition money to pay his wife to attend parties. Many women would envy such a life, but many others find that it comes with too many sacrifices. Money often represents freedom for those who don't have it, but those who do may find themselves trapped in a gilded cage. Upward social mobility is a cherished dream for many people, but life at the top can be just as confining as life at the bottom. Being

defined as the wife or daughter of an influential man provides little opportunity for personal growth and expression because the interests of the man and the maintenance of his image trump all else.

In the preparatory notes for his colossal Rougon-Macquart series of novels, Emile Zola divided society into four “worlds” of people, segregated primarily by the amount of money to which members of each group had access. The first world consisted of soldiers and laborers, the second world of merchants, the third, the bourgeois and high society, with the fourth being a “world apart” consisting of priests, artists, prostitutes, and murderers.

What is the invariant of this motley group? A common function, I would venture: both the prostitute and the artist (as well, of course, as the murderer and the priest) insure communication between the topologically separate classes. By virtue of their extraterritorial status, they enjoy a unique freedom to circulate in society (Schor 1978, 130).

Freedom to circulate in multiple areas of society does not imply genuine welcome or belonging in any of them. When American actor Charlie Sheen was asked by a judge why he would pay for sex, he replied “I don’t pay them for sex. I pay them to leave” (Tooley 2011). Nevertheless, it may be this perceived freedom which attracts some women to a life of prostitution. Part of a prostitute’s job is looking like she is having a good time. For that reason, it often looks to an outsider like she is living a glamorous life, especially if she has generous clients. For some young women, prostitution may even seem like the only possible escape route from a life of poverty. However, no amount of money can alleviate the emotional impoverishment that accompanies this lifestyle. The archetype of the French literary prostitute is Zola’s own Nana. Having come from a background of extreme poverty and neglect, Nana manages to rise to the top of her profession, bankrupting several bourgeois men and a count in the process. Despite the enormous sums of money she receives, she is never satisfied, and dies a miserable, premature death from smallpox.

The reasons young women drift into prostitution are varied, but Ken Bugul probably knows them all. Her childhood in Senegal was characterized by loneliness. The grief resulting from her mother's abandonment remained an unhealed wound long after her mother returned. Her frail and elderly father was kind and loving, but she had no special relationship with him: "Il était le père de tout le monde; il avait autant d'affection pour ses propres enfants que pour les autres" (Bugul 1982, 96). She threw herself into her studies as a distraction from her emotional pain. When she got a scholarship to study in Belgium, she naively assumed that she could leave her problems behind by going to Europe: "Je me disais que tout ceci était de la vieille histoire, que tout ceci allait s'arranger dans le Nord sans problème. La Terre promise. Le martyr ne serait plus long" (Bugul 1982, 45).

Unfortunately Ken's problems did not magically disappear when she arrived in Belgium. She found herself in an alien landscape, unable to make sense of the attitudes and behavior of the people around her. Everyone seemed to be in a frantic rush, too busy to even greet one another on the street. But when she wandered into a wig shop, the saleswoman was friendly. She tried on a blond wig, which did not suit her, and the saleswoman apologized for not having anything appropriate for a black woman. "Oui, j'étais une étrangère et c'était la première fois que je m'en rendais compte" (Bugul 1982, 60). Ken's foray into the wig shop was the genesis of her economic alienation in Belgium. When she put on the blond wig, she hardly recognized herself in the mirror. Yet she was willing to wear it, exchanging her authentic self for a fleeting sense of belonging. This need for belonging continued to grow as did her awareness of the commercialization of African culture in Europe. Most of the urbane consumers of African art and fashion at that time had only a vague idea of the diversity of ethnicities on the African continent, and Ken found herself modifying her personal identity to conform to the stereotyped expectations of others. This is always and everywhere the true nature of a prostitute's work, which is why loneliness and alienation are inevitable for women who find themselves living such a life.

When Ken received news that her father in Senegal had died, it seemed that there was nothing for her to go home to. She drifted away from her studies, lost her scholarship as well as her contact with other African students, and began spending most of her time with white people who were interested in her only because she was a novelty. When she made the acquaintance of a young woman who worked as a call girl, she learned that a lot of men were interested in having sex with an exotic woman from Africa. Her payment for her first encounter was a fur coat. When she put it on the alienation she felt in the wig shop returned, greatly intensified:

Je crus un instant que je vivais vraiment la réalité, que tout ceci durerait pour la vie, car la conscience de ce moment-là était le rejet total de toute équation de la raison, du réel. Je me sentais comme sortie d'un gouffre qui n'était autre que mes réalités et celles de la vie (Bugul 1982, 154).

In my Master's thesis I examined the issues of space and boundaries in the lives of working women. Of all women, it was determined that prostitutes have the greatest difficulty creating a boundary between work and personal life, as intimacies normally reserved for marital or romantic relationships are sold for profit. Any romantic partner who is aware of the nature of her employment would either be consumed with jealousy, which would doom the relationship, or would be comfortable with the notion of profiting from it, which would make him a pimp (Masters 2005). It is not just romantic relationships which can be jeopardized in this way. In her novel, *L'amant*, Marguerite Duras illustrates the sinister turn the relationship between parent and child can take when the possibility of financial gain in exchange for access to the child's sexuality is introduced:

Le lien avec la misère est là aussi dans le chapeau d'homme car il faudra bien que l'argent arrive dans la maison, d'une façon ou d'une autre il le faudra. Autour d'elle c'est les déserts, les fils c'est les déserts, ils feront rien, les terres salées aussi, l'argent restera perdu, c'est bien fini. Reste cette petite-là qui grandit et qui, elle, saura peut-être un jour comment on fait venir l'argent dans

cette maison. C'est pour cette raison, elle ne le sait pas, que la mère permet à son enfant de sortir dans cette tenue d'enfant prostituée (Duras 1981, 33).

Marie Donnadiou Legrand's attitude toward Marguerite vacillated between contemptuous abuse of the daughter she was exploiting and a matter-of-fact expectation that Marguerite contribute financially by any means possible. Although Marguerite showed an obvious fascination with the idea of prostitution, and her lover's wealth is a defining feature of their relationship, it cannot be categorically stated that she was ever a prostitute. He was always her "lover", never her "client". Due to her mother's obsessive fixation on their financial troubles, Marguerite came to equate money with love, believing that her family would be happy and her mother more loving if their financial situation improved. It is obvious that the lover loves her, but Marguerite's answers are inconsistent when asked if she loves him. She tells her mother she is only with him for his money. She tells the lover that she knew he was wealthy the first time she saw him, and cannot be certain whether she would love him if he were poor. Even with the reader, she is coy about her true feelings for the man, guarding the truth the way some women guard their virginity. This is perhaps, an effort to erect some kind of boundary between herself and the crowd of others intruding upon the relationship.

Although the primary definition of prostitute is "a woman who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for money" (Merriam-Webster 2006, 937) a closer look at the sexual dynamic between men and women reveals that the exchange of sexual favors for money exists along a spectrum. The woman who openly engages in street prostitution is at the far end of the spectrum and her activities bring the true nature of such transactions into sharp focus by specifying an exact price for a specific service. People tend to be more comfortable maintaining a little bit of mystery about how much money an engagement ring cost. Dowries and bride prices tend to be shrouded in a multitude of social niceties which lend an air of respectability to what would otherwise be a straightforward business transaction. When Marilyn Monroe said "Money always makes a man more attractive", the comment was received as a cute piece of social

commentary. That would not have been the case if she had specified *how much* money or *how much* more attractive.

The authors in this study who come from cultures in which arranged marriages are customary must grapple with the notion that their lives and their bodies can be traded, often without their consent. While thirteen-year-old Assia Djébar was hesitating to don the traditional Islamic veil, many girls her age in her community were being forced into marriages with men they did not know. She was fortunate enough to avoid such a fate, but the fact that arranged marriages existed in her community presented a danger that she vowed to rebel against:

Jamais, jamais, je ne me laisserai marier un jour à un inconnu qui, en une nuit, aurait le droit de me toucher! C'est pour cela que j'écris! Quelqu'un viendra dans ce trou perdu pour me prendre: il sera un inconnu pour mon père ou mon frère, certainement pas pour moi! (Djébar 1985, 22-23).

In Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Ramatoulaye's daughter Daba tells her that her friend Binetou is being pressured to marry an older man by her parents, who stand to gain financially from the arrangement. Ramatoulaye tells Daba that Binetou should not give in. However, the pressure is too great, and Binetou finally agrees to the marriage. A few days later, Ramatoulaye receives the news that her husband has taken a second wife—Binetou. Despite being the injured party in this situation, Ramatoulaye is not blind to Binetou's suffering in the following months:

Victime, elle se voulait oppresseur. Exilée dans le monde des adultes qui n'était pas le sien, elle voulait sa prison dorée. Exigeante, elle tourmentait. Vendue, elle élevait chaque jour sa valeur. Ses renoncements, qui étaient jadis la sève de sa vie et qu'elle énumérait avec amertume, réclamaient des compensations exorbitantes que Modou s'exténuait à satisfaire (Bâ 1979, 72).

Mariama's ability to see beyond her own pain sets her apart as a true leader of the feminist movement. Although her feelings of betrayal are evident throughout the work,

she understands that cooperation between men and women is the best way to achieve change.

The bodies of women are often exploited for financial gain in ways that are not overtly sexual. In *Métisse blanche*, Kim Lefèvre writes of the extreme poverty of the families of Vietnamese rickshaw drivers, whose wives were forced to supplement their income by serving as wet nurses for the children of middle class families. They earned far more money than their husbands, but never enough to lift their families out of poverty. The only way to maintain this source of income was through frequent pregnancies, which resulted in malnourished children and greater financial need for the family. Although no one in Kim's family ever reached this level of destitution, she was literally "sold" by her stepfather to work as a domestic servant in order to pay off his gambling debts. Kim's reaction to this event sheds some light on how unhappy she was at home and how low her expectations for her life had fallen, even at the age of twelve:

Je n'avais pas de peine. Au contraire, je voyais dans cet événement l'amorce d'une nouvelle aventure qui égayerait la monotonie de l'existence. Quant à ma mère, elle savait qu'avec son or caché elle pourrait toujours me racheter le moment venu. Nous nous fîmes, par conséquent, des adieux légers (Lefèvre 1989, 146).

For many of Kim's female acquaintances, the "or caché" provided the only insurance available from the sudden misfortunes which could befall the family, often due to patriarchal indiscretion. This money was kept on the woman's person at all times, well hidden from her husband. It was only used in dire emergencies, although the occasional coin might be furtively handed to a child with whispered instructions to buy food when a father figure withheld too many meals as punishment. The primary concern was never to let the man find out about the money. In this case, even having a daughter sold into servitude was not a serious enough emergency to constitute making Kim's stepfather aware of its existence. Such habits are hardly conducive to marital harmony, and should not be considered representative of all Vietnamese families.

Throughout her novel, Kim demonstrates the ability to learn and grow from the briefest encounters with enlightened individuals. Her period of servitude provided a respite from the abuse and deprivation she had endured at home. She had more and better food to eat, fewer chores, and for the first time in her life, the opportunity to observe a married couple who truly loved each other. Later on, as a teenager, she stayed with the family of a friend, and was astonished to see that the parents kept their money in a drawer and each family member was permitted to take from it as needed, as long as they were mindful of the household budget. For years she had seen men using money to control women, but this single observation completely transformed her ideas about money. She instituted this practice, herself, when she first started living on her own and was serving as guardian to one of her younger sisters. Finding the right balance between trust and wariness with money can be difficult, as will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Been caught stealing

Few things can be more economically disruptive to an indigenous society than the installation of a colonial regime. Colonialism robs indigenous people of the natural resources, i.e. the wealth of their native land, and delegitimizes existing economic systems. Those who strike out as settlers in a colonial territory often do so with the intention of finding their fortune in a new country where the best resources haven't been picked over. Colonial regimes dismiss traditional economies as primitive and destroy bartering systems already in place, imposing their own currencies instead. The indigenous population is forced to adjust to a currency minted in another land, bearing the faces of leaders with whom they have no cultural connection. Every transaction in the new currency serves as a reminder that the land has been colonized and all wealth exists at the whim of the colonizer.

The traditional economic system, which may have provided a spare, but adequate standard of living for most people seems backward next to the sophistication and conspicuous consumption of the colonists. Even those who long for the colonizers' departure may buy into the notion that the old way of life was somehow inferior.

Parents naturally want their children to be as happy and well off as the newcomers, which creates a certain vulnerability to economic suggestion. The children receive contradictory messages about the importance of getting an education and returning to a traditional way of life. The official political status of a country can be misleading. Due to the terms of the Pacte Colonial, many independent African nations continue to pay colonial taxes to France over fifty years after gaining independence (4). Opt-out attempts, such as the one which occurred with Togo in 1963 have, in every instance, resulted in a coup, and the installation of a new, pro-France regime. Algeria's bloody war for independence illustrates the high cost of economic freedom. Despite winning their own war for independence, the people of Haiti were required to pay France the modern equivalent of twenty-two billion US dollars to compensate for financial losses to French slave traders caused by the abolition of slavery. These payments began in 1804 and continued until 1947 (Koutouin 2014). Statistics like this make one question what it really means to be an independent nation. You can't spell postcolonial without colonial.

The two authors who best illustrate the hardships of life under the Pacte Colonial are Ken Bugul and Calixthe Beyala. As children, both were bombarded with messages of nostalgia for a more traditional way of life. And both were encouraged to succeed in the colonizer's highly competitive school system in the hopes of using that success to revive certain aspects of the traditional way of life. Both women struggled with the cognitive dissonance inherent in these messages. For Ken Bugul this contributed to a catastrophic psychological crisis which culminated in a fall into prostitution and drug abuse, and a subsequent return to her homeland with nothing to show for her time in Europe other than the clothes on her back and a heart full of pain. For Beyala, her grandmother's insistence that she excel in school, in order to resurrect her defunct natal village left her in a double bind. She flourished academically, but there was no way she could bring back the traditional village her grandmother remembered so fondly. That way of life was lost, and the best Beyala could do was to memorialize it with her writing.

Although the colonized usually come out on the losing end of the financial game, the countries involved in colonization frequently victimize their own citizens. The defining circumstance of Marguerite Duras' childhood was the economic hardship created by her mother's ill-considered land concession. It was this incident, far more than the premature loss of her husband, which defined the life of Marie Donnadiou Legrand and, by association, that of her children. In *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, Marguerite reveals that the origin of her desire to write was to tell the story of her mother:

Une fois j'écrirai ça: la vie de ma mère. Comment elle a été assassinée. Comment elle a mis des années à croire que c'était possible qu'on puisse voler toutes les économies de quelqu'un et ensuite de ne plus jamais la recevoir, la mettre à la porte, dire qu'elle est folle, qu'on ne la connaît pas, rire d'elle, faire croire qu'elle est égarée en Indochine. Et que les gens le croient et qu'à leur tour ils aient honte de la fréquenter, je le dirai aussi. On n'a plus vu de Blancs pendant des années. Les Blancs, ils avaient honte de nous (Duras 1991, 101).

When an entire country steals from another country or from its own citizens, such theft is not technically illegal from the standpoint of the country doing the stealing. Thefts such as these are rationalized by the aggressor, and the public is conditioned to ignore or minimize the situation through propaganda which stereotypes the victims as inferior. In situations such as these, it is often hard to find a guilty party on which to pin the blame. Would it have been fair for the Vietnamese blame Marguerite Duras and her family, themselves victimized by colonial greed? Should the Algerian Arabs consider Marie Cardinal culpable, a woman who was born into a pied-noir family but was also a political activist for Algerian independence? Out of sheer inertia, this type of theft can continue for generations, and it takes a great deal of energy to bring it to a stop. Innocent people are inevitably hurt in the process. Reggae musician Eddy Grant summed up the situation perfectly with the lyric "Who is to blame in what country? Never can get to the one" (Grant 1982). The institution of colonialism may be abhorrent, but the individual colonists are often pleasant people who may not even be profiting much from the arrangement. The descendants of first-generation colonists

know no other home and may be ill-equipped to improve the fate of the indigenous population, even if they have an understanding that such improvement is needed.

Theft on a smaller scale, in which individuals steal from other individuals, is very personal and no less damaging. This type of experience is often a rite of passage for a naïve young person who is still inclined to trust in the goodness of others. Kim Lefèvre experienced this as a young woman, securing her first lodging away from home, when she prepaid a large amount of rent for what was to be her first private apartment. The couple she gave the money to absconded with it, and she was threatened with the prospect of homelessness on the eve of starting her first teaching job. This was a significant financial blow which tested the limits of her resourcefulness, but she managed to overcome the setback and put the incident behind her. That was not the case for Marguerite Duras. She grew up seeing her oldest brother steal any money he could find. Their mother sometimes hid money from him, but on other occasions enabled his self-destructive behavior by paying his debts. Marguerite and her other brother frequently went hungry as a result. She had become so resigned to her brother stealing from her that, even as a middle-aged woman, she said nothing when he stole her entire life savings. Once an individual becomes accustomed to being an impoverished victim, breaking out of that cycle can be extremely difficult. This situation is examined in the next section.

3.5 Une sale mentalité de pauvre

Contrary to logic, money is not always the cure for poverty. After enduring a childhood characterized by extreme poverty, Marguerite Duras commented that money didn't change anything because she would always keep "a damned mentality of being poor". Despite an abundance of alienation in several domains, money is Marguerite's primary domain of alienation. Her alienation here is extreme, and non-normative. A sense of lack permeates most of her work. She was raised by a destitute widowed mother, who had sought out a life in the colonies with her husband after being lured by government propaganda recruiting workers. The existence of such propaganda illustrates what a small and privileged group of individuals actually benefited from colonialism. Even after

her husband fell ill and returned to France where he later died, Marie Donnadiou Legrand refused to give up on her dream, and remained in Vietnam with her three children. After ten years of hard work and scrupulous saving, she purchased a land concession from the French government, which turned out to be a government-sanctioned swindle. She was so distraught at the loss of her life savings that she sank into a deep depression. Money became her obsession. Her behavior became increasingly erratic, fluctuating between threatening government officials and borrowing more money in rash attempts to make her worthless plot of land arable. Her two youngest children were often the targets of her misplaced rage (Adler 1998).

As a result of this upbringing, Marguerite internalized the idea of poverty and made it the focal point of her life story. She continued to maintain this narrative of poverty for herself and her mother regardless of improvements to their financial status. Laure Adler, author of *Marguerite Duras: a life*, claims that Marie Donnadiou Legrand amassed a substantial fortune before she returned to France in 1950, and that she sent a lot of this money to her children. She founded an upscale boarding school in Saigon, and built an estate which consisted of five houses and a variety of other enterprises. Duras never hints at this except to say that when her mother died the notary declared the will invalid because it favored her eldest brother too much. The reader is left to speculate on where all the money came from. It may be that the money never seemed real to her, at least not the way poverty did. In *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, the protagonist tells her lover "Je crois qu'on est pauvre de naissance. Même si je suis riche un jour je resterai avec une sale mentalité de pauvre, un corps, un visage de pauvre, toute ma vie j'aurai l'air comme ça (Duras 1991, 148).

This "sale mentalité de pauvre" could best be characterized by a tendency to dwell on past mistakes, the "if onlys" and the "should haves" dominating every waking thought. This tendency is particularly strong in Duras' writings, and can be easily illustrated in the example of the diamond ring which she either did or did not receive from her Chinese lover depending on which of her works one is referencing. In her novel *L'amant*, she mentions the ring, which attracted a great deal of attention at the boarding school she

was attending, but didn't dwell on the subject much after that. In *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, the ring is a focal point. Although this work is believed to contain far more fictional elements than *L'amant* or *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, the obsessive focus on the diamond ring is so rich with detail that it rings true to life. In this version the ring is obtained through a business-like negotiation between the mother and the lover. Once obtained, the mother forces her daughter to break off contact with the lover, then immediately goes to the nearest city with her children where she spends weeks going from one jeweler to another trying to sell the ring for the amount of money she was told it was worth, all the while avoiding contact with the jilted lover who desperately wants to recover his family heirloom. One jeweler after another tells her that the diamond is flawed and worth far less than the price she is asking. She becomes enraged with her daughter's lover for giving her a flawed diamond. In yet a third version of the story, told in *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, the lover tries to give a ring to "l'enfant", but she refuses, saying "On n'arrive jamais à vendre un diamant quand on est pauvre. Rien qu'à nous voir ils croient qu'on l'a volé.... Ma mère m'a dit de ne jamais accepter un diamant mais seulement de l'argent" (Duras 1991, 146-147).

The multiple versions of Marguerite's story of her Chinese lover, and especially regarding the incident involving the ring is characteristic of the mental habits of the chronically poor. In the specific case of Duras, trying to determine what really happened may be a hopeless task. For Duras, the inconsistencies go much farther than money. The mother, the brothers, the lover, and Marguerite herself, all seem to undergo vast shifts in personality from one work to the next. Marguerite's fiction is enriched by the memories of her life, but the memories themselves began to fade with so many creative retellings.

The obsession with past mistakes, constantly trying to locate the precise moment when a better decision might have averted catastrophe, inhibits one's ability to move forward and create a better outcome in the future. When the judgmental voice of the Other chimes in, the feelings of alienation and hopelessness are only exacerbated. "She shouldn't have gotten herself pregnant." "I told him to plant soybeans instead of cotton

this year.” “They should have known it was a scam from the start.” Talking to others about money woes is as likely to provoke criticism as sympathy, which contributes to feelings of alienation.

Trying to function under prolonged financial stress does not bring out the best in people. Kim Lefèvre’s family made many migrations across Vietnam in an effort to stay out of combat zones. She witnessed formerly well-mannered individuals, scrambling over one another and fighting to get access to water after being confined in a hot, overcrowded train car for several hours:

Je réalisai, à cette occasion, combien la pauvreté est dégradante. Durant les jours terriblement longs du voyage, je vis des personnes, très courtoises au départ, se disputer pour un pouce de plancher où étendre leur dos. On cachait son eau comme si l’on s’attendait à la pire sécheresse. La générosité se tarissait à mesure que le temps passait. On ne s’offrait plus rien; on se dissimulait pour manger (Lefèvre 1989, 110).

Perhaps it is scenes like this which cause many people to regard poverty as a moral failing, even in children who could not possibly have done anything to bring it upon themselves. In his 1947 work *If this is a man*, holocaust survivor Primo Levi explored the issue of whether it is possible to retain human dignity in the midst of inhuman violence (Levi 1947). Impoverished children may have few manners, but they also have few reasons to have them. The first experiences of poverty shaming can be some of the most painful memories of childhood. Calixthe Beyala describes such an experience in *La petite fille du réverbère*. On her way home from taking the baccalauréat exam, she wanders into the Akwa Palace Hotel. She gains entry by saying that her father is inside the hotel waiting for her. She feels that she has wandered into paradise, enjoys being called “Mademoiselle” for the first time in her life, and marvels at the beautiful surroundings and cool sensation of air conditioning. For a brief instant, this completely transforms her feelings about herself: “L’ancienne Tapoussière disparaissait, hop! Je me sentais si différente que je crus être capable de réussir non seulement mon

certificat, mais également mon brevet” (Beyala 1998, 180-181). This feeling of exuberance is short-lived:

Le Nègre aux biceps en acier m’attrapa par le bras: “C’est pas un maquis, ici!” Il me traîna et des gens autour de nous riaient: “C’est pas un lieu pour les va nus-pieds!” ... Il me jeta dehors et la chaleur me suffoqua.... J’eus si honte que je répétai: “pardon Missié!” (Beyala 1998, 181).

Calixthe comments that this “tic de langage” of saying “Missié” still comes back involuntarily during moments of social anxiety, more than twenty years afterward. The emotions attached to incidents such as these, which provoke the first, intense feelings of humiliation about social class, often create a strong response of programmed behavior which can be difficult to overcome. After this incident she walks to the beach where she watches ships leaving the harbor, most of them heading to France and is filled with a sudden longing to go there, where she imagines that life’s hardships will disappear. At this point, the adult Beyala, the one who has lived in France interjects:

J’ignorais alors que j’y rencontrerais des humains dignes de ce nom, mais également certains, d’un autre type, de ceux qui vous soumettent sous le poids de leurs professions décoratives qui ne savent pas encore que, derrière le mot ou la phrase mille fois répétés, existe toujours une inconnue et que le talent ne consiste pas toujours à dire ce qui n’a jamais été dit (Beyala 1998, 182).

This passage, an obvious reference to the accusations of plagiarism Beyala encountered in 1996, illustrates something that the older Beyala understands, which the younger Beyala cannot. People with money may be better equipped to cope with alienation, but they are still not immune to its effects.

To those living in poverty, it is difficult to imagine a problem which cannot be solved by a little more money. Those who have learned from experience that this isn’t the case may find little sympathy from jealous peers. Many parents who sacrifice to finance a child’s education in the hope that the child will come back and provide for them in their old age fail to realize that their expectations were unrealistic and that the pressure on their child

was too great to bear. When Ken Bugul returned to Senegal at the age of thirty-five, she was unmarried, with no children and no money. In an interview, she explains how this situation destroyed her status within the community:

Au Sénégal, dans toute l'Afrique, c'est un désastre pour un immigré de revenir d'Europe les mains vides. Il y a des Africains qui se suicident plutôt que de rentrer plus démunis qu'ils sont partis... Ma mère a été très déçue. Je représentais l'échec (Joignot 2006).

Ken felt compelled to return to her homeland, even though it meant being the subject of gossip and recrimination. "J'étais revenue parce que j'étais épuisée. Épuisée d'avoir erré partout, erré à la recherche de quelque chose que je ne pouvais pas leur expliquer... Et devant ces gens qui m'avaient vu naître, j'étais arrivée, presque achevée" (Bugul 1999, 162). Having nothing left to lose, she was able to make a fresh start in her native land. She reconnected with her mother and joined the harem of the elderly spiritual leader, le Serigne, who very much resembled the father she had lost. She emerged from this experience neither broke nor broken, having made peace with her troubled past.

If there is a mentality of poverty, is it possible that there could be a mentality of wealth, a mindset which could negate the feelings of poverty and allow the individual to truly enjoy what he or she has? Marguerite Duras chose to focus on lack even later in life when she had plenty of money. However, some of the other authors examined here seem to take a more balanced approach to financial matters. They perceived financial setbacks as temporary and took them in stride, finding resourceful ways to get by. Ultimately the distinction seems to be one of locus of control. Those who are more resilient, financially or otherwise, tend to operate on the assumption that they have the ability to improve their situation through their own actions. Some degree of resiliency may be innate to the individual, but a particularly challenging combination of obstacles has the potential to defeat even the most determined optimist. We will take a closer look at this in the concluding section.

3.6 Conclusions

Like many other forms of alienation, money-related alienation can have long-lasting negative effects on one's sense of security and self-esteem, especially if the alienating events occur early in life. The manner in which the adults in a child's life respond to financial setbacks seems to play a large role in how the child perceives the problem. From a child's perspective, if the parents seem helpless and overwhelmed with the problem of finances, it can be difficult to imagine growing up and being able to manage such problems oneself. Yet parents often expect exactly that. They may not know how to get themselves out of a financial dilemma, but if only their son or daughter excelled in school, married well, or went to another country, he or she would be able to take care of the entire family. The exploitive economic systems of colonial and postcolonial societies create an environment where such circumstances are commonplace.

Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul, from Cameroon and Senegal respectively, both grew up in countries impacted by the Pacte Colonial. Ken's novel *Le baobab fou* begins under a baobab tree where one of her ancestors loses an amber bead from a necklace. Such a bead is the type of thing people of a traditional economy might use for barter. The bead lies under the tree for decades before the toddler Ken finds it and places it in her ear. Ken sees this moment as her first initiation of suffering and a harbinger of trials to come. She never mentions the bead exiting her ear, and we can assume that it remained implanted there as a constant reminder of her ancestral history and a filter through which everything she hears must pass. Coming back from Europe empty-handed and emotionally bankrupt felt like failure. However, this was the middle, not the end, of her journey. In addition to her writing, Ken has created a thriving business as an art dealer, and finances are no longer a focal point in her most recent interviews, which suggests that she has found a sense of economic balance. Calixthe, like Ken, found that Europe didn't live up to her expectations. This realization was a turning point because she stopped looking for personal transformation from sources outside of herself. She seems to have overcome many of her personal difficulties and made good

use of her economic success as an author. She is a social activist and has dedicated a large portion of her resources to helping Cameroonian orphans.

Mariama Bâ presents a different perspective than Bugul or Beyala, having been born in 1929, long before Senegal became an independent country. In her novel, *Une si longue lettre*, she says little of the childhood of her protagonist Ramatoulaye. However, we know that Mariama was born in the bustling colonial city of Dakar, and probably grew up with more material comforts than children in remote villages. Traditions were still strong in her community, but Mariama chose to break with tradition and pursue a career. In many ways, it seems that she was a generation or two ahead of her time. Strong female role models were scarce and this created a difficult situation for her. She understood that much of the manipulation and controlling behavior between men and women, and even between parents and children could be traced back to financial dependence, which can only be changed by equity of opportunity. She knew that things might turn out better for her daughters, but for her, it was too late. Her premature death, along with her admonition to doctors that “Les maux dont on vous parle prennent racine dans le tourment morale” (Bâ 1979, 67), demonstrate that her healing process was incomplete.

Gabrielle Roy’s primary domain of alienation was money. It was severe, but normative. Most of her alienating experiences occurred during the time of the Great Depression and World War II. Her autobiography which was written in the 1980s, toward the end of her life, is filled with happy memories of her family and friends, and her experiences traveling abroad. However, there is also a great deal of sadness and regret at the hardships endured by family members she was unable to help. The unfinished second volume of her autobiography focuses almost exclusively on the death of her mother, which occurred just prior to Gabrielle’s financial success. This following quote, which appears in the notes to this work, reveals that she never escaped emotionally from the poverty of her youth, which for her, represented shattered dreams and the suffering of those she held most dear:

Ainsi, par ma faute, maman et moi, et elle sans doute encore plus que moi, avions vécu en pauvres chacune à notre bout du monde, et une sorte de remords ou de sourd révolte, je ne sais encore comment nommer ce sentiment, pénétrait en moi pour y prendre racine et ne jamais tout à fait me libérer (Roy 1997, 99).

A close examination of Marguerite Duras' works shows that she had a great deal of her personal identity invested in poverty and victimhood. The "damned mentality of being poor" never left her, and one begins to wonder if she even wanted it to. Joy and abundance were concepts so foreign to her, that it might have been frightening had they appeared. This mental rut of alienation allowed her to write the same story over and over and still make it interesting, just as the family in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* listened to the same record over and over. The reason was simple. It was one of the only records they had, and Marguerite never considered telling herself a new story about her life. Despite its sadness, there was a comforting familiarity to it.

The fact that any type of alienation can be both extreme and normative is unsettling, but it illustrates the endemic financial devastation that occurs during times of war, particularly in the third world. Kim Lefèvre grew up in such an environment, but she was blessed with the ability to learn from the wisdom and mistakes of others. At a young age, she realized that her female relatives had endured many indignities due to their financial dependence on men. Like any other young woman, she yearned for affection and romance, but she knew that her biracial status made her even more vulnerable than other Vietnamese women, and thus made her first priority that of securing credentials for a stable career. Although her own financial alienation figures prominently in her first autobiographical novel, *Métisse blanche*, in her second novel *Retour à la saison de pluies*, she hardly mentions her personal finances, but worries a great deal over that of her mother and sisters, who didn't have the opportunity to leave Vietnam. Although she did not fall into the same trap as Marguerite Duras, clinging to a mentality of poverty even in prosperous times, like Gabrielle Roy, she suffered from a sort of survivor's guilt for finding a way out of poverty when so many people she loved were unable to do so.

Both Marie Cardinal and Maryse Condé had to go through periods of financial insecurity during young adulthood. This alienation is mild to moderate, and normative. Neither of these women devoted more than a few pages of their autobiographies to these problems, which indicates that financial problems, for them, were peripheral to other forms of alienation. It is, perhaps, the financial ease they enjoyed during childhood which imprinted them with a belief that any financial reversal would be temporary and that they would have the means to overcome it. Cardinal expressed frustration with her economic hardships, but her focus was always on her healing; her career and her relationships blossomed as her mental and physical health improved. Not all of Maryse Condé's siblings did as well as their parents, and she expresses concern and sadness over their economic struggles. However, her own hardships are glossed over, as if she has more important things on which to focus her attention. Likewise, Assia Djebar rarely mentions personal financial problems. Although she was keenly aware of the economic dynamic between men and women and between colonizer and colonized, the central aspects of Assia's alienation are land, education and history, issues which will be explored in later chapters.

Notes

- (1) According to the Hedonic Treadmill model, roughly fifty percent of happiness is based on genetic predisposition, forty percent on personal habits and intention, and ten percent on external life circumstances (Lyubomirsky et al 2005).
- (2) The game of Monopoly was originally created as a tool to teach children the dangers of unrestricted capitalism (Adams 2011). The rampant exploitation of the working class during the Industrial Revolution alarmed many political activists, including L. Frank Baum, whose book *The wonderful Wizard of Oz* seems to use allegory and metaphor to attack the corrupt political and banking practices of his time (Dighe 2002).
- (3) In the United States, the statistics range from \$500,000 over a 40-year career, which comedienne Sarah Silverman called "the Vagina Tax" (Figuroa 2014), to

the frequently quoted but rarely cited statistic that “a woman earn 78 cents for every dollar a man earns”, to a mere 7 percent wage gap (Dugas 2012), in which the researchers controlled for variables such as number of hours worked per week, educational levels and career choices.

(4) The fourteen countries affected by the Pacte Colonial are the Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, the Central African Republic, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, and Guinea-Bissau. The eleven main components of the pact are listed below (Koutonin 2014):

- i. Countries must repay France for the infrastructure built by France during colonization.
- ii. Countries must deposit monetary reserves in the France National Bank.
- iii. France has first right to buy any natural resources found in former colonies.
- iv. French companies must be considered first for all public works projects.
- v. Senior military officers from former colonies must receive training from France or French-run training facilities.
- vi. France retains the right to intervene militarily and station troops indefinitely in former colonies.
- vii. French must remain an official language and be the primary language used in education.
- viii. Countries are required to continue using the French colonial currency. [This practice has even continued after the introduction of the Euro.]

- ix. Former colonies are obliged to send France an annual balance sheet and reserve report.
- x. Former colonies are not permitted to enter into military alliances with any country other than France without express approval from France.
- xi. Former colonies are obliged to ally with France in times of war or global crisis.

Chapter 4—Alienation in the domain of land

The soil is the great connector of our lives, the source and destination of all.

--Wendell Berry (1977)

4.1 Introduction

The word land has a variety of meanings depending on the context and culture in which it is used. Indigenous people might define land as the ground beneath their feet, or the terrain up to and beyond the horizon, otherwise known as home. A non-indigenous person might use the term in reference to a few specific acres designated for cultivation or “improvement”, or to specify a portion of the Earth’s surface marked off by political boundaries as a sovereign nation. The French word “terre” is equally versatile in that it can mean dirt or soil, or even the entire planet. When one considers the natural surface of the Earth, with all its geological features, it may conjure up images of great beauty, such as the Himalayan mountain peaks or the African savannah at sunset.

Nevertheless, the vastness and indifference of nature can also create feelings of unease. Every person on Earth is vulnerable to the effects of earthquakes, droughts, floods, and the invisible dangers of infectious diseases coming from the natural world. Some of these threats have been minimized in the developed parts of the world, at least for some people, but no one can be completely safe from natural disaster, and knowledge of this creates feelings of alienation.

In this study, alienation experienced as a result of a direct threat from the natural world will be classified as primary alienation. Children encounter this type of alienation the first time they get a bee sting or a thorn beneath their skin. Despite these hazards children have an innate love of nature and are eager to interact with it on a physical level. The guileless interactions between children and nature—the endless fascination with ladybugs, trees, and mud—are not encouraged beyond the age of puberty in most cultures. Yet the fondest memories of childhood are often of those carefree moments of outdoor play before life became increasingly compartmentalized by the literal walls of

school buildings and the figurative walls of ideology. School is where children are taught the names of various nation states, as well as the mountain chains and rivers which mark off their borders. They are taught to pledge allegiance to a piece of cloth with an emblem on it which represents the nation state where they reside, which is of course, superior to any other nation state in existence. Nature is indifferent to the ever-shifting political boundaries and the blood that seeps into her soil as human beings squabble over her resources. People however, are not. Land-related alienation filtered through the medium of human activity will be classified as secondary alienation.

The indigenous peoples of the world do a better job of maintaining the innocent attachment to the natural world seen in children. Native peoples have been content to live on the same land as their ancestors, moving about somewhat, but never venturing too far from the familiar, and rarely building permanent structures or doing anything else which would significantly alter the landscape for future generations (1). Such cultures are not immune to conflicts with neighboring tribes, but such conflicts do not come close to the horrifying effects of modern warfare. Within a few seasons, any signs of these battles left on the natural environment fade to oblivion. There is no depleted uranium, mustard gas, or forgotten land mines left in the soil for future generations to deal with.

In her book *The death of nature*, Carolyn Merchant delineates the progression of the human perception of the natural world. Prior to the Scientific Revolution, people tended to view the natural world as an organismic system in which all parts were interconnected, and changes affecting one part affected the whole (2). During the Renaissance period many writers began to focus on sickness and decay in nature, and people came to believe in nature as disorder. One consequence of this was the subjugation of women, who were perceived as being closer to the natural world than men. Merchant links this change of mindset with the religious conflicts occurring throughout Europe at the time, particularly the witch trials. The witch came to represent the dark, disordered, feminine aspect of nature. Native Americans also came to be feared and were increasingly represented as ignorant and brutal savages, which made it easier to justify genocide as a means of taking control of their land. From the theory

of nature as disorder emerged the philosophy that it was man's duty to impose order on nature, thus controlling it for human benefit (Merchant 1980). As the land came to be parceled out, fenced off, tilled, artificially landscaped and built upon, the world and everyone in it became increasingly fragmented, isolated, and alienated, often with little understanding of what was lost or how to get it back.

This shift in mindset did not occur simultaneously everywhere in the world. Some indigenous cultures have managed to remain in the figurative Garden of Eden even into modern times. Occasionally someone emerges from such a society with first-hand knowledge of a way of life which disappeared from Western society several generations ago (3). The culture shock is traumatic for the individual involved, but the insights which can be shared tell us much about the simplicity and interconnectedness of a life to which most Westerners can no longer relate. Of all the authors in this study, Ken Bugul probably has the closest connection with an indigenous culture, and thus had an exceedingly difficult time adjusting to life in Europe. The loneliness she observed, particularly of the most vulnerable members of society, had become so endemic to European culture that most people no longer noticed it:

Dans ce pays, les malades étaient seuls, les handicapés seuls, les enfants seuls, les vieux seuls. Et c'étaient les étapes les plus riches de la vie humaine.

Là-bas tout le monde est intégré, concerné, entouré; tout vit ensemble. Même l'arbre donne l'ombre et la fraîcheur, a son utilité culinaire ou thérapeutique, il est un lieu de méditation (Bugul 1982, 117).

In his book *Man and nature: the spiritual crisis in modern man*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr illustrates how the “desacralization” of nature has contributed to a worldwide rise in cases of mental illness. According to Nasr, the domination of external nature has coincided with the giving of “complete freedom to the animal nature within man” and an obsession with an elusive dream of economic progress which inevitably leads to warfare (Nasr 1968, 18).

As nostalgic as one might be for a return to a traditional way of life on an unspoiled land, it must be acknowledged that this is also a life without antibiotics, and often without sufficient food or protection from the elements. The United Nations estimates that indigenous people make up five percent of the world's population, but fifteen percent of those living in poverty (Freedman 2012). From a certain perspective, applying Western definitions of poverty to an indigenous people is illogical. Indigenous societies, by their very nature, meet their needs for survival via direct interaction with the natural world, rather than through the intermediary of employment and money, so it makes sense that money would be scarce in such cultures. Rather than discussing the amount of money indigenous people have or do not have, it might make more sense to determine to what degree indigenous people are allowed to live in ways which are authentic to their culture. In his book *Victims of progress*, John H. Bodley insists that "It is quite incorrect to consider indigenous people 'impoverished' when they enjoy cultural autonomy with full ownership over their territories" (Bodley 2014, 185). According to Bodley, it is only when cultures are forced to accept standards of economic progress imposed by the dominant society that deprivation becomes endemic. Depopulation and loss of native land and resources lead to increasing rates of crime, despair, and addiction among survivors, who enter a cycle of chronic poverty. The United Nations' 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples represents a leap forward in the rights of native peoples, but it remains to be seen whether these resolutions will be effectively implemented.

Even the most well-meaning humanitarian relief organizations are not immune to the tendency to adopt a tone of paternalism by making assumptions about what is best for members of another culture. In some cases this is understandable; it can be shocking to witness how unforgiving the natural world can be to native peoples. As a child, Marguerite Duras understood that her own bouts with hunger and lack were insignificant compared to those of the Vietnamese children who inhabited the jungle adjacent to her mother's land concession. Every year countless children died senselessly from cholera because their hunger was so great that they could not resist eating the unripe mangos. Others died from drowning, heatstroke, or intestinal worms:

Il en mourait tellement que la boue de la plaine contenait bien plus d'enfants morts qu'il n'y en avait eu qui avaient eu le temps de chanter sur les baffles. Il en mourait tellement qu'on ne les pleurait plus et que depuis longtemps déjà on ne leur faisait pas de sépulture. Simplement, en rentrant du travail, le père creusait un petit trou devant la case et il y couchait son enfant mort (Duras 1950, 118).

Although the indigenous population is vulnerable to primary land alienation without the interference of colonizers, it is often the presence of colonizers which overtaxes the natural resources, leaving the indigenous population without sufficient access to food. When native peoples can no longer be sustained by the land, they are forced into the cities where they become a permanent underclass, subjected to discrimination and chronic poverty.

One must consider whether it is even possible for one land to be a home to two peoples. In his book *If this is your land, where are your stories?* J. Edward Chamberlin states that he believes it is possible, but only after we have re-imagined “them” and “us” (Chamberlin 2003, 4). Peaceable interactions between cultures must be based upon a mutual respect for the other party’s home, a respect which may be incompatible with the colonizer’s agenda. An exaggerated sense of patriotism for one’s own land can lead to reckless disregard for the Other, creating a sense of entitlement and a justification for exploitation. Some people who engage in this behavior may sincerely believe that they are behaving ethically. Differing concepts of what it means to own land and what relationship human beings should have to the land are at the root of the problem.

Marie Cardinal experienced significant alienation from her own family and culture as her growing sensibilities led her to a clear understanding of the political relationship between France and Algeria. This type of secondary alienation, which is common among conscientious objectors, exemplifies the complexities of national affiliations and cultural allegiance. This alienation, however, has no connection to the natural world, as Cardinal explains: “Pour la géographie c’est simple, il n’y a que celle de mon lieu de naissance qui me convienne absolument. Ce n’est pas que je ne trouve pas la France

belle, au contraire; mais ce n'est pas chez moi" (Cardinal 1980, 27). Even after an absence of twenty-five years, Marie could still describe the flora and fauna of Algeria in perfect detail, equating the rhythm of the Algerian seasons with the songs her mother and Arab caregivers used to sing to her during childhood.

Most people cannot think about the place where they grew up without also thinking of their own mother. If one's first concept of home could exist in the form of one person, the most suitable candidate could only be one's own mother. Not all mothers are nurturing, but the archetypal ideal of the loving mother is thoroughly embedded within the human psyche, and few things can be more threatening to a child's developing concept of safety and home than an absent or abusive mother. "Mother Nature" or the "Earth Mother" exists in various forms in cultures throughout the world as a more expansive version of this concept, illustrating the female personification of the natural world, particularly as it relates to fertility and the giving of life. A link between sexuality and land can be observed in many of the works examined here, with an increased tendency toward perversion and sexual dysfunction as a culture becomes progressively more separated from the natural world.

The question arises as to whether alienation from land is inevitable for people who have abandoned an indigenous way of life. We must also consider whether patriotism necessitates the devaluation of citizens of other nations who are potential enemies in the next political conflict. These struggles are played out in the lives of each of the authors being studied. Although land as it pertains to national and cultural identity with all of its accompanying political ideologies consumes a great deal of the intellectual energy of adults, I contend that children are born indigenous and are only later taught to filter their ideas of land through human classifications. This process of socialization is a cooperative effort of family and community to instill feelings of patriotism in a child to which can later be added a litany of social obligations such as military service and the payment of taxes. But long before these abstractions enter a child's awareness, she first has a concept of land as the dirt beneath her feet, the ground underneath the house in which she lives, and the landscape which surrounds it. These are the non-human

elements of home, which are balanced out by the human elements of family and community, all of which will be examined in the following section.

4.2 Homesick

The ache for home lives in all of us, the sacred place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.

--Maya Angelou (1986)

Random House Dictionary lists seven definitions of the word “home” (2014, 554), but it is definition number seven, “a person’s native place or own country” which is the subject of so much literary and diasporic angst, and to which Ms. Angelou refers in the above quote. The other definitions seem anemic, focusing on physical dwelling spaces, even ironically, institutions “for the homeless”. To those living a nomadic lifestyle, home might be a bed in a yurt, or familiar faces around a campfire. In her article “The psychology of home: why where you live means so much”, Julie Beck compares Eastern and Western notions of home. The Westerner may use the words home and house interchangeably, seeing his home as a financial investment, and maintaining a belief that individuals remain inherently unchanged regardless of where they live. He is likely to pack up and move without hesitation if circumstances are economically favorable. Alternatively, South Asians view home and self as intricately intertwined, based on the belief that people have a relationship with the environment in which they live (Beck 2011).

Viewed through this non-Western lens, it seems obvious that any traumatic events associated with home would create feelings of alienation. Every author in this study exhibits some feelings of conflict regarding the place she grew up. Sometimes alienation affects everyone in a community, particularly when external political clout collides with local cultural traditions. For some authors, the communities in which they grew up changed so much in a single generation that they came to feel cut off from their ancestors. War, politics, and even economic development can alter one’s hometown to such a degree that it can scarcely be recognized, but often, alienation is more personal,

hidden inside the walls of the family home. A dysfunctional home life during childhood inevitably creates feelings of insecurity which must be resolved. Leaving home (and later coming back) is often a part of the process of accepting the fact that even though home can be a disappointment, it is an integral part of who we are.

Kim Lefèvre's early experiences of home were traumatic enough to create an extreme and non-normative degree of secondary alienation. In her early childhood, it is hard to say that she had a home at all. She and her mother were outcasts as a result of Kim's illegitimate and biracial status. Unable to provide for her, her mother was forced to leave her in the care of relatives. Her first teacher was a spiteful woman who took out her hatred of the French on six-year-old Kim. To escape the humiliation, Kim stopped going to school and spent her days playing in a nearby cemetery. One day, she wandered down a wooded path, hoping it would lead to a village populated entirely with biracial people: "J'aurais un père métis, une mère métisse, un oncle métis, et même mon institutrice serait métisse. Personne ne me remarquerait car je serais comme tout le monde" (Lefèvre 1989, 41). The path emerged at a horse racing track where her uncle was gambling. He blamed her misbehavior on her French blood and demanded that her mother immediately retrieve her daughter and put her in an orphanage: "Après tout, il appartenait aux Français d'assumer les mauvaises graines que son armée avait semées à travers le pays. Le futur Viêt-nam n'aurait pas besoin de ces enfants bâtards" (Lefèvre 1989, 44). Ironically, even the orphanage didn't want Kim at first because she had no birth certificate proving her paternity. It was only her mother's resourcefulness which allowed Kim admission to this "home" for unwanted biracial girls.

At the orphanage all the girls were métisse, but this was hardly the home Kim was searching for when she wandered down the wooded path. Discipline was harsh and the strong preyed upon the weak. The Vietnamese language was prohibited, so newcomers were mute until they could learn French. The nuns taught the girls that they were French, and when conflicts between the French and Vietnamese broke out, the children prayed for the victory of France. Yet when the war intensified and the nuns realized they may have to relocate the orphans to France, the girls were terrified:

Toutes françaises que nous étions, nous n'avions jamais connu que le pays où nous vivions: L'Indochine, comme on l'appelait alors. Nous aimions le riz, les fruits tropicaux; nous ignorions le lait, les fromages. Aussi loin que nous remontions dans notre souvenir, nous ne trouvions aucun visage familier qui fût français. Les chants qui avaient bercé notre enfance étaient de mélancoliques plaintes vietnamiennes (Lefèvre 1989, 72).

There weren't sufficient resources to bring all of the girls to France, and it was only this extraordinary circumstance which allowed Kim's mother to reclaim her daughter. The home she took her to was no more welcoming than anywhere else she had lived. Her step-father despised her, and her mother could never show her affection in his presence. Things were little better in the surrounding community. Anti-French sentiment was high and it didn't take long for Kim to realize that she would never be fully accepted in her homeland: "Le Viêt-nam ne voudrait jamais de moi" (Lefèvre 1989, 98). Years later, when she was offered a teaching assignment in France, she suffered the same apprehensions she had felt at the orphanage at the prospect of leaving Vietnam:

Je mesure à présent mon attachement à la terre vietnamienne, à sa culture dont je constate, au fil du temps qui passe, les empreintes profondes sur ma personnalité. Le Viêt-nam a modelé le noyau de mon être. ... Je me souviens également de ma peur de la France, un mélange de panique et de répulsion, comme lorsqu'on jette une vierge dans le lit d'un inconnu. La France, c'était l'image du père qui m'avait abandonnée (Lefèvre 1989, 405).

Her decision to go to France turned out to be a good one, and she made a permanent home there, became a successful writer, translator and comedienne, married and had a son. Due to the unstable situation in Vietnam, she lost contact with her mother and sisters. She avoided the Vietnamese district in Paris, where she might have encountered people she had known in her youth, and even forgot certain phrases from her native language. But everything changed with the publication of *Métisse blanche*. One of her former students from Vietnam showed up at her doorstep, effectively forcing

her back into the Vietnamese community: “Et les années-lumière que j’avais voulu jeter entre le Viêt-nam et moi, entre mon enfance et moi, comme un grand espace d’oubli, se retrouvèrent tout à coup abolies” (Lefèvre 1990, 18). This led to her return home to a war-ravaged Vietnam she hardly recognized, reunion with her mother and sisters, and some much-needed closure.

Any feelings of welcome during Kim’s childhood were fleeting and situational. Alienation was a constant, no matter where she was living. Although her departure from Vietnam at the end of *Métisse blanche* was unexpected to Kim, the reader finds it almost inevitable given her childhood experiences there. Home is a concept which links the past and the future together. If the past is particularly traumatic and the future precarious, as was the case with Kim, a departure from home may be the only way to find a welcoming place in which to heal and consider the possibility of reconnecting with the point of origin.

Kim Lefèvre left Vietnam in large part to escape racial discrimination, but for many people, economics is the primary factor in deciding to relocate. Changing economic systems force people to relocate when survival in their home community is no longer possible. A contributing factor may be the colonizers’ conspicuous consumption, which can make participation in their economy seem more exciting than it really is. In Chapter 3 we looked at alienation within the domain of money, but it is worth mentioning again, due to the power money has to pull people away from the land. Once they have left, it is almost impossible to go back. Calixthe Beyala begins her novel *La petite fille du réverbère* with a narrative describing her grandmother’s efforts to contain the youth of her native village Issogos, who were leaving in droves to find manufacturing work in the cities of Cameroon:

Depuis les temps les plus reculés, dans mon village enclavé au milieu des hautes montagnes on ignorait l’argent et ses pouvoirs. On échangeait. On vivait frugalement au rythme des saisons. ... Grand-mère dirigeait sa cité dans un souci constant du bien-être et la terre et des hommes. Un jour, imperceptiblement, les mailles de la science se resserrèrent sur notre village. Il y

eut une chute brutale de l'intérêt pour cette brousse, où les arbres coupaient la vue à hauteur d'homme et les isolaient des lumières (Beyala 1998, 10).

By 1945, Beyala's grandmother and her two daughters were the only people still living in the village. She took one last stroll among the graves of her ancestors and declared "Il est temps d'affronter l'ennemi" (Beyala 1998, 11-12). She took a bit of dirt with her, wrapped in her scarf, vowed to return someday and rebuild her kingdom, and moved to the city of Kassalafam with her two daughters. After the birth of her illegitimate granddaughter Beyala, she banished the girl's mother and determined to raise her herself, insisting that the child was born in order to resurrect the village of Issogos. The dirt the grandmother had brought from Issogos seemed to have found its way onto Beyala:

Moi, j'étais sale et j'étais convaincue de ne pouvoir inspirer que deux sentiments: le dégoût ou la haine. J'avais beau me laver, me frottiller au juscha, la poussière restait inexorablement collée à ma peau. Grand-mère disait que c'était parce que j'avais été conçue sous l'emprise des instincts dans un monde régi par la foi chrétienne ou la tradition (Beyala 1998, 39).

The self-loathing Beyala described here goes beyond the feelings of inferiority typically experienced by members of a defeated, colonized people. As an illegitimate child, abandoned not only by her father, but also by her mother, she was an outcast even among those who were already down-trodden, and even among members of her own family. Her academic and economic success was exceptional, and Beyala continues to use her literary fame to promote awareness of discrimination, particularly for African immigrants in Europe. One problem with replacing a communal connection to the earth with the individual pursuit of wealth is that not everyone ends up with a fair share of the money. Many people are left out of the new economy, and are made to feel as if there is no place for them in the world. Although many people leave the traditional village with starry-eyed dreams of wealth, many others simply have no other options, as explained by Ken Bugul:

Ces êtres humains désespérés, devant la famine, la misère, la maladie, avaient fui vers les grandes villes et de là deçus, vers d'autres cieux pour devenir des émigrés qu'il fallait fourrer dans des charters, ces "machins", ou refouler à des frontières et de là en faire des hors-la-loi qui désormais braveraient tous les périls pour s'arracher leur part de survie, dans un monde apparemment fait uniquement pour quelques-uns (Bugul 1999, 134).

Many people are under intense pressure to leave home even though they would rather stay. Others long to leave, but find few opportunities to do so. This was the case for Gabrielle Roy. There were numerous obstacles preventing her from leaving home, but with determination and luck she overcame them all. Although she loved her home, it always seemed too small to contain her expansive dreams. The house she grew up in was in a constant state of disrepair, but it was the location of many happy (and not so happy) memories. Due to the family's precarious financial situation, they knew it was only a matter of time before they would have to sell it. After the death of Gabrielle's father, she and her mother reluctantly rented out part of their home to boarders. They later sold the house and had to become boarders themselves. Her siblings drifted apart, physically and emotionally, after the last of the family property was sold. Gabrielle felt a strong connection with the natural world, viewing it with childlike wonder, and taking great comfort in being out of doors regardless of her fragile health and the harsh northern climate. However, her autobiography *La détresse et l'enchantement* describes a harrowing incident of primary land-related alienation.

As a young woman, working at one of her first teaching assignments in a rural Manitoba school far from home, she would sometimes spend weekends at the farm of an uncle who lived in the vicinity. On one occasion, homesick and longing to see her cousins, she decided to go to her uncle's farm unannounced. She got off the train at the remote station and was warned not to go any further on foot. Undaunted by the snow on the ground or the freezing drizzle falling from the rapidly darkening sky, she set off toward the farm, leaving the well-traveled path to take a shortcut through the woods. She was within sight of her uncle's farmhouse when she found herself waist-deep in a bog:

Que l'amour ne protégeât pas mieux était ce qui me chavira le plus, je crois. Car, en ce moment, j'aurais crié bien en vain. ... c'est peut-être ce sentiment qui me laissa le plus d'angoisse, qu'ils fussent heureux au moment où je me débattais contre la mort, leur grande affection pour moi ne les en ayant même pas avertis (Roy 1984, 120).

It took every ounce of her strength to fight her way free. Having lost her flashlight, she had to brave the darkness and the coyotes, backtracking several miles to reach the house via the main path. This passage illustrates the alienation that comes with the realization that the natural world is completely indifferent to human suffering. All but the most sheltered individuals are confronted with this realization at some point, so I classify this experience as normative. Despite its short duration, the experience was intensely frightening, so I also classify it as severe.

Poets often write of personal communion with Nature, describing the sense of well-being one might feel upon experiencing the more beneficent aspects of the natural world, but part of this communion also involves struggle. Everyone struggles against nature every day in order to survive, knowing that Nature will eventually win. In this instance Gabrielle's struggle with Nature was quite literal as she fought to free herself from what could have been her own grave. Although such experiences can be traumatic, some researchers have found that a brush with death can have psychological benefits. In their article entitled "Letting go of the negative: psychological growth from a close brush with death" Dr. Leonard Martin and Dr. Douglas Kleiber assert that a common after-effect of life-threatening traumatic experiences is an adjustment of personal priorities and a tendency toward greater focus and mindfulness (Martin et al 2005). It was shortly after this event that Gabrielle became more focused on her writing projects and began saving aggressively for her trip to Europe. Although she drew no specific correlation between the incident in the bog and her decision to travel, it seems clear that her decision to fight for her life led to a decision to fight for the life she wanted.

Unlike Roy, Mariama Bâ was not able to leave her homeland of Senegal—at least not physically. Her life as a married, and later a divorced woman with a job and a house full

of children kept her from going too far from the place where she was born. However, in her novel *Une si longue lettre*, Aïssatou, the friend of narrator Ramatoulaye and recipient of the letter, is living in the United States. The character Aïssatou has the surname Bâ, which suggests that Mariama is writing the letter to herself, and since Aïssatou left Senegal, a part of Mariama did as well. Aïssatou and Ramatoulaye are connected to the land of Senegal and to each other. The opening passage of the letter describes how their grandmothers lived on adjoining properties and would send messages back and forth. Their mothers were friends as well, and as children, the two girls walked the same path to school where both were among the first Muslim girls to receive a higher education. The two women seemed to be living the same life right up until Aïssatou moved to the United States.

Faced with the same dilemma of how to cope with an unfaithful husband, their paths diverge when they make different decisions. Aïssatou divorced and relocated with her children. Ramatoulaye remained married, although she would soon be widowed, and stayed in Senegal. Rather than giving in to bitterness, she sincerely seeks to make her country a better place, demonstrating a profound empathy which makes political boundaries, and even patriotism, irrelevant: “Pour vaincre ma rancœur, je pense à la destinée humaine. Chaque vie recèle une parcelle d’héroïsme, un héroïsme obscur fait d’abdications, de renoncements et d’acquiescements, sous le fouet impitoyable de la fatalité (Bâ 1979, 22). By focusing so intensely on the suffering of others, Mariama almost surely increased her own psychological suffering. However, her awareness of the things others choose not to see is commendable, and if everyone possessed this degree of empathy the world would be at peace. She saw the independence of Senegal as an opportunity to promote solidarity among her fellow citizens:

Au-dessus des inclinations, inévitables, pour tel ou tel parti, tel ou tel modèle de société, il fallait l’unité nationale. Beaucoup d’entre nous ralliaient de partie dominant, lui infusant du sang nouveau. Être productif dans la mêlée valait mieux que se croiser les bras ou s’abriter derrière des idéologies importées (Bâ 1979, 40).

The type of national unity Bâ is advocating is loftier than the blind patriotism politicians rely upon during times of war. It is the type of unity that requires looking for similarities rather than differences, and the benefits are feelings of welcome and safety for everyone who has a home within the nation's borders. This philosophy is still an unrealized ideal in most societies. The alienation resulting from the alternative is discussed in the following section.

4.3 Do you have a flag?

We stole countries with the cunning use of flags. Just sail around the world and stick a flag in.

--Eddie Izzard (1998)

Calixthe Beyala had a flag. Born just one year after Cameroon gained independence, Beyala's strong feelings of patriotism coexisted with an intense outrage over government corruption. In *La petite fille du réverbère*, she recounts an incident in which she was recruited at the last minute to appear with the President in a New Year's Day draped in the Cameroonian flag. Maria-Magdalena, the young woman who was originally selected for this honor, had become disheveled in a fight with another girl, and was no longer presentable. Beyala, whose poor personal hygiene had earned her the nickname "Tappoussière", tried to decline the request:

J'avouai que je ne m'étais pas lavée et que je risquais de salir le drapeau. Que ma naissance de bâtarde me plaçait dans une situation illégale vis-à-vis des lois de la République. Graduellement, pendant que durait cette épreuve d'auto-humiliation, l'émotion gagnait mes camarades.... À la fin, il n'eut plus de doute: j'étais la plus indiquée pour porter le drapeau.... J'étais sa République du Cameroun, véreuse, sale, esclandreuse, mais une République lumineuse dans cette stabilité désespérante de chaleur (Beyala 1998, 117-118).

As the school children marched proudly to City Hall, Beyala was delighted to be the center of attention. However, this feeling was short-lived. As Beyala and her

classmates got closer to the town square they encountered increasing signs of civil unrest. Many people were using the occasion to protest recent government atrocities, and others were taking advantage of the general chaos to loot and riot. At the sound of gunfire, the teacher urged the students to stay together and guided them toward the port at the edge of town, where he had to protect Beyala and the other girls from lecherous sailors. His advice to the girls was to beware of strangers. But this begs the question “Who is a stranger?” The children were walking through their hometown, in what should have been a pleasant celebration involving the entire community. The majority of these people were their neighbors, not strangers. The teacher himself was no better than the sailors, since he had engaged in sexual intercourse with Maria-Magdalena shortly before the parade, and it was this incident, which had instigated the brawl between her and a jealous rival.

Choosing to identify certain people as a stranger or “Other”, even if the Other has been living in the same land or even sharing a bloodline, is the original source of conflict. One of the most common ways this conflict can manifest is between the settler and nomad, a conflict which goes all the way back to the biblical story of Cain and Abel. As a tiller and keeper of the land, Cain stayed in one place, while Abel moved about, following his flocks. When Cain killed Abel, God’s punishment was to make him a wanderer and vagabond upon the Earth. Settlers tend to perceive nomads as being without vocation or purpose, and have a narrow definition of what constitutes productivity and work. To the settler’s mindset, this is such a serious moral failing that it even justifies violence against nomads. Cain knew this to be the case, having just inflicted this fate on his own brother, and he implored God to give him a lighter sentence: “I shall be a fugitive and wanderer upon the Earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me” (Genesis 4:14). Cain seems to be expressing a deep-seated fear of the natural world, suggesting that even at the dawn of so-called civilization people had already begun the process of creating barriers between themselves and nature. God then agreed to mark Cain so that no one would kill him, and Cain ended up settling in Nod, East of Eden. The outcome of Cain’s conflict with Abel set the tone for future conflicts between settlers and natives, with natives losing almost every battle, in a

struggle which continues to this day. As the natives eventually succumb to defeat, conflicts begin to develop between “new” settlers and “old” settlers, with “old” settlers feeling that they have a stronger claim to the land and attempting to halt the influx of immigrants.

There is currently no clear definition of what constitutes an indigenous person, so the UN estimate that indigenous people make up five percent of the world’s population is only an approximation. Whatever the accurate figure, the indigenous population was once one hundred percent and this slow but steady decline has coincided with global environmental degradation. Where indigenous cultures exist, the local ecology is generally thriving, at least to the point that the indigenous people can prevent others from exploiting their land. The reason native peoples do a better job of protecting the environment than colonists, is that they tend to perceive their relationship with land as one of stewardship, rather than ownership. Although indigenous people have stories and legends about their historical and cultural ties to the land and the deities who govern it, what they don’t have is a piece of paper which legitimizes their claim to the land in the eyes of the newcomers. Nor do they have mines to extract minerals from it or fences to parcel it out. During the colonial period, the prevailing attitude in Europe was that colonizers had not only a right, but a *duty* to appropriate lands which would otherwise lay idle (Chamberlin 2003, 48).

Whereas a native, whose needs for food, water, clothing and shelter have been met, might use any extra time at his disposal to relax and bond with other members of his community, a European living in the colonial period might be reminded of the parable of the talents and told that “idle hands do the devil’s work.” One could even use this philosophy to justify slavery, i.e. saving the native’s soul by keeping him busy. These attitudes contributed to the dehumanization of native peoples, who became little more than a nuisance to the colonizers, while the European powers fought one another over the rights to lands on other continents.

In his book *If this is your land, where are your stories?* J. Edward Chamberlin challenges the traditional definition of settlers and nomads:

Think about it. Aborigines, who know the names of every plant and the location of all the water holes, as perpetual nomads? Europeans in a place ten thousand miles from home, as settlers? It doesn't make sense. For millennia, farming people have roamed around the world looking for new places and dreaming of the home they left behind, moving on after a generation or so to other new places. And we call these people "settlers"? The other people, the indigenous people who have lived in the same places for tens of thousands of years... we call Them "wanderers"? The truth is that We are the nomads and They are the settlers (Chamberlin 2003, 29-30).

The countries at greatest risk for colonial occupation are those in a favorable location and those with an abundance of natural resources. Algeria is situated in a prime location on the northwest coast of Africa, with easy trading access to the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, Europe and neighboring African countries. For this reason, there has always been an amalgam of cultures in the region, and incidents of piracy have been common for centuries. At the time of the French invasion in 1830, the country's demographics consisted of a Muslim majority, a large Berber minority, with small pockets of other ethnic groups scattered throughout the land (Ageron 1990). Due to their long history of contact with European cultures, the native Algerian people of the early nineteenth century lacked the innocence and naïveté of other indigenous peoples. When the French showed up with the intention of appropriating their land, the locals knew exactly what they were up against and mounted a fierce, if ineffective, resistance.

It is through battles of conquest that the colonizers create their own stories to justify their presence in a new land. Compared to the benevolent tales of a Great Spirit lovingly providing for a native people, these bloody tales instill the belief that land and home can only be obtained through acts of violence. There is an accompanying message that violence could erupt at any time and that citizens may be called upon to protect their land from other invaders. The heroic deeds of those fighting for the losing side often go unremembered and unrecorded. For 130 years, the Arabs who fought for Algeria were forgotten. After the Algerian War for Independence, Assia Djebar took it

upon herself to unearth these stories and bring them to light, but in doing so, she realized that they had lost much of their original tone by being told in the language of the colonizer.

Djebar often describes the land as if it were a reflection of its inhabitants. The Algerian soil is soaked with blood as a result of the violent struggles to control it. The French occupation began and ended with violent wars which affected the lives of everyone who called this land home. Virtually every family lost at least one of its members as a result of the violence, rendering this secondary alienation normative, even though it is extreme. In *L'amour la fantasia*, Djebar describes the impotent horror of a grieving mother who lost her son in 1843 while surrounded by hostile French soldiers: "Notre terre est à eux! Cette mer est à eux! Où abriter mon fils mort? N'y aura-t-il plus jamais un coin d'Islam pour nous, les malheureux?" (Djebar 1985, 215). Children represent the hopes and dreams their parents have for the future and, for that reason, few things can be more traumatizing than losing a child. Yet it is primarily a nation's youth who are sacrificed in times of war. The average age of a foot soldier varies from one country and war to another, but it generally ranges from late teens to mid-twenties, young enough for the word "infantry" to seem ironically à propos. None of these soldiers come home unscathed, and many do not come home at all. For every soldier who dies, there are loved ones who feel the loss of this ultimate act of patriotic sacrifice.

Patriotism is often touted as a virtue, but it can also have a sinister side, as young people, filled with loyalty for their homeland are persuaded or coerced into killing and / or dying to further the interests of government leaders. The cause may be just or unjust, but if one fails to do one's civic duty and fight for one's country, the societal shame is intense, whereas, the collateral damage resulting from such acts of violence are often dismissed as veterans are left to deal with these traumatic memories privately. Feelings of patriotism are instilled in children at a young age through subtle and not so subtle messages designed to condition children to believe in the superiority of their own government. This idea is reinforced with patriotic legends, national anthems with catchy uplifting tunes and gruesome lyrics, and visual aids such as flags. The benefit of the

flag is that it can be carried to any other part of the globe, or even the moon. No matter how far one is from home, seeing that the “*étandard sanglant est levé*” will instill the conditioned response of obedience to the cause, whatever that happens to be.

Decisions are made at the top levels of government without regard to the well-being of civilians, and when consideration is given, there is always an acceptable level of collateral damage. Children, who are taught to support their nation’s leaders without question, are usually given biased or incomplete information. As a teenager in a boarding school run by French nuns, Kim Lefèvre heard from one of the day students that the French army had been defeated at Diên Biên Phu and that Vietnam was to be divided along an arbitrary 17th parallel. Everything to the north of this line was to become communist. Although she knew that the school was south of the line, this development was alarming because she had no idea whether her family was trapped in communist territory. Asking the nuns for information was out of the question. This experience of secondary land-related alienation was both non-normative and extreme. Kim literally became ill with fear that she would be permanently cut off from her family. It was only when her friend Dô was able to smuggle a map of Vietnam to her in the infirmary, showing that her family in Thuy Hoa was safely south of the 17th parallel that her health began to improve. This incident illustrates how the human costs of warfare are grossly underestimated. Had Thuy Hoa been located just north of the 17th parallel, it is likely that Kim would have suffered a relapse of tuberculosis and lost her life in a manner which would never have been included in any statistical reports on collateral damage.

Kim reports a general feeling of celebration among the Vietnamese following the victory at the battle of Diên Biên Phu, although she was largely excluded from taking part in it due to her confinement at school. Like Lefèvre, Djebar, and Bà, Ken Bugul saw her own country gain independence shortly before she left home to study in Belgium. However, what she had imagined would be an easy solution to all of life’s problems proved to be a disappointment:

Le pays venait d'avoir l'indépendance, le moyen de faire marche arrière, peut-être retourner au village me blotter dans les cuisses chaudes de la mère, rouler dans le sable, écouter les contes et les légendes de l'Afrique, baignée de frayeur, de curiosité, de découvertes.

Mais l'indépendance m'avait déçue. Je croyais que l'indépendance allait me sauver. Je ne constatais aucune acquisition d'identité propre, aucun souffle. L'indépendance était comme la reconnaissance et l'officialisation de la dépendance (Bugul 1982, 176).

Some of this disenchantment may arise from the fact that France has maintained a military presence in, as well as substantial economic ties to many of its former colonies. However, it is also the degradation of traditional cultures and languages which renders the desired “marche arrière” impossible and creates an identity crisis for citizens of the newly independent nation.

Even citizens of first world nations are not immune to politically and economically-induced alienation. It is possible for a country to colonize *itself* to such a degree that people feel alienated by a lack of access to the natural world. Gabrielle Roy is an example of the settler who is actually a homesick wanderer, to whom the Chamberlin quote refers. During her stay in London, she became fatigued and began to experience health problems. Fresh air was always Gabrielle's first remedy of choice for ailments of body and mind and this was no exception. She made inquiries and learned of a green line bus, with routes in the rural outskirts of the city. She boarded the bus without a planned itinerary, got off at a site recommended by other passengers, and began strolling along a wooded path. Each turn revealed new delights, and she finally emerged in a small village, where she stayed at a guest house run by a woman who became a lifelong friend. After a few days in Upshire she was feeling better, and working enthusiastically on a new novel. However, there was a feeling of unease one day when she was out on a walk and noticed the London skyline faintly visible on the horizon:

C'est que tout ici, ainsi que j'allais bientôt l'apprendre, terres, fermes, pâturages, village, chasse gardée à même la forêt, le petit château, même jusqu'à un certain point l'église et son cimetière, appartenait au seigneur des lieux et que celui-ci réussissait encore à empêcher—mais pour combien de temps?—l'expansion vers Upshire du grand Londres métropolitain qui, à quelques milles seulement, piaffait de l'impatience d'y répandre d'autres lotissements étroits, des High Streets pareils à ceux d'en arrière, rang sur rang de cottages identiques et assurément des ABC tea-shops à la douzaine (Roy 1984, 378).

The reader finds herself supporting this “seigneur”, himself a vestigial remnant of an oppressive feudal system, if only he can continue to hold back the urban sprawl. Fortunately Gabrielle’s fears for the destruction of Epping Forest have not yet come to pass, although the worldwide destruction of old growth forests continues.

Despite the alarming degree of ecological decay occurring in modern times, there is a desire to protect the natural world and preserve at least a part of it in its unspoiled state. Perhaps this is due to human biology and instinctual genetic memory. Human beings are composed of the same elements present in the earth, and the ancestors of humanity were indigenous peoples, almost all of whom perceived the earth as feminine, even maternal. For the human race to collectively turn its back on thousands of years of evolution in such a short period of time is cause for alienation, which may in turn create a desire to reconnect with the Mother.

4.4 Terre / mère

The establishment of personal and group identities requires the construction of boundaries between the self and the non-self. According to Julia Kristeva’s theory of maternal abjection, the first psychological task of an infant is to create a boundary separating the self from the mother. She describes this process as “a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under a power as securing as it is stifling” (Kristeva 1980, 13). This is a gradual process, and children still require maternal nurturing during childhood. In order for development to occur in a healthy

manner, it is the child who should pull away, not the mother. Kim Lefèvre, Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul were all abandoned by their mothers during childhood with serious detrimental consequences. When one considers the Earth itself as the collective mother of humanity, the gradual separation of humankind from the natural world over the past few thousand years seems like a natural phase of development, albeit a dangerous one.

This adversarial stance against nature is exemplified by Marie Donnadiou Legrand, mother of Marguerite Duras. Marie moved her children from house to house several times. Marguerite demonstrates little nostalgia for any of her childhood homes, but the most memorable of them was certainly the Cambodian land concession, which Marie purchased after ten years of scrupulous saving. The government officials who sold it to her required that the land be cultivated. However, all but one acre was flooded with sea water for several months of the year, so it was impossible for her to comply.

Concessions of this type were a common means of swindling an underclass of French colonists into giving up their life savings for a plot of land they could not cultivate. The government would then revoke the concession and sell it to the next unsuspecting victim.

Marie Donnadiou Legrand was accustomed to being able to impose her will on others, but she was no match for the French Colonial Government or the Pacific Ocean. Her financial ruin was vastly compounded by her expensive and futile efforts to construct a sea wall. By the time she gave up, she was deeply in debt, her relationships with her two youngest children had deteriorated so far that they were beyond repair, and the ocean continued to ebb and flow according to the season. The secondary alienation caused by this government exploitation is extreme and non-normative. Although there was a great deal of primary alienation caused by the floods, it should be pointed out that the word “flood” usually refers to an inundation of water on land that is not usually submerged. Since the seasonal flooding of this land was a natural process, the primary alienation is really a result of Marie’s delusional belief that she could hold back an entire ocean to protect her homestead.

This headstrong battle against the Pacific consumed all of Marie's time and energy and served as a distraction from some of the distressing familial strife occurring in her home. The failed sea wall was an unnatural boundary and an attempt to compensate for more appropriate boundaries which were lacking in Marguerite's family relationships. According to Kristeva's theory, the perception that an established boundary has been breached can create feelings of anxiety and disgust within the individual. The complete absence of familial boundaries in Duras' writing is the source of much of the controversy surrounding Duras' work. All three children often slept in the same bed as their mother, even when they were in their teens. Marie Donnadiou Legrand displayed an inappropriate fawning adoration of her eldest son and even expressed a desire to be buried in the same grave with him. She turned a blind eye to his opium addiction and gambling, while abusing and neglecting her two youngest children, who had no one to turn to for affection except each other. In her novel *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, Marguerite acknowledged an incestuous relationship with the younger of her two brothers. Although incest between siblings is exactly the type of boundary breach which would result in revulsion according to Kristeva's theory, Marguerite Duras defended it as one of the most perfect forms of love (Adler 1998, 332).

All three children roamed barefoot through the rainforest among poisonous snakes, and panthers, and Marguerite likewise roamed the city streets without curfew or other restrictions. During one of these urban excursions, Marguerite had to confront an archetypal fear which manifested in the person of a mentally ill beggar woman who chased after her, cackling and trying to touch her. She feared that if this woman made physical contact with her, she would become crazy. Much of this fear can be explained as a displaced terror of her mother, who was also mentally unstable. However, the witch, as a hostile feminine personification of the natural world, has been a menacing presence in the imaginations of children throughout history. Marguerite's terror was enhanced by a lack of personal boundaries which could have provided protection. The prevailing theme of *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* is the futility of creating any boundaries. *L'amant* begins and ends with a ferry ride across the Mekong River, symbolizing the crossing of a boundary. This second journey proved to be a definitive

boundary between Marguerite and her childhood. At the age of seventeen, she left Vietnam and never returned.

The matricidal evocations which occur frequently in Duras' writings are indicative of the violent loathing presented in Kristeva's theory. Even if the subject does not have a desire to kill the mother, the mother's continued existence can be perceived as a threat to identity development. One can imagine Gabrielle Roy's increasing frustration as she approached the age of thirty and was still living with her frail and impoverished mother. Her attempt to separate from her mother might even be compared to her intense struggle to extricate herself from the bog near her uncle's farm. Although Gabrielle had fond memories of her childhood in Manitoba, it had come to represent an ever-increasing sense of despair, as her mother and siblings struggled under the yoke of poverty which had grown heavier with the passage of time. This alienation is severe, but normative. She wasn't the only member of her family with wanderlust, but she was the only one who could indulge it in a healthy manner. One sister, Adèle, had an especially difficult time settling down. She worked as a rural teacher, moving frequently around northern Alberta, staying for brief periods at the most remote outposts she could find:

Ce qu'elle voyait fuir, elle, inlassablement de chaque côté de son train, c'étaient les espaces plats, la plaine sans cesse renouvelée, sans cesse pareille à elle-même, l'océane ferme enclos en notre pays. Nous la plaignions de tout notre cœur, un être incapable de se faire à la vie avec les autres, incapable d'accepter pour longtemps la terrible solitude qu'elle recherchait. Ainsi avait-elle, allant et venant d'un pôle à l'autre, usé plus de courage qu'il n'en eût fallu pour édifier une vie bien réussie—mais qu'est-ce aussi qu'une vie bien réussie! (Roy 1997, 56-57).

For a time, Adèle owned a plot of land, but upon learning of her mother's death, she went into the village and sold it for a pittance to the first person she encountered, stating "Ma mère est morte; la vie est finie" (Roy 1997, 70). It didn't take long for her to regret this rash act, but the deed was done. Roy's entire family seems to be caught in

perpetual conflict between longing for home and desperately wanting to leave it. This friction manifests as mental illness, alcoholism, and despair. Although Gabrielle's siblings loved each other, it was their mother who had been the anchor holding the family together, and after her funeral, they each seemed grateful to go their separate ways.

Gabrielle Roy was away from home when her mother died, and so was Maryse Condé. Neither of them had parents who lived to see their daughter's literary success. At the time of her mother's death, Maryse Condé was a gifted, but underachieving lycéenne. She never knew her maternal grandmother, who was an illiterate mulatto and the inspiration for Condé's novel *Victoire: les saveurs et les mots*. Maryse's mother never had complete confidence that the upward social mobility she had achieved was secure. When removed from her own cultural milieu where her status was known and respected, she experienced anxiety and, for the first time, Maryse saw a more vulnerable side of her mother.

The incident came about when Maryse's parents made a decision to try out an unfamiliar vacation destination in Goubeyre. Maryse was excited and eager to see something new. When they arrived, the land was wild and unlike anything she had seen before: "Je regardais de tous mes yeux et j'avais l'intuition que j'étais née, sans le savoir, dans un coin du paradis terrestre" (Condé 1999, 122). Her mother, however, was upset about the rustic lodging, and angry about having been taken in by deceptive advertizing. For Maryse, being in a place where no one knew her was particularly liberating: "Moi, j'adorais Goubeyre. Enfin, j'étais anonyme. Personne ne m'y connaissait, personne n'y faisait attention à moi. J'aurais pu courir sans souliers dans la rue si j'en avais eu la fantaisie" (Condé 1999, 125). This anonymity which so delighted Maryse was a much more significant factor contributing to her parents' malaise than the lack of water pressure in the shower. The social demographics, which were so different in Goubeyre, are explained in the following passage:

Selon la rigide géographie sociale de ce temps-là les régions de Trois-Rivières, Goubeyre, Basse-Terre appartenaient aux mulâtres. Saint-Claude et Matouba

étaient les fiefs des blancs-pays qui les disputaient aux Indiens. Mes parents, quant à eux, avaient leur place en Grande-Terre. C'est là que les nègres avaient grandi, qu'ils s'étaient imposés en politique ainsi que dans tous les domaines (Condé 1999, 123).

For Maryse, this experience of alienation was mild and normative, and actually provided an opportunity for growth. A source of optimism in this situation is that Maryse and the local children genuinely wanted no part of the segregated system preferred by their parents. They simply wanted to be friends, and the limited social opportunities in Goubeyre made it difficult for their families to prevent them from interacting. It was at this time that Maryse began to question many of her parents' assumptions. Just as they were able to improve their social standing in Grande-Terre, she was able to do the same on a larger scale by taking the best of what her parents taught her and discarding what she considered irrelevant.

Sometimes this process of sifting through childhood dogma involves spending time away from home. Leaving home usually means severing ties with the mother, at least temporarily, which can be difficult regardless of the quality of the relationship. Part of the reason Ken Bugul left Senegal was to escape the loneliness she felt as a result of being abandoned by her mother as a young child. Ken's return to Senegal was truly a rebirth. She had absolutely nothing, just like the day she was born. She even shaved her head, an outward symbol of her desire to make a fresh start. Like many other individuals who needed guidance, she sought out the community's spiritual leader, the Serigne. She sat in his presence for several hours each day. He told her what to do, when to come, when to go, but like a growing child, she occasionally asserted her own will. The Serigne had twenty-seven wives, many of whom had come to him via arranged marriages. However, when Ken became his twenty-eighth wife, it was her own decision.

The safety she felt in the presence of the Serigne might be compared to that of a womb. She lived with her mother, rather than staying in the compound with the other wives, but she visited her husband every day. The sandy path between the Serigne's compound

and her mother's home forms the title of her second autobiographical novel, *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*. This path forms an umbilical cord between Ken's past, as her mother's daughter, and her present as wife of the Serigne. As she walks this path every day, feeling the sand of her homeland under her feet, she reports a strange effect: "J'avais eu plusieurs fois envie d'en manger et j'en avais mangé. Ce sable me mettait l'eau à la bouche et quand je l'avalais, j'éprouvais une étrange sensation (Bugul 1999, 192-193).

She comments that this coincided with a period of intense libido. The soil of her native land infused her with fertility, which had been diminished during her time abroad. She had come to perceive her unplanned pregnancy and subsequent abortion in Belgium as resulting from her diasporic alienation in a strange land. She expresses distaste for many of the sexual practices preferred by European men, suggesting that the more separated people are from the natural world, the more complicated their sexuality becomes. She had come to perceive this separation from the natural world as separation from the fecundity of life. The modern world treated the resulting emotional upheavals with pharmaceutical drugs. But Ken felt that what she needed to overcome her emotional malaise was an exorcism of sorts, the type of thing most Europeans would scoff at: "J'avais commencé par manger du sable, de ce sable brillant de mon village, quand arrivée au seuil des choses, je dus presque subir une purification. Et ce fut avec ce sable que je me purifiai" (Bugul 1999, 204).

Ken Bugul is not the only writer to make a connection between sexual dysfunction and modern dystopia. Marie Cardinal, upon her return to Algeria, commented that Europeans are often stiff in their mannerisms, lacking the graceful ease of movement she observed among the Arabs. She asserts that it is her country of Algeria which taught her to make love, which made it possible in her writing to find the sweet spot between the "fausseté de la pudeur" and the "malhonnetété de l'obscenité" (Cardinal 1980, 170). After returning to France, Marie was overcome with physical and mental health problems which focalized around her reproductive organs, and created a constant flow of blood (See Chapter Two). Although the abuse she endured at the

hands of her mother was likely the primary cause of her affliction, one cannot help seeing the connection between Cardinal's wounded sex organs and the violent intermingling of images of sexuality and land in the writing of Assia Djébar. In these passages, Djébar illustrates the imbalance of power and exploitive nature of colonialism. As a French woman sympathetic to the plight of Algeria, the violent trauma of her homeland is also played out in Cardinal's body. Djébar's description of the "prise d'Alger" is particularly graphic in its sexually violent imagery:

Ce monde étranger, qu'ils pénétraient quasiment sur le mode sexuel, ce monde hurla continûment vingt ou vingt-cinq années durant après la prise de la Ville Imprenable... Y pénètrent comme en une défloration. L'Afrique est prise malgré le refus qu'elle ne peut étouffer (Djébar 1985, 70).

Although some fear of sexuality may occur naturally, the majority of it seems to be culturally imposed. As a child Kim Lefèvre took pleasure in playing outdoors, running half-naked through the rice paddies, catching grasshoppers, which she cooked and ate with the neighboring children. Her mother put a stop to this behavior as soon as she began menstruating. Upon losing her carefree access to the natural world she developed a fear of sexuality, which was unnaturally pronounced due to the type of attention she was receiving from the men in her community. Most the men who were attracted to her considered her biracial status a kink, which created such a degree of abjection that she never had sexual relations with a Vietnamese man. It is likely that her negative experiences with Vietnamese men allowed her to forgive her mother for abandoning her at the orphanage. Unlike Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul, she expresses little resentment toward her mother for abandoning her. Despite a four-year separation while Kim was in the orphanage and a thirty-year separation after she moved to France, her ties to her mother remained strong, even though they were ties of mutual suffering.

Although all of the authors in this study except Gabrielle Roy became a mother, this section has, until now, focused on the authors as daughters. However, it is the voice of the mother which prevails in the writing of Mariama Bâ. She expresses a forlornness

which might call to mind the voice of Mother Nature personified in the face of human strife and ecological decay. Mariama was aware that the world had changed in a fundamental way during her lifetime, and that her own generation was caught in the transition, unable to persist in the comfortable ancestral traditions of its parents, and unable to move forward into the expansive new world destined for its children. Heavily burdened with responsibilities, she found herself overextended physically and emotionally. Like Mother Nature, Bâ resembles a fragile ecosystem, unable to recover from a too-rapid depletion of resources. Without much complaint, she absorbed the suffering of others into her own and gave until she had nothing left. Her writing, although tinged with melancholy, is imbued with hope for a brighter future, as is the work of many of the other authors examined here. Despite the universal experience of land-related alienation, the natural, and even the political world offers opportunities for growth and healing following these devastating experiences.

4.5 Conclusions

Regarding the natural environment, a willingness to interact with the land on its own terms tends to contribute to a sense of serenity, mitigating other types of alienation. This type of interaction with the land becomes increasingly difficult as the natural world is altered to further the political and financial interests of humans, and fragile ecosystems are strained by rapid population growth. It seems that the more one tries to manipulate the natural environment for personal gain, the greater the degree of frustration, as evidenced by the fact that one of the greatest sufferers of land-related alienation can be observed in the person of Marie Donnadieu Legrand, mother of Marguerite Duras. Her fruitless attempt to hold back the Pacific Ocean proved to be an exercise in hubris which left a permanent mark of alienation on her children.

Marguerite found an occasional respite in the happy hours with her brother Paolo, traipsing through the nearby jungle. It was there that the children were able to hunt birds and game, and catch fish, which sustained them during the worst of their financial hardships. Although writing helped Marguerite to cope with her feelings of alienation, there is little evidence that she experienced significant healing during her lifetime. Her

departure from Vietnam at the age of seventeen might have provided an opportunity for a fresh start, but the outbreak of World War II a few years after her arrival in France likely reinforced the emotional blueprints established during childhood, convincing her that there was no safe place on earth. This alienation and fear remained with her throughout her life. In a 1991 interview she commented “Only the stupid are not afraid” (Garis 2012).

Not everyone is as open about acknowledging chronic fear as Marguerite. The arrogant superiority observed in Maryse Condé’s mother is actually suppressed fear. Her outrage over their Spartan vacation accommodations was little more than displaced insecurity about being in a social environment where her status was not recognized. The conflicting attitudes of Maryse and her mother about their vacation in Goubeyre illustrate another interesting phenomenon. People who have been thoroughly “civilized” may still pursue outdoor adventures on beaches, in mountain cabins, or on safari, but these activities are primarily consumer-driven. Although the entrepreneurs who provide such entertainment have an interest in land conservation for the continuation of their business, neither they nor their customers are connecting with nature in a mindful way, as Maryse was trying to do. This vacation proved to be an important milestone in her personal growth as she recognized that she did not have to be defined by her parents’ preferences and prejudices.

Prejudice is what creates most secondary land-related alienation. This type of alienation is far more predominant than primary land alienation in the works examined here, but that is to be expected given the political and historical relationships of the authors’ homelands with hexagonal France. Kim Lefèvre’s anxiety over the location of the 17th parallel is just one example of the numerous traumas she endured as a disenfranchised métisse. Having spent an entire childhood being persecuted for colonial abuses from which she never benefitted, she finally left the country which she felt had rejected her. Her return to Vietnam after thirty years in France was a highly charged emotional experience and required a great deal of mental preparation. More

than half of her novel *Retour à la saison des pluies* deals with the events leading up to her decision to go home and the preparations she made for the trip.

Kim's recovery from this alienation is the best that could be expected given her biracial status. She never found the land she searched for as a child where everyone was like her. Racial intolerance made it impossible for her to completely integrate her two national and cultural identities. This intolerance was essentially a manifestation of a deeply endemic fear of contamination. We might even call it a culturally pervasive experience of abjection. The only possible compromise for Kim was to alternate between her two identities. In Vietnam she found friends who politely pretended not to notice her European features. People in France were more accepting of her biracial status, but she still knew that she was different. In spite of these obstacles, she created a good life for herself in France, and is now able to acknowledge the suffering she endured in Vietnam without malice: "Aujourd'hui, j'aime cette terre d'une autre façon, non plus à la manière d'une enfant meurtrie, mais comme une adulte capable de faire la part entre ce qu'elle m'a donné de ce qu'elle m'a refusé" (Lefèvre 1989, 406).

Making peace with one's homeland is a difficult process and many people get caught up in the assumption that national independence can provide a short cut to personal growth. In truth, a nation's independent status is no guarantee of happiness for its citizens. Many of our authors describe feelings of disappointment when they realized how little things had changed. Although people often refer to their home country as "the motherland" or "the fatherland" those who are alive to see the birth of a new nation are really more like parents, and may feel disappointment when it fails to live up to their expectations. Often the solidarity of the colonized underclass disappears when national independence removes the common enemy, creating a factionalized population. Adding to this problem is the fact that history cannot simply be swept away by raising a new flag. The presence of the former colonizer can still be felt, creating a friction which contains elements of intimacy as well as conflict, as described by Assia Djébar.

Assia chose to leave her homeland and move to France when the independent Algeria she had worked so hard to help create fell short of the hopes she had for it.

Conversely, Marie Cardinal was forced out of Algeria as a result of the war for independence. Although she wholeheartedly supported Algerian independence, she lost her homeland and endured ideological conflicts with her family as a result. When she returned to Algeria after a twenty-five year absence, she was required to obtain a tourist visa. This trip provided Marie with an opportunity to reconnect with her past and, by bringing her daughter, she was also able to share her family history with the next generation.

Calixthe Beyala left Cameroon to study in France and ended up making her home there. Her experiences in Cameroon as a fatherless child were painful, and her grandmother had infused her with nostalgia for a traditional way of life which could not be revived. Although she left Cameroon, she never abandoned it. As a writer and activist, she continues to advocate for the rights of immigrants and women, and seems to have experienced significant healing through her political engagement. Ken Bugul has also been involved in activist work, but in her case, primary land connection proved to be a conduit for healing from secondary land alienation. It was physical contact with the land on the path between her husband's home and her mother's that allowed her to regain a sense of peace. The simple act of walking the path day after day, reaching down and touching the sand, sometimes even ingesting it, did more to restore her connection to home and family than any amount of political change could do.

Gabrielle Roy also experienced a degree of healing by connecting with the natural world. She had inherited a sense of nostalgia for a home lost by her ancestors in Acadia, as well as her parents' homesickness for Quebec, where she spent a large portion of her life. Although she was prone to depression, the natural world was a frequent source of comfort, which softened some of the blows life sent her way. The final passage of *Le temps qui m'a manqué* describes one of her forays into a cold and stormy night along the rocky Atlantic coast of Quebec:

Vers le milieu de la nuit, je rentrai transie, mouillée jusqu'aux os car il s'était mis à tomber une grande pluie froide, endolorie de la tête aux pieds, cependant curieusement mystérieusement délivrée, comme si l'amertume du moins m'avait

été enlevée... Mais au fond, je suis toujours en peine de m'expliquer comment je sortis, cette nuit-là, sinon apaisée, du moins consentante à vivre en ce monde (Roy 1997, 92).

As the quote above suggests, recovery from alienation is often incomplete, often just enough to allow the individual to gather strength and face the next challenge. In a world strained with war, environmental degradation and social injustice, it is easy to find reason for discouragement. Mariama Bâ was aware of the scope of change which needed to occur before the outcome she envisioned could become a reality, but she also believed that such change was inevitable. Her writing portrays a longing for a future she did not expect to see. Her premature death thwarted her personal recovery, but her writing continues to speak for her even in her absence.

The rift between mankind and nature, which has come as a result of our modern lifestyle, also reflects on the spiritual condition of mankind, a topic which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Notes

- (1) Considering the tremendous effort which went into creating the stones circles of Europe, the pyramids of Egypt and Central America, and the surviving structures of ancient Greece and Rome, it seems evident that when ancient peoples did build structures, they meant them to be permanent and for the benefit of future generations.
- (2) Although the expansion of the Roman Empire had a negative impact on the surrounding environment, water and air were treated as shared resources, and efforts were made to mitigate the effects of air pollution in heavily populated areas. This emphasis on conservation might be explained by the influence of a polytheistic religion which emphasized harmony between the divine and the human. Nevertheless, this system was deeply flawed in ways which foreshadow many of the current problems facing mankind. The existence of slavery indicates

that there was an underclass of workers who were considered expendable and were excluded from many of the social ideals espoused by Roman citizens.

- (3) The 1980 South African film *The gods must be crazy* presents a poignant, but comical portrayal of first contact between a tribal Bushman and white South African society. In reality such interactions are usually tragic, as was the case of Ishi, “the last wild Indian in North America”. As the last surviving member of his community, Ishi lived alone for three years in the California desert before being captured near Oroville, California in 1911. Anthropologists from the University of California at Berkeley interviewed him in order to document the culture of his people, the Yahi. Ishi was provided with housing and given a job as a janitor at the Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco. He demonstrated his skills making arrows and building fires for museum visitors, but he had no immunity to common illnesses and was frequently sick. After his death in 1916, researchers disregarded Yahi customs by performing an autopsy, removing his brain, and cremating his body. His brain was sent to the Smithsonian, where it remained until 2000, when the closest living indigenous peoples to the Yahi tribe were able to bury Ishi’s brain and ashes according to Yahi customs (history.library.ucsf.edu/ishi).

Chapter 5—Alienation in the domain of religion

Irreverence is another person's disrespect for your god; there isn't any word that tells what your disrespect to his god is.

--Mark Twain (1916)

5.1 Introduction : The beginning of wisdom

Anthropologists believe that religion has been a part of the human experience for at least thirty thousand years. Ancient cave paintings and burial sites provide evidence that our human ancestors believed in a world of spirits and the afterlife. To the atheist this apparent instinctual human tendency is evidence that religion is nothing more than a mechanism for survival produced by natural selection and brain chemistry. To the person of faith, it is evidence that God does exist and is reaching out to humans, who are, in turn, reaching out to God. Either way, the line of demarcation between anthropoid and anthropos was formed in the first moment of religious inquiry, when intellect detached from instinct and began its journey of self-discovery. Whether God created man or man created God, both were present at the birth of humanity. One of the defining characteristics of humanity is a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction with the physical world, and a desire to understand what exists beyond it:

Mais l'homme qu'il soit, comme on l'a dit, l'aboutissant normal, biologiquement normal de l'antropoïde, ou qu'il soit, ce que je crois profondément, une créature unique dans l'univers, est tourmenté par quelque chose que nous avons à étudier aujourd'hui, par l'Invisible. Pourquoi partout trouvons-nous cet homme insatisfait des montagnes, insatisfait des fleuves, insatisfait des arbres? C'est pourtant beau le réel, c'est pourtant riche de science. Pourtant l'homme a été insatisfait du visible, et il a jugé nécessaire d'expliquer les choses visibles par les choses invisibles (Jousse 1934).

It seems logical to conclude that the earliest humans, vulnerable to a harsh, predator-filled environment might have been predisposed to superstition and magical thinking.

But their need for vigilance might also have honed their senses to a greater awareness of the subtle, spiritual realities existing just beyond the realm of ordinary, human perception. The goal of this chapter is not to take a position in the debate on the existence or non-existence of God, but rather to analyze religion as a contributing factor to feelings of alienation for the authors being studied. Religious practice can affect every aspect of one's life from physical and psychological health to social and economic standing. It makes sense, therefore, to examine this issue from multiple theoretical perspectives.

Geneticist Dean Hamer claims that the universal inclination toward religious belief can be explained by the existence of a "God gene", specifically the Vesicular Monamine Transporter 2 or VMAT2 (Hamer 2005). He maintains that an environmental cue is required to activate this gene, but that the genetic predisposition is strong enough to explain the persistence of a belief in God even in communist countries where a concerted effort is made to suppress religion. Hamer identifies the rituals and dogmas associated with individual religions as "memes", while emphasizing the more universal tendency for humans to seek self-transcendence through spiritual experiences.

Sigmund Freud felt that the human predisposition to believe in God was ultimately based on the human condition of "infantile helplessness", of being unable to conceive of a world without parents. Freud's concept of the superego, the ego and the id, might be compared to a vast religious cosmology superimposed upon the microcosmic self. Just as the id is a dark, seething mass of chaotic energy threatening to break through the surface, the superego resembles the perfectionist deity who banishes the id into outer darkness. The ego, caught in the middle, struggles to contain the id and also to avoid offending the superego. Freud's atheistic axiom is countered by Carl Jung's breakaway theory which acknowledges the concept of God as a universal archetype, an aspect of humanity's collective unconscious which interacts with the personal unconscious and cultural constructs to manifest in individual beliefs and behavior patterns. Jung made no assumptions regarding God's objective existence or non-existence, stating only that

the archetypal patterns were universal and that their original source could not be determined (Palmer 1997).

Whereas Hamer has researched the question of religion from a standpoint of genetics, and Freud and Jung from one of psychology, Karl Marx approached the theme from a political and economic perspective. He considered religion a human construct, the externalization of the collective psyche of a people. According to Marx, the suffering and joy expressed through religious activity reflects the internal reality of those who collectively embrace it (Marx et al 1964). Marx was convinced that religion had been used for millennia by those in power to provide false hope to the impoverished masses, and that the absence of religion would allow this false hope to be replaced with real hope. Marx's theories were influential in developing the policies of many of the former Communist states, where the practice of religion was discouraged and even persecuted. The practical application of Marx's theories resulted in political ideology serving as a supplement for religious belief, which did little to diminish feelings of disillusionment among members of the proletariat.

It may be that a number of factors contribute to the human tendency to embrace religion, rendering all of the aforementioned theorists at least partially correct. People express this tendency in individualized ways, which can lead to factionalism and persecution of those who are different. Those who embrace religion wholeheartedly tend to feel that there is a correct way to worship, and try to instill proper religious habits in their children during their formative years. Research indicates that early childhood is a time of enhanced receptivity to religious ideation, and religious adherents often seek to take advantage of this developmental window. A 1944 study conducted by Ernest Harms and published in the American Journal of Sociology examined the drawings of over 800 children of various ages depicting their imagined images of God. The youngest children, who were between the ages of three and six, generally produced images which suggested that their perception of God was similar to that of a fairy tale. Harms also noted a profound sense of awe, which he interpreted as an indication that

“children have a leaning toward a God experience from the time their consciousness awakens” (Harms 1944, 115).

Children still in the fairy tale stage of religious consciousness are usually already experiencing pressure from their families and societies to conform to religious conventions. Children at this age may be apt to ask a lot of questions, but when it comes to religion, few of these questions can be answered definitively. While some religions are open to the questioning of unknown and unknowable spiritual information, many take a more authoritarian stance, discouraging any inquiry which might cast doubt on cherished beliefs. Children are thus conditioned to stifle their natural curiosity and accept at face value the information they are receiving. The disapproval they receive from adults when they question an accepted religious dogma can be so severe that they suppress all conscious doubts or at least refrain from vocalizing them.

Honest religious inquiry, therefore, tends to be suppressed by fear, if not of censure in this world, of some horrific punishment in the hereafter. In his 1927 lecture, “Why I am not a Christian” Bertrand Russell stated that fear is the basis of religion and that fear is the “parent of cruelty” (Russell 1927). Indeed, those wars which are not started as a result of greed or conflicts over resources are usually caused by a religious dispute. Approximately 84% of the world’s population claims affiliation with a religion. This includes members of over 33,000 Christian denominations, as well as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and minority religions such as Shinto, Jainism, Wicca, and animistic traditions (Pew Research Center 2012). Many of these systems are inclusive and recognize the validity of other faiths, but many others are characterized by a belief in exclusion—that people who have fundamentally different beliefs are misguided, sinful, or even destined for eternal torment. The tendency to insert God into human quarrels can be dangerously delusional. From the smallest indigenous tribe to the largest political superpower, very few cultural groups go to war without a firm belief that God is on their side. This intermingling of religion and politics can lead to prolonged conflict between cultural groups whose members may have forgotten the cause of their original quarrel.

Organized religious groups can be so effective at controlling the behavior and even the thinking patterns of individuals that many people go through life without questioning the religious instruction they received during their youth. Since it is not possible to completely manipulate the emotional responses of individuals, many people go through the motions of a ritual which feels empty out of societal or familial pressure to conform. Such individuals may have a longing for the type of authentic religious experience described to them by others, but are unable to make the personal connection with God. Speaking openly about such feelings is likely to result in the individual being criticized for a lack of faith. Since God is perfect, it must be the congregant who is at fault.

In *Les mots pour le dire*, Marie Cardinal illustrates how her childhood religious experience was contaminated by feelings of unworthiness instilled in her by those responsible for her spiritual edification. She describes being required to sit with other children in silent prayer and meditation for an entire hour. She became bored and distracted, her mind wandered, and she concluded that she was unworthy of God's love. Given the nature of children's cognitive development, it is unlikely that any of the children in Marie's group were fully engaged in this process; if they were permitted to speak freely, most of them would probably agree with cartoon character Bart Simpson who wondered "why God would want us to waste our weekend sitting in super-boring, no-recess, dress-up school" (The Simpsons 2015). The cultural belief that children are to be seen and not heard is never more strictly enforced than in church. Marie, finding herself unable to live up to the standards of perfection presented by the Church, learned to feign piety. This may have enabled her to please the adults in her life and avoid punishment, but it also created a rupture between her authentic self and the self she showed the world, and this was a division which would have to be repaired later on:

Aussi si je ne parvenais pas à être conforme à l'intérieur il fallait que je le sois à l'extérieur. Correcte, polie, bonne élève, propre, vertueuse, obéissante, économe, serviable, pudique, charitable, honnête, j'y arrivais tant bien que mal, souvent mal parce que j'aimais trop m'amuser et rire. ... J'étais quand même une

bonne fille, pas très présentable, mais vertueuse, honnête et bonne élève et je faisais un effort visible pour avoir une véritable vie religieuse (Cardinal 1975, 83).

Marie's exhaustive list of virtues illustrates the unrealistic standards to which she held herself. Her innate sensitivity to criticism from others affected her thinking patterns to such a degree that she continued to criticize herself internally when she was alone. This type of conditioning amounts to a mild form of mind control. Many religious leaders and people of faith, who emphasize a doctrine of free will, would balk at such a statement, but it cannot be denied that fear plays a role in the spiritual development of many children. This manipulation is often done with the best of intentions, as those involved in it usually received the same type of instruction during their own youth. Religious leaders claim to have special knowledge regarding afterlife rewards and punishments, which can create deep-seated anxiety in the minds of young people regarding their final fate. Religious instruction begins while children are young enough to believe that adults are all-knowing, and free will is only discussed after a child has been thoroughly educated on the subjects of sin and damnation.

Guilt is one of the primary emotions associated with religious alienation. The term "Catholic guilt" has been coined to describe the disproportionate pangs of conscience which afflict those who have had a Catholic upbringing upon committing minor infractions (urbandictionary.com). Christian guilt might be a more appropriate term, since Protestants are equally vulnerable, but Protestants tend to hide their guilt, supplicating God in private, whereas the confessional is immediately visible upon entering any Catholic church. This guilt is sometimes centered upon the image of the crucifix, an image violent enough to be upsetting to young children who must sleep with one hanging above their beds. Although many people who grew up Catholic assume that the crucifix goes back to the earliest days of the Church, this image has not always been the focal point of Christianity. In their book *Saving paradise: how Christianity traded love of this world for crucifixion and empire*, Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker demonstrate how images of the crucifixion were completely absent during the first millennia of Christianity. According to Brock and Parker, the early church

depicted Christ as a living shepherd in a paradise which existed here on Earth, not in the afterlife. It was not until the tenth century that images of the crucifixion began to appear in Europe, a time which coincided with the first crusade. The authors concluded that by relegating paradise to the afterlife, Christianity came to sanction the notion of redemptive violence, placing victims in harm's way, and absolving perpetrators of responsibility for their actions (Brock et al 2008).

Although most people associate the image of the crucifix with violence and suffering, Ken Bugul, who was well into adolescence when she first arrived in Belgium and noticed the crucifix over the bed in her dorm room, was more troubled by the nudity of the image than by the physical suffering it portrayed:

Je n'ai jamais compris pourquoi dans la religion catholique, les saints étaient représentés dans des tenues indécentes. Le torse du Christ, son ventre, ses cuisses sèchement musclés. Enfin j'avais fini par me retrouver entre les draps. J'éteignis la lumière après quelques soupirs et reniflements, épuisée. Et je sentais le petit Christ au-dessus de moi (Bugul 1982, 50).

For Marie Cardinal, the crucifix was an image which haunted her childhood. Her mother hung an ornate crucifix above her bed, placing special emphasis on its monetary value as a work of art. Marie would often gaze at the crucifix, imagining the details of Christ's suffering and reminding herself that it was for her that he had endured such torture. She pressed nails into the palms of her hands, wanting to share in Christ's suffering, but was unable to push hard enough to draw blood. She had difficulty sleeping at night, fearful of demons under her bed and fraught with anxiety for the suffering Christ on the wall behind her. She demonstrates a belief in Christ's suffering on her behalf, but doubts his willingness or ability to protect her.

One might suspect the absence of a strong male role model as a factor in Marie's inability to put her faith in patriarchal religion. Although Marie's father was a regular presence in her life up until his death when she was fourteen years old, she never lived with him, having been born shortly after her parents' divorce. His poor health and

passive personality compared to that of her domineering mother made him an ineffectual role model. Marie's religious anxiety can hardly be separated from the excessive fear she felt toward her father. His attendance at her first communion made her uneasy, and she was so afraid of him during visits to his apartment that she occasionally relieved herself in the elevator instead of asking to use the bathroom. This fear of her father seems out of proportion, given the more significant abuse she endured at the hands of her mother, but it might be explained by the Judeo-Christian tendency to identify God as a male father figure. The shame associated with the female body and the obsession with female chastity which dominate all three of the primary monotheistic religions create unnecessary awkwardness between fathers and daughters, which for a psychologically vulnerable individual like Marie, could escalate into full-blown neurosis.

The tendency of Marie's father to critique her manners, and make excessive inquiries about her life, her studies, etc, is reminiscent of a priest in a confessional, but in this case, no pardon was being offered. Marie realized that in criticizing her, her father was actually criticizing his ex-wife's upbringing of her. Accepting judgment for the faults of others can create intense feelings of abjection, but it is also the foundation of Christian theology. The innocent Christ suffers for the vicarious salvation of others, while his irascible Father in the sky watches everything from above, judging every thought, word and deed. The heavenly Father and earthly father were fused together in Marie's mind in the image of an eye watching from above. This image haunted Marie throughout her life, and it took years of psychoanalysis to uncover a buried memory from early childhood of her father surreptitiously photographing her while she was urinating. The eye she saw was the camera lens, but the man behind it provoked an almost supernatural terror.

Given the combination and severity of catalysts in this domain, I classify Marie's alienation as extreme and non-normative. It is not difficult to see how Marie's scrupulosity contributed to her later bout with mental and physical illness, an illness she refers to as "La Chose". When religious dogma instills a belief in eternal punishment as a consequence of sin, there may be a powerful tendency to repress any thought which

might be interpreted as sinful. To some degree, this is unavoidable due to the inherent cognitive dissonance in many religious teachings. Children are taught that God loves unconditionally, but are then handed a litany of “thou shalt nots” which negate the concept of unconditional love. The ideal of universal peace is juxtaposed with a history of inquisition and religious warfare. There is an emphasis on loving kindness and a simultaneous fixation on the image of a man being tortured to death.

Just like any aspect of humanity, religion has its shadow side, although it goes to great lengths to suppress it. Humanity as a whole remains unwilling to acknowledge the shadow aspect of religion, but soul-searching individuals have been doing so privately for millennia. In Jungian psychology, it is crucial to integrate the shadow aspect of the self in order for healthy identity development to occur. Everyone has negative aspects of his or her personality which must be acknowledged in order to preserve psychological integrity. Failure to do so results in illness, as was the case with Marie Cardinal. Yet Marie was able to regain her physical and spiritual vitality by engaging in thorough self-examination. Her psychotherapy might be considered a lengthy confession or even an exorcism, in that it allowed her to bring forth and shine light on each aspect of her shadow self before finally accepting it and reintegrating it back into herself.

Given the almost universal experience of fear during the process of religious formation, one has to wonder whether anything positive can come from it. The Bible states that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). It never states that the fear of the Lord is the end of wisdom. If one thinks of fear as the first step on the path of spiritual discovery, it could be considered an opportunity for growth. The New Testament states that “Perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). The distance between these two points is great, but each step of the journey provides an opportunity for spiritual development and healing. Organized religion, with its prescribed rituals and traditions, sometimes fails to recognize that this journey is different for each person, and that some people may choose not to take it at all. Some individuals look at the destructive effects of organized religion and decide they want nothing to do with it. Others are simply unmoved by religious stimuli or find religious customs to be irrelevant

to their lives. Choosing a life without religion could also be considered a spiritual path, and there is wisdom to be gained through this choice as well. A few of the authors in this study fall into this category, and their experiences will be examined in the following section.

5.2 Opting out

Assuming that the God gene does exist, there are many people for whom it is not activated. Marguerite Duras expressed very little religious sentiment. The religion of her culture was Catholicism, but as a young girl with a deceased father and an overbearing mother, it seems possible that she would have had no context for a patriarchal religion. Although she attended Catholic schools, she makes no mention of attending church with family members or engaging in religious ceremonies at home. Holidays were not observed and gifts were never exchanged. Christmas was a non-event in the family home because it would have taken attention away from Marguerite's narcissistic mother: "Non seulement aucune fête n'est célébrée dans notre famille, pas d'arbre de Noël, aucun mouchoir brodé, aucune fleur jamais. Mais aucun mort non plus, aucune sépulture, aucune mémoire. Elle seule" (Duras 1981, 72).

This family, consumed with its own pain, was too isolated to partake in community celebrations, which is one of the functions of religion. Religious holidays and traditions can give life a sense of rhythm and meaning, connecting people to others around them as well as to their own past. Secular holidays and social events can serve as a supplement for non-religious people, but it is clear that humans have a psychological need for some sort of periodic communal celebration. Without the outward example of a religious community, Marguerite was unable to develop an internal spiritual practice. This experience is definitely non-normative, but it is difficult to classify the degree of alienation Duras experienced in this domain. Religion was simply not present in her life. She describes no overtly traumatizing experiences relating to religion, but it is not clear to what degree the lack of religion itself created trauma. I hesitantly classify this alienation as severe due to the damaging effects of the supplement she chose. She was aware that a need for spirituality was not being met in her life, and she openly

acknowledged that alcohol had filled the void. Since the alcoholism announced itself on her features long before the addiction came, one might even conclude that she had been created in this god's image:

Maintenant je vois que très jeune, à dix-huit ans, à quinze ans, j'ai eu ce visage prémonitoire de celui que j'ai attrapé ensuite avec l'alcool dans l'âge moyen de ma vie. L'alcool a rempli la fonction que Dieu n'a pas eue, il a eu aussi celle de me tuer, de tuer. Ce visage de l'alcool m'est venu avant l'alcool. L'alcool est venu le confirmer. J'avais en moi la place de ça, je l'ai su comme les autres, mais curieusement, avant l'heure. De même que j'avais en moi la place du désir (Duras 1981, 15).

The emotional crisis which often precedes spiritual growth may have been hindered in Marguerite due to dissociative defenses which enabled her short-term survival but jeopardized her long-term psychological well-being. Alcohol anesthetized a great deal of her pain, thus preventing her from attaining the spiritual release she might have found by journeying through it. She moves between the first and third person throughout *L'amant*, as if to distance herself periodically from the more intense traumatic experiences she endured. This is a denial of her wholeness, an evisceration of the self, which she had to anesthetize artificially. She shuts out her feelings, effectively minimizing the emotional release of writing an introspective autobiography.

Although she demonstrates the ability to partially insulate herself from her own pain, she is less capable of shutting out the pain of others, particularly her brother Paulo, and to a lesser extent, her lover. Although the abuses she endured at the hands of her mother and oldest brother are horrific, they are described with dream-like detachment, only occasionally coming into sharp focus, and the reader does not feel Marguerite's suffering as keenly as, for example, Paulo's when he was being bullied at the dinner table by his brother Pierre. In fact, one of the few times she uses religious language is when she refers to Paulo as a martyr, and states that it was Pierre who killed him. Objectively, Paulo died of pneumonia, but that does not render Marguerite's accusation against Pierre false, when one views her writing through a poetic lens.

In his book *Structure du langage poétique*, Jean Cohen describes the difference between objectivity and subjectivity as follows: “Le code du langage ordinaire s’appuie sur l’expérience externe. Le code du langage poétique se fonde, au contraire, sur l’expérience interne” (Cohen 1966, 212). Objectivity is therefore more concerned with the observer than the observed, and is exemplified by Duras’ tendency to view her own suffering from a vantage point outside herself. Writers must necessarily create some distance between themselves and their work in order to connect with the reader. Writers of autofiction must find the appropriate balance between denotation and connotation, and between affective and emotive language in order to convey their personal experiences with at least some factual accuracy, while producing the desired emotion in the reader. This friction between internal and external emotions resolves itself differently for each author, but Cohen makes the following generalization:

Alors que l’émotion réelle est vécue par le moi comme un de ses états intérieur, l’émotion poétique, elle, est portée au compte de l’objet. La tristesse réelle est éprouvée par le sujet sur le mode du “je suis” comme une modification de lui-même dont le monde reste la cause extérieure. La tristesse poétique, au contraire, est saisie comme une qualité du monde (Cohen 1966, 206).

During peak religious experiences, the boundaries between objectivity and subjectivity dissolve. Researchers studying the brain activity of Buddhist monks and Christians engaging in deep meditation have noted enhanced activity in the frontal cortex, particularly in the pineal gland, and a greater degree of synchronization between the left and right hemispheres. The research subjects described perceiving dissolution between the boundaries of the physical self and their surroundings, resulting in feelings of bliss (Vedantam 2001). However, we must reconcile this with Kristeva’s theory of abjection, which was discussed in Chapter 4, and I believe free will is at the core of this paradox. In her essay “Pouvoirs de l’horreur”, Kristeva expounds upon the profoundly negative experience of abjection as a result of boundary breaches perceived between the self and others. Abjection might be considered a violation, whereas a voluntarily sought-after spiritual experience might be described as communion. Being forced to

conform to the religious traditions of another culture might lead to feelings of abjection, whereas those who participate freely are more likely to have a positive experience. If intense feelings of abjection are present due to psychological trauma, the individual may be too guarded to achieve the mental states associated with blissful religious experience. However, in some individuals, it may simply be a matter of innate brain chemistry or life circumstances.

For many people, the need for a spiritual practice can fluctuate throughout one's lifetime. Gabrielle Roy experienced a fervent religious feeling as a child, which faded as she got older. Shortly before her departure for Europe, her devoutly Catholic mother asked if she would attend mass with her:

Depuis quelques années, sans qu'il en soit jamais ouvertement question entre nous, je m'étais peu à peu éloignée de la pratique religieuse, en révolte, à la fin, contre un esprit qui voyait le mal partout, réclamait pour lui seul la possession de la vérité et nous eût tenus à l'écart, s'il l'avait pu, de tout échange avec la généreuse disparité humaine (Roy 1984, 238).

Gabrielle agreed to attend the mass, but only out of love and respect for her mother; in her words, she was borrowing from her mother's faith, which was sufficient for both of them. One of her sisters, Bernadette, was a nun who spent most of her life in an austere convent. Gabrielle always admired Bernadette, but did not envy her. The two women exchanged letters for several years which increased in frequency in the weeks prior to Bernadette's death. Some of these letters were published in a collection titled *Ma chère petite sœur: lettres à Bernadette, 1943-1970*. These letters suggest a gradual rapprochement between Gabrielle and her Catholic roots. Toward the end of Bernadette's illness, Gabrielle attended mass every day to pray for her sister. Sitting at Bernadette's bedside shortly before her death, Gabrielle listened as her sister, for the first and only time, expressed regret over the ascetic life she had led.

Like most people who had a Catholic upbringing, Gabrielle Roy was no stranger to guilt. She tried to comfort Bernadette in her final days with colorful descriptions of her life's

travels, but she was never able to shake her sorrow over the unrequited dreams of her parents and siblings. Overall, Roy's alienation in the domain of religion could be categorized as mild and normative. The love and respect between Gabrielle and her family was not conditional upon her continued participation in Catholic ceremonies. This may be why she was willing to occasionally attend mass with her family during her years as a lapsed Catholic, and also why she was able to return to Catholicism later without much ado.

Whereas Gabrielle Roy experienced Catholicism as the predominant spiritual tradition in her life, for Calixthe Beyala, Catholicism was juxtaposed against the animistic beliefs promoted by her grandmother, who worked as a shaman. Beyala made little mention of the Catholic religion in *La petite fille du réverbère*, although she surely had exposure to it at school, and later in France. Nevertheless, her book is filled with images of spirituality and magic in the person of Beyala's grandmother. Her grandmother had an expansive knowledge of herbal medicine and enough showmanship to compensate for any gap in her healing abilities. On one occasion she convinced a man who owed her money that she had "stolen his sex" (Beyala 1998, 67). This event served only to increase her status in the community because it occurred in public and the man made such a fuss that a crowd gathered around.

As a spiritual leader in a community which believed her to be a witch possessing special powers, Beyala's grandmother was empowered in ways few European women could comprehend. Yet, she had conflicting desires for her granddaughter. She wanted her to excel in school, but also encouraged her to maintain their cultural traditions which were slipping away, and to this end she trained Beyala as an herbal healer. During puberty Beyala was subjected to a harrowing initiation process which involved the use of hallucinogenic plants. Beyala was a fearful and reluctant participant in this ceremony:

Je n'étais pas prête à entrer dans cet univers où Grand-mère voyait des choses qui marchaient à travers les collines et volaient dans les airs alors que les autres

ne les voyaient pas. Je ne voulais pas vivre dans l'esprit et m'emparer des secrets du monde (Beyala 1998, 165).

Her grandmother was unyielding, insisting that she had seen possibilities in Beyala from the time she was born and that she intended to teach her everything she knew. She acknowledged that this experience would come with suffering and was dangerous: “Ça serait tellement plus simple si c'était comme chez les chrétiens!” (Beyala 1998, 165). She never made it clear what aspect of Christianity seemed easier to her, but it might be inferred that she meant the neatly packaged belief system and vicarious system of redemption. As a shaman, she was required to seek her own truth, atone for her own failings, and find the answers to her questions without the benefit of an enlightened priest class, or an infallible book. Beyala does not write specifically about her spirituality following this rite of passage, but she seems more mature from this point forward, as if she had taken a greater responsibility for her life. Now a grandmother herself, she seems dedicated to creating a better world for future generations. Her devotion to political activism and advocacy work on behalf of women and people of color are pursued with an almost religious zeal, possibly leaving little time or energy for more conventional religious activity.

To those who are struggling with faith, it may seem that those who profess to have it never doubt themselves or their god. In truth, many individuals get stuck in the fairy-tale stage of religious consciousness, too afraid or too intellectually lazy to question what they have always been told. They may seek validation by attempting to convince others to go along with established traditions. These conversion attempts could come in the form of a friendly knock at the door or something much more heavy-handed, as we will explore in the following section.

5.3 Conversion or coercion?

Religion has been used throughout history to justify acts of violence on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic scale. Although most religions claim to promote peace, it is the source of much conflict throughout the world. Tension between Catholics and

Protestants in Northern Ireland has erupted into periodic violence for centuries. Conflicts between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East have been going on for over a millennium. Atheists are persecuted by religious people in many parts of the world, while Tibetan Buddhists are persecuted by the atheist Chinese regime. The tribal mentality which dates back to the Old Testament is still going strong. The wars of religious conquest depicted in the Christian Bible seem to have formed a template for human history, as political and religious groups continue to act out their aggressions against other factions of humanity.

On a smaller scale, religion is used to control the behavior of individuals, either with threats of punishment, banishment from the religious community, or other types of shaming. The local religious community is an institution which censures behavior deemed unacceptable or inappropriate. Forgiveness of sins may be promised, but religious leaders are sometimes slow to forget. Eve's supposed transgression in the Garden of Eden is still used as an excuse to subjugate women. Original sin in Christianity is presented as a "stain" upon the soul, which can only be removed with prescribed rituals. The theme of sin and punishment is not unique to Christianity. The Hindu religion is rich with vivid symbolism. It is the faith which inspired Gandhi to lead his nation in a bloodless revolution. Nevertheless, its caste system hinders social mobility and instills members of lower castes with the belief that they bear guilt for sins committed in other lives which they cannot remember. For many people, regardless of their religious background, the belief in the sin is stronger than the belief in the ritual, which results in excessive fear. Fear can become so deeply embedded in a culture that people are no longer aware of it on a conscious level nor do they recognize how easily fear can transform into hatred.

Throughout the French occupation, Algeria was beset with bitter conflicts between French Catholic and Arab Islamic interests. Attempts were made to convert the local Arab population to Christianity, but Islam was already firmly entrenched, and the apartheid-style discrimination was counterproductive to missionary efforts. As of this writing, about 99 percent of Algerians are Sunni Muslims, with Christians, Jews, and

Ibadi Muslims making up the other one percent (US Department of State 2013). The epic failure of these conversion efforts might best be summarized by a brief scene from the 1990 French film *Outremer* (1). The film depicts the lives of three pied-noir sisters living in Algeria during the years leading up to the War for Algerian Independence. In this scene, one of the sisters, Zon, quizzes her young daughter about what she has learned in church. The child replies “Nous sommes tous frères dans Jésus-Christ.” She then asks her mother “Est-ce que les Arabes sont aussi nos frères?” Without hesitation, Zon replies “Non” but quickly corrects herself and says “Oui, mais seulement dans Jésus-Christ” (*Outremer* 1990).

With conversion efforts in Algeria unsuccessful, the French attempted to restrict the free practice of Islam. Much of this conflict focalized around the issue of the Islamic veil. The French military tried to suppress the use of the veil, requiring Arab women to remove it for identification photographs. The fact that women’s clothing was at the center of an argument which was largely between two groups of men illustrates the dilemma many women face. Many in the non-Muslim world consider the veil a symbol of patriarchal dominance over women, and in many cases it is. However, for a large number of Algerian women, the veil came to be a symbol of Algerian independence. It is evident in Djébar’s writings that she struggled between a desire for freedom from subjugation to the patriarchal system and a longing for Algerian independence. The emphasis on the veil illustrates how, for Algerian women, it became impossible to pursue both goals simultaneously.

This dilemma can be observed in Assia’s own life, as she was going through adolescence. Despite her unwavering loyalty to her Islamic faith, she hesitated to don the veil when the other girls her age did. Her mother deflected the comments of inquisitive neighbors by saying “Elle lit” (Djébar 1985, 203). Assia’s experiences as one of the few Arab girls in a French school will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but regarding the veil, she found herself in a double bind. The veil would have been forbidden at the French school she attended, but even if it were not, she would have been ostracized if her classmates had seen her wearing it. Her female cousins

and the other young Arab girls in her neighborhood were already wearing veils and in some cases getting married, and her non-conformity left her a target for criticism. This alienation is severe and non-normative. She seemed to consider this an acceptable sacrifice, and expressed a strong fear of being forced into an arranged marriage by her parents. Although Assia's parents were comparatively open-minded, often testing the boundaries of conventional Muslim decorum, they never deviated from protocol enough to create a scandal, and Assia was aware that the restrictions on her freedom throughout her life might exceed those of her French classmates.

It is clear that many of the trappings of Islamic culture did not sit well with Djébar. Nevertheless, her ability to separate the positive aspects of her faith from its authoritarian, patriarchal aspects allowed her to cultivate a rich spiritual life. She describes her first stirrings of religious feeling, inspired by the annual reading of the "complainte d'Abraham":

Suspendue au drame biblique qui commençait, je ne sais pourquoi ce chant me plongeait dans une émotion si riche: la progression du récit à la fin miraculeuse, chaque personnage dont la parole rendait la présence immédiate, le poids de la fatalité et de son horreur qui pesait sur Abraham, contraint de voiler sa peine.
(Djébar 1985, 193).

The personal sacrifice described in the story of Abraham touched her deeply, and she obviously felt a personal affinity with his need to *veil* his pain. Few religious traditions have ever succeeded in embracing complete gender and ethnic equality, but individuals from marginalized groups are often successful at finding comfort in religious teachings. Separating spiritual truth from the examples of flawed human proselytizers is a necessary task for anyone desiring an authentic spiritual experience.

As difficult as this task can be when dealing with the religious traditions of one's own culture, it is often impossible for people confronted with a belief system which seems completely foreign to their own. Even the most tolerant of individuals is not immune to feelings of cultural and moral superiority when it comes to religion. Many people who

are open-minded about eating food from another country or watching a foreign film recoil at the idea of attending a worship service with people of another faith. From Atheists to Catholics, Muslims to Wiccans, smugness and religious belief (or unbelief) frequently go hand in hand. Some religious groups isolate themselves out of fear of intellectual contamination. For others, the belief that one has superior knowledge is accompanied by belief in a responsibility to share this knowledge with those who don't have it.

Missionaries have been vilified by many post-colonial critics who describe them as "colonialism's agent, scribe, and moral alibi" (Comaroff et al 1991, 1:88). Missionaries, particularly those sent by the Catholic Church, have had such a profound impact on world events that it is difficult to imagine how history might have unfolded without their influence. The human tendency to anthropomorphize God makes it difficult to separate the message from the messenger. Humans create God in their own image, or to be more precise, in the image of those with the greatest degree of political power. For instance, in religious icons Jesus Christ is usually depicted with European features rather than the Middle Eastern features he must certainly have had, and this is the image presented to new converts of all races and ethnicities.

Even among members of the culturally dominant society, there are those who are victimized. A patriarchal governmental system promotes a patriarchal religion, which discourages female independence. Yet a patriarchal system can even be detrimental to the majority of males. In Islamic culture, men of high social status and wealth are able to take as many as four wives. This system benefits a few high-status men in the community, but creates a lack of eligible women for men of more modest means. Young men who are unable to marry are often kept busy with military service, but military activities tend to promote the interests of those with political and economic power, not the community as a whole.

It is common for religion to be used as a justification for maintaining a subordinate class of people, with the most frequently excluded group being women. Patriarchy, which is firmly entrenched in the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam,

is characterized by an absolute control over women's sexuality. In some societies this control takes the form of virginity testing, in which a young bride is physically examined prior to the marriage and the sheets are checked after the wedding night. It is not uncommon for men to establish dominance over other men by seducing or even raping the wives, daughters, or sisters of their enemies. The victims are considered permanently defiled and any children born from such encounters are outcasts. The only way to prevent such contamination is to imprison women under the watchful eye of their male guardians. In a matrilineal society there would be no "illegitimate" children because it is a simple matter to determine the identity of a child's biological mother. Establishing paternity is more difficult, but for a patriarchal society to function effectively, a man must be absolutely certain who his children are in order to pass property down to his sons. For this reason, some patriarchal systems allow a man to have more than one wife, but women are never permitted to have more than one husband.

Mariama Bâ's experience with polygamy illustrates the often invisible suffering of women living in patriarchal societies. Religion is Bâ's primary domain of alienation. This alienation is extreme, but normative to her culture. A less educated woman might have been less aware of the indignities of her situation, but Mariama was the intellectual equal of any man in her community. She understood the inferior status assigned to her because of her gender, but she could do nothing to change it. In *Une si longue lettre*, she describes Ramatoulaye's ordeal on the day she found out that her husband was marrying Binetou, a friend of their daughter. It started with a knock at the door. Mawdo, the former husband of her friend Aïssatou was there with her husband's brother Tamsir, and the local Imam. They announced that they had just come from a wedding, specifically the wedding of her husband, Modou Fall:

Les épines ainsi ôtées du chemin par l'Imam, Tamsir osa: "Modou te remercie. Il dit que la fatalité décide des êtres et des choses: Dieu lui a destiné une deuxième femme, il n'y peut rien. Il te félicite pour votre quart de siècle de mariage où tu lui as donné tous les bonheurs qu'une femme doit à son mari" (Bâ 1979, 57).

Modou Fall was able to take a second wife and claim that it was God's will with the full support of the local spiritual leader. He was, therefore, able to separate himself from the responsibility for the suffering his actions caused. The Imam's presence legitimized Modou Fall's behavior, and provided a subtle reminder to Ramatoulaye of what was expected from her in response to the news. Her suffering was not acknowledged, and she was deprived of the comfort she may have received from her own Muslim faith.

When those in power claim to have a superior knowledge of God's will, it usually follows that God's will aligns perfectly with their personal agenda. Although the Quran allows a man to have up to four wives, it also obliges him to provide for all of them and to treat them equally. Modou Fall abandoned Ramatoulaye and the children they had had together after he married Binetou. Ramatoulaye was left to emotionally and financially support their twelve children on her own. Modou Fall selected which passages of the Quran he would follow and which he would ignore. In a patriarchal society, this type of hypocrisy is tolerated in men, but not women. This truth was not lost on Ramatoulaye. When Tamsir showed up on her doorstep exactly forty days after the death of his brother with a self-serving proposal of marriage and the Imam by his side, she condemned him for disrespecting his brother's memory. She accused him of having planned to propose to her since the day of his brother's death. She criticized his treatment of the three wives he already had, knowing that he was only interested in her for the income she could provide:

Ma voix connaît trente années de silence, trente années de brimades. Elle éclate, violente, tantôt sarcastique, tantôt méprisante.... "Tu oublies que j'ai un cœur, une raison, que je ne suis pas un objet que l'on se passe de main en main. Tu ignores ce que se marier signifie pour moi: c'est un acte de foi et d'amour, un don total de soi à l'être que l'on a choisi et qui vous a choisi" (J'insistais sur le mot choisi.) (Bâ 1979, 85).

Bâ's use of parentheses in this passage draws further attention to the word "choisi". It was a word and an idea which she cherished, and there is a feeling of triumph in this passage as she refuses to be intimidated by patriarchal authority and speaks up for

herself. Yet Tamsir had the Imam on his side, and the Imam claimed to speak for Allah Himself: "l'Imam prenait Dieu à témoin: --Quelles paroles profanes et dans des habits de deuil!" (Bâ 1979, 86). Ramatoulaye's truth was treated as blasphemy, while Tamsir's duplicity was considered honorable. The Imam's support of the actions of Modou Fall, Tamsir, and other men like them set a tone of misogyny which affected the entire community.

Lack of integrity among religious leaders can create feelings of alienation among followers and can even cause some religious adherents to lose faith, whereas the presence of ethical religious leaders fosters spiritual growth in the community through positive mentorship. This might explain why Ken Bugul was less critical of the institution of polygamy than Mariama Bâ, and even a willing participant in it. Ken's experiences with the Serigne were positive and she describes him as a kind, wise, and ethical man. People traveled great distances to consult with them about their personal problems. Nevertheless, she was aware that many of his brides came to him reluctantly as a result of arranged marriages and she used her writing to give voice to one such woman. In her novel *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*, Bugul tells the story of Rama, one of the Serigne's younger wives who was unfaithful to him and ultimately ran away. Although Rama's departure created quite a stir in the community and humiliated her family who had given her to the Serigne as a gift, the Serigne, himself, said nothing in judgment against her. Ken never made the claim that polygamy was an ideal arrangement, but she did remark that the women in the Serigne's compound were able to live together in relative harmony without the jealousies inherent in European-style relationships in which monogamy is promised but often not delivered.

It may be that the source of Mariama Bâ's suffering is the intermingling of religious and cultural traditions, which resulted in her having the worst of both worlds. By sacrificing the approval of her family to marry a man she truly loved, she burned a bridge which she could not rebuild. She did this in conformity with the European ideologies she had encountered through her educational experiences; ideologies in which she truly believed. She thought that Modou Fall shared those beliefs, and perhaps he did in his

youth. Modou Fall was free to support Ramatoulaye's desire for a more egalitarian relationship when it benefited him, but he was also able to invoke his patriarchal male privilege when a mid-life crisis tempted him to do so.

Just as there are gender inequalities in religious communities, there are also economic inequalities in many congregations throughout the world, as major donors are granted special privileges. Although Kim Lefèvre had had exposure to Catholicism since she entered the orphanage at the age of six, her official conversion was arranged during her adolescence in order to secure a sponsor to help pay for her educational expenses. The process of interviewing with Madame N was degrading, and she was painfully self-conscious at her first communion. She had no family members in attendance and Madame N arrived late, with an obligatory gift which was so thoughtless and impersonal that Kim became upset and could not bring herself to accept it. This experience of alienation is moderate, especially compared to the other events in Kim's life. However, the unusual circumstances surrounding her conversion are non-normative. Although Kim expresses gratitude for the financial assistance she received from her godmother Madame N, it obviously troubled her that her benefactress had no interest in making anything other than a financial contribution to her upbringing:

J'imaginai son ennui de devoir se déranger pour moi, une corvée parmi d'autres que lui imposaient ses bonnes œuvres. Combien d'œuvres de charité avait-elle entreprises pour acheter son paradis? Curieuse religion. "Et comment font les pauvres pour aller au ciel?" me dis-je (Lefèvre 1989, 296).

Despite the difficulties of her introduction to the Catholic faith, Kim came to embrace it. It is through the voice of Malintzin-Marina, the protagonist of her novel *Moi, Marina la Malinche* that this is best revealed. It is not difficult to see why Kim would identify with the historical figure of Doña Marina enough to write her story. As mistress and interpreter for Hernán Cortés, she finds herself caught between two worlds. She witnesses first-hand the destruction of the Aztec Empire by Spanish invaders, and struggles to reconcile her newly found Christian faith with the suffering caused by those who transmitted its message:

De nouveau elle regarde le désastre de Mexico. Elle ne parvient pas à y croire. Elle reste là, sur le chemin, exclue de la société des vaincus qui se bousculent sur la chaussée; étrangère aux vainqueurs qui banquettent dans leurs vomissures et leurs excréments. Elle ne participe ni à la vie des uns, ni à celle des autres. La Providence a voulu qu'elle ne soit de nulle part: trop Indienne quand elle se trouve parmi les Espagnols, trop chrétienne au regard des gens de sa race.

Elle souhaite en finir, détruire en elle le souvenir des horreurs qui hantent son esprit. Du fond de sa détresse elle implore, non pas le Christ triomphant, mais le Christ crucifié, celui qu'on torture et qui est mort sur la croix (Lefèvre 1994, 288-289).

This passage illustrates how converts brought into the faith through the work of missionaries have a different spiritual experience than those who are born into it (2). For the newly converted, this is often a violent social transition. Conflict among the indigenous people is inevitable as some people assimilate the new religious traditions more quickly than others. Even those who do not accept the new religion's teachings are affected by them, as exemplified by the changing dynamic in Lefèvre's family. As the only devoutly Catholic member of her family, religion became yet another thing which set Kim apart from everyone else. Religion changed the way she perceived her parents. Her mother suddenly seemed ignorant and superstitious, and she considered her step-father a hypocrite due to his sudden interest in acquiring Catholicism in addition to Buddhism in order to improve his business connections. Despite these difficulties, converting to Catholicism helped Kim to find a path of her own, as she already understood that following in the footsteps of other women in her family would lead to disaster.

Due to her biracial status, Kim was already accustomed to the racial animosity directed at her by members of her community. The Catholic Church, as well as the Catholic schools she attended, may have offered a more welcoming environment than what she was accustomed to. However, many people find that racial inequalities are more

pronounced in religious settings than in any other. American civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. often commented that Sunday morning was the most segregated hour of the week, and current research shows that little has changed since he made that statement in 1963 (Grossman 2015). In some communities members of different races worship in separate churches, but segregation can also occur within the church walls, as people choose not to interact with congregants of a different race or social class. The privileged group may engage in acts of conspicuous consumption, using this opportunity to establish territorial dominance. Maryse Condé commented that she saw more “blanc-pays” in church than anywhere else:

Des blancs-pays dans le banc devant nous, dans le banc derrière nous. Sortis des quatre coins de La Pointe. Des hommes, des femmes, des enfants. Des vieux, des jeunes, des bébés dans les bras. On n'en voyait jamais autant qu'à la grand-messe. À croire que la cathédrale était leur bien. Que le Bon Dieu était leur proche parent (Condé 1999, 90).

Maryse's childhood assessment of church was typical. She disliked uncomfortable clothes and having to sit still for long periods of time. During a particular mass when her mind began to wander, she noticed one of the Caucasian women sitting in a nearby pew. Maryse thought this was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. When she mentioned it to her mother, she was chastised for admiring the beauty of someone from another race. Her mother considered this a betrayal: “Comment mon idéal de beauté pouvait-il être une femme blanche? N'existait-il pas des personnes de ma couleur qui méritaient cette distinction? Passe encore si j'avais choisi une mulâtresse, une capresse, une koolie même!” (Condé 1999, 93)

From then on, when Maryse went to church, she did not turn her head in this woman's direction: “J'avais compris que sa beauté m'était interdite” (Condé 1999, 94). Despite having been bullied by a white girl, Maryse describes having friendships with white children at school; friendships which dissolved immediately when they set foot outside the school grounds. If she saw a white friend on the street on Sunday on the way to church, it did not occur to her to acknowledge this friend with a greeting. This is

especially ironic because the original meaning of the word “catholic” is universal, relating to all people, inclusive (Random House 2014, 181). The very institution which professes to promote equality and inclusion among all people lags behind other societal institutions such as schools in promoting racial equality. Some researchers have even concluded that religion predisposes people to be more racist than those who are not religious. A meta-analytical study published in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* found that religious agnostics were the only racially tolerant people. Although humanitarian values are promoted by most religions, in practice, people rarely look outside their own cultural group to promote these values (Hall et al 2010).

Condé’s experiences were mildly alienating, but normative to her culture. She treats the issue of religious friction between blacks and whites in her novel *Moi Tituba, sorcière*. The protagonist is a slave from the Caribbean accused of witchcraft in colonial New England. Although members of her family chose to segregate themselves from people of other races, Maryse has discarded this philosophy. Her writing encourages inter-racial dialogue, and her lengthy career as a university professor has given her the opportunity to continue this dialogue with the next generation.

5.4 Conclusions

Archeological evidence suggests that religious practice has been a part of the human experience since before recorded history. Researchers from various fields have attempted to explain this innate human tendency, but each discovery leads to further questions, and this seems to be the very nature of the spiritual quest. Direct religious experiences are almost always positive. Children often have such experiences when they are out in nature or engaged in imaginative play, and feel an unexpected sensation of wonder, or expansion of self. Researchers have documented changes in the brain activity of individuals engaged in meditation, which suggest that subjective religious experience can produce measurable changes in brain chemistry. However, these types of peak religious experiences are often completely divorced from formal religious ceremony, and this situation can create confusion and turmoil in the minds of spiritual seekers.

In order for a spiritual practice to be sincere and positive, the individual must be free to accept or reject it based on his or her own personal experiences and intuition. Religion which is forced upon an individual or coerced with threats of eternal suffering cannot be practiced joyfully and sincerely, and negates the concept of free will. Few children experience true freedom of thought in matters of religion and must either accept what they have been taught without question or go through the later process of scrutinizing the dogmas which were imposed upon them during childhood. Religious experiences filtered through the medium of other people create occasion for alienation, as the individual's perception may differ from the expectations established by others. Children often go through the motions of religious ceremonies in order to please the adults around them without feeling a direct connection to divinity. The censure for openly complaining about some of the less appealing aspects of organized religion may be so great that children suppress any negative statements or even thoughts, thus creating an outward demeanor of compliance which camouflages their inner confusion and feelings of inadequacy. These feelings of inadequacy can lead to a child accepting her status as a sinner and engaging in self-destructive behavior, as was the case with Marie Cardinal.

Marie's efforts to contain the bad or sinful aspects of herself created a fragmentation of her internal Self, which could only be integrated with years of psychotherapy. Genuine spiritual growth cannot be achieved by simply sitting quietly through a church service. True spiritual growth requires a journey through fear, and suffering is an inevitable part of this process. Although Marie looked outside the Church when she was ready to seek healing, her experience with psychotherapy might be likened to a more extensive version of the Catholic confessional, in which she examined and accepted each aspect of her painful past before re-integrating it with her Self.

Despite the shortcomings inherent to organized religion, there seems to be an innate need to make a spiritual connection, whether it comes from genetic predisposition, psychological complexes, social and economic factors or a combination of these. For those who do not feel a strong sense of religious yearning, there is almost always a supplement to take its place. For Marguerite Duras, this supplement was alcohol, but

the supplement is not always or necessarily an addictive substance or some other negative habit. It is common during the final years of life to embrace spirituality to a greater degree than during youth, and it is interesting to note that Marguerite Duras gave up alcohol at the age of 68 at the encouragement of her companion Yann Andrea. The treatment nearly killed her, but she emerged from it sober, and continued writing almost until her death. It is unclear whether the absence of alcohol made room in her life for a genuine spiritual connection. If it did, she did not say so, and it may be that she traded her addiction for an even greater degree of dissociation. In a four-hour video interview conducted in 1988, she appeared disoriented, often gazing wordlessly into the camera, or making incomprehensible statements. Although sobriety gave her a few extra years, there is no way of knowing whether she was able to use this time to make peace with a life fraught with hardship and loss.

Calixthe Beyala also demonstrates a lack of interest in formal religion, and in her case political and social activism seem to serve as a positive supplement to participation in traditional religious activity. This is not an easy path, and Beyala has frequently found herself at the center of controversy due to her determination to speak her truth. She seems committed to following her conscience rather than looking outside herself for guidance, and one might conclude that she has fulfilled the high expectations her grandmother set for her.

For Ken Bugul, Catholicism was just one component of an entire culture she found alienating. The animistic beliefs she grew up with were considered primitive in Europe. Spirituality was almost completely divorced from the natural world and Ken, feeling that she was living in a soulless environment, lost her sense of purpose. This alienation is severe and non-normative. Her time away from home ultimately allowed her to experience a greater appreciation for her own culture when she returned to Senegal, albeit as a prodigal daughter. Her marriage to the Serigne constituted a spiritual rebirth, and although feminists have criticized her for taking part in a polygamous relationship, she was able to make this choice of her own free will, a circumstance which she found empowering.

For Mariama Bâ, polygamy was not a choice, but a mandate forced upon her by her husband with the approval of the local religious authorities. Her Muslim faith could offer little solace because it was the Muslim religion which allowed her to be placed in such a situation. Ramatoulaye consoled herself by writing about her anguish to her friend Aïssatou. Movies, music and books were a comfort, but religion was not. Even so, she expresses compassion for humanity, which is the core of true spirituality. She never lost her faith in God, even though she felt abandoned by the local religious community. Although Mariama divorced her husband, Ramatoulaye, the protagonist of *Une si longue lettre*, did not, and Bâ devotes much of her writing to the importance of maintaining family ties despite the shortcomings of its various members.

The connection between family and religious alienation is strong, particularly when an individual deviates from the religious traditions followed by other family members. If the religious defector is still loved and accepted by other family members, feelings of alienation are minimized. Gabrielle Roy exhibits a sensitivity and depth of emotion which might be characterized as spirituality although for many years she lost interest in the formal Catholic religion of her upbringing. She expressed no hostility to Catholicism, even though she associated it with her family's suffering and lack of social mobility. Although in many families this lack of religious practice might create conflict among family members, it seems that Gabrielle's more pious relatives accepted her lack of faith, while she maintained a respectful attitude toward their beliefs. It was likely her close relationship with her devout sister Bernadette which contributed to her renewed interest in the Catholic faith later in life.

There are many Christian teachings which create cognitive dissonance in spiritual seekers. Children are given mixed messages regarding forgiveness from sins, and eternal punishment. Children internalize the image of the angry man in the sky who judges every sinful thought, word or deed and begin to judge their own thoughts, words and deeds in the harshest way possible. The fear created by religion provides a powerful tool for social control which may be used deliberately to promote a political agenda, or simply out of convention. Once an individual has internalized the belief in a

judgmental God who can read minds and administer eternal punishment, the individual may begin to censor his or her own thoughts and behavior to such a degree that external supervision is no longer needed. It is during this process of indoctrination, such as after the installation of missionary settlements that conflicts can arise, as members of the population undergoing conversion display varying degrees of acceptance of the newly introduced dogmas. This can erupt in power struggles over external displays of compliance such as the conflicts which occurred over the Islamic veil in French-occupied Algeria.

This particular power struggle placed women at the center of a conflict between two patriarchal religious traditions, both of which marginalized their status, albeit in different ways. Assia Djebar devoted much of her writing to the issue of the veil. At times she describes it as a prison, but she also compares the opening through which veiled women view their surroundings as a camera lens, through which the feminist gaze can take in the world. Djebar seeks to separate the human rights issue of patriarchal abuse from the religion of Islam. Her ability to do this in her personal life has allowed her to take comfort in her religion, as well as to write from a perspective which is feminist without being anti-male.

Djebar's writing weaves her personal history with the history of her people, both collectively and individually. This provides a more "poetic" method of discourse described by Jean Cohen, which allows for a greater degree of emotional truth. Kim Lefèvre and Maryse Condé both chose to explore their feelings about race and religion by writing works of historical fiction. The author's experience is always present, even in works of fiction, and the *moi* in the title of both novels is a tell-tale sign of the religious alienation experienced by Lefèvre and Condé. For all three women, religion and racial violence and hatred are intertwined. Kim Lefèvre took comfort in the image of the crucified Christ because she could identify with his suffering. Maryse Condé, through her writing, has honored her familial and racial heritage, while developing a positive rapport with other cultures. Condé, who was once reprimanded for admiring the beauty of a white person in church, is now married to a Caucasian man named Richard

Philcox. It was Philcox who translated *Moi, Tituba, sorcière*, along with several of her other novels, into English.

Racial segregation is still more pronounced in religious institutions than elsewhere, but perhaps this is to be expected, since religious institutions tend to place an emphasis on the past through adherence to traditions which are often thousands of years old. Social change tends to come about more quickly in educational institutions, but this change comes with its own form of suffering and alienation, which will be the focus of the following chapter.

Notes

- (1) Brigitte Roüan directed and co-wrote this film, and also played the role of the middle sister, Malène. The film is divided into three parts as it goes through the same time period portraying the lives of each of the three women. Roüan did not shy away from depicting the casual disregard of entitled colonists toward the local population, but also managed to portray the difficulties faced by colonial women in a very human way.
- (2) It is doubtful that the conversion of the Aztecs would have been so successful without the visions Juan Diego claimed to have had of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and the appearance of her image on his tilma. To the Aztecs, it was a message delivered to one of their own people, in their native language, from a dark-skinned virgin, which convinced them more than all of the European missionaries ever could. It is estimated that nine million Aztecs converted to Catholicism in the ten years following the appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe (Johnson 1993).

Chapter 6—Alienation in the domain of education

The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

--Aristotle

6.1 Introduction : The roots of education

Informal education has existed since the dawn of humanity. Stone-age parents surely taught their children how to locate shelter, hunt game, and forage for berries. Children learned by watching their elders perform tasks essential for survival, and these lessons were woven organically through the day, in an educational system that still exists in many indigenous societies. Most historians believe that formal education originated in ancient Egypt sometime between 3000 and 500 B.C.E., a time period which coincides with the introduction of agriculture and diversified labor. The definition of formal education varies from culture to culture, but generally speaking, formal education carries the clout of a recognized institution, be it religious or governmental. Educators are trained according to specific guidelines and are expected to follow an established curriculum. Students who complete the program are awarded a credential which enhances their status within the community.

Informal education is a spontaneous process with lessons inspired by the environment and delivered via mentors working without titles, credentials or perhaps even the realization that they are teachers. A babysitter teaching a child the alphabet, or a grandparent demonstrating how to catch a fish are examples of informal education. Researchers have identified a third category, non-formal education, which lies somewhere between the two. Non-formal education tends to be affiliated with community groups and is generally undertaken for the purpose of personal enrichment (Coombs et al 1973). In practice, the distinctions between these categories are sometimes ambiguous, and there is potential for overlap between the various educational systems, but it is clear that education is most effective if students have access to all three types of instruction. Lack of access to informal and non-formal

educational opportunities is believed to account for much of the achievement gap between students of high and low socioeconomic status.

The first formal educational systems introduced abstract concepts in addition to practical living skills. A new occupation was created, that of teacher, and a designated place for learning was needed; thus the first obstacles to universal education were introduced. The time required for educational pursuits created an additional hindrance for students whose labor was needed to help provide for their families. With the exception of Sparta, no ancient civilizations routinely educated girls (Cordasco 1963, 5).

During the Renaissance, education became more widely promoted, but it was still reserved for boys from bourgeois and noble families. Rabelais' depiction of the education of Gargantua (circa 1535) was influential in establishing the educational ideals of this time period, as was Montaigne's essay *De l'institution des enfants* (1580). Both advocated an educational system tailored to the needs of the individual student, usually by means of a private tutor. In reality, few people could procure an education of this quality, and teacher-oriented instruction in church-affiliated schools was the norm. The church was present in the lives of Europeans of all social classes, and it played an important role in the development of educational systems which benefited both women and men, and even allowed for a small degree of social mobility. It was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that girls in Europe and North America were permitted on a wide scale to attend school, and Elena Cornaro Piscopia was the first woman ever to receive a doctoral degree, which was awarded in 1678 from the University of Padua (Grendler 1989).

Although Piscopia was the exception, girls were slowly acquiring greater access to education, even though the customary curriculum was limited to basic reading and mathematics, and domestic activities such as housekeeping and sewing (Vinovskis 1995). At the collegiate level, isolated schools for women began to appear in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in 1833, Oberlin University was established as the first co-educational university in the United States. Oberlin also broke with tradition by welcoming black students, a move which was unprecedented in a

nation where slavery would remain legal for another 31 years (Fletcher 1943). Despite the successes of female Oberlin graduates, many universities were slow to transition to co-educational status. It was not until 1974 that Oxford University began accepting female applicants. Thus, a long tradition of exclusion exists in formal education, with alienation being the inevitable result.

Education is often touted as a panacea to all of society's ills, especially poverty, which explains the degree of sacrifice many parents are willing to make for their children's education. Nevertheless, despite all of the propaganda touting the benefits of education, it is difficult to find a single educated person who is not haunted by some aspect of his or her educational experience. Whether the traumatic memories were caused by schoolyard bullies, cruel teachers, or the competitive environment in which each student's successes and failures are common knowledge, no one attends school for very long without experiencing some degree of alienation.

Even among the greatest intellectuals of all time, those after whom schools are named, we see myriad complaints about the ordeal of navigating the educational system, such as the comment attributed to Albert Einstein: "the only thing that interferes with my learning is my education". Likewise, Voltaire is attributed with making the claim that he had learned nothing at Jesuit school other than "un peu de latin et des bêtises". If he made that statement at all, we can probably dismiss it as exaggeration, and perhaps even feel a little sympathy for the teachers who had to take on Voltaire. Education provides students with the cognitive skills to engage in such criticism. Nevertheless, it is a common sentiment among students that much of the time they spend inside school walls is wasted, and that they are, on some level, actually being harmed by the experience. Much of this discontent arises from the existence of a rarely-acknowledged parallel curriculum which emphasizes respect for authority and conformity to social conventions. Even students who like learning will dislike school to the extent that they find their authority figures unfair and the social conventions pointless.

The distinction between learning and education is an important one, as many people in the modern era have come to view education solely as a means of procuring a well-

paying job. This seems to be a step backward from Enlightenment-era thinking, and a reversal to a more simplistic philosophy of teaching children where to find the good berries. A large number of schools have come to emphasize STEM curricula at the expense of the humanities, which has caused many to question whether the modern educational system has lost its soul.

We find in the experiences of Maryse Condé, a good illustration of many of the shortcomings of modern education, as well as an example of how a student can still benefit from a flawed educational system. When she first began attending school, she loved it: “Pendant ces premières années, l'école fut pour moi la félicité. Je n'avais pas encore commencé de la haïr, de la considérer comme une prison où l'on est sommé de se conformer à des règles dénuées de signification” (Condé 1999, 31). Maryse was a gifted student, while her best friend Yvelise was the weakest student in the class. Maryse often had to defend her friend from the ridicule of classmates, but on one occasion, it was Maryse herself who contributed to Yvelise's humiliation. If the youthful Maryse had a shortcoming, it was a tendency toward brutal honesty even when there was no malicious intent. When assigned the essay topic of describing her best friend, she wrote that Yvelise was neither pretty nor intelligent. Their teacher read this in front of the entire class, sentenced Maryse to eight hours of detention, and referred her to the principal who contacted the parents of both girls. Despite Yvelise's hurt feelings and the efforts of both sets of parents to keep them apart, Yvelise and Maryse remained lifelong friends.

At this point, Maryse's enthusiasm about school was already waning. Like many students who are intellectually brilliant, she was not considered a “good” student due to her noncompliance with the mandates of the parallel curriculum. As she came to perceive school as a prison, she proved to be a less-than-perfect inmate. She disrupted class, talked back to her teachers and failed to complete her assignments. Her morale was at an all-time low during her high school years, which were spent at the Lycée Fenelon in Paris:

Au lycée, où j'étais plus impertinente que jamais, professeurs et élèves avaient peur de moi. Esseulée, j'affûtais comme des flèches des épigrammes que je lançais à la volée contre tous. Comme je m'apprêtais à passer mon deuxième bac avec un an d'avance, je paraissais l'incarnation de l'intelligence couplée avec la méchanceté (Condé 1999, 132).

Her tendency to lash out at everyone who crossed her path is understandable considering the level of stress she endured at this time of her life. Her brother Sandrino was dying of cancer. Although she had other siblings living in Paris, Sandrino had always been her confidant. Sandrino's death was followed closely by that of Maryse's mother. Maryse had always had a close but tumultuous relationship with her mother, and had missed an opportunity for a final visit when her father refused to pay for her to travel to Guadeloupe during a school break because of her poor grades.

In at least one case, the hostility Maryse felt toward her teachers was mutual. Her French teacher, Mme Épée, was unabashedly racist, but this was a different kind of racism than she had encountered in the past. Maryse had already faced discrimination based solely on her skin color, but in this instance she was told that she was inferior to other blacks. Mme Épée compared Maryse unfavorably to a classmate who was the daughter of a diplomat from Senegal:

À l'évidence, j'incarnais la dégradation de l'Afrique transportée dans le Nouveau Monde. ... Sans le savoir peut-être, elle rejoignait la longue lignée des missionnaires et des administrateurs coloniaux qui ont ridiculisé, vilipendé "l'Africain détribalisé", le "trousse-red nigger" sans vouloir reconnaître que Marguerite, formée dans un pensionnat catholique de Dakar, admise dans un des meilleurs lycées de Paris, n'était pas plus "pure" que moi (Condé 1999, 142).

Several other students were aware of this dynamic and reached out to Maryse in friendship. She was grateful for these gestures, but also understood that, to most of her classmates and their families, she represented a departure from the typical Caribbean Islander. The general assumption was that the majority of people from Guadeloupe

spoke only Creole and worked in the sugar cane fields. By attempting to create conflict between Maryse and Marguerite, Mme Épée was utilizing the same “divide and conquer” tactics that had been employed by colonists for centuries. This type of negative experience with a teacher is common, as we will see when we look at the experiences of some of the other authors.

Maryse had a good rapport with one teacher during high school. Mlle Lemarchand took a special interest in her, and seemed to understand some of the reasons for her defiance. She gave Maryse a special assignment—one of sharing a book with the rest of the class written by an author from her country. At the time, Caribbean literature did not offer many options, but shortly before his death, Sandrino was able to help her by recommending the book *La rue Cases-Nègres* by Joseph Zobel of Martinique. It was this book which led her to Franz Fanon, Léopold Senghor, and other writers of the Négritude movement. For the first time Maryse was able to understand the ancestral history which her parents had tried so hard to hide from her and also from themselves: “D’un seul coup tombait sur mes épaules le poids de l’esclavage, de la Traite, de l’oppression colonial, de l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme, des préjugés de couleur dont personne, à part quelquefois Sandrino, ne me parlait jamais” (Condé 1999, 118).

Mlle Lemarchand, by giving Maryse this assignment, led her to a turning point where she became more politically active and found a community of like-minded friends. At the time, Maryse probably could not have imagined that she would one day be among the most renowned of Caribbean authors, but it is a common theme that something encountered during formal education, often inadvertently, can lead a student down an unexpected intellectual path which later leads to a satisfying career and a new life. After graduating from Fenelon, she entered the Sorbonne “comme un prisonnier touche à la terre de son évasion” (Condé 1999, 147). Overall, Maryse’s alienation could be classified as severe, but normative. Overt racism was an unfortunate part of daily life for black scholars in the 1950s. Her decision to continue her education at the university level after such a difficult passage through high school is an illustration of her natural love of learning, which was too strong to be tarnished by a few bad experiences in the

classroom. The ability to separate the institution of education from one's own personal experience with it is important, given the inevitability of alienation in this domain.

This task can be quite difficult, even for someone as intelligent as Maryse Condé. For a student of average or below average intelligence, the early experiences of failure can create serious life-long deficiencies of self-esteem. It is between the ages of six and twelve that children struggle with Erikson's developmental conflict of Industry Versus Inferiority. Success at this stage of life will help a child establish patterns of success throughout adulthood, whereas disappointment and rejection can lead to lifelong feelings of inferiority. For school children, learning is their job and good grades are a means of demonstrating their worth to themselves and their family members. It is their first opportunity to demonstrate competence outside the family home. If a child reaches the conclusion that she is not good at the first and only job she has ever had, she will be unable to successfully resolve this conflict (Erikson 1959, 87-93). The grading system used almost universally, creates winners and losers, and every student knows which category he or she falls into. Although all of the authors in this study were intellectually bright, their successes came with tremendous sacrifice, and they were not indifferent to the suffering of their less-gifted peers. Calixthe Beyala, Maryse Condé and Ken Bugul, all received numerous awards in school, but were also aware of the inherent injustice of formal educational assessment:

Pourquoi donner des prix à certains et pas à d'autres? Pourquoi essayer de frustrer encore plus ceux qui avaient moins bien réussi? Ceux qui, toute une année scolaire, s'étaient tapé aussi les dix kilomètres, parfois plus, pour se rendre au lycée, sous le vent, sous le soleil? Pourquoi creuser un fossé entre les élèves de même âge, de mêmes aspirations, pourquoi déjà créer les différences qui accoucheront de complexes brisant une vie entière? (Bugul 1982, 166).

Even if a student successfully weathers the conflict of Industry Versus Inferiority and emerges with a strong sense of confidence, she must confront the following stage of Identity Versus Role Confusion, usually during secondary school. Adolescence is a time of pronounced vulnerability, and unscrupulous teachers occasionally prey upon this

weakness by behaving seductively with students. Although we would like to believe that such incidents are rare, the experiences of the authors in this study indicate that it is not. Other types of abuse are common as well. Teachers are as flawed as any other human beings, and those who are prone to biases against members of a particular gender, ethnicity or social class create an alienating learning environment for their students. Although it is easy to vilify teachers who behave unethically or whose students perform poorly, it must also be acknowledged that teaching can be profoundly stressful. Teachers may have little control over the curriculum they are required to use, and are often given inadequate resources to produce the expected results. For teachers and students alike, the educational experience consists largely of being scrutinized by someone else and judged as worthy or unworthy.

This prolonged initiation process, which usually consumes most of childhood and some of young adulthood, completely alters the individual, affecting relationships among family members as well as members of the entire community. For all its faults, there is a general consensus in modern society that one is better off with a formal education than without one. However, universal access to education is still a long way from reality. For those born into the right circumstances, education is taken for granted. Others, including some of the authors in this study, have had to struggle against tremendous obstacles to receive an education. We will examine the issue of unequal access to education in the following section.

6.2 Unequal opportunity

One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world. Education is the only solution.

--Malala Yousefzai (2013)

The belief in education as a positive and constructive institution has become so ubiquitous that few people in the modern era question it. The handful of cultural groups who remain skeptical of higher education, such as the Roma and the Amish, tend to live on the margins of society. Such groups are sometimes classified as backward or

ignorant due to their recalcitrant attitudes toward higher learning, but their wariness can often be justified considering the abuses minority cultures have endured at the hands of educators. In the United States, the practice of forcibly removing Native American children from their families and educating them in boarding schools remains a blot on the nation's history, and a horrific trauma in the minds of tribal elders whose childhoods were marred by these institutions (Bear 2008). Despite the destructive effects of this practice, many people in positions of authority continue to see this misuse of education as a valid method of integrating minority populations. As recently as 2010, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico proposed boarding schools as a means of integrating Romani children into mainstream Slovakian society. The perception of Romani children as inherently inferior is evidenced by the fact that they are routinely sent to schools for the mentally disabled, based solely on their ethnicity (Amnesty International 2010).

The existence of groups who choose not to formally educate their children creates an ethical conundrum for governments who have adopted compulsory education laws. Although children reared in separatist cultures can function well within their own communities without a formal education, those who wish to leave the group face almost insurmountable challenges when they enter mainstream society. These individuals find themselves handicapped by a lack skills necessary to navigate their new world and a lack of support from people who may have preconceived notions about individuals from different backgrounds (Hamilton 2014). For most people, the Amish culture conjures up bucolic images of horses and buggies and hand-made quilts. Likewise, Romani Gypsies have alternately been romanticized in popular culture as carefree travelers and lovers of music or negatively classified as thieves and con artists. These stereotypes are perpetuated by the fact that few people from these groups write books, engage in politics, or otherwise interact with the outside world.

Even so, one person can have a huge impact as a representative of her culture, and it is education which gives this person the ability to tell her story. The personal narrative is a powerful instrument in bridging cultural gaps, but this idea goes much farther than race or nationality. In 1902, the publication of an autobiography written by a 22-year-old

Radcliff student permanently altered the public perception of people with disabilities. *The story of my life* is just one of the many contributions Helen Keller would never have been able to make if she had not had parents with the resources and determination to procure an education for her. The importance of familial support cannot be overemphasized, especially for female students living in patriarchal societies where the education of women is discouraged. Assia Djébar and Mariama Bâ have both done a great deal to change the European and North American perception of Muslim women, but it is doubtful that either of these women could have received the quality of education they did without the support of their fathers. Djébar's father was a teacher who defied tradition by taking his daughter to work with him. Mariama Bâ's maternal grandparents, with whom she lived following the death of her mother, had no intention of educating her beyond primary school. It was the intervention of her father, a civil servant for the French colonial government, which allowed her to continue her studies.

Significant progress has been achieved in the goal of universal education since Djébar and Bâ were in school, and in many countries women have even surpassed men in education, earning the majority of university degrees. However, in some parts of the world, there are still concerted efforts to discourage girls from attending school, as the case of Malala Yousafzai illustrates (1). Malala's ordeal is far from an isolated incident. Many young women put themselves in harm's way every day in order to attend school. In April of 2014, 276 Nigerian school girls from the village of Chibok were kidnapped by the militant Islamic group Boko Haram, a name which means "Western education is forbidden". As of this writing, 219 of the girls remain missing and are presumed to have been forced into sexual slavery, military service, or early marriage. The girls from Chibok represent only a fraction of the women and girls who have been abducted by this group. Despite the commitment of most Nigerians to education, the fear inspired by Boko Haram has had a devastating effect on the community, and represents an ongoing threat to the future of education in Nigeria. Many schools have closed in the wake of Boko Haram attacks, and parents who sincerely want an education for their children continue to keep them home out of fear (York 2015) (2).

Universal education can prove disruptive to established power structures, and those who have benefited from the exclusionary practices of the past may be reluctant to accept change. Historically, formal education has been offered only to wealthy, white males. Being excluded from any of these groups drastically reduced one's chances of receiving an education. Being excluded from all three would make educational attainment almost impossible. This is one reason why the literary contributions of these authors are so significant. Some of them are among the first members of their families to receive an education, and thus to be able to participate in literature and tell their stories. Many have used the opportunity to tell the stories of their ancestors, whose voices were stifled under the weight of history. Assia Djébar took this task very seriously, attempting to serve as a voice for an entire race of disenfranchised women. Djébar walks a fine line, both honoring her cultural traditions, and breaking away from them when she feels that there is room for growth.

Her early childhood memory of walking to school hand in hand with her father must have been a powerful one, as she chose to begin her novel *L'amour, la fantasia* with it. Although it is obvious to the reader that she is describing a memory from her own childhood, this scene is described in the third person, referring to the child as "fillette arabe", as if she had the hope that this scene would become archetypal; a rite of passage that every Arab girl would eventually share. Sending Arab girls to a French school was not exactly forbidden during Assia's youth, but it was certainly frowned upon:

Dès le premier jour où une fillette "sort" pour apprendre l'alphabet, les voisins prennent le regard matois de ceux qui s'apitoient, dix ou quinze ans à l'avance: sur le père audacieux, sur le frère inconséquent. Le malheur fondra immanquablement sur eux. Toute vierge savante saura écrire, écrira à coup sûr "la" lettre. Viendra l'heure pour elle où l'amour qui s'écrit est plus dangereux que l'amour séquesté (Djébar 1985, 11).

The perceived threat to Arab culture posed by women being able to read and write in French is emphasized throughout Djébar's writing. She describes how cloistered

Algerian women would write letters to men they did not know, in response to personal ads from magazines. These letters were always written in French. Although Assia never mentions responding to such ads herself, she did receive a love letter at the age of seventeen. Her father found it and became enraged, ripping it to shreds before she could read it. The taboo against love letters was so strong that Assia's father made himself the subject of neighborhood gossip by writing to his wife when he was absent from home for a few days. The idea of strangers handling this type of intimate correspondence was shameful, and the individuals writing and receiving personal letters had to rely upon the silence and discretion of the local postal worker.

For Assia, the French language represented an expansion of her world, a world that can be extremely small for a veiled Arab woman. Djebbar describes the veil as an instrument for rendering a woman invisible, for keeping her blind. Yet if she knows how to read and write, a window is opened, and her guardian has to be more vigilant. Djebbar's identity is both personal and collective, and she felt that her own liberty benefited other women still imprisoned behind the veil:

Comme si soudain la langue française avait des yeux, et qu'elle me les ait donnés pour voir dans la liberté, comme si la langue française aveuglait les mâles voyeurs de mon clan et qu'à ce prix, je puisse circuler, dégringoler toutes les rues annexer le dehors pour mes compagnes cloîtrées, pour mes aïeules mortes bien avant le tombeau (Djebbar 1985, 204).

Assia alternates between expressions of freedom and vulnerability regarding the French language, as well as the French education system. The "unveiling" was quite literal at times. As an Arab adolescent attending a school with French girls, she always worried that her father would arrive for a visit during PE class when she was wearing shorts. She knew that her classmates would never understand this "honte de femme arabe", and never discussed these feelings with them. This alienation could be classified as moderate, but non-normative. On many occasions, she was able to overcome her shame and revel in her freedom. She reminisces about spending Friday afternoons with a friend who was "demie italienne". They had to take a bus from the school to their

home town, and they took advantage of the brief time before the bus arrived to explore the neighboring community. Assia was aware that few Arab girls were able to walk unescorted and unveiled through the city streets. When one of her cousins showed her a newly built school for Arab girls in her home town, she realized how differently her personality would have developed if her parents had made different decisions regarding her education:

Si j'avais fréquenté l'une d'elles (il aurait suffi que mon enfance se déroulât dans la cité d'origine), j'aurais trouvé naturel ensuite d'enturbanner ma tête, de cacher ma chevelure, de couvrir mes bras et mes mollets, bref de mouvoir mon corps au-dehors comme une nonne musulmane! (Djebar 1985, 206).

Djebar's alienation in the French lycée was caused in large part by her status as an ethnic minority and a member of the colonized group. However, members of the favored cultural group can also find themselves in the minority, a situation which creates a different type of alienation. Marguerite Duras spent her years as a lycéenne at a French-run boarding school in Vietnam, in which the majority of students were métisse. Marguerite and her friend Hélène Lagonelle were the only two white girls in the school. Hélène was an inept student to put it mildly, and Marguerite flagrantly ignored curfew, often staying out all night to be with her lover. Her reputation had deteriorated to such a degree that most of the other students had been forbidden by their mothers to have any contact with her. The headmistress called a meeting with Marguerite's mother to discuss the matter, but was met with indifference and even a suggestion to let the girl do as she pleased: "La directrice a accepté parce que je suis blanche et que, pour la réputation du pensionnat, dans la masse des métisses il faut quelques blanches.... La directrice m'a laissée habiter le pensionnat comme un hôtel" (Duras 1981, 88).

It is difficult to follow the logic of the headmistress in this matter, but it is obvious that the variable of Marguerite's race weighed more heavily than that of her conduct. This hierarchy of values may have benefited the school financially, but it did not benefit Marguerite or any of the other students. The double standard certainly would not have won her many friends among her métisse classmates, even if they were allowed to talk

to her, but we must also consider the psychological effects of such inconsistent disciplinary practices. For students with chaotic home lives, school has the potential to offer a more predictable environment, giving the student a feeling of safety. In this case, the lack of structure and boundaries which characterized her family life was carried over into her school experience. Marguerite was somewhat cavalier in her portrayal of these events and with this particular author, one can never be certain about the accuracy of such anecdotes. Although these experiences may have been exaggerated, alienation was certainly present. Marguerite was treated differently from her classmates, and thus ostracized from them, creating an alienation which I classify as moderate and non-normative.

It is during school that many close friendships are formed, but Marguerite had only one. H  l  ne is the only classmate or school friend she discusses in detail, and like most of Marguerite's relationships, this friendship was characterized by engulfment of personal boundaries and unhealthy co-dependence. H  l  ne needed Marguerite to console her for the humiliation she received from family and teachers due to her academic failures. Marguerite was sexually attracted to H  l  ne and fantasized about "sharing" H  l  ne with her lover, although these desires remained unsatisfied. Both girls had fears for the future, and lacking a loving maternal figure to comfort them, they tried to reassure one another. Regarding the other students, Marguerite makes the following observations:

Il y a beaucoup de m  tisses, la plupart ont   t   abandonn  es par leur p  re, soldat ou marin ou petit fonctionnaire des douanes, des postes, des travaux publics. La plupart viennent de l'Assistance publique. Il y a quelques quarteronnes aussi. Ce que croit H  l  ne Lagonelle c'est que le gouvernement fran  ais les   l  ve pour en faire des infirmi  res dans les h  pitaux ou bien des surveillantes dans les orphelinats, les l  proseries, les h  pitaux psychiatriques (Duras 1981, 87).

H  l  ne was wracked with anxiety because she did not want to be forced into one of these aforementioned occupations. She was also afraid that her parents would arrange a marriage for her as a means of getting her off their hands. When Marguerite returned from one of her encounters with her lover wearing a diamond ring, the girls began to

imagine a life in which they could make their own decisions. Yet their imaginations could take them no further than a life of prostitution, as Marguerite's lover had told her that French prostitutes were very expensive. The girls were aware that they would need money to survive, yet the only options they knew of were a handful of low-paying service jobs or marriage to a man chosen by someone else. Given such meager choices, it is understandable how the life of a prostitute could seem glamorous and even liberating.

Although Duras' story predates Kim Lefevre's by twenty-five years, Lefèvre was a member of the nebulous group of "métisses" Duras wrote about, and her financial worries were even more serious than those of Duras. The cost of education is prohibitive for many students, and the poorest students are often at the mercy of fickle donors. Kim attended school between the ages of six and ten, when she lived in the orphanage, and she remembers how she and the other girls were expected to behave when their benefactors came to visit:

Il y avait dans l'assistance toute la colonie française de Sâ-m-Son, des gens haut placés et influents auxquels nous devions offrir le spectacle de gamines pauvres mais touchantes. Il nous fallait surtout les émouvoir, car l'orphelinat avait grand besoin de leurs dons. ... Certains poussaient la complaisance jusqu'à nous faire croire qu'ils regrettaient de ne pas être orphelins eux-mêmes car, n'était-ce pas là une formidable école de formation du caractère? (Lefèvre 1989, 68).

Scenes like this recurred throughout Kim's youth, as her dignity was routinely sacrificed in exchange for the right to sit in a classroom. On one occasion she witnessed her mother groveling before an employer who had shown her kindness, as she begged him to help provide her children with an education. Later on, she had to implore her husband to claim Kim as his biological daughter so she could obtain the necessary paperwork for Kim to attend school. It was greed, rather than love, which convinced him to do so, as Kim's mother pointed out how her daughter's education might benefit him financially. Kim's studies at the lycée were funded by a wealthy benefactress, but only on condition that she convert to Catholicism (see Chapter 5). Her education was

disrupted by poverty, war and illness, and by the time she was able to return to school, she was older than most of her classmates. The stakes were very high, and she knew there would likely be no second chances in her life if she did not do well in school.

Academic pressure weighs heavily on many students. The competition for scholarships can be so intense that ambitious students must neglect their health by studying constantly. The title of Calixthe Beyala's novel *La petite fille du réverbère* refers to her habit of sitting under a street light to study late at night because there was no electricity in her home. Friendships may be lost due to envy over unequal opportunities, and relationships may be strained if family members question the student's priorities. Kim Lefèvre became so distraught after failing the bac on her first attempt that she created a study schedule accounting for every minute of the day and allowing herself little time for sleep and eating. The headmistress tore up the document as soon as Kim showed it to her, which only added to Kim's anxiety. She did manage to pass the bac on her second attempt, but her fears were justified. A student's entire future often hangs on the results of a single examination.

The benefits of academic excellence are as much social as they are material. For a marginalized individual, education may provide an opportunity to prove oneself or even to improve the status of the entire family or cultural group. As a member of a small francophone community surrounded by native English-speakers, Gabrielle Roy summed the situation up quite well: "Les minoritiés ont ceci de tragique, elles doivent être supérieures... ou disparaître" (Roy 1984, 85).

Nevertheless, these gains may prove ephemeral. When Calixthe Beyala aced the bac, she went from illegitimate outcast to local hero overnight. She had been told that if she did well enough in school, she could have all the fathers she wanted, and indeed, in the days following the publication of the exam results, she was quietly approached by a number of men, each bearing gifts and claiming to be her father. Her mother Andela, whose beauty was legendary among the local men, had abandoned her shortly after her birth. After so many years of absence, this was the moment when Andela chose to reappear. She told Beyala the name of her real father, a man she would never meet,

and sent away the lingering pretenders. Beyala describes her mother's return as a cyclone sowing calamity (Beyala 1998, 209). She doted on her two younger children, and scorned her eldest daughter. Even the grandmother's attention, which Beyala had always counted on, was now divided. When the grandmother announced that she was leaving on a journey, and was giving all of her possessions to Andela, Beyala felt betrayed and heartbroken. At the very moment when she should have been rejoicing in her academic success, her world seemed to be falling apart. Her alienation at this time was both severe and non-normative.

Ken Bugul was also disillusioned with the life she thought she wanted; a life she thought education would provide. The roots of Ken's alienation can be traced to her early years, when she became the first member of her family to attend a French school. This time period coincides with an unexplained separation from her mother, which created an almost intolerable feeling of abandonment. Nevertheless she enjoyed her first French lesson, not realizing that later it would come to symbolize a greater and more permanent separation from family, not only for herself, but for all students of the colonies: "L'école française qui allait bouleverser mille mondes et mille croyances qui se cachaient derrière les baobabs médusés en prenant des formes humaines" (Bugul 1982, 140). Ken worked hard in school and we can conjecture that at least on a subconscious level, she thought academic success might bring back her mother. Her mother did return, but the feelings of abandonment stayed with her. She coped with her emotions by dedicating herself to her studies. After graduating from the Lycée Malick Sy at Thiès, she attended the Université Cheikh Anta Diop for one year where her exceptional performance allowed her to continue her studies on a full scholarship in Belgium.

After making tremendous sacrifices to study in Europe, once she arrived, Ken was unable to connect with European society. For someone who had struggled so hard to reach the goal of studying abroad, to simply walk away just weeks after attaining it is indicative of extreme and non-normative alienation. The question of why Ken, who was obviously very intelligent, chose to abandon her studies when so many other students in

the same situation persevered is complex. Maryse Condé, for example, had parents who valued education. She had traveled to Europe a number of times and even had family members who lived there, whereas Bugul had been raised in a more traditional environment and had no support system in Europe. Ken's unrealistic expectations must also be considered. Her primary motivation for studying abroad was to leave behind her troubled life in Senegal. Emotional problems cannot be escaped so easily, and Ken was ill-equipped to deal with them in a foreign land. The only way for her to gain closure was to return to Senegal and begin again. Yet we must pose the question—might a good teacher have been able to help Ken? Was there nothing in her studies which could have captivated her interest and given her something to strive for? Was the curriculum so contaminated by the colonial agenda that she could find nothing redeeming within it? In the following section we will examine the issue of curriculum deficiencies and educational alienation.

6.3 Curriculum

Education should train the child to use his brains, to make for himself a place in the world and maintain his rights even when it seems that society would shove him into the scrap-heap.

--Helen Keller (1934)

At the time of this writing, a conflict is raging in American school systems over the implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which became law in 2010 with strong public support from Microsoft CEO Bill Gates. The US Department of Education has encountered substantial resistance from state and local school systems transitioning to the new standards. Supporters point out the need for consistent educational benchmarks among the thousands of independent school districts in the US, while opponents claim that the new standards are overly generic, developmentally inappropriate, and place too much emphasis on standardized testing (Bleiberg and West 2014). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has spent approximately 2.5 billion dollars promoting Common Core in the name of philanthropy, but critics point out that

Common Core places a heavy emphasis on technology, most of which is provided by Microsoft and that Mr. and Mrs. Gates send their own children to a private school which does not use Common Core (Layton 2014). Teachers, parents and politicians on both sides of the argument remain locked in a bitter dispute which is based more on ideology than the best interests of the students, and no compromise appears to be on the horizon.

When a curriculum is designed and teaching methods selected, the needs and welfare of the students are often only of peripheral concern. Young children are naturally active, inquisitive and noisy, but few educational systems are designed to take advantage of these attributes (Kalish 2012). Instead children are conditioned via disciplinary tactics or even pharmaceutical drugs to sit passively, listening to the teacher and performing repetitive tasks for several hours each day. This method of instruction is easiest for the teacher, especially if he or she is lacking in imagination or resources, and in an earlier era one might be able to dismiss these practices as ignorance on the part of educators. However, in the modern age, a vast quantity of information about children's cognitive development has been gleaned by researchers such as Jean Piaget.

Piaget's theories of childhood cognitive development, which were first published in the 1930's, have shed much light on how the juvenile mind acquires knowledge, but educational professionals were slow to incorporate his findings into educational practice. It was not until the 1970's that educators began to integrate Piaget's epistemologies into school curricula, and even then the movement was relatively short-lived. Piaget's pedagogical influence has waned significantly in recent decades, and with it, the appreciation for activities such as spontaneous play (Mikelskis-Seifert 2008, 163). Likewise Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, which has the potential to engage students who struggle under traditional teaching methods, has only been accepted by a handful of privately-run educational systems.

Cognitive development specialists are given only a marginal role in curriculum design, while government institutions, religious organizations and corporations exert the

greatest influence on what and how the next generation of voters, worshippers, workers and consumers will learn. The well-known statement attributed to Adolf Hitler “Let me control the textbooks, and I will control the state”, provides an extreme example of the dangers of absolute political control over schools, but all governments exert some control over school curricula. School systems in the United States began introducing special programs for gifted students in the late 1950’s, and many intelligent students have benefited from these programs. However, it is not widely known that these measures were taken for the sole purpose of identifying and recruiting the brightest young minds to assist in the development of military technology during the Cold War with the Soviet Union (National Defense Education Act of 1958).

It is generally accepted that education must prepare students to be contributing members of society, but to the extent that the contribution a student is expected to make is contrary to the student’s nature, such educational experiences will prove to be alienating. The people of Europe and North America have come to expect a substantial degree of political and corporate influence on their school systems. The absurdity and irrelevance of such targeted curricula become more apparent when viewed through the eyes of colonial subjects who may still remember a time when they were not immersed in the political and corporate environment of the colonist’s world. When colonialism took hold, European educational systems were exported to the colonies without real consideration for whether they were relevant to the students. In a paper presented to the 2011 International Conference on Teaching, Learning and Change, Oba Nwanosike and Liverpool Eboh Onyije outline the deleterious effects of education on the colonized people of Africa:

The system of education was designed to impose upon Africans, the white man’s mythical, racial superiority and African inferiority. Whatever Africans were taught about themselves was designed to enable them to internalize their inferiority and to recognize the white man as their savior. Colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion, and the development of underdevelopment (Nwanosike et al 2011, 628-629).

Ken Bugul's experiences with the colonial school system provide a near-perfect case study exemplifying the claims made by Nwanosike and Onyije. The excitement Ken felt as a young girl first starting school eventually transformed to complete disdain for an educational system which drove a wedge between family members and made promises it could not deliver. For most children, school is the first environment in which they spend significant time away from their families. It marks their first exposure to ideas which may differ from what they have been taught at home. The students' horizons are broadened, but they are also being led away from their cultural traditions, and this inevitably creates a barrier between children and their relatives who have not attended school. Ken, who was despised by her grandmother for attending French school, did not realize until she was older, that this generational divide was not localized to her own family, but instead formed a wide net, encompassing all colonial subjects: "Le grand fossé se creusa. L'éducation traditionnelle s'empêtra. La génération façonnée par l'école française entra dans la solitude, face à la famille traditionnelle" (Bugul 1982, 179). Caught in a double bind, Ken focused on her studies to distract herself from her loneliness and isolation, but this commitment to her schooling only served to exacerbate existing familial conflicts. Ken had a thirst for knowledge, but it was the colonizer who determined how she could quench it.

The alienation created by a curriculum imposed by another society is pervasive and can be difficult to quantify, but it is inevitably first-generation scholars, such as Ken who suffer the most. Many teachers, believing that they are doing a service, cruelly open the eyes of their students to a life they cannot have and injustices they cannot escape. When this occurs, it can be difficult to determine whether students are better or worse off for having this knowledge. Mariama Bâ's feminist values came as a result of her exposure to European ideologies in school, but she was forced to live in a misogynistic society which did not share these values. She believed that relationships between men and women could be egalitarian, but in the reality of her world they were not. This alienation is severe and non-normative, but she took it on willingly. Although Bâ considered her life as a scholar one of the defining aspects of her Self and expressed

no regrets regarding her education, it is obvious that her life might have been easier, even longer, if she had followed a more traditional path.

Kim Lefèvre was over the age of 50 when she learned that her mother had not always been the impoverished, defeated woman she remembered. Her education was impressive for a young Vietnamese woman in the early 1930's, but there were few opportunities for her to put her education to use. All she could do was read books and dream of a better life. When her extraordinary beauty caught the attention of a French officer, she fell in love, placing herself in a highly vulnerable situation. She later found herself abandoned and alone with an illegitimate daughter and a burden of shame which closed the few doors life had opened for her.

Tu aurais-dû, ma mère, rester dans ton village, continuer à faire partie de la bande des petites filles qui traînent dans les rizières et qui finissent par épouser un garçon de la campagne dont la fortune égale celle de leur propre famille. Tu n'aurais pas dû goûter à l'instruction, ni lire ces livres qui parlent de liberté et de bonheur (Lefèvre 1990, 89).

Nevertheless, Kim's mother struggled against all odds to see that her daughters receive an education, and Mariama Bâ did the same for her children. These courageous first-generation female scholars broke a path for those who followed. In any given society, there are those who see change as positive and those who fear it and try to suppress it. The introduction of new ideas can be especially threatening to those accustomed to living in a homogenous culture. The mere existence of a biracial individual like Kim Lefèvre challenges notions of singularity and plurality. The idea of a woman studying and working professionally can also be jarring to those who are conditioned to seeing women only in domestic settings. Assia Djebar demonstrated great dexterity at navigating the plurality of her existence, but this aspect of her nature provoked criticism from all parties. She was temporarily expelled from the École Normale Supérieure in Sèvres, France for protesting the French occupation of Algeria, only to be harshly criticized after Algeria gained independence for continuing to write in French (Rogers 2005). It is her internal friction as an educated feminist devoted to the religion of Islam,

and an Arab woman refusing to negate the aspects of her identity acquired from her French education which sets the tone for most of her writing. The plurality of her identity existed both before and after Algeria gained its independence, but the attitudes of her detractors tended to fluctuate with the political climate.

It is clear that education must evolve to meet the needs of society, but the plurality of cultures within a society can make it difficult to determine what those needs are. The very purpose of education is in dispute. The idea that education should assist in the formation of the intellect has largely been supplanted by the notion that education should prepare students for future employment. Many are willing to toss aside centuries of emphasis on the Liberal Arts in order to focus exclusively on STEM curricula. The justification for this line of thinking is that the majority of jobs in the modern world are in STEM-related fields (Klebnikov 2015).

Although preparing students for employment should be one of the goals of education, it should not be the only or even the primary goal. During the Renaissance period, when formal education became firmly established in Europe, students began learning things which were not essential to their physical survival but which enhanced their quality of life in incalculable ways. It was this “unnecessary” information which gave students the ability to create and appreciate works of art and literature, and ultimately laid the foundation for scientific advancement. It is the individual spark of creativity, often a byproduct of formal schooling which leads to the great eureka moments which permanently alter the course of humanity. An overly-standardized and inflexible curriculum stifles the creativity which education should seek to enhance. Skilled educators have always known this, as the following quote from Marcel Jousse illustrates:

C'est que chaque homme apporte je ne sais quelle note inentendue. Sans doute, vous me direz comme Keats que les mélodies inentendues sont les plus douces. Et c'est pour cela que certains individus n'ont pas été mis en relief parce qu'ils étaient trop uniques. C'est je crois, la grande tâche de celui qui sait

enseigner de comprendre ce que c'est que l'Unique dans chacun des individus
(Jousse 1936, 97).

Even on the most superficial level, a standardized curriculum can deliberately or inadvertently alienate large groups of people with inaccurate assumptions about their lives. Children may be vaguely aware that something in their textbook doesn't match their personal experience without realizing to what degree they are being marginalized. Marie Cardinal did not write much about her early years of schooling, other than to comment that her textbooks were printed in France and described a European landscape, foods, and seasons. We can assume that this was the case for most students attending colonial schools, who were often an afterthought, if they were remembered at all, by mainstream curriculum developers. This is a mild form of alienation, even normative, as entire subcultures are routinely bombarded with irrelevant cultural references. Australians and South Africans might be more amused than outraged by the Caribbean travel guide, published in the United States, which boldly claims that "Kingston, Jamaica is the largest English-speaking city south of Miami, Florida" (Sandler 1999, 31) (3). Although a North American travel writer might get away with forgetting the existence of an entire hemisphere, his Australian counterpart enjoys no such privilege.

There are occasions when being forgotten and invisible may be preferable to attracting attention. This was the situation in Saint Boniface, the small francophone community where Gabrielle Roy grew up. These isolated francophone communities in Western Canada were a source of annoyance to the Canadian government. In an effort to encourage French-speaking Canadians outside of Quebec to adopt English, the law prohibited more than one hour of French language instruction per day. Gabrielle was fortunate enough to attend school during a time when enforcement of this law was relatively lax:

Pourvu que les élèves fussent capables de montrer des connaissances de l'anglais, à la visite de l'inspecteur, tout allait plus ou moins. Nous étions toujours, évidemment, exposés à un regain d'hostilité de la part de petits groups

de fanatiques qui tenaient pour la stricte application de la loi. Pendant quelque temps courait la rumeur qu'un enquêteur était sur le sentier de guerre (Roy 1984, 70).

Roy's teachers needed their jobs, and were taking significant personal risk by ignoring the law. Yet they were dedicated to the needs of their students, often working after hours to provide supplemental instruction to those who needed it. Aside from family members, no one has more influence on the upbringing of a child than teachers. A good teacher can change the life of a student for the better, while a bad teacher can do irreparable harm. The demands placed upon teachers are great, and as a result, they too are prone to alienation, as will be discussed in the following section.

6.4 Le premier métier

Ken Bugul described teaching as the first profession of the colonized black man, but one could make the more general statement that teaching is a gateway profession for any first-generation scholar seeking to join the middle class. It is logical that teaching would serve as a transitional career. Children from impoverished families have little contact with adults working in professional settings; teachers are therefore, the first and possibly only role models for upwardly mobile students to follow. Historically women have had greater access to this career than to any other, and some women may go into teaching by default. Other individuals choose teaching to comply with expectations of their family or because the only accessible institution of higher learning is an *école normale* (4). For a variety of reasons, many people take teaching jobs not because it is a calling, but because it is the most readily available occupation. Of the nine authors examined in this study, six worked as teachers and three had at least one parent who was a teacher.

The very best teachers encourage their students to rise above the challenging circumstances of their lives and to strive for a life of dignity and self-worth. Once a student has been inspired by such a teacher, she carries that memory throughout her

life, never forgetting the ideals awakened by her instructor. Mariama Bâ's life path was clearly altered by the influence of one devoted teacher:

Je n'oublierai jamais la femme blanche qui, la première, a voulu pour nous un destin "hors du commun". ... Le mot "aimer" avait une résonance particulière en elle. Elle nous aima sans paternalisme, avec nos tresses debout ou pliées, avec nos camisoles, nos pagnes. Elle sut découvrir et apprécier nos qualités... Elle concorde avec les options profondes de l'Afrique nouvelle, pour promouvoir la femme noire (Bâ 1979, 27-28).

This teacher's influence is clearly apparent in Bâ's writing, and surely shaped Bâ's own approach to teaching as well. She found the profession of teaching extremely rewarding, and made no complaint about the working conditions at the university where she taught; only of the difficulties of caring for a home and family in addition to her professional responsibilities. Bâ was not the only one of our authors who pursued a dual career of teaching and writing. Assia Djebar and Maryse Condé both made it to the top of the teaching profession. Their prestige as writers paved the way for careers lecturing at elite universities throughout the world. Marie Cardinal spent several years teaching at French lycées when she traveled throughout the world with her husband, but she makes little mention of it in her autobiographical novels. From this we might conclude that any alienation she experienced as a teacher was not significant enough for her to consider it worth writing about. Kim Lefèvre adjusted to her first teaching job with ease: "J'aimais mes élèves qui me le rendaient bien. La supérieure me gratifiait parfois d'un sourire, signe qu'elle ne regrettait pas de m'avoir gardée" (Lefèvre 1989, 362). However, Gabrielle Roy's initiation to the teaching profession was quite traumatic. Her student teaching assignment was difficult due to unruly students and an unhelpful mentor:

Si c'était cela être institutrice, me disais-je, jamais je n'y arriverais, j'en serais toujours incapable. Je voyais se fermer devant moi la seule voie pour laquelle j'avais été préparée. En vérité, tout m'échappait: la classe qui se moquait de moi, mon avenir qui se dérobaît, ma confiance en mes aptitudes, même l'espoir

de passer mes examens de fin d'année. Pour achever de m'abattre, sans cesse me revenait l'image de mon père dont l'état avait subitement empiré (Roy 1984, 87).

This alienation was severe and non-normative, but of short duration. Following the death of Gabrielle's father, her mentor became more sympathetic. She quickly gained confidence in the classroom and continued teaching for seven years. In her book *Ces enfants de ma vie*, she shares fond memories of teaching the children of working-class immigrants, many of whom did not speak English. She was obviously a dedicated teacher and a lover of children, although she never had any of her own: "Mes élèves, par leur joie, me redonnaient celles de mon enfance. Pour boucler le jeu, je cherchais à magnifier la leur afin qu'elle les accompagnât aussi tout au long de leur vie" (Roy 1977, 27). Although she enjoyed her years of teaching, she never intended for it to be a lifelong career. She left her teaching job as soon as she had saved enough money to travel to Europe and did not return to the profession when she came back to Canada, instead seeking work as a freelance writer and journalist.

It is not uncommon for teachers to leave the profession after a few short years, often due to low pay and difficult working conditions, while many stay because they feel that they have no other options. Disgruntled teachers inevitably create an alienating learning experience for their students. Most students have encountered a teacher who was unfair, snide, or obviously biased. At its extreme, such situations can escalate to physical abuse. Ken Bugul was horrified because so many of her classmates dropped out of school due to physically abusive teachers:

Comment le maître oserait-il toucher à un millimètre de ces peaux frêles? Il les frappe tous à sang, pour assouvir sa soif de faire souffrir. Quel enseignant! Il faisait partie de cette génération d'instituteurs de l'époque coloniale, imbus de leur puissance. Instituteur était le premier métier de l'homme noir colonisé: enseigner la langue coloniale, la poésie coloniale, le rêve colonial. Avec quelle ardeur l'exerçait-il! (Bugul 1982, 191)

In the case described by Bugul, it seems that racial hatred of the colonizer had transformed into self-hatred on the part of the teacher, which was then projected onto his students. The school environment is one in which members of the colonized race can be manipulated into turning on one another, unaware of the machinations of the colonizer. Once these seeds of discord are sown, those affected come to feel alienated from others in their community and even from their own past. This was the case for Kim Lefèvre, whose earliest experience with education was one of abuse and alienation. As a biracial child, Kim was subjected to racism from both the French and the Vietnamese. Her first teacher was so vindictive toward her that she began to cut school to escape the abuse. The chain of events which followed led directly to her being separated from her mother and spending four years in an orphanage (see chapter 4).

It is not uncommon for teachers and school officials to abuse their power and take advantage of the vulnerability of their students. Ken Bugul was never subjected to the severe beatings many of her classmates had to endure, but there was an aura of menace about the school which frightened her. In spite of this, she remained steadfast in her studies, doing whatever was necessary in order to graduate. At one point she had to live with a school administrator and do domestic chores to pay for her room and board. One day the wife of the school administrator became verbally abusive. She called Ken “putain” and ejected her from the home without explanation. Ken was eleven years old and did not know the meaning of the word “putain”, but she knew that it was an insult which was always directed at women. She later learned that the school administrator had expressed his intention to take Ken as a second wife, which had provoked the rage of his first wife. Ken was fortunate that this situation did not escalate to a forced marriage. She managed to continue her studies in spite of this incident, but the scene foreshadows her later departure from school and her descent into a life of drug abuse and prostitution.

The school administrator’s prurient interest in Ken was disgraceful, but such incidents are more common than one might expect. Kim Lefèvre was barely past puberty when she fell victim to a predatory teacher who habitually seduced his female students. With

a hostile step-father as her only male role model, she was not accustomed to receiving kindness or affection, which made her especially vulnerable to this man. The teacher was dismissed from his job when the situation came to light, but it was Kim who suffered the bulk of the humiliation. She was subjected to an extreme degree of victim-blaming by her family as well as the entire community. She was beaten by her mother and step-father and shunned by her family for several days. The community gossiped about nothing else and Kim was taunted when she finally left the house. “Hou! La voleuse de mari! Hou! La putain de professeur!” (Lefèvre 1989, 264).

This alienation is extreme and non-normative. The only mitigating circumstance was that the teacher had not taken her virginity and thus her reputation was tarnished, but not completely ruined. “En ville, on ne se lassait pas de médire de moi. Je devenais une sorte de curiosité: métisse, immorale, folle, tels étaient les qualificatifs qu’on m’attribuait. J’écoutais, surprise, mon histoire que je ne reconnaissais pas” (Lefèvre 1989, 264).

Her disgrace was so great that her mother and step-father arranged for her to go to boarding school in Saigon. She anguished over the fate of the teacher, even continuing to have obsessive thoughts about him years later. Despite the circumstances surrounding her entrance to the boarding school, it proved to be beneficial in ways she could not have anticipated in the midst of the crisis. As a result of her attendance at this school, she had access to medical care the following year when she was recovering from tuberculosis, a circumstance which probably saved her life. Her connections there also led to an opportunity to teach and study in France and escape the horrors of yet another war.

Calixthe Beyala’s teacher engaged in sexual relations with his students without reprisal. Although his behavior was reprehensible, this over-burdened and under-qualified teacher was stressed to the breaking point:

Il avait été envoyé en France, pendant six mois, avant de revenir éduquer les Camerounais. Nous étions cent quatre-vingts élèves dans la classe, de six à

vingt ans, à s'en foutre que Maître d'École ait lu d'Homère jusqu'à Malraux spécialement pour que nous devenions la réplique exacte de nos ancêtres les Gaulois (Beyala 1998, 39).

The teacher soon gave up trying to manage 180 students alone. Beyala describes a particularly dramatic scene in which he struck a disrespectful student in the face with a whip, then selected six students, more or less haphazardly, to receive special attention and assistance on the bac. Beyala was among this privileged group. Accustomed to being scorned for her illegitimacy, this was one of the few times she was able to shine, and she felt great pride at being among the chosen. In spite of the teacher's obvious character flaws, Beyala developed quite a crush on him, and was bitterly jealous of her classmate Maria-Magdalena, who was the object of his interest. It was likely Beyala's lack of personal hygiene which saved her from becoming another of his victims.

Despite his shortcomings, he did recognize Beyala's potential, and she focused on her studies in part to make him proud. It is largely due to this man's influence that she was able to obtain a scholarship and study in France.

Just as a bad teacher can occasionally do some good work, a bad parent can prove to be a remarkably good teacher. We find in the mother of Marguerite Duras, an example of an exceptional teacher. Marguerite pulled no punches in detailing Marie Donnadiou Legrand's deficiencies as a mother, but the following statement pays tribute to a great teacher working with the most unfortunate of students:

On dit qu'elle n'a jamais abandonné un enfant avant qu'il ne sache lire et écrire. Jamais. Qu'elle faisait des cours tard le soir pour les enfants dont elle savait qu'ils seraient des ouvriers plus tard, des "manuels" elle disait: des exploités. Elle ne les lâchait que lorsqu'elle était sûre qu'ils étaient capables de lire un contrat de travail (Duras 1991, 122).

Marie seemed to have immense compassion for children who were not her own, often "adopting" impoverished native children and welcoming them into her home, while her two youngest children suffered grievously as a result of her abuse and neglect. Maryse

Condé's mother also had significant maternal deficiencies, but her success as a teacher contributed to the admiration Maryse felt toward her.

Assia Djébar is the only one of our authors whose parent was also *her own* teacher. As the only Arab teacher of the French language, her father Tahar Imalhayène faced discrimination on a daily basis. He taught a special class which consisted of over 40 Arab students of various ages and abilities. In order to meet the requirements of his job, he had to maintain firm disciplinary control over his students at all times. Assia, who had the triple distinction of being the youngest in the class, the only girl, and the teacher's daughter, found this situation very intimidating:

Même assise au fond, je participe, moi aussi, à cette sorte d'effroi devant le maître; le maître, dans tous les sens de la domination. J'ai peur moi aussi, bien que je sois "la fille du maître": je ne dois pas bouger. Je ne dois pas troubler cet office (Djébar 1995, 267).

By creating a clear boundary between their home personas of father and daughter and their school personas of teacher and student, Assia and her father managed to make this situation work. At the end of the school day she would watch him take off his black jacket, erase the chalkboard, and gather up his students' notebooks: "Je m'approche de lui. Il est redevenu le père. ... le père et la fillette retrouvent un doux et amical dialogue" (Djébar 1995, 268).

There is no way of knowing what future Mr. Imalhayène envisioned for his daughter when he broke with tradition and brought her into his classroom, but in doing so, he created opportunities which led her all the way to the Académie Française. The cultural and political impact of Djébar's work is vast and it all began with her father walking hand in hand with her on her first day of school. Few individuals can assess the true value of their education while it is still in progress. In the midst of the daily grind of lectures and examinations, it is difficult to determine where one's education will eventually lead, but with hindsight, one can look back on the traumatic years of school and see the seeds that came to fruition later in life.

6.5 Conclusions

The assumption that formal education is a positive influence for humanity is rarely questioned even though virtually everyone who has spent time in a classroom has been traumatized by it to some degree. Despite the inherent flaws in our current educational systems, it seems conclusive that all nine of the authors in this study benefited more than they were harmed by their education.

As the only one of our authors who left school without obtaining a university degree, Ken Bugul's educational alienation deserves a bit of extra scrutiny. She invested years of her life in the French colonial education system, only to realize later that her entire way of thinking had been contaminated by it. Her lack of a university degree should not be considered a failure. Her decision to leave school marked the beginning of her emancipation from the indoctrination of her youth, but without an alternative plan or positive role models to assist her, she had to learn by harsh experience, by diving directly into the world of the colonizer. In doing so, she gained the ability to see her world as it was rather than how it was presented in textbooks, and she gained a deep understanding of the raw, exploitive relationship between colonizer and colonized.

The school of hard knocks has some very tough teachers, and *Le baobab fou* ends on a dark note, with Ken contemplating suicide under the dead baobab tree in her home village. However, this apparent defeat is transformed into triumph in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*. Here we see Ken continuing to learn on her own terms, with a teacher of her choosing, the Serigne, and we see that she teaches him as well, telling him about the lessons she learned during her time in Europe. Following the death of the Serigne, she married a physician, gave birth to a daughter, and began working as a writer and art dealer. These enterprises, as well as her activist work for the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, would never have come about if she had not received a formal education. The life she has lived since her departure from Belgium seems to indicate that she has successfully integrated the experiences of her youth, and accepted the negative as well as the positive aspects of her education.

In examining the collective experiences of these women, a pattern emerges which might explain the love-hate relationship many intellectuals have with the educational systems which have evolved since the Enlightenment era. Most children begin their first day of school with optimism and enthusiasm. This excitement begins to fade as they encounter their first disappointments, failures, and rejections. Much of this is inevitable, but in many ways the school system, by its very nature, creates these alienating experiences by forcing students to compete with their peers for grades and scholarships. Some are rewarded while others, who may have worked just as hard, are left with feelings of envy and failure. Children come to equate their self-worth with their grades and the degree of acceptance they receive from their teachers and peers. The authors in this study generally excelled academically, yet they still experienced alienation. Some were alienated for being in an ethnic or gender minority, others for deviating from family tradition by going to school at all.

What all nine authors have in common is natural intelligence, which allowed them to unlock the true gift of education, which is learning how to teach oneself. Once a student has developed an interest in a particular subject, no negative experience in the classroom can deprive her of this passion. If a student is able to maintain her enthusiasm for learning long enough to acquire basic reading and critical thinking skills, she is free to expand her knowledge beyond the established curriculum, either inside or outside of a traditional classroom setting. Ironically, this type of self-directed study tends to be discouraged by the educational establishment, as students who attempt to take control over their own learning are often pressured by teachers, school administrators, and parents to conform to the expectations of others.

Gabrielle Roy's family considered her education complete when she graduated from the *école normale* and became a teacher. Yet, she felt that there was more to for her to learn and experience. Against the advice of her family, she resigned from a secure teaching job in the midst of the Great Depression, and traveled to Europe, where she studied acting at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. It was during her stay in Europe that she began writing, eventually becoming one of Canada's most influential

authors. Likewise, Maryse Condé's enthusiasm for writers such as Franz Fanon and Léopold Senghor and her subsequent immersion in the Négritude movement probably would not have met with the approval of her parents or even the majority of her teachers. Nevertheless, this was the inspiration which led her to become one of the most respected contributors to francophone literature.

There are almost always points of vulnerability in a student's career; moments in which the future is uncertain and a poor decision could permanently derail his or her aspirations. Kim Lefèvre experienced several such close calls brought on by poor health, financial problems, and personal scandal. In retrospect we can see that Marguerite Duras' entire adolescence was a precarious time, her attachment to school being tenuously linked to a single friend. The lax discipline of her school environment and her obsession with her family's troubled financial situation placed her at high risk for leaving school and becoming a prostitute, as did Ken Bugul. Her departure from Vietnam allowed her to make a fresh start after her lover was forced by his family to marry another woman. Marguerite shares little information about her studies at the boarding school in Vietnam, but we can assume that she performed well academically. When she moved to France at the age of seventeen, she studied political science and law, eventually earning a degree from the Sorbonne. Prior to becoming an established writer, she worked for the French government. Given her impressive educational and employment history, it is evident that she overcame the perceived limitations of gender which caused such anxiety for her and Hélène Lagonelle.

Perceived limitations and genuine hardships can serve as a motivating factor, provided that they are not too overwhelming. As a child, Gabrielle Roy saw that her family was struggling with chronic financial hardship, and could think of no way to be of service other than getting good grades. While lying in a hospital bed recovering from an appendectomy, she made a conscious decision to earn perfect grades in order to compensate her parents for the financial burden caused by her illness. As a member of a minority culture group, she was also motivated to excel in order to improve the status of other francophone people in her community. One can only wonder whether Calixthe

Beyala would have achieved the same degree of success if she had not possessed a fierce determination to compensate for her illegitimate status. Kim Lefèvre, both illegitimate and biracial, was propelled by similar motives.

There is a great deal of anguish associated with the process of receiving an education. However, its greatest redeeming factor is that although it creates alienation, it also provides a mechanism for coping with it. It provides the skill of reading, of connecting with the experiences of others in diverse parts of the world, and of verifying that the story of one's people is accurately portrayed. It also provides the skill of writing, of telling one's own story to a larger audience. These skills are crucial for the participation in history, which is the subject of our next chapter.

Notes

- (1) Malala Yousafzai is a young Pakistani woman who, along with two of her female classmates, was shot by members of the Taliban who sought to discourage girls from attending school. The case drew world-wide attention, and following her recovery, Malala became the youngest Nobel Laureate ever. She is currently a political refugee in England where she attends school and works as an activist for female education (Yousafzai and Lamb 2015).
- (2) There are many examples of courage emerging from this story, one of which is worth mentioning here. One of the girls who escaped had a sister who was an employee of the American University of Nigeria. She approached university officials asking if something could be done to help her sister and the other girls who had escaped their abductors. As a result, a scholarship fund was established. Although many of the girls and their families were afraid to take advantage of this opportunity, twenty-one of them are now continuing their studies at the American University of Nigeria (York 2015).
- (3) There are several English-speaking cities in Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, and Zimbabwe which are larger, more populous, and further south than Kingston, Jamaica (worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities).

(4) The term “normal school” originates from the French *école normale*. These schools were established in Europe and North America as teacher training institutes. Many government-run universities originated as normal schools. When these institutions transitioned into four-year universities, the normal schools continued as the institutions’ educational departments (newworldencyclopedia.org).

Chapter 7—Alienation in the domain of history

Where I'm from, we believe in all sorts of things that aren't true... we call it history.

--Gregory Maguire (1995)

7.1 Introduction : What is truth?

When I was in secondary school, my English teacher took the class on a field trip to visit the library of a nearby university. The librarian gave us a tour and demonstrated how to access the various databases and use the microfiche reader. We were told that we could search archived newspapers from a historical date and find out what had happened on that day. At the time, I accepted that statement at face value, but in retrospect it was at best, a half truth. What can be found in newspaper archives is not a record of what happened on a particular day in history, but a record of what people said happened on that day. Sometimes the difference is vast, as we see in the case of the 1890 Massacre of Wounded Knee.

This confrontation was originally labeled a battle, even though most of the casualties were unarmed women and children (1). The violence was provoked when a deaf Sioux warrior failed to drop his rifle immediately when commanded to do so. The vast majority of newspaper reporters who covered the story were white, and they relied solely on the testimony of members of the army. They failed to interview Sioux survivors, most of whom did not speak English. Some reporters, including L. Frank Baum, who would later write the Oz books, unabashedly called for the genocide of Native Americans. Most Western settlers, who had been conditioned to regard Native Americans as less than human, never thought to challenge the official story, and no one protested when twenty Medals of Honor were awarded to cavalymen who participated in the massacre (Hill 1999).

Eighty-one years would pass before the Native American version of what happened at Wounded Knee would come to light. By the time *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee* was

published in 1971, those who had perpetrated this crime were safely in their graves and would not have to answer for it, and there were no living survivors to whom an apology could be addressed. Native Americans had assimilated into mainstream society, or were living in deep poverty, out of sight on reservation land. Native American culture had become a curiosity, and in the United States it had become trendy to claim Native American ancestry. The tomahawk, no longer a weapon to be feared, had become a museum piece and a marketing logo for sports teams with Native American-themed mascots. Authors and film-makers had begun exploring Native American culture, and this new genre of books and movies had become very popular. The American Indian Movement had achieved some gains as an advocacy group and had even arranged a 71-day siege at Wounded Knee, but with Native Americans representing less than two percent of the US population (census.gov) their political clout was and still remains extremely limited.

Scenarios such as this illustrate that a free press, although essential to a free society, is no guarantee that the public will have access to the whole truth. A free press is at liberty to align itself to a particular cause. In every corner of the world, we can see that historical narratives fluctuate with the shifting political climate. In the midst of historical turmoil, the official story initially favors whichever group has the upper hand, while opposing points of view are only revealed decades later, after the outcome of the conflict is no longer in question. Despite the unreliability of media accounts, these are often the best or only records available to historians. Journalists are not held to the same evidentiary standards as those required in a court of law, and they often write stories based on hearsay or the self-serving accounts of witnesses. Inaccuracies are almost inevitable given the rush to get the story out as quickly as possible, and these inaccuracies spread quickly from one media source to another. A story which breaks in one newspaper is generally repeated in scores of other publications without independent verification of facts.

With the advent of broadcast television and the World Wide Web, information whether it is true or untrue, can now travel at lightning speed and the potential for collateral

damage is magnified. The line between news and entertainment has all but disappeared with the increasing public interest in the lives of celebrities. There is little distinction between coverage of world events and celebrity gossip, which is often quite malicious. When one adolescent spreads hurtful information about another online it is called cyber-bullying, but when the media does it, in most countries, it is considered protected free speech. Anything which might capture the public's interest—a high profile crime, a sex scandal involving a politician, a contentious celebrity divorce—is fair game. Journalists themselves often enjoy celebrity status and are prone to exaggerate especially when doing so could further their careers. Such a case came to light in February of 2015, when American TV journalist Brian Williams was forced to admit that he had embellished certain accounts of his experiences when he was embedded with American troops in Iraq in 2003. In this case, the Internet played a crucial role in bringing the truth to light, as it was a comment posted to Facebook which ignited the scandal (2).

Even when journalists are making an effort to be as accurate and unbiased as possible, there are as many different perspectives as there are observers; each point of view is inevitably incomplete and therefore, only partially truthful. There is substantial research which indicates that eye-witness testimony is unreliable. Researchers have demonstrated that creating a false memory is not difficult, and often the subject will continue to insist that the memory is real even after being presented with evidence that it is not (Loftus 1997). Despite common beliefs to the contrary, the human brain is not a simple recording device. The information received through the sensory organs is filtered through preconceived ideas and expectations, and almost immediately altered by possibly inaccurate interpretations. Each time the memory is replayed, new interpretations are added, motives are reassessed, and the memory may be altered to such a degree that it bears little resemblance to the accounts of others who observed the same event (Bridge et al 2013).

This microcosmic historical revisionism can occur even when all possible efforts are made to prevent inaccuracies. Disagreements over the details of past events are a

common cause of family disputes, and this is often exacerbated when family members deliberately attempt to negate their own destructive behaviors and question the memory of those who challenge their story. Discord can occur even when there is no malicious intent because each family member has a unique set of experiences, which can only be partially understood from someone else's point of view. Even siblings, who grow up in the same household with the same parents have different experiences in the family. Each sibling is born at a different time in the family's history. Financial situations fluctuate, as do the health and dispositions of various family members. Just as circumstances fluctuate within a family, conditions on a world-wide scale are constantly in flux, and the timing of one's birth has a profound effect on one's historical perspective. A superficial look at the changing social norms over the past century reveals periods of predominant conformity and periods of predominant non-conformity. Individuals seem to be caught up in a revolving wheel of history, playing roles they may not have chosen had they been born into different circumstances.

William Strauss and Neil Howe are the creators of the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, which identifies recurring generational cycles in history. According to Strauss and Howe, history runs in cycles of generational archetypes, ranging from 20-22 years, and individuals born within a particular time in the cycle will both influence and be influenced by their position within it (Strauss and Howe 1997). These cycles shift from crisis, which is characterized by collectivism and self-sacrifice, to awakening, which is characterized by individualism. The four-stage cycle of social or mood era (also called turnings) and the shifts between them are generally completed in an 80-90 year span. The transitions or "turns" between the cycles are generally points of societal conflict as a new generation comes of age and brings a different approach to the current challenges, provoking criticism from their predecessors. This explains how cultural values differ from one generation to the next, and the conflict which inevitably results (Strauss and Howe 1997). Crises can happen at any point in the cycle, but the reaction to a crisis is likely to depend on the attitudes of the generational cohort occupying the greatest number of leadership positions. Some nations and cultural groups may be in a

different stage of the cycle than others, which would cause them to be out of sync with their geographic neighbors, creating a potentially volatile situation.

By applying the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory to the authors in this study, we see that Mariama Bâ, who was born in 1929 and lived as a non-conformist during a period of high conformity, demonstrates a respect for tradition, even though she chose not to follow it to the letter. In contrast, Ken Bugul who was born in 1947, and Calixthe Beyala, who was born in 1960, both came of age during a period of predominant non-conformity, and the primary emotion in their work is anger. Even though Bâ and Bugul were both Senegalese, we might conclude that Bugul had more in common with Beyala, who was Cameroonian. As the youngest of our authors, we see considerably more rebellion and irreverence in their writing, which corresponds to the non-conformist generational cohort to which they belong. The irony created by ever-changing social mores is that acts of conformity during one era are often considered acts of non-conformity during the next era. Bâ was condemned by members of her community for her rejection of polygamy, while one generation later Bugul was criticized for her willing participation in it. Failing to live up to the expectations imposed by society leaves one vulnerable to censure and ostracism. These societal expectations are usually presented via educational institutions, often through lessons in history. By presenting certain historical events in a positive or negative light, subtle expectations are conveyed to students regarding their own obligations to society.

There are a variety of ways in which history is taught, and the manner in which it is presented determines how an individual or group will respond to it. History handed down via oral tradition is accepted as myth, but also as truth. Societies who make use of the oral tradition understand that myth can be true without being factually accurate. When history is taught in a classroom, much of the information shared is apocryphal although it may not be presented as such. Students who have been led to believe in the factual accuracy of everything they were taught in history class are likely to become adversarial when presented with conflicting information. Although people assume that the information portrayed in history books is accurate, historians acknowledge that their

occupation largely consists of guesswork. In his book *History: remembered, recovered, invented*, Bernard Lewis illustrates the means and motives for manipulating history with specific historical examples. One of the most common types of historical embellishment is the “foundation myth”. According to Lewis: “Most countries and peoples and powers arise from humble origins, and having risen to greatness, seek to improve or conceal their undistinguished beginnings and attach themselves to something older and greater” (Lewis 1975, 59). Such embellishment serves to legitimize authority by creating a link to an earlier established institution, instilling a sense of trust in the populace for entities which would otherwise be lacking in authenticity.

Although Lewis is referring to the foundation myths of groups who rise to positions of power, there are also cultural groups who cling to foundation myths of persecution, and members of such groups must struggle to adopt a more positive identity. Foundation myths also exist in families, and the type of foundation myth a family has chosen reveals a great deal about the history and dynamic of that family. We will explore this topic in the following section.

7.2 Where do we come from?

The personal narrative begins with one’s ancestors. But how much can really be known about our distant ancestors? We gaze in wonder at Stonehenge, or the Sphinx, or the cave paintings of Lascaux and speculate about the ancient peoples who left behind such legacies. Speculations lead to assumptions, and if the individuals making them have enough clout, those assumptions eventually become a part of established history. The current era will one day fade into historical oblivion and all the rich subtleties of our way of life will be reduced to a smattering of remnants. I can imagine puzzled archeologists from the distant future making conjectures about the four faces carved into Mount Rushmore. These likenesses of American presidents might be mistaken for deities worshipped by the former inhabitants of the North American continent. Such a scenario may seem far-fetched, but it does not take millennia for misinformation to creep into the historical narrative. It is never possible to have anything closer than second-hand knowledge about events prior to one’s birth, and as we see in the

children's game of "telephone," information becomes increasingly distorted the further it travels from its original source.

Fictionalized accounts of ancient wars and other catastrophic events are often glorified and romanticized, while modern calamities are portrayed with realistic emphasis on the suffering of those involved. The greater the temporal distance between the trauma and the retelling of it, the greater the tendency to minimize the emotional distress of those affected by the events. The earliest maternal ancestor Gabrielle Roy knew of was an Acadian who was violently extracted from his homeland by the British. According to her mother, this was the beginning of their family's suffering. No one knew much about this Acadian, not even his name, but this story was repeated often enough for Gabrielle and her siblings to accept it as a part of their identity. For the Roy family, their connection to the Acadian Diaspora was a source of pride and they seemed to take pleasure in repeating this origin myth of tragedy. An origin myth of persecution has an appeal for many people, perhaps because it denotes moral infallibility. Assuming that this Acadian ancestor existed, his alienation would have been extreme enough to affect several generations of descendants.

However, the alienation Gabrielle acquired as a result of her father's traumatic childhood was far greater. She never met her paternal grandparents who had died before she was born, but she knew that her grandfather had been extremely abusive toward her father, and she was upset that her mother had placed a photo of her husband's parents on the parlor wall:

Nous n'avions jamais connu ces deux êtres que par leur portrait terrible et quelques confidences échappées à mon père. Je ressentais à leur endroit un tel éloignement que je refusais de me reconnaître en eux. Je m'imaginai issue des Landry seulement, cette race plus légère, rieuse, rêveuse, comme un peu aérienne, aimante, tendre et passionnée (Roy 1984, 96).

Gabrielle was especially horrified by the stories she had been told regarding her grandfather's hatred of books and his malicious attempts to deprive his son of the

pleasure her took from reading and learning. Despite his harsh upbringing, Léon Roy did not mistreat his own children, but the tribulations of his early life left him prone to bouts of melancholy, and Gabrielle and her siblings were all afflicted by depression, some to a crippling degree. This type of alienation is common and therefore, normative, but I also classify it as severe. Although she desired to distance herself from her paternal ancestors, Gabrielle acknowledged them briefly in her autobiography, presumably to honor her father and to give voice to his suffering, which afflicted her as well. Some of our authors have attempted an even deeper connection with their ancestors, preserving their stories, which were quickly passing into oblivion.

The struggle against oblivion is unique to the human race. By reaching into the past to honor one's ancestors, there is a tacit hope that future generations will do the same. The drawback to this decadent fascination with the past is that if taken too far, it can stifle the possibility for future growth. Maryse Condé, like most of the authors in this study, managed to write about the past without losing perspective. Her novel *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, tells the story of her maternal grandmother, who was a young, unwed mother struggling to overcome illegitimacy, illiteracy, and misogyny in Guadeloupe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a safe assumption that Maryse's mother would not have approved of this book, had she been alive to see it published. She was deeply ashamed of her humble origins and assumed that her children would be as well. Maryse felt nothing but admiration toward her mother for having improved her social standing, but it seems that she never expressed these feelings while her mother was still alive. The burden of things left unsaid is often a contributing factor to alienation in this domain, and writing can provide a way of mitigating this alienation, even if death separates the writer from the other party.

Like Gabrielle Roy, Maryse Condé was the youngest child in her family, and was considered spoiled by her older siblings. However, the youngest child has the fewest number of years to connect with parents, grandparents and even siblings, creating a situation which leaves the last-born especially vulnerable to alienation in this domain:

Mon adolescence avait la couleur d'une fin de vie. Je me retrouvais face à deux vieux corps dont je ne comprenais pas les humeurs. Dans notre maison régnait une atmosphère de veillée funèbre. ... C'était comme si je rôdais dans un cimetière pour me ressouvenir de ceux que j'avais perdues (Condé 1999, 130-131).

Roy's mother found it difficult to identify the original homeland of their family, and Maryse Condé's family would have had similar difficulties, had they been willing to explore the question. The Arawaks, who were the original inhabitants of the Caribbean Islands were almost completely obliterated by disease. Over 75% of the current population of Guadeloupe is of African descent (New World Encyclopedia 2012). Yet Africa is a large continent, and the original slave population came from diverse backgrounds, with no common language or culture. These individuals were forced to interact, and the amalgam of linguistic and cultural traditions merged with that of the European settlers, eventually developing into an independent set of traditions. Europeans created this situation to which former slaves were forced to adapt, but some Europeans were also quick to suggest that African traditions had become adulterated in the Caribbean. Maryse was subjected to discrimination based on this assumption while studying at the Lycée Fenelon.

This experience of alienation may have provided the impetus for her to conduct her own investigation and better understand her ancestral history as a Caribbean Islander. Like most inhabitants of Guadeloupe, Maryse and her family were cut off from their ancestors who lived prior to being extracted from Africa; as a result, her culture was literally born out of slavery. Maryse's parents had hoped that by refusing to acknowledge this history, their children would be spared the pain of dealing with it. However, such ancestral trauma can be felt even if no one speaks of it openly. As was discussed in Chapter 2, every cell of the human body carries genetic material from the most distant of ancestors, and we are learning that this genetic memory has a stronger influence on physiology and psychology than previously suspected (Dias and Ressler 2013).

When researching family history, it is necessary to rely on the testimony of elders who may have any number of motives to keep certain things quiet, or to misrepresent the past, as we have seen in the case of Maryse Condé. Inevitably, the image we have of our parents is incomplete, and even less can be known about our grandparents. Despite these obstacles, anyone attempting to write a personal narrative must make an effort to connect with their personal and collective past, and a large part of this work consists of resolving contradictions. Calixthe Beyala's grandmother told her that she had been the matriarch of a peaceful village. She ruled this simple, but happy community until its other members were lured to the city, and she and her daughters were all that remained. However, even in her own narrative, Beyala's grandmother was forced to admit that life was far from perfect:

Grand-mère, vêtue d'un pagne rouge, ordonnait les mouvements du quotidien. ... et quand elle songeait qu'il était temps de repeupler la bourgade, elle regroupait les couples et célébrait des mariages. Quelques mois plus tard naissaient des bébés potelés, dont la plupart mouraient, mais ce n'était pas triste... Un sort partagé par l'ensemble de la communauté (Beyala 1998, 10).

With only this version of events, we have no way of knowing how happy the other members of the community were with this woman's leadership or whether everyone shared her peaceful resignation to the high infant mortality rate. We do know that when people started leaving, the matriarch's strongest argument to keep them from doing so was their obligation to their dead ancestors:

Si vous partez tous, qui va veiller sur nos morts, hein?" Elle se tournait vers les parents et d'une voix sourde: "Dites-leur de rester. S'ils partent, qui va vous enterrer, hein?" Les vieillards se recroquevillaient, emportés devant leur paternité, vaguement cocufiés par le destin: "La jeunesse est ingrate!" (Beyala 1998, 11).

But is youth truly ungrateful, or is it simply yearning for a future with more to offer than the obligation of burying their parents and children? Scholars such as Buckminster

Fuller and Stanislaw Ulam identified the phenomenon of accelerating change, or an increase in the rate of technological and social progress resulting in rapid and unparalleled shifts in cultural norms. Widespread anxiety and social malaise are the natural consequences of unprecedented change, and young people may come to see the wisdom of their elders as increasingly irrelevant to the challenges presented by a hostile and unpredictable world. Even when the ideals and values of a new generation are in flux and young people turn a deaf ear to the counsel of their elders, we still see a sincere desire among the youth to connect with their familial past. Although Beyala's grandmother was unable to sway the youngest generation of her village, she was able to provide a positive influence for her granddaughter. When she gave Beyala the task of resurrecting her lost village, she gave her no specific instructions other than to do well in school. This advice proved to be sound, because it was the act of writing which enabled Beyala to honor her ancestors, even though it may not have been what her grandmother originally had in mind.

Being a first-generation scholar means creating a new trajectory in the family history. In *Une si longue lettre*, the protagonist Ramatoulaye reminisces about the hope and trepidation she felt as a young woman pursuing higher education. Mariama Bâ was among the first Senegalese women to pursue higher education, and she understood that she was on the cusp of a new generation, embarking on an uncertain future:

Nous étions tous d'accord qu'il fallait bien des craquements pour asseoir la modernité dans les traditions. Écartelés entre le passé et le présent, nous déplorions les "suintements" qui ne manqueraient pas... Nous dénombrions les pertes possibles. Mais nous sentions que plus rien ne serait comme avant. Nous étions pleins de nostalgie, mais résolument progressistes (Bâ 1979, 32).

Bâ's departure from the traditional way of life created a situation in which the disappointments she experienced were different in nature to those of her parents and grandparents, and any advice they could have offered would have been little help. Nevertheless, she was not completely without emotional support. The "nous" of the

above passage indicates solidarity among peers, so this alienation could be classified as normative, and also moderate.

While Bâ was seeking to break free from traditions which limited her opportunities, Ken Bugul sought to reconnect with a family and cultural history from which she had been cut off. The first part of her novel *Le baobab fou* is titled “Pré-histoire de Ken”, and tells of her ancestors living near the baobab tree which was the center of the community where she grew up. It is interesting to note that baobabs are extremely long-lived trees, occasionally living more than 1,200 years. To those native to the African savannah, the baobab is the tree of life, providing food, shade and medicine. However, in *Le petit prince*, Saint-Exupery illustrates how the hardiness of this tree is perceived as a threat by a modern domesticated humanity bent on taking control of the natural world:

Mais s'il s'agissait d'une mauvaise plante, il faut arracher la plante aussitôt, dès qu'on a su la reconnaître. Or il y avait des graines terribles sur la planète du petit prince...c'étaient les graines de baobabs. Le sol de la planète en était infesté. Or un baobab, si l'on s'y prend trop tard, on ne peut jamais plus s'en débarrasser. Il encombre toute la planète. Il la perfore de ses racines. Et si la planète est trop petite, et si les baobabs sont trop nombreux, ils la font éclater (Saint-Exupery 1943, 23).

This passage illustrates the perspective gained by Saint-Exupery as a result of his experiences fighting the Nazis in World War II. For Ken the baobab represented the past and future of her people, but at the end of *Le baobab fou*, it was nothing but a dead tree. The fact that Ken's novel ends with her grieving under the dead baobab is indicative of her extreme and non-normative alienation in this domain. The generations which preceded her took for granted that the baobab would always be there. Her generation saw its death, although it was not necessarily her generation which killed it. The old parable of reaping what one sows, is only partially accurate. It is more often one's children and grandchildren who reap what is sown by their ancestors. Such a statement is not meant to shift the blame for current problems onto preceding generations. Indeed, preceding generations were burdened with left-over problems

from their own ancestors, and the current generation is creating plenty of problems for its descendants. Nevertheless, as the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory posits, generational cohorts find themselves compelled to cope with situations not of their own making only to be criticized for utilizing strategies which deviate from those preferred by their predecessors who contributed to creating the problems.

This same dynamic can be observed at the microcosmic level of the family, as roles are often pre-assigned in the family narrative, and those who deviate from expectations are subjected to criticism. It is common for an unfair burden to be placed on one family member due to her position in the family. As the youngest member of her family, Gabrielle Roy felt pressured to remain at home indefinitely and provide physical and financial care for her mother and mentally ill sister after the death of her father. These events took place during the Great Depression and Strauss and Howe would consider this a time of high conformity. Gabrielle did choose to leave home and pursue her personal goals, but we see a primary emotion of guilt, as opposed to the anger we see in some of our other authors.

Calixthe Beyala was also unfairly burdened by the obligation to revive her grandmother's native village, while Ken Bugul was expected to excel academically in Europe and return to Senegal to financially support her family and community. In all of these cases, one family member was selected to perform a task which the others were unable or unwilling to do, thus creating a separation between the chosen individual and the rest of the family. This separation is frequently characterized by a greater degree of association with the Other. At its worst, this situation can manifest as scapegoating. Kim Lefèvre was the target of hatred and violence in her community and even in her family, solely because of the French blood in her veins. Although she was as much a victim of colonialism as anyone, she was persecuted because the other victims were unable to punish those who were actually responsible. It might seem logical to assume that alienation in the domain of history would tend to be normative, affecting entire sub-cultures rather than individuals, and this is often the case. However, when individuals are singled out to carry a burden not shared by other family members, strong feelings of

alienation are created which are not experienced by the group as a whole. Personal histories begin to diverge dramatically from others in the same group, creating feelings of isolation and exclusion, a problem which we will explore in the following section.

7.3 Your history, my history, our history

Identifying perspective is crucial to understanding any historical narrative. Consider a seven-year-old refugee of the Spanish Civil War. She experiences this historical event from as close as one can get, but the view from that vantage point is extremely limited. The child knows only suffering, but does not understand the cause or the long-term effects. Gabrielle Roy had the experience of walking through a camp full of refugees from this war. She may have seen this suffering child, as well as thousands of others, and she wrote down what she saw in an effort to document as many details as possible. Yet the view of an outside observer is also incomplete. Decades later, a university student reads through the historical accounts and analyzes the long-term political ramifications of the Spanish Civil War and how it shaped the following decades of European history. This student may dedicate his life to the study of history, but his perspective is also incomplete because the misery our young refugee has been rendered insignificant. The difficulty of writing about history is that absolute truth is always an illusion due to the fractured nature of the human perspective. Each person's individual history is unique, but under normal circumstances there is a great deal of overlapping history among members of the same family or peer group. The greatest risk of alienation in this domain occurs when one's personal history differs substantially from the history of others in the same family or cultural group. When this occurs, one can no longer rely upon general consensus for validation of personal experience, and the resulting cognitive dissonance leads to alienation.

More than any other author in this study, Kim Lefèvre's personal history is separated from those of other members of her family and community, and these experiences go back to her earliest years. Her hazy memories of early childhood prior to entering the orphanage were of her and her mother trying to survive on their own in a hostile environment. Although her life was traumatic from the beginning, we find in Kim's early

childhood, one mitigating factor, which may have enabled her to overcome some of her later life experiences. These early years provided Kim and her mother with a shared history which created a special bond between the two women, a bond which did not include Kim's sisters. It was likely this bond which allowed Kim to re-establish the emotional connection with her mother after her time in the orphanage, and to cope with her difficult family situation. The maternal connection was of utmost importance, because without a father, she was cut off from half of her ancestral history. During her four-year stay in the orphanage, her mother married and had another daughter, events which were a part of the family's history, but not a part of Kim's personal history. Her alienation in this domain was exacerbated by her step-father's rejection of her, which caused her to be cut off from half of the family history of her sisters.

Kim's experiences at the orphanage were so foreign to those shared by the other members of her family and community that when she spoke about her time among the French, their reactions only served to emphasize her status as "Other": "On me manifestait le même intérêt qu'on aurait porté à un canard trouvé au milieu d'une couvée de poussins" (Lefèvre 1989, 87). The years Kim spent at the orphanage were a unique time in her life because it was the only time in which she shared this aspect of her alienation with others. All of the girls in this institution were peers; all were living with the stigma of being illegitimate and alienated from both French and Vietnamese culture, yet they were too traumatized to console one another in their shared plight. The distress created by this situation caused the victims to turn on one another and Kim only felt solidarity with the other girls at the moment of her departure: "Pour la première fois, un courant fraternal passa dans nos relations si arides jusqu'alors. Nous éprouvâmes les unes pour les autres une tendresse nouvelle, nous comprîmes enfin que nous partagions le même sort, celui des déshérités" (Lefèvre 1989, 76).

This tender moment was a departure from the bulk of Kim's experiences in this institution. In fact, the alienation Kim experienced in the orphanage was so intense that she remarked that she could not imagine what her fate would have been if she had stayed there much longer. This is a strong statement given the level of trauma she

endured after returning to her family, and one which allows this alienation to be classified as extreme and non-normative.

Kim's identity was thoroughly dissected, and when she lived in Vietnam she tried to negate the French aspects of her identity in order to connect with her family. After immigrating to France, she applied the same tactics in reverse. She avoided the Vietnamese district where she might run into former acquaintances, lost contact with her relatives in Vietnam, and even began to forget words from her native language. However, we often see that the trauma of early life tends to resurface during middle age, and with the passage of years, Kim felt compelled to write about her childhood, an act which proved to be cathartic. The events which followed the publication of *Métisse blanche* allowed Kim to re-integrate the disparate aspects of her fractured identity.

By writing of her life, Kim was able to affirm her personhood, and to tell the story that no one wanted to hear when she was living in Vietnam. Having lost touch with her relatives there, she was unaware of the twists and turns her family's history had taken. Upon her return, she learned that the Second Indochina War (3) had brought yet more violence and famine to the lives of her mother and sisters, and that one of her sisters had been imprisoned for several years for attempting to flee the country. Kim's step-father had died, enabling the women to begin a new chapter of their family history, free from his negative influence. Kim spent much of this visit clarifying misconceptions between herself and her mother and sisters, as the women tried to better understand one another's personal histories. These conversations were painful but necessary, as they allowed Kim to rejoin her own history to that of her family.

In situations such as this, complete reintegration is impossible. By moving to France, Kim created a new history which she did not write about in either of her autobiographical novels. She has chosen to keep the majority of her experiences in France private. She married a Frenchman in 1962, but in a recent interview, she referred to the marriage in the past tense. In this same interview, she briefly mentioned a son, but did not state whether he was her only child (Lefèvre n.d.). The new life she created in France barely touches the history she shared with her mother and sisters. Her son, who is only one

quarter Vietnamese, would have difficulty relating to his mother's life prior to her arrival in France, and even more so with his grandmother and aunts who stayed behind. However, the personal narrative provides a link. Kim stated that she wrote in order to tell the story of her mother, but to whom did she wish to tell it? Out of all of the individuals who would read her books, only her child(ren) can carry this narrative to the next generation of her family.

Although Kim returned to Vietnam alone, Marie Cardinal took her youngest daughter with her when she returned to Algeria after a twenty-five year absence. She wanted Bénédicte to accompany her because this child had been born in France and had never before been to the land of her mother's roots. For Bénédicte, this was not just an opportunity to see another country, but also to see another side of her mother. When Marie left Algeria, she was forced to accept the political affiliations of her birth, even though her European heritage was completely foreign and even repugnant to her:

Je détestais la France, ma famille bien élevée, les rois, les châteaux, les victoires, les gloires, les monuments, les grands magasins, les boulevards, le climat tempéré, la fine pluie distinguée d'été. Pour moi c'était l'enfer: toujours faire attention à se tenir correctement, à parler correctement, à manger correctement, à être habillée correctement. Merde! (Cardinal 1977, preface).

"Enfer" and "merde" are strong negative words to describe one's national heritage, so I classify this alienation as severe. Some of Marie's alienation may have been mitigated because she did not realize when she left Algeria that she would not be able to return. Although Marie and her family were among thousands of other pied-noir families forced to leave Algeria, this type of mass exile is a highly unusual historical event, so I hesitantly classify it as non-normative. Marie surely experienced some backlash upon her return to France after public sentiment turned against the Algerian occupation, and we see a bit of defensiveness in her writing. When the original French colonists arrived in Algeria, they did so with the full support of their compatriots in Europe. It was their descendants who had to cope with the collective guilt and judgment projected onto them for the acts of their ancestors. For Marie, going to France meant leaving behind the

only home she had never known, but for the Arab population, the French exodus represented hope for a new and independent history for Algeria.

Unfortunately, the departure of the French from Algeria failed to provide the satisfaction many Arab freedom fighters had hoped for. Assia Djebar describes how Algeria's history paused for a time, as it struggled to deal with its collective trauma: "Algérie fantôme où les vivants, croyant vivre pour eux-mêmes, continuent, malgré eux, à régler les comptes des morts pas tout à fait morts, persistant, eux, à s'entre-dévorer" (Djebar 1995, 230). Part of Algeria's struggle was learning to live with constant reminders of the French occupation, one of which was the persistent presence of the French language. Coming to terms with the abuses of the colonizer within the language of the colonizer is a paradox which many find difficult to resolve. We must raise the question—is it possible to be completely honest when speaking someone else's language? Language influences patterns of thought and behavior which are specific to cultural groups, and when one is required to communicate in a second language, thoughts and feelings can only be approximated.

We have seen how the loss of indigenous language can lead to children becoming unable to communicate with other family members in a single generation. Maryse Condé only heard her mother speak creole on one occasion and Maryse and her siblings were never allowed to speak it. Their mother associated the creole language with poverty and low social status. These judgments were arbitrarily imposed, but Maryse's mother accepted them without question, and expended a great deal of effort suppressing deeply ingrained patterns of thought and speech. Human beings tend to equate their thought patterns with their sense of self, and since people tend to think in their native dialect, the sense of self is judged as inferior. In such a situation, improving one's status is a task which requires constant vigilance lest an errant syllable give away the humble origins of the speaker. Although it is possible to elevate one's social status in this manner, attempts to improve self-esteem via these methods are doomed to failure on all but the most superficial level. We are reminded of the definition of alienation which came to Maryse after her conversation with Sandrino: "Une personne

aliénée est une personne qui cherche à être ce qu'elle ne peut pas être parce qu'elle n'aime pas être ce qu'elle est" (Condé 1999, 16).

Suppressing a language or dialect judged by the dominant culture to be inferior causes irreparable damage to cultural and personal identity. "Correct" diction and usage are almost always the patterns of speech preferred by the group with the most impressive origin myth. Greater power does not necessarily mean greater linguistic sophistication or higher moral fiber. Often it just means greater numbers, more money, or better weapons. Linguists estimate that of the roughly 7,000 known languages in existence, a language disappears about once every two weeks. Despite scholarly interventions to preserve indigenous languages, economic development is causing them to go extinct even faster than animal species (Underwood 2014). In his book *If this is your land, where are your stories?* J. Edward Chamberlin comments on the Darwinian nature of the survival of languages: "The trouble is that the 'right' conditions are often the product of force...as, of course, are the wrong conditions. The language that wins out is sometimes the one with the army" (Chamberlin 2003, 16).

Assia Djébar had a deep instinctual understanding of the problems associated with the loss of native language, and had mixed feelings about writing in French. Doing so was a political act, which she discussed in a 2005 interview for the PEN World Voices Festival:

I had a lot of good friends who were killed because of the French language—French teachers who were murdered. The only way I could achieve a balance was by using the French language in memory of the victims of intolerance... I can say that I'm tapping the richness of Arabic to continue my trajectory in French (PEN 2005).

Djébar knew that she had gained enormous personal benefits from her French education. Just as she had more freedom to move about in French secular society, she also had more freedom of expression in the French language, which was less steeped in religion than her native Arabic. The French language contributed to the

secularization of Algeria, a cultural change which outraged many Arabs, and contributed to the violence and political unrest which affected Djébar and so many others following Algerian independence. Her alienation in this domain was severe, but normative because it was shared with her entire cultural group.

Although traditions are inevitably lost during social upheavals such as this, adopting a siege mentality toward the future is self-defeating. For many, this means learning the language of the colonizer because that is the language in which books are published. Being forced to comply with Western publishing and copyright conventions can also create alienating situations, as we see in Calixthe Beyala's plagiarism scandal. Beyala's culture of origin is founded on oral tradition and myth, a worldview in which no one can claim ownership of words. The following passage illustrates how deeply this concept troubled her:

Je revins sur mes pas, sans doute pour que le monde ouvre ses yeux sur cette belle vie dure d'Afrique, sans doute pour crier aux ignares qu'un écrivain n'est qu'un griot qui utilise des signes; qu'un griot n'est qu'une mémoire et que cette mémoire appartient à tous. Ou à personne... (Beyala 1998, 222).

One of her motives for writing *La petite fille du réverbère* was to respond to those who had criticized her during this ordeal. The degree of anger apparent in this work is indicative of severe alienation in this domain. I also categorize it as non-normative due to her unusual family situation and the public humiliation caused by the lawsuit, which she lost.

This incident highlights the fact that even though more individuals than ever are able to share their personal narratives, they are still not in complete control over the manner in which they are shared or even the content. All of the authors in this study were affected by these limitations to some degree. Assia Djébar possessed a better understanding of the Western mindset than Beyala, and was generally shrewd enough to present her intended message within the required parameters. Nevertheless, she commented that her Western readers wanted her to write about the Islamic veil. This subject would

certainly have received less of her attention were it not for the influence of her publishers, and we can only wonder what information she had to leave out in order to make room for it. Resolving conflicts in this domain sometimes involves making compromises and choosing one's battles carefully. Some of our authors have managed to do this more successfully than others.

The ability to choose battles wisely was not a skill possessed by Marguerite Duras or her mother. When Marie Donnadieu Legrand spent years of her life attempting to hold back the Pacific Ocean and make her land concession arable, she wasted valuable time and resources which could have been put toward less futile endeavors. In Duras' work we often see obsessive attention focused on a particular crisis, while other problems of equal or greater importance are ignored. Empathy seemed to be a commodity of limited supply, and Marguerite and her brother Paolo generally found themselves dead last on their mother's list of priorities. Ahead of them was their brother Pierre, their mother's various projects to save the land concession, her students, and the impoverished native Vietnamese children on whom she continuously doted. Marguerite felt that her family had been victimized by the colonial government and it may be for this reason that she seems less afflicted by postcolonial guilt than Marie Cardinal, and there is even a trace of white superiority in her work. Although she is not indifferent to the suffering of the natives, there may have been some genuine resentment that what little love her mother had to give was doled out to other children.

Despite the overbearing presence of her mother, Marguerite seems at times like an orphan, not just lacking parents, but lacking a cultural heritage. We don't see a strong connection to Vietnamese culture in her work, but in her childhood, her only connection to France was through the oppressive colonial government, which she and her family hated. She ruminated endlessly about the crimes committed against her mother by the colonial concession office, long after her mother had recovered from the bad investment. The story of how her mother rose from financial ruin to rebuild her fortune would have made an interesting book, but this was not a book Marguerite chose to write. Just as Marguerite seemed to relish her identity as an impoverished victim, she

also took pleasure in seeing herself as a social outcast. She describes herself as having a scandalous reputation as a lycéenne, but former classmates remember a secretive, but well-mannered girl.

In many ways, Marguerite's internal experience did not match up with the consensus of others, but that does not mean that she was being deliberately dishonest. She *felt* like an outcast, and she wrote in order to validate those feelings. She was, at the end of her life, looking back at a very unhappy childhood, and attempting to assuage some of that misery by creating an aura of specialness around the fictional characters she had created out of herself. One can never be quite certain how much of Duras' narrative is true, but there is an anchor point, where Marguerite's account and those of her former classmates converge and that is the diamond ring, portrayed so prominently in *L'amant*. She is remembered to have flaunted a diamond ring at school and bragged about knowing a rich man (Haven 2014). The irony of Duras' obsession with her childhood is that it was an obsession with something which she herself believed, did not exist:

L'histoire de ma vie, de votre vie, elle n'existe pas, ou bien alors il s'agit de lexicologie. Le roman de ma vie, de nos vies, oui, mais pas l'histoire. C'est dans la reprise des temps par l'imaginaire que le souffle est rendu à la vie. ... Rien n'est vrai dans le réel, rien (Manceaux 1997, 104).

Her compulsion to return repeatedly to traumatic memories indicates that she was caught in what Sigmund Freud called "the repetition compulsion", the tendency to continue reliving an earlier trauma and in doing so, to gain mastery over the situation (Van der Kolk 1989). Initially she used alcohol to anesthetize the pain of reliving these experiences, but we might speculate that the repetition compulsion was stronger than her addiction to alcohol. When cirrhosis threatened her life, *L'amant* was still a work in progress. She chose to submit to detoxification treatment so that she could see the novel to completion.

Duras is not the only author in this study who deliberately altered her life history. Calixthe Beyala's novel *La petite fille du réverbère*, though definitely autobiographical, is

inconsistent with many of the published facts about her childhood. Beyala was raised by an older sister, who is conspicuously absent from the novel, in which her grandmother raised her. It would be inappropriate to label this as dishonesty, because the work is an autobiographical novel, not an autobiography, a distinction which allows the author to adjust the facts of the story as needed in order to achieve the desired effect. The narrator may not remember precise details, but the memories are colored by particular emotions, and the author fills in the gaps in a way that illustrates those emotions. The personal narrative also gives the writer the opportunity to have the last word, and this can be very empowering for those who have experienced alienation in this domain. Kim Lefèvre and Calixthe Beyala might have imagined the fathers who abandoned them reading their works. Maryse Condé might have imagined the teachers who discriminated against her because of her race reading her books decades later. Writing about injustice is a political act; thus politics play a role in all of the works of this study. All of the authors in this study considered themselves on the losing end of politics, so it is important to consider the audience for the political messages contained within these works.

Former colonists returning to France experienced tremendous difficulty integrating into mainstream French culture, in large part due to the perceived inferiority of the colonists. Marguerite Duras and Marie Cardinal both commented on the unequal dynamic between colonists and European French. Cardinal describes the paternalism toward the Arab population as “un cancer du ventre”. “La France avait, vis-à-vis de l’Algérie française, un comportement colonialiste qu’on appellera aussi le paternalism, ce cancer du cerveau. Cancer du ventre et du cerveau, cancer généralisé donc” (Cardinal 1977, preface). The analogy of metastasized cancer illustrates the difficulty and rigor of the remedies needed to restore health to both nations after 130 years of occupation. It was Cardinal’s generation which was burdened with this task, and one could make the argument that she made a worthy contribution to this effort with her writing, as did Assia Djebar.

Although an author may not have such grandiose ideas about her work, any personal narrative is a contribution to the collective history of humanity. Gabrielle Roy's work *La détresse et l'enchantement* reads as a traditional autobiography and there is no sense of fictionalization or embellishment. One sees in her writing a desire to give an honest account of the events of her life and to memorialize the people she cared for, even those she knew only briefly. Gabrielle realized that she had lived in interesting times and that most of the fictional characters she had created were based on people she had known. Having used these people to create her fictionalized stories, she felt compelled to tell the true stories of their lives and to show how those stories had intersected with her own. By finding the junctions where personal histories connect, alienation among family members can be healed, and a greater degree of social engagement becomes possible.

7.4 Conclusions: Where do we go from here?

A popular saying in self-help books is "You can't write the next chapter of your life while still reading the last one". Yet the abundance of "posts" in the current lexicon—postindustrialism, postcolonialism, etc. suggests that this belief has not yet caught on, at least not in the academic world. These "posts" lead to a historical dead end as we wait for a clever scholar to name the era which follows postmodernism. Rapid social change has contributed to a general sense of eschatological panic, which has been noted by scholars from a variety of disciplines, including mathematicians Stanislaw Ulam and John von Neumann. Ulam and von Neumann were both concerned about "the ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue" (Ulam 1958, 5). Assuming that the doomsayers are wrong, the era in which we find ourselves will not be the end of history, but will likely end up somewhere in the middle. That being the case, we must consider what type of historical narrative we are leaving for future generations. Statistics and dates are important, but so are the myths which have been handed down for hundreds of years via the oral tradition. The concern for accuracy is

valid, but in this context, accuracy and truth are not exact synonyms, and if the ultimate goal is truth, we should seek to record as many different perspectives as possible.

Generally we do not see multiple historical perspectives portrayed in a single work, but Assia Djébar defies this tradition in *L'amour, la fantasia*. In this book, Djébar shares the macro history of the French occupation of Algeria, as well as autobiographical information and fictionalized accounts of other Algerian women. One million Arabs died in the Algerian War for Independence, but that statistic is not likely to strike an emotional chord in the average person reading a history textbook. Yet Djébar's portrayal of the grief of a fictitious Algerian woman whose son died in that conflict connects the reader to the truth of these events. By depicting archetypal experiences, Djébar was able to share, not what happened to one woman, but what happened to millions of women. Due to the multiplicity of perspectives, *L'amour, la fantasia* leaves the reader with a mosaic, even a disjointed, impression, but this work may be as close to historical truth as we can find from a single author. With her writing, Djébar sought to propel Algeria into a more positive future, and we can conclude that the success of her efforts indicates that she experienced significant healing in this domain.

Documenting historical events is never a simple matter of creating a record of what happened. Eye-witnesses may proclaim "I was there. I saw what happened," but they did not see everything. No one ever does. Even in the best of circumstances, establishing a historical narrative is an imprecise art. Capturing the past is difficult, especially for inhabitants of former colonies whose national traditions were corrupted by decades of outside influence. Colonialism seeks to quiet the ancient myths which hold a people together:

Le colonialism ne se contente pas d'imposer sa loi au présent et à l'avenir du pays dominé. Le colonialism ne se satisfait pas d'enserrer le peuple dans ses mailles, de vider le cerveau colonisé de toute forme et de tout contenu. Par une sorte de perversion de la logique, il s'oriente vers le passé du peuple opprimé, le distord, le défigure, l'anéantit (Fanon 1961, 201).

After the history of a people has been deconstructed, it is often reconstituted, but in a way which bears little resemblance to that which was lost. The new history is painted in broad strokes, and dissimilar groups are frequently lumped together. A pre-Columbian Hopi native would not have felt that he had much in common with a member of the Iroquois League, they are now gathered together under the umbrella term “Native American”. To the historian writing the textbook and organizing the new narrative, they are similar enough to share a generic and much abbreviated history, and their descendants share space at cultural festivals celebrating Native American heritage.

African culture has been subjected to the same involuntary amalgamation, a situation which created a great deal of alienation for Ken Bugul. To Europeans who saw nothing of her except her skin color, Ken was no different from someone from Zaire or Kenya, but she wanted to be respected as a Senegalese woman. She perceived the Festival des Arts Nègres which took place while she was in Belgium as a celebration of the material conquest of Africa, rather than an authentic recognition of African traditions:

Le déchet que le colon avait fait du Noir en l’arrachant à ses rêves trouvait consécration dans cette manifestation mondiale. Le Festival fut le symposium de l’homme noir néocolonial entretenu. La mère Afrique subit l’assaut de la coopération qui ne faisait qu’enliser le Noir de plus en plus dans les bouleversements psychiques insondables (Bugul 1982, 183).

Ken is currently an art dealer living and working in Benin, so we can assume that it wasn’t specifically the marketing of African art which upset her, as much as the appropriation of African culture by outsiders, with the purpose of exonerating centuries of exploitation.

Ultimately, history is a dialogue between the past and the present, and the intentions and motives of those engaging in the dialogue frequently provide the best indicators of the quality and accuracy of the narrative. Despite its elusive nature, the examination of our personal and collective history is a crucial component in understanding the human condition. A great deal of alienation in this domain stems from defamation and the

bearing of false witness. Often, the issue at stake is not one of factual accuracy, but the invalidation of personal experience. The impressions people have of their past should not be discounted, even when those impressions conflict with other evidence. Those impressions exist for a reason and the importance of understanding history is learning from it, and avoiding the repetition of mistakes. Although the facts of what happened are often subject to dispute, intense emotional memories are carried deep within the psyche and rarely forgotten, and it is this type of memory which is most important in the majority of non-European cultural traditions. To the modern European mindset, myth and history are completely different. But to the indigenous mind, myth is the only truth one can hold onto. Unlike simple words on paper, myth is a living truth, which yields to the storyteller and also to the listener.

In creating these autobiographical works, these authors sought to accept their lives and family histories and to create a more positive future for themselves and the generations which would follow. The healing power of writing cannot be understated particularly in this domain because it aids the individual in making peace with her personal and collective past. Human memory is far less reliable than most people realize, but writing about the past serves the purpose of creating a snapshot of a memory. This gives the reader insight into the state of mind of the narrator at the time of the writing, but the writer also has the option of returning to the work and evaluating her own growth and change over time.

The emotional tone of a work depends on the author's stage of recovery at the time of the writing, and Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' research on the stages of grief could be applied to these works. Shock, denial, anger and acceptance are present in all of the authors of this study, but the proportions vary depending on the author and work in question. Generally speaking, shock, denial and anger can be seen more clearly in authors such as Calixthe Beyala and Ken Bugul, who were still fairly young when they wrote their autobiographical works. Acceptance is more prominent among the authors who wrote their autobiographical works toward the end of their lives, such as Gabrielle Roy and Mariama Bâ. In Roy's case, some issues remained unresolved, particularly regarding

her parents, but overall, it seems that she made peace with her life. Likewise, Bâ succumbed to rumination and second-guessing, but she did not get stuck in a repetition compulsion as did Marguerite Duras. She was able to make peace with her past, but her future was far more troubling. By the end of *Une si longue lettre*, it seems that Bâ was ready to set aside her few regrets, acknowledging that almost any course of action available to her would have been fraught with difficulties.

Common sense would indicate that no amount of ruminating over the past will make it better, but quantum mechanics often flies in the face of common sense and there is evidence that observation actually does change the reality of what is being observed (Jeffrey 2015). At the very least, the act of observing and recording the past changes the observer. Writing about one's personal history allows for the integration of that history into a larger context. The personal perspective expands to become a part of the broader human experience. Writing allows the individual to extract painful experiences from the past, and to put some distance between the wounded self and the traumatic memories. If the writer is unable to detach from the memories during the writing process, she remains defeated by them, as was the case with Marguerite Duras.

However, in many cases the observer can be healed physically and psychologically as we see with Marie Cardinal. Following the publication of *Les mots pour le dire*, she was flooded with letters to which she had no time to respond. This is what led her to write her next book *Autrement dit*. Whereas *Les mots pour le dire* chronicled her journey to wholeness through psychotherapy, *Autrement dit* focalized around a series of conversations with Annie Leclerc. *Autrement dit* was an expansion on the material presented in *Les mots pour le dire*, not a parallel representation of it. Annie asked deep, penetrating questions, and Marie's willingness to be vulnerable and allow someone else to control the direction of the conversation demonstrates a strength which was not apparent in her previous book. To Marie, this was a continuation of the psychoanalysis she had undergone earlier, but she now understood that she had outgrown the need for a doctor: "Une fois la période proprement médicale terminée,

quand le malade n'en est plus un, qu'il se sent responsable et capable d'exister sans la présence de son docteur, l'analyse continue" (Cardinal 1977, preface).

Ken Bugul and Kim Lefèvre also demonstrated healing in this domain by writing multiple autobiographical books. With both of these authors, there is a first novel which illustrates the origin of childhood alienation and a second novel in which readers are shown the growth and resolution which occurred as a result of writing the first.

Marguerite Duras provides a sharp contrast to Bugul and Lefèvre because her works seem to run along parallel tracks depicting overlapping events, and there is a feeling of repetition, which we do not see in any of the other authors in this study. Marguerite may have experienced a temporary emotional release as a result of her writing, but the alienation always returned and she felt compelled to rewrite the story. It is noteworthy that *L'amant*, is considered her masterpiece, while her later attempt at telling the same story in *L'amant de la Chine du nord*, shows a decline in artistic merit, as we see her grasping for something which continuously eludes her.

Duras was unable to accept her past, and thus made repeated efforts to erase it by changing the story until it was unrecognizable even to her. However, a large part of healing in this domain involves acknowledging that the past was painful and accepting it as it was. Maryse Condé's parents attempted to protect her from her ancestral history by keeping it a secret, but despite their efforts this legacy had left its mark. The historical trauma had been encoded in her genes, and without any orientation to her ancestral past, she had no way of making sense of it. This trauma was endemic to her culture, embedded so deeply that it had come to seem normal. Maryse was a chronic victim of subtle, but cutting micro-aggressions solely because of her race. It was only on the occasions when the abuse became flagrant, such as when she was bullied by a white girl named Anne-Marie, or when her teacher subjected her to racial slurs, that this suppressed alienation was forced into her conscious awareness.

The chapter of Maryse's book *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* which deals with the abuse she suffered at the hands of Anne-Marie is "Leçon d'histoire". At this point, Maryse was no longer able to follow her parents' example of ignoring the problem. She began

conducting her own investigation, which included asking herself why she had submitted to Anne-Marie's abuse rather than fighting back. This was the beginning of Maryse's empowerment, but it came at the price of distancing herself from her parents. Striking a balance between acknowledging the suffering of one's ancestors and maintaining an attitude of optimism is a difficult task and a frequent source of friction among family members. Whereas a foundation myth based on victimhood will continue down the generational line affecting all who come afterward, pretending that ancestral suffering did not exist also creates alienation. When an entire cultural group is afflicted by ancestral trauma, efforts to overcome it must take place at the individual and the societal level.

Although alienation in this domain is often shared by everyone in a particular society, it can feel very non-normative. Individual coping strategies vary so widely that victims become factionalized and take out their frustrations on one another. This was the case in 1960, when Algeria won its independence. Political independence was an unfamiliar experience because there were no longer any living Algerian Arabs who had not been born under colonial rule. Factionalism and violence became endemic, as the citizens of a newly independent Algeria struggled to overcome 130 years of foreign aggression.

At times such as this, the ties which bind one generation to the next become extremely fragile. Elders are made to feel irrelevant, and the young must adapt to a new way of life which their upbringing may not have prepared them for. Those who resist the changes will eventually be dragged along by the force of history. Calixthe Beyala's grandmother realized this when she looked around and saw that she and her daughters were all that remained of their native village. It wasn't her choice, but her family's future was elsewhere, and once she gave up fighting against the inevitable, she was able to prepare Beyala for a life so different from her own, that she could hardly have imagined it. Education, specifically the skill of writing allowed Beyala to connect with her family's history, and pick up a narrative thread which was in danger of being lost with the vanishing oral tradition. However, nothing could change the fact that she and her

grandmother were living in different worlds. They were connected by love, but their ability to understand one another was compromised.

Beyala gave her readers a vivid image of her grandmother, but would the grandmother have thought it was accurate? There is no way of knowing how the ancestors our authors wrote about would feel about the way they are portrayed in these literary works. Would Maryse Condé's grandmother recognize herself in the novel *Victoire*? This question may be irrelevant because it is ultimately up to the current generation to make sense of history, to find a way to learn from it, and to move forward into an unknown future. Most of our authors wrote in order to document their personal struggles and to make peace with the events of their lives, but they also wrote for their loved ones, to honor them and share their stories. In reading these works, we are reminded that millions of others faced similar struggles and died in anonymity. Chronicling these events, even if it is decades later, is often the only thing which can be done to honor the victims of cultural violence, and to reduce the likelihood of history repeating itself. It may seem unrealistic to believe that the personal narrative could contribute to world peace, but none of the casualty statistics from the Second World War affected the public to the same degree as the *Diary of Anne Frank*. If such narratives serve to reduce the level of violence in the world, perhaps the hardships endured by these individuals were not in vain.

New history is being made with every passing moment, and with it new chances for alienation or integration. For this reason, the journey toward healing is never-ending, and there are many setbacks along the way. The narrative of one's life does not end until the moment of death. Each of the authors in this study had the option of ending her autobiographical work(s) on a positive or negative note. Ken Bugul's novel *Le baobab fou* ends with Ken sitting alone all night under the dead baobab tree. But even in this work, we are reminded that the sun is rising and a new day will begin. And history will continue marching forward.

Notes

- (1) The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 was the last battle between white soldiers and American Indians. The Western frontier was generally considered conquered at this point. 150 Lakota Sioux were killed during the battle, but at least 100 more died of starvation and exposure in the following days (newworldencyclopedia.org).
- (2) Brian Williams claimed to have been aboard a Chinook helicopter which was brought down by grenade and gunfire. It was a comment posted on Facebook by serviceman Lance Reynolds which brought the Williams scandal to light: “Sorry dude, I don’t remember you being in my aircraft. I do remember you walking up about an hour after we had landed to ask me what had happened” (Reynolds 2015). Other servicemen involved in the incident confirmed Reynolds’ statement and demanded that Williams acknowledge that he had lied. Williams did issue an apology, but failed to accept full responsibility for the falsehood, suggesting that he had somehow remembered the incident incorrectly.
- (3) Although this war is referred to as the Vietnam War in the United States, in Vietnam, it is called the Second Indochina War or the American War. Since we are looking at this issue from Lefèvre’s point of view, I will use the Vietnamese terminology.

Chapter 8—Conclusions

L'heure viendra où nous serons roi

Où la terre tournera comme on voudra

Des étrangers nous viendrons de partout pour vivre au mieux

Nous autres serons enfin les moins envieux même s'il faut attendre un siècle ou deux

--Corneille (2005) (1)

8.1 Introduction

In Chapters Two through Seven, we separated the concept of alienation into the six domains of blood, money, land, religion, education and history. This made it possible to deconstruct the experience and engage in a thorough analysis. In this chapter the findings will be synthesized and we will analyze the trends observed among all of the authors across the domains and determine to what degree these women were able to overcome their alienation, and what internal or external conditions facilitated or hindered the process. I assumed that this final stage of analysis would involve the preparation of charts and graphs delineating correlations between the degree of alienation, the number of domains involved and the level of recovery experienced by each of the authors. However, I realized that there were thousands of aggravating and mitigating factors influencing each author's level of resiliency, the multitude of which defied this researcher's attempt at quantification. Therefore, the critical analysis method which has served effectively in previous chapters will again be utilized in presenting these conclusions.

The first trend which was observed was the link between resiliency and cathartic release. In fact, the link was so strong, that in the works studied, resiliency was not observed without catharsis. Cathartic release was almost always followed by a shift toward future-oriented thinking, and a general increase in feelings of optimism. Every author who experienced healing from alienation also experienced a cathartic release of

negative emotions, often occurring in multiple episodes. The term catharsis derives from the Greek “Katharsis”, which stems from the root “Kathairein”, meaning to clean or purify (Barnhart 1988, 151).

At this point we must make a distinction between healthy cathartic release and uncontrolled cathartic aggression. When healthy catharsis occurs, the alienated individual and any allies assisting with the process maintain some control over the experience, and it occurs without causing harm to anyone else. Unhealthy cathartic release or cathartic aggression occurs when negative emotions have been stifled for too long. This type of catharsis is characterized by outward manifestations of rage which may provide temporary relief for the individual experiencing them, but does not lead to long-term healing. Research has shown that engaging in aggressive behavior actually reinforces a link between anger and aggression, leading to an increase in violent behavior over time (Markman 2009). This is the cause of most abusive situations in the home, and perpetuates alienation in the family by transferring it from one generation to the next. The violence may not be physical, but words can be just as damaging. The most obvious example from the texts studied is the verbal abuse Marie Cardinal endured as a teenager when her mother told her about her attempts to induce a miscarriage. After stifling her resentment over the unplanned pregnancy for years, the sudden unleashing of negative emotions may have felt cathartic for Marie’s mother at the time, but this was not a moment of healing. Transference of alienation from parent to child is a common occurrence, and the child is inevitably left to cope with the consequences.

Healthy catharsis can occur in a number of ways, and may take the form of shedding tears, talking about the trauma, or writing. For the remainder of this chapter, this is what will be meant by the term “catharsis” or “cathartic release”. In every case, an author’s inability to experience cathartic release was followed by an increase in alienation and dysfunction, often leading to physical illness. In the midst of her psychoanalysis, Marie Cardinal realized that it was unshed tears, which had been feeding the illness from which she suffered:

Les larmes ont commencé à couler pour que ma douleur soit supportable, j'avais refoulé ma rage alors que je ne savais même pas qu'elle était en moi. Cette révélation soudaine de ma violence est, je pense, le moment le plus important de ma psychanalyse. Sous ce nouvel éclairage tout devenait plus cohérent. J'ai eu la certitude que cette force rentrée, muselée, enchaînée, qui grondait constamment en moi comme un orage, était la meilleure nourriture de la chose (Cardinal 1975, 203).

Catharsis is essential to recovery from alienation, but this can only occur if the individual believes herself to be in a safe environment, and that she has the strength to face her pain without being consumed by it. Ideally home would be safe place where individuals could experience catharsis and console one another in times of distress, but this is rarely the case. If multiple family members are coping with alienation in unhealthy ways, there may be physical or emotional abuse. Sometimes there is a breakdown in communication and a lack of compassion among family members who are too preoccupied with their individual problems to help one another. This was Ken Bugul's experience, and she describes the pervasive loneliness which characterized her adolescent years: "Comment les choses, les rapports en étaient-ils arrivés à un tel point que je ne pouvais plus pleurer en famille et encore moins y rire. La famille!" (Bugul 1982, 181).

Some degree of alienation is unavoidable as one navigates the stages of life. Each of the eight conflicts presented by Erik Erikson represents a vulnerability specific to a particular stage of life, and a normative pattern of alienation experienced by the majority of people. Despite its inevitability, normative alienation can feel extremely non-normative if it is not discussed with others, and for this reason, I found the normative / non-normative classification more difficult than anticipated. Although certain types of alienation tend to be common in a particular culture, the manifestation of alienation is specific to each individual. Furthermore, what is normative in one culture is non-normative in another, and although an entire cultural group may be having a common experience of alienation, that experience may be a historical anomaly. In the cases

where classifications were relatively easy, I found that a normative experience of alienation was no easier to tolerate than a non-normative one, and in some ways it may be even more challenging. Normative alienation may be accompanied by a sense of futility, especially when dysfunction is endemic to a family or society. When such a situation exists there may be few or no unaffected individuals to model a better alternative.

Inevitably, the people who are close to the alienated individual have a significant impact on his or her potential for recovery. For those who do experience healing, it is often bittersweet, because there are always those close to them who are not so fortunate. As Gabrielle Roy prepared to leave Manitoba to travel to Europe her family gathered at the train station to see her off. As she took her seat by the window and saw the family members standing on the platform, she also thought of her deceased relatives, all of whom had struggled without success to realize the same dream that was suddenly coming true for her: “Ils semblaient tous me reprocher leur vie manquée ou incomplète. ‘Pourquoi toi seulement? Pourquoi pas nous? N’aurions-nous pas nous aussi pu être heureux?’” (Roy 1984, 243).

Assia Djébar experienced a similar sentiment, albeit in an entirely different circumstance. When she wore a veil to a cousin’s wedding, she felt as if she were putting on a disguise, one that she was free to discard as soon as the event was over. When she thought of the other Muslim girls in her community who were permanently confined to life behind the veil, it suddenly seemed wrong that she alone should have such privilege:

Soudain, une reticence, un scrupule me taraude: mon “devoir” n’est-il pas de rester “en arrière”, dans le gynécée, avec mes semblables? Adolescente ensuite, ivre quasiment de sentir la lumière sur ma peau, sur mon corps mobile, un doute se lève en moi: “Pourquoi moi? Pourquoi à moi seule, dans la tribu, cette chance?” (Djébar 1985, 239).

These perceived obligations toward one's "semblables" are a recurring theme, and this sort of survivor's guilt can be difficult to overcome. On several occasions, the authors were observed deliberately dwelling on sadness in a moment which should have been happy, solely because their loved ones were deprived of a similar experience. Usually there is a logical understanding that abandoning one's own opportunities out of loyalty to those who don't have them benefits no one, but the misguided tendency to "help" loved ones by taking on some of their alienation is strong, particularly in societies which demand a high degree of conformity.

The pressure to conform is never more intense than during adolescence and a large number of the authors in this study chose to focus on events which occurred during their adolescent years. This is the time when the crisis of Identity Versus Identity Diffusion must be resolved, and it is a particularly vulnerable age because decisions made at this time can be difficult to change later on. During periods of high conformity as described by Strauss and Howe, individuals are pressured to remain in a state of identity foreclosure, which makes successful resolution of this conflict impossible. James Marcia defined identity foreclosure as committing to an identity promoted by others without considering other options. Resisting this pressure requires a strong will, and those who achieve identity integrity are sometimes left with lingering guilt for having failed to meet the expectations of their families. Kim Lefèvre was living in a society which demanded a high degree of conformity, but to a large extent, her ability to conform was hindered by factors outside of her control, specifically her racial status. Being an involuntary non-conformist may have enabled her to take further risks including leaving her homeland, given that her initial attempts at conformity did little to save her from persecution. Identity foreclosure for her would have meant accepting her inferior status and living her life as a scapegoat.

The unrelenting nature of Kim's alienation highlights an issue which I did not address in my opening chapter, that of duration of alienating situations. This factor was hard to ignore as I delved further into the study. It is evident that chronic trauma which persists over a period of years is more damaging than short term alienating events. Although

the latter can create symptoms of post-traumatic stress, as we saw in the case of Gabrielle Roy following her exposure to the Spanish Civil War, the former may cause the individual to develop unhealthy coping skills as was the case with Marguerite Duras. When an individual is subjected to sustained alienation which does not subside despite the passage of years, there is no set point of normalcy to which she can return if the situation improves. This is particularly true if the alienating events take place during a child's formative years. If chaos becomes the norm, the sudden absence of chaos can be so unfamiliar that it may provoke anxiety, causing the individual to deliberately recreate the chaotic situations which she has come to accept as normal. For Duras, the set point established during her childhood was one of poverty and ever-present danger. She came to believe that she was powerless to change her situation for the better, and when money and safety finally came into her life, she paid no attention to present conditions and continued to dwell in her chaotic past. As the only author in this study who showed no significant healing as a result of writing her narrative, Duras' case will be examined more closely and compared to that of Kim Lefèvre, in the following section.

8.2 Spotlight on Vietnam

By coincidence, the two authors who experienced the greatest degree of alienation were both from Vietnam. Kim Lefèvre and Marguerite Duras suffered extensive alienation across all six domains, yet Kim was able to move on from her trauma while Marguerite was not. These two cases invite closer scrutiny, and it seems that a complexity of internal and external factors contributed to the differing outcomes. Kim's experience demonstrates that recovery is possible, even from an extreme degree of alienation, provided that certain conditions are met. First of all, the traumatized individual must find a safe haven, and once there, she must undergo a sufficient degree of cathartic release to separate herself from the trauma. An ally is necessary to facilitate this process. The ally must be loyal, capable of listening without judgment, and willing to hold the individual accountable for her actions. The ally can be a close friend or relative, but only if he or she can set aside any self-interest and avoid being triggered by the emotions released during catharsis. In order for catharsis to be effective, the

alienated individual must have a belief that her situation is not hopeless, that healing is possible, and that a life worth living awaits following recovery. Finally, she must have the determination to move forward into that new life, taking responsibility for her own future.

The most noticeable difference between the two women is that of race, but it is unlikely that Kim's biracial status would have given her an advantage over Marguerite. Despite Marguerite's poverty, her race would have accorded her a number of privileges which were not available to Kim. It is apparent that the two women had vastly different personalities and coping strategies, and they also had different childhood experiences. Although Kim's childhood was every bit as traumatic as that of Marguerite, certain aspects of it may have contributed to her self-reliance, whereas Marguerite's locus of control was more external, a factor which inhibited the first requirement for recovery—that of finding a safe haven. Essential to the creation of a safe haven is the ability to establish boundaries, which was a skill Lefèvre had and Duras lacked. I believe this can be attributed to the relationships these women had with their mothers, who were almost polar opposites. Kim knew that her mother loved her, despite four years of abandonment and the fact that she was not demonstrative. In contrast, Marguerite was never separated from her mother during childhood, and there was an inappropriate amount of physical contact. Marguerite's life at home was devoid of boundaries, with the mother sleeping in the same bed as all three of her adolescent children. Her mother had violent mood swings and Marguerite got swept up in them, absorbing her mother's emotions into herself. Engulfment of this type inevitably complicates the recovery process because the alienated individual must sort out her own trauma from that of other people.

Although Lefèvre was deeply saddened by her mother's life circumstances and even blamed herself to some degree for her mother's difficulties, she did a better job of separating from maternal anxiety than Duras. Furthermore, there was a general feeling in Lefèvre's work that she and her mother were allies. Duras had no allies, although she did have a few people who cared about her, and perhaps even loved her. The

person Marguerite loved the most was her brother Paolo, who was mildly retarded. Although she was Paolo's ally and protector, he was too weak to return the favor, as was her Chinese lover and her friend Hélène Lagonelle. Kim was fortunate to have a mother who provided both love and alliance. Although her mother's ability to help her in a concrete financial way was limited, Kim always knew that her mother wanted the best for her, and her encouragement enabled Kim to find ways to help herself. Although she suggested to her husband that Kim's schooling might benefit them financially, Kim knew that this was a ruse to gain his support, and that her mother's love for her was not attached to any personal agenda. Her dream for Kim was a career as a midwife, but when Kim had other ideas, she was supportive, saying "J'ai choisi pour toi la solution la plus simple. Mais si tu veux avoir une position plus élevée, pourquoi pas?" (Lefèvre 1989, 269).

Kim was appreciative of her friends and allies, and she demonstrates an ability to focus on the positive, even when there was very little to work with. This tendency may be innate or instinctual, but there may also be some degree of personal choice. In research conducted by Richard Wiseman, people who considered themselves lucky tended to notice money which had been left lying on the ground, while people who self-identified as unlucky would step right over it (Wiseman 2004). It is unlikely that a young Kim Lefèvre would have described herself as lucky, but it does seem that she was aware of resources available to her and had the ability to take advantage of opportunities for healing, when they arose. During times of financial difficulty which threatened her academic future, she was able to network and find a friend with whom she could board, or a donor to help with tuition. If Duras ever sought out or received this type of assistance, she never mentioned it, dwelling instead on the family's paltry meals and her brother, Pierre's constant theft.

Kim stored up memories of kindness shown to her, which may have helped sustain her during difficult times. One of the first such memories was when her mother's step-mother put a positive spin on her biracial status: "Tu es un alliage, ni or ni argent, ta vie sera difficile. Mais celui qui recherche la rareté sera heureux de te trouver" (Lefèvre

1989, 38). Kim only benefited from this woman's kindness for a brief time, but she held onto this memory throughout her life. As much as this woman loved Kim, it was Kim's uncle who made the decisions in their household and ultimately forced his sister to place Kim in an orphanage. After four years in this establishment, Kim had become a hard-edged institutionalized child who stifled her emotions to avoid showing weakness. Immediately after being reunited with her mother, she instinctively recognized an opportunity for cathartic healing. The first night she spent with her mother was in a hotel room as they travelled back home, and four years of bottled up misery and loneliness could no longer be contained. Emotionally overwhelmed, Kim lost the ability to speak and spent the night crying like an infant:

Ma mère, affolée, me prit dans ses bras et me berça jusqu'à l'aube. Elle me raconta par la suite combien mes grimaces et mes pleurs de nourrisson lui avaient fait peur. Quant à moi, de cette nuit je ne conserve que le souvenir d'une souffrance intolérable (Lefèvre 1989, 77).

This was the only time her mother showed her that kind of physical affection, but it was sufficient for her to let go of four years of pain. By reverting to an earlier stage of development, even though it was only for a few hours, she was able to reset her relationship with her mother. Her ability to process this healing opportunity efficiently in the midst of ongoing alienating trauma was crucial, because just one day later, she was thrust into a household where her stepfather did not want her and her mother's attention was divided among many other obligations. However, the fact that her mother came back for her after Kim had given up hope of seeing her again, instilled in her the belief that life can change for the better, and this may have given her a more optimistic outlook during times of difficulty.

The closest Marguerite Duras ever came to the type of cathartic release Kim experienced after being reunited with her mother was in the arms of her lover, who she described as a nurturing parent: "J'étais devenue son enfant. C'était avec son enfant qu'il faisait l'amour chaque soir" (Duras 1981, 122). Despite the intensity of his emotional attachment, Marguerite's lover was passive and weak. He provided the

occasional respite from her tumultuous life, but lacked the ability to protect her from her abusive mother, and was himself, at the mercy of his own domineering father. He allowed his father to manipulate him through guilt and money, and both he and Marguerite knew that separation was inevitable. When circumstances finally forced them apart, Marguerite had to hide her tears, not only because of the clandestine nature of their romance, but because it was not permitted to show emotions in her family:

Elle l'avait fait sans montrer ses larmes, parce qu'il était chinois et qu'on ne devait pas pleurer ce genre d'amant. Sans montrer à sa mère et à son petit frère qu'elle avait de la peine, sans montrer rien comme c'était l'habitude entre eux (Duras 1981, 135).

As we see frequently throughout her writing, Duras dissociates from the narrative by switching to the third person when the emotions become too unbearable to relive. This demonstrates that she was not fully committed to the act of catharsis, and thus never received the full benefits of it. She also uses the third person during episodes with her lover, as much of their time together is wasted grieving over their imminent separation. The moments of happiness she enjoyed with him were so tenuous and short-lived that later they seemed dreamlike and unreal, so much so that this episode formed a brief parenthesis which was set apart from all of the other events of her life.

Thus Marguerite came to perceive safety and love as an anomalous event to which she could never return, and this deeply-held belief precluded her ability to find safety in any domain. Even as a child, she seemed to have discarded any hope of financial security. The statement “Je crois qu'on est pauvre de naissance” (Duras 1991, 148) which she attributed to her fifteen-year-old self is almost too cynical to be believed in someone so young. It may be that the older Marguerite wished to give her character an edge, by projecting some of her own cynicism onto her younger self, thus making her appear wise. Money was her primary domain of alienation, and the pathetic nature of this alienation is represented in the continuous conflict against two immovable forces—the French Colonial Government and the Pacific Ocean. The futility of fighting against these two forces and the absolute refusal of Marguerite's mother to acknowledge defeat

are at the heart of this alienation. Marguerite's desire to help her destitute mother, and thus regain her love was a hopeless task, and her failure only served to create the expectation of failure and alienation throughout her life.

Kim Lefèvre also experienced an extreme degree of alienation in the domains of money and land, which in her case was normative as a result of colonial exploitation and war. Alienation in these domains is especially problematic for individuals seeking a safe haven. On one occasion, Kim and her family were forced from their home, and soldiers burned their entire village to keep the French from taking it. Kim and her family were reduced to refugee status and occasionally went without food, and during these times, the extent of her poverty would have surpassed that experienced by Duras. However, during times of relative political stability, there were opportunities for economic advancement, and by the time Kim left Vietnam, her step-father's business ventures were going well. She did not characterize her childhood as one of chronic poverty, but of financial volatility and a frightening degree of economic vulnerability to unreliable men. In her family, the men controlled the money and thus the women who were financially dependent upon them. Kim lacked a strong female role model in this domain, although Marguerite might have had one if she had chosen to open her eyes to it. We know that Marguerite's mother was able to improve her financial standing and recover from the losses sustained due to the land concession, although her daughter's attention remained fixed on their years of destitution. Few thinking patterns are more self-destructive than habitually denying the existence of that which is positive. In some cases Duras seems to make a deliberate decision to be dishonest with herself, while at other times, positive experiences were pushed outside of her awareness by subconscious defense mechanisms.

It is likely a combination of these factors which caused Marguerite to be cut off from the support of a spiritual community. Religious and educational institutions can serve as fallback havens for individuals with dysfunctional home lives, and Kim was able to take advantage of these opportunities by converting to Catholicism during adolescence. Religious celebrations and other holidays were completely absent from Duras' family

life, although it is probably a safe assumption that she had at least as much access to the resources of the Catholic Church as Lefèvre. It may be that she simply was not moved by religious stimuli, and it did not occur to her to depart from her family's tradition by seeking out religious experiences on her own. There is no way of knowing how she would have responded had she been exposed to more religious traditions during her childhood; it might have been a source of comfort or yet another thing which provoked fear.

She used religious language in her personal narrative on one occasion, when she described her brother Paolo as a martyr. Since she had no belief in God and had never experienced the comforting aspects of religion, Paolo's martyrdom seemed devoid of purpose, a sacrifice which meant absolutely nothing. Paolo's death seems to mark the point at which Marguerite's last opportunity for healing was lost. At this point she became fully committed to her status as victim. She lost all hope for the future and turned to alcohol to dull her pain. She acknowledged that alcohol had taken the place of God in her life. In one of her final interviews, she commented "I had a lover with whom I drank a lot of alcohol" (Garis 1991). We might speculate that this addiction represented a desire to return to the only safe haven she had ever known—those few stolen hours with her lover.

Marguerite Duras experienced a great deal of success in her life. Her academic achievements at the Sorbonne, her heroic work for the French Resistance during World War II, a beloved son with a successful career as a photographer, and her literary contributions all point to a life well-lived. Yet all of these outward manifestations of success stand in stark contrast to the inner poverty which characterized her private life. Despite all the other events of her life, she continued to define herself by her impoverished childhood, a brief love affair she had at the age of fifteen, and the premature death of her brother Paolo. Her departure from Vietnam meant leaving behind her lover, with whom she had no hope of being reunited, and her attempt at making a fresh start in France was thwarted by the eruption of World War II. A certain degree of optimism is necessary for recovery from alienation, and Duras was derailed

by a series of painful events which included her husband's detainment in a concentration camp, a stillborn child, the theft of her life savings by her brother Pierre, and the death of Paolo. Although she spent the second half of her life in relative safety, among people who would have been willing allies, she had suffered so many losses that she was no longer capable of experiencing recovery, even when she tried. Her companion, Yann Andrea, who doted on her during the last sixteen years of her life, helped her to stop drinking, but at that point, alienation had become a fossilized aspect of her identity.

In contrast, it seems that Kim Lefèvre had an innate capacity for resilience which manifested automatically when conditions were favorable for recovery. Conditions were not often favorable in her youth, and on many occasions, she had to wait a long time for circumstances outside of her control to change for the better. Nevertheless, she arrived in France during a time of relative peace and prosperity, which allowed her to make a clean break with her past, establish a new life, and then look back on her youth from a point of safety. Safety is an absolute necessity for recovery and without it catharsis cannot occur. We will explore the relationship between safety and catharsis in the following section.

8.3 Safety and catharsis

The moment of cathartic release is one of extreme vulnerability, and for that reason, catharsis cannot occur without a safe environment and the support of at least one ally. If these conditions are not met, the alienated individual will continue to suppress her most violent negative emotions, even when doing so compromises her health. Marie Cardinal was well into her seven years of therapy before she made this realization: "J'étais émerveillée par la belle et compliquée organization de l'esprit des êtres humains. La rencontre avec ma violence est intervenue quand il le fallait. Je ne l'aurais pas supportée avant, je n'aurais pas été capable de l'assumer" (Cardinal 1975, 203). It was found that alienation within the domains of blood, money and land made it more difficult to gain access to a safe haven. These three domains, identified by Cardinal as the things colonists were unwilling to share with natives, represent the essentials of life

without which one cannot survive. That is not to say that there was never any exchange of blood, money, or land between the colonizer and the colonized, only a lack of *willingness* to share. Most colonists were committed to maintaining the upper hand in each of these domains, and any transference that did occur brought with it the risk of abjection for those affected.

Power maintained by brute force often proves to be illusory and Cardinal's status as colonist did nothing to protect her from alienation. The colonists themselves were victimized by this system, as illustrated by Marie Cardinal's distress brought on by her forced departure from Algeria and the exploitation of Marguerite Duras' family by the colonial government in Vietnam. Cardinal's primary domain of alienation was blood, and she could have lost her life as a result of it. The healing she experienced was nothing short of miraculous and serves to validate talk therapy as a tool for recovery. She was suffering from symptoms of extreme abjection and one of the first things her therapist did was provide necessary assistance with boundary formation. He accomplished this by insisting that she keep to the regular appointment schedule and follow office protocols, thus establishing his office as a safe haven for her recovery. The primary function of an ally is to listen without judgment, but as a therapist, he was also capable of distinguishing symptoms from source problems. He recognized immediately that her flow of blood was only a symptom, and was distracting Marie from her real trauma. He showed no interest in her symptoms, and simply encouraged her to talk about the events of her life. This technique proved so effective that the flow of blood stopped almost immediately, although it took years for her ongoing narrative to uncover the deepest root of her problem.

As women, all of these authors experienced the blood-related alienation surrounding menstruation and loss of virginity. Most of this alienation is normative, with Cardinal being the exception. When blood is found outside the body it constitutes a boundary breach of the worst kind, one which speaks to the primal fear of loss of life. The anatomy of women's bodies requires the monthly shedding of blood, a boundary breach to which women must become accustomed during adolescence. The loss of virginity is

an obvious boundary breach, as is the Other's intrusive preoccupation with virginity status. The majority of responsibility for preserving virginity is placed upon the young girl. Although young men may be involved in policing the sexuality of women in their immediate family, they may also prey on the virginity of women outside their family. This creates an atmosphere of distrust between men and women and even among women themselves. The normative nature of this type of alienation does nothing to reduce its severity, and the situation is riddled with irony. Any loving mother, aware of the degree of shame which would befall a young woman judged to be sexually impure, would try to protect her daughters from such a fate. In such cases, the mother would be acting as an ally, using her experience to help her daughters navigate the oppressive patriarchal system. Although the mother is participating in the patriarchal control system she does so because she knows the consequences of defying it. When Marguerite Duras lost her virginity at the age of fifteen, her mother responded with apathy, which only proved to Marguerite that her mother did not care what happened to her.

Duras was fortunate in that she did not become pregnant as a result of her relationship with her lover. An unplanned pregnancy at that time in her life would have had catastrophic results. Pregnancy dissolves many boundaries because it requires the mother to shelter another human being within her body for nine months. Under ideal circumstances, the mother's feelings toward the fetus are nurturing, but abjection is inevitable if the child is not loved or wanted, as was the case with Ken Bugul who chose to have an abortion. If the mother is unable to overcome her feelings of abjection toward her child and does not have an abortion, abuse toward the child is assured as we saw with Marie Cardinal. It is a mother's job to console her children, and ideally, a mother should provide the first safe haven for cathartic release. Not all mothers are able to fulfill this task, which makes early childhood a vulnerable time. All nine authors experienced some degree of alienation relating to their mothers, with some experiencing significant abuse or even maternal abandonment.

Women are especially vulnerable during pregnancy, as desertion by the child's father would have dire consequences, and this vulnerability does not go away after the birth of the child. Mariama Bâ's narrative illustrates the degree of stress mothers face when trying to care for their children without a proper network of support. Bâ's trauma came about later in life when she was resolving Erikson's crisis of Generativity Versus Stagnation. Her life had not turned out the way she had imagined and many of the goals she had set in motion decades earlier could not be unfulfilled due to her husband's abandonment. She was completely without allies other than Aïssatou, the recipient of her letter to which the title of her novel refers. The character of Aïssatou may have been based upon a friend of Bâ's, but since she bears the same surname as Bâ, it is more likely that she was an alter ego, an attempt by Bâ to conjure a support system where none existed. Either way, Aïssatou was residing on another continent and could not be physically present for her friend in her time of need. It seems that circumstances propelled Bâ prematurely into the next and final crisis in Erikson's theory, the crisis of Ego Integrity Versus Despair. This conflict is apparent in *Une si longue lettre*, as the narrator struggles to make sense of her life, and there is no evidence that Bâ was able to fully resolve this crisis prior to her death.

While Bâ was without allies, Gabrielle Roy's family provided her with a small army of allies, but all were impoverished and struggling with various manifestations of alienation, which put a strain on the family unit as a support system. In Roy's family, the primary domain of alienation was money. The boundary issue is a prominent one in this domain, especially for those living in societies which demand high conformity, as individuals are expected to share any good fortune which comes their way. There are obvious benefits to this type of safety net, but the drawbacks are immense. As the only member of her family to maintain steady employment during the Great Depression, Roy struggled with feelings of guilt for saving money for a trip to Europe rather than sharing her earnings with struggling relatives. This internal conflict reached culmination shortly before her scheduled departure, when her mother's unexpected illness nearly forced her to deplete her savings and cancel her trip.

Roy spent the first three decades of her life feeling financially overwhelmed, and her later success was marred by regret that she was unable to help the rest of her family. These regrets stayed with her for the remainder of her life, and Roy's experience illustrates that recovery exists along a continuum, and almost no one manages to completely transcend the experience of alienation. The events which provoked the trauma cannot be erased and thus remain a part of the "self". Over the past century, numerous psychological techniques which purport to reframe traumatic memes and neutralize the negative emotions associated with them have been introduced. From traditional psychotherapy to hypnosis to neuro linguistic programming, the abundance of such techniques illustrates that none of them have proven to be fully effective, and we must conclude that living with a certain degree of trauma may simply be a part of the human condition.

All of the loving feelings Gabrielle felt for her relatives were mixed with sadness because they had all shared the traumatic experience of long-term poverty. Releasing the sadness would have meant losing the familial affection as well. Although money itself is no guarantee of emotional well-being, the shame and vulnerability created by financial lack, compromises one's ability to find a safe haven. Most individuals experience occasional financial strain, but if the predominant experience with money is one of stability, the individual will perceive financial difficulties as temporary setbacks and will act with confidence to address them. Sometimes a little bit of financial distress can provide an opportunity for empowerment. In the case of Marie Cardinal, we see just the right amount of financial discomfort. The financial problems she experienced were not insurmountable, and were a necessary distraction from her health problems. The manageable task of maintaining employment to pay her therapist and provide for her needs boosted her confidence so that she could address her more serious issues in therapy.

Cardinal also experienced alienation in the domain of land. Alienation in this domain makes it almost impossible to find a safe haven, because the home itself is no longer secure. In the domain of land, it was discovered that the vast majority of alienating

experiences were secondary, or filtered through the medium of human politics. Where primary land alienation does occur, as we saw with Gabrielle Roy trapped in the bog, recovery is significantly easier despite the severity of the event, perhaps due to the absence of malicious human intent. The greatest contributing factor to alienation in this domain is that of war. Assia Djébar witnessed a tremendous amount of violence during and after Algeria's struggle for independence, and as a result, land was her primary domain of alienation. The only mitigating factor was that Djébar was a young adult during this conflict, and was politically engaged in the process. She had a feeling of solidarity with other Algerian Arabs of her generation who were also fighting for their country's freedom. Their empowerment came at a high price, and the excitement of embarking on a new era of freedom quickly faded as they were left to cope with the lingering reminders of the French Occupation, and the loss of over ten percent of their compatriots who died in the conflict.

The nuances of the relationship between colonizer and colonized are lost on children who may not see the agenda hidden in their school textbooks. It was not until adolescence that Ken Bugul realized the degree to which the African continent had been exploited. This exploitation became very personal during her time in Europe when she found herself alone and without allies. Like Djébar, Ken makes a literary connection between land and the female body, and her experiences with prostitution were directly tied to her alienation in this domain. Her clientele found her exotic and she accepted that label, although it meant nothing to her. She was not exotic to herself, but having been immersed in a foreign culture, she had lost touch with her true identity. Erikson and Marcia did not take into account the factors of colonialism and super-imposed cultures when they developed their theories of psychosocial development, but the bicultural nature of Bugul's existence created extraordinary obstacles for her to overcome, and the closing scene of *Le baobab fou* shows her at the rock bottom of her despair. Even so, she managed to make a remarkable recovery. She rejected much of what she had been taught by the European school system and fully embraced her identity as a Senegalese woman. Thus she successfully resolved the crisis of Identity

Versus Identity Diffusion, and by entering into a happy marriage with the Serigne, she resolved the following crisis of Intimacy Versus Isolation.

Sometimes the best treatment for alienation in the domain of land is time away from home, and every author except Mariama Bâ left her homeland at least temporarily. In the case of Bâ, it is difficult to clearly classify her alienation in the domain of land because the entire system, religious, political, economic, and cultural seemed to be working against her. Without an ally to encourage her, she encouraged herself and tried to envision a better future for her children. To an extent, Bâ managed to make peace with her life and even achieve a partial recovery, but it is far less than one would hope for in such a situation. Due to her age and maternal obligations, leaving Senegal and making a fresh start were out of the question. Her willingness to experience catharsis was insufficient for her to make a full recovery, as her environment and life circumstances did not provide her with many of the necessary resources. This is a common problem which we will discuss in the following section.

8.4 Something to strive for

The logical purpose of healing from alienation is to have a more enjoyable, balanced and productive life following recovery. Processing and releasing alienating trauma is a daunting task, and without some future benefit on the horizon, there is little motivation to go through such an ordeal. Individuals with a predominantly external locus of control may feel that they are incapable of experiencing meaningful change, and fail to recognize the opportunities available to them. Alienation in the domains of religion, education and history tends to contribute to this problem. These domains represent the ideologies held by individuals and cultural groups, some of which have been misused for centuries to subjugate entire civilizations. Sometimes there are external forces which prevent an individual from healing. Although it would be gratifying to believe that personal initiative and will are the sole factors determining the extent of recovery, there are a multitude of insurmountable obstacles which can make healing impossible. Women living in patriarchal societies may find themselves trapped in an abusive marriage, or financially subjugated to such a degree that there is no discernible means

of escape. If the alienated individual has no role models in her family or community who have managed to overcome similar difficulties, she may be unable to imagine any other type of existence. This is one of the dangers of normative alienation, especially that which is long-term.

Hope for the future is essential to the healing process, and on a global scale, things seem to be moving in a positive direction. There are numerous reasons to justify optimism regarding humanity's future, not the least of which is the ease with which ideas can be shared on a world-wide basis. Those who are dedicated to bringing about positive changes are no longer working in isolation, and can organize their efforts and encourage one another with the click of a mouse. In general, we see a greater degree of openness than in past generations, and a willingness to share the pain, shame and sadness of human existence, especially if doing so can help others. By publically sharing their personal narratives, each of these authors has reached out to those facing similar hardships. Although no book can take the place of a flesh and blood ally, the written word can inspire and encourage, bringing comfort in times of distress.

As flawed as our formal educational systems are, they seem to have instilled a sense of social justice which is becoming more pronounced with each generation. World events point to an emerging intolerance of the discrepancy between the way things are and the way things should be, and we see increasing public outcry against the institutions which profess to uplift humanity, while victimizing the most vulnerable members of society. The attention focused on corruption and abuse of power may give the appearance that things are getting worse even though this is a sign that positive changes are well underway. The allegations of sexual abuse which created such a public relations nightmare in recent years for officials of the Catholic Church, served to shine a light on the shadow side of religion, forcing the institution to engage in a thorough self-examination. Victims who had suffered in silence for decades were able to tell their stories and begin the process of cathartic healing.

Humanity may be on the cusp of a spiritual renaissance, but there is still a great deal of alienation imposed by organized religion. Religion sets itself apart from all other

domains in that it has the power to threaten adherents even beyond the moment of physical death. Any organization wielding this type of psychological control should be closely scrutinized. In a perfect world, religious institutions would be places where suffering individuals in need of an ally and a safe haven could find them and begin the healing process. In many cases this is true, but in patriarchal societies, women who seek religious experiences are starting from a place of disadvantage, and are often made to feel that they must compensate for their gender. Although studies show that women are generally more religious than men (Zuckerman 2014), they are still not eligible for ordination in many churches, and the Judeo-Christian creation myth paints the first woman in a negative light and curses all those who follow. The inherent biological vulnerabilities of women as child-bearers have contributed to the misogyny which has been present to some degree in almost every human civilization since the Stone Age. Patriarchal religions brought about the introduction of official mandates which have served to institutionalize restrictions placed on women, particularly regarding their sexuality and freedom of movement.

Even Assia Djébar, arguably the most empowered woman in this study, was plagued by feelings of vulnerability. Her loving parents were remarkably progressive in their attitudes compared to the other Muslim families in the community. Nevertheless she was frightened by the fact that her father had such complete control over her, even though he chose not to wield it. She received an education because he chose to allow it, and she knew that he was free to change his mind at any moment. This situation highlights a truth which many feminists find difficult to accept; the fact that male allies are an absolute necessity if a woman is seeking emancipation in a patriarchal society. The first feminists to emerge from patriarchal cultures are almost always women of extraordinary intelligence who are fortunate enough to have liberal-minded, male relatives who do not see their intelligence as a threat. Breaking free from such a system is all but impossible without the cooperation of such men.

Mariama Bâ's situation illustrates the degree of coercion suffered by women in patriarchal societies who do not have male allies. It was her father's advocacy which

allowed her to receive an education and thus pursue a career, but much of that freedom was lost when her husband abandoned her. As a single mother of nine living under a Muslim patriarchy, she realized how limited her options were. Her husband was surrounded by powerful allies who justified and excused his behavior. Having reached middle age she found that she had invested so much of her life in the future she expected to have with her husband, that there was little energetic capital for her to make a fresh start following his departure. In his absence, her only option was to carry on to the best of her ability, fulfilling his obligations as well as her own. It is apparent that Bâ had the motivation and potential for healing but lacked the resources necessary to complete the process. She is to be commended for doing what she could to promote her own healing. The safe havens available to her were those provided by her job, her writing, and the books, music and movies which supplemented the companionship she needed, but these were insufficient for her to experience the needed catharsis. Writing served as a sort of psychotherapy, and it did allow her to experience some healing, although it was partial and incomplete.

One hears the voice of Bâ speaking through the character of Ramatoulaye in *Une si longue lettre*. She is gracious and advocates for forgiveness and family unity, and if this were Bâ's final work, we might conclude that she had made peace with her life in spite of her husband's betrayal. However, her second and final novel, *Un chant écarlate* shows a degree of anger which she was not able to express in a work which was as obviously autobiographical as *Une si longue lettre*. In this work Mireille, a young French woman, driven to madness by her Senegalese husband's infidelity, kills their young child and stabs her husband. This scene illustrates one of the potential consequences of an inability to achieve a healthy cathartic release. Individuals who commit violent crimes often state that something inside them "just snapped." If the need for catharsis is sufficiently strong, the suppressed anger may force itself out in a fit of violent rage. Physically, Mireille is nothing like Ramatoulaye or Bâ. She is young, white, and blonde, a negative image of Bâ, her shadow self, and in this character, we see evidence of a suppressed anger which almost certainly contributed to Bâ's poor health and premature death.

Mariama Bâ was failed by the spiritual leaders of her community, who defended her husband and left her without support. However, a religious mentor who provides council without judgment can be the ideal ally, and when such a mentor is found, religion becomes one of the most powerful resources available for those recovering from trauma. Ken Bugul had been involved in activities a patriarchal religion would usually consider unforgiveable in a woman. She had had an abortion, abused drugs, and worked as a prostitute. Even so, of all the authors in this study, she experienced the greatest degree of empowerment in this domain, because she was able to find the right mentor. After she returned to Senegal she sought out the Serigne, a holy man who became her friend, ally and husband. He recognized that she had gained wisdom as a result of her traumatic experiences, and encouraged her to talk about them. Over time, her painful past lost much of its sting, and she was able to create the authentic life she wanted.

All nine authors experienced alienation in the domain of education, some to an extreme degree, yet none of them seems to regret having attended school. Ken Bugul, who experienced such an extreme degree of alienation that she abandoned her studies before graduating from university, promotes education, while criticizing the corrupt implementation of it. The educational empowerment of these women is proof that the existence of alienation within a specific domain does not negate the possibility of empowerment within that domain, as long as the positive experiences outweigh the negative ones. Some of these authors come from countries where universal education is still far from reality. Even those who were fortunate enough to have consistent access to education suffered from discrimination based on race, gender, religion, and native language. Although the women in this study managed to overcome these obstacles, many people are not so fortunate, and they number in the billions. Those who are not able to receive an education have diminished access to the intellectual and material resources which enhance personal agency and quality of life, and are therefore at increased risk for alienation in all the domains.

In addition to the practical importance of school as a place to prepare for a career and financial independence, it is also the place where members of a generational cohort come together to explore ideas about the issues which define them, thus creating a boundary between themselves and their parents and grandparents. When bright young minds converge on university campuses, the result is often the emergence of paradigm-changing ideas. Maryse Condé was fortunate enough to be a part of such a movement, which brought about a world-wide shift in social consciousness. After experiencing severe alienation in secondary school, she found her safe haven at the Sorbonne, where she found friends and allies among the other students and writers involved in the Négritude movement. Condé's personal experiences with alienation contributed to her literary greatness. It is the process of overcoming adversity which deepens a writer's colors and makes it possible for her to create the complex fictional characters which populate the great works of literature. Her personal struggles served to enrich her art, which has given her a place among the greatest Caribbean writers in history.

There is a drawback to educational institutions as portals for social change. Since schools are quicker to espouse change than other imbedded cultural institutions, students may be given the illusion of opportunities which are not yet available outside the academic world. Ideas promoted sooner than they can be implemented lead to false hope, and this is especially true in societies with multiple cultural influences, or those going through social transition. The two authors who experienced this to the greatest degree were both from Senegal. Ken Bugul became disillusioned with the European educational system when she realized that it promised equality of opportunity, while subtly promoting European dominance. Likewise, Mariama Bâ was exposed to feminist ideals which were decades away from taking hold in her society. She strove to make these ideals a reality, but her efforts made more of a difference for subsequent generations than for her own.

By promoting social change, idealistic students attempt to create a new historical trajectory. The academic study of history gives scholars a clear picture of where things have gone wrong in the past, allowing them to focus on how best to create a better

future. However, alienation in the domain of history inhibits future growth, especially when entire races of people are made to feel that they have no historical accomplishments on which they can look back with pride. Aimé Césaire was one of the founders of the Négritude movement, and his prose poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* illustrates his own journey from alienation to healing. Early in the work he identifies the historical subjugation of the black race as the greatest threat to the future of his people. The danger of alienation in this domain is getting stuck in the belief that the past dictates the future and the way things have been are the way things will always be. Césaire leads by example, and after acknowledging the past as it was, he looks forward:

Et nous sommes debout maintenant, mon pays et moi, les cheveux dans le vent, ma main petite maintenant dans son poing énorme... Et la voix prononce que l'Europe nous a pendant des siècles gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences, car il n'est point vrai que l'œuvre de l'homme est fini que nous n'avons rien à faire au monde... (Césaire 1939, 20).

The first step of healing is acknowledging the past, as painful and imperfect, but many people get stuck in this stage. They experience an incomplete catharsis by telling, but not releasing the traumatic story of their past. There is a perverse and self-indulgent pleasure in acknowledging one's victimhood, becoming angry about it, and projecting that anger onto the responsible party. It may be tempting to try to recreate this feeling of vindication by telling the story again. Marguerite Duras became rooted at this point and failed to advance any further with her healing. Moving on to the next stage of healing requires taking responsibility for what happens next. This responsibility stretches into the distant future, because even death cannot release the trauma of alienation. It is possible to transmit alienation onto future generations biologically through genetic lines, and verbally, by misusing the oral tradition to perpetuate negative foundation myths.

Although the buffer of time does not always provide the expected degree of protection, in some cases, the passing of a couple of decades can enable an individual to look

back on childhood experiences with greater objectivity. This gives the adult self the opportunity to come to the aid of the defenseless child self. Calixthe Beyala exemplifies this in *La petite fille du réverbère*, in which she allows herself a much-needed catharsis by expressing years of pent-up anger. She imbues her younger self with a knowledge and perspicacity beyond her years, and speaks in defense of the child she was as well as others like her. Beyala's ongoing activist work and her commitment to helping Cameroonian orphans prove that she has not forgotten her origins. Her transformation from the dirty, illegitimate street urchin Tapoussière to the world class author she is today, is remarkable. Those who have successfully emerged from alienation are uniquely qualified to serve as allies and mentors for those still suffering. Beyala demonstrates empowerment in the domain of history, which expands across all domains. By taking control of the past, and looking without bitterness at events which caused trauma, one draws the strength to envision and create a better future. It is unlikely that alienation can ever be eliminated in a world of human fallibilities and limited resources, but this rite of passage which affects everyone might become significantly easier if the historical trajectory can be altered by even a few degrees.

8.5 Final thoughts

In retrospect, I believe that the strength of this study lies in the deconstruction of alienation into diverse domains, which ties the personal experience of alienation to academic disciplines such as economics, biology and ecology and to societal constructs such as religious and governmental systems, where the individual perspective is often not considered. However, the topical nature of this research precluded the depth of analysis which would have been possible with a more narrowly-focused study, a limitation which leaves this topic open for further research. As postcolonial and feminist theory continues to evolve, there will always be new avenues of inquiry to explore, particularly in the shifting notion of cultural identity. It was Homi Bhabha who insisted that true cultural identity cannot be found within the walls of museums, but in the manner in which a people chooses to confront the alienation and threats to its survival thrust upon it by a hostile world (Bhabha 1994, 172). This is a departure from traditional

interpretations, but one which provides a vibrant alternative to approaches which focus on dichotomies of conquest and victimization.

This nascent shift away from an adversarial perspective is likely to progress slowly, as it conflicts with deeply ingrained patterns of thought and behavior. The human brain seems to be genetically wired to distrust outsiders, and this may have served our cave-dwelling ancestors quite well. We are now living in an era in which cooperation, rather than competition is the key to survival, but the difficulty of overcoming these long-held instinctual tendencies is exacerbated by the unchecked greed of the ruling class. Over the past several centuries, the primal fear of the unknown Other has been exploited by those in positions of power to promote discord and gain support for wars of conquest. The nature of our xenophobia has changed, and classism has begun to supplant racism in many parts of the world, but the plutocrats of the world continue to take advantage of innate hostilities to maintain support for an underclass of laborers to balance out the supply and demand economic equation (Franks 2012).

Ethno-racial boundaries are becoming weaker for a variety of reasons including global commerce, ease of world travel, and an increase in interracial relationships. Some theorists have even suggested that in the coming centuries the human race will experience an ethnic and cultural consolidation, characterized by a common language and an increase in racial amalgamation (Cheney-Rice 2014). In many ways, this would constitute a tragic loss of linguistic and cultural heritage, but on the positive side we can only wonder how long racism could endure in such a world.

Already, there are signs of progress, and statistics reveal a worldwide decline in violence, although the media has chosen not to report on this trend. Europeans and Americans can turn to CNN or BBC News and receive continuous updates on violent events occurring all over the world. Yet these incidents are in the news because they are unusual, and as anecdotes, they are not representative of wider trends. In his book, *The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined*, Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker provides convincing statistical evidence of a dramatic worldwide reduction in war deaths, family violence, racism, rape and murder. He attributes these

changes to the fact that IQ has steadily risen with each generation, with standards defining the 100-point average constantly being adjusted upward. According to Pinker, we are living in a smarter, more educated world, which places a higher value on human life than it used to (Pinker 2011).

Humanity seems to be putting its best evolutionary foot forward to cope with unprecedented challenges. Outrage over human rights abuses contribute to the continuing world-wide civil unrest. These sweeping manifestations of anger exacerbate chaos in the short term, but they also signal a collective catharsis which might prove to be the last convulsions of barbarism. Political revolutions are most likely to occur at times in history when people are anticipating a positive future which does not materialize, whereas societies characterized by unrelenting inequality and injustice can go decades, even centuries without significant rebellion because there is no hope with which to fuel it (Robinson 2008). The pioneers of social change are the first to experience the hope which later spreads to everyone involved in the movement. No one knows from whence this first spark of hope comes, but advancements such as the printing press and the World Wide Web have made it possible for that hope to spread from the mind of one person to the entire globe.

These pioneers don't always live long enough to see the desired changes with their own eyes, but events seem to be accelerating at a rate never before seen. The song lyrics chosen to set the tone for this chapter state that a century or two may be necessary for the desired changes to materialize, a very optimistic time frame which would still exclude the songwriter. Even knowing that, Corneille describes such a time as "notre jour", indicating that he considers himself a part of this new world, even though he may not be physically present in it. As Pinker and other researchers have demonstrated, the world is already much safer than it was in the past. Humanity is emerging from centuries of collective trauma, but it will take time before the majority of people will be able to accept the reality of a safer and kinder world.

The personal narrative does more than provide a means of catharsis for the author. It allows others to get to know the narrator and to identify experiences which are common

in spite of cultural differences. It opens a dialogue and anyone who chooses to engage, is led to the inevitable conclusion that alienation feels the same regardless of the race or social class of the individual experiencing it. The irony is that alienation makes one feel isolated, when it is, in fact, among the most common of human experiences, and acknowledging this may be the key to bringing people together. Learning new ways to communicate is essential to the process of collective healing.

There has been much discussion in this study about the necessity of establishing boundaries in order for healing to occur, but once that has been accomplished, the next step is migrating to the edges to interact with those on the other side. Jean-Jacques Rousseau identified the first fence as the origin of human strife. He may well have been correct, but over the past several centuries, humans have become psychologically dependent upon these boundaries in order to feel safe from outsiders, and it will be a long time before they can be safely eliminated. Boundaries that are neither too porous nor too impenetrable allow us learn more about one another without sacrificing what makes us unique as individuals. With each shared narrative, the fear of the Other dissolves a little more, and history may eventually bring us to a time when boundaries resemble picket fences over which neighbors exchange pleasantries.

Notes

- (1) Corneille, born in 1977 as Cornelius Nyungura, is a singer and songwriter who performs in French and English. He was born in Germany to Rwandan parents, but spent the majority of his childhood in Rwanda. At the age of sixteen, he was the only member of his family to survive the Rwandan genocide. He subsequently returned to Germany and was taken in by friends of his parents. He currently lives in Quebec with his wife who is half Brazilian. With affiliations to so many different countries, he heralds an emerging trend toward multiculturalism brought on by globalization, and his song lyrics indicate that he sees himself as a citizen of the world. Despite the personal tragedies he has endured, his music exudes optimism and hope for a bright future (Ankeny 2015).

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In accordance with the technical requirements for quotations and referencing set forth by the University of South Africa, I will follow the convention of capitalizing the first letter of titles and only proper nouns thereafter.

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