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HERITAGE REPAIR: REVISITING FAMILIAL AND COLLECTIVE HISTORIES IN
FILIAION NARRATIVES BY DALILA KERCHOUCHE, COLOMBE SCHNECK AND
MARTINE STORTI

by

REBECCA RAITSES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2022

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of
the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Heritage Repair: Revisiting Familial and Collective Histories in Filiation Narratives by
Dalila Kerchouche, Colombe Schneck and Martine Storti
By Rebecca Raitses

Advisor: Maxime Blanchard

This thesis offers a critical reading of three French narratives: Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki* (2003), Colombe Schneck's *Les guerres de mon père* (2018), and Martine Storti's *L'arrivée de mon père en France* (2008). These works combine representations of familial history with the explorations of personal and collective traumas or repression. The study addresses the following dimensions of the texts: 1) The catalyst of intergenerational silence behind these and many other similar works; 2) The textual interplay between storytelling and material evidence; 3) The ways in which the authors combine narratives of familial hardships on one hand, and of socioeconomic or racial oppression inflicted on marginalized subjects on the other.

The findings presented here hope to contribute to the study of filiation narratives, an emerging genre still in need of delineation, and to introduce the genre to an anglophone audience. In addition, this dissertation ultimately addresses what role literature can play in understanding history and societal injustices.

KEYWORDS

Filiation narrative, immigration, history, memory, multidirectional memory, investigation, archive, biography, trauma, affect

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Introduction: *Le récit de filiation*

“My father hid that he was Jewish [...] My father hid all that from me. I always felt an absence of nationality and never had something of my own, a place that belonged to me. So I took it upon myself to write this novel” (“Buy High, Sell Cheap: An Interview with Alejandro Jodorowsky”, Mar 8, 2018)

“I asked—I never got any answer,” (Larry David on asking his parents about their pasts, *Finding Your Roots*).

The issues surrounding current understanding of major historical events lie at the heart of much of 21st century literary and cultural criticism. In an age when only 2% of French adults report knowing about the Nazi camp Drancy¹, how do we preserve the memory of tragedies like the Shoah²? One way to keep alive the memories of those who perished is for their descendants to share their stories. This is complicated, however, by the fact that many descendants have only a

¹ <http://www.claimscon.org/france-study/>

² The selection of works I have chosen do concern the Holocaust, but also wrongs done to French-Algerian refugees after the Algerian War, for example.

rudimentary grasp themselves. For this reason, it is not uncommon to see people take to the archives and take up pen, eager to better know the stories and to share them.

Division, as Jacques Derrida puts it, is behind the impulse to take up writing. “‘Division,’ dit-il. ‘Division active.’ Voilà pourquoi on écrit, voilà comme on rêve d’écrire, peut-être. Et voilà pourquoi, deux motivations plutôt qu’une, une seule raison mais une raison travaillée par ladite ‘division,’ voilà pourquoi le faisant toujours on se rappelle, on s’inquiète, on se met en quête d’histoire et de filiation.” (*Le monolinguisme de l’autre* 22) Here Derrida defines division as a spur or gap in the self prompting the writer to explore history for healing psychological connections to past people and places. This division could also be called separation or rupture and may take many forms: separation from one’s homeland, separation from a loved one, rupture with tradition or with the past in general. Derrida also connects this division with the quest for *histoire* and *filiation*. *Histoire*, here, should be understood in both senses: story and history. Rupture with one’s heritage becomes a catalyst for an eventual attempt at re-establishing lineage, continuity and narrative cohesion. In *Le monolinguisme de l’autre*, Derrida identifies this correlation. "La rupture avec la tradition, le déracinement, l’inaccessibilité des histoires, l’amnésie, l’indéchiffrabilité, etc., tout cela déchaîne la pulsion généalogique, le désir de l’idiome, le mouvement compulsif vers l’anamnèse, l’amour destructeur de l’interdit" (Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l’autre*, 116).

One way the genealogical drive raised by Derrida and the compulsion to write manifests is in works which attempt to connect with the family’s past. The desire to better know one’s kin is often related to the desire to better know oneself. This is especially common for a generation disconnected from family tradition, perhaps living in a country other than that of their parents or grandparents, suddenly yearning for stories of the past and a better understanding of what their families experienced. This dissertation seeks to categorize a segment of these works as filiation

narratives. My use of the term filiation narrative comes directly from the French term *récit de filiation*, which has been in use in French scholarship for some time. The term was coined by Dominique Viart who has written extensively on contemporary French literature and has theorized various manifestations of the encounter between history and literature. The filiation narrative is an example of what Viart refers to as “le roman archéologique.” So before looking at the specificities of the filiation narrative, let’s look at the broader category of archeological novel.

Archeology is an interesting metaphor for this type of novel because it conjures images of digging through soil in the hopes of recovering clues to better understand the past. The archeologist cannot know exactly what they will find and isn’t even certain to find anything. This, in and of itself, is fitting for the filiation narrative as narrators often profess an uncertainty as to whether their research will uncover anything meaningful. Even more importantly, the relics that an archeologist is able to recover can foster better understanding of distant ancestors, about whom it is otherwise difficult to know anything. In addition, the process of discovery, the geographical location, the depth of the layers, are essential details which remain attached to the object and without which the relic loses both significance and authenticity. The archeological novelist performs similar operations, setting out to uncover traces of the past in order to better understand what came before. Like the archeologist, the novelist uses cultural material as a means to form hypotheses about the past. In Laurent Demanze’s formulation, “L’écriture de soi cède alors à un souci archéologique, qui ausculte les survivances du passé et dévoile une part insue de soi” (Demanze 9). For the writer of archeological narratives, the process of discovery also plays an important part. Moreover, the clues uncovered facilitate the formation of a more comprehensive understanding, as Modiano signals in *Livret de famille*. “Il suffisait de rêver sur les deux ou trois

éléments dont je disposais, et je parviendrais à restituer le reste, comme l'archéologue qui, en présence d'une statue aux trois quarts mutilée, la recompose intégralement dans sa tête" (185).

One of the principal authors in this thesis' corpus, Dalila Kerchouche, also employs the metaphor of archeology to describe the process by which her narrator uncovers more of her family history. Referring to Algeria, Kerchouche writes, "... c'est là-bas que la vie de ma famille a basculé. Là-bas que mon père est devenu harki. Là-bas que mon frère Moha a voulu retourner. Là-bas, aussi, que je poursuis, après les camps, ma quête "harkéologique" dans le passé, mon voyage à la source du drame" (187). This portmanteau of Harki and archeological, signals the narrator's process of digging for clues to help her better understand her family's past. Like an archeologist, the narrator doesn't know what they will uncover until they do. For this reason, the archeological narrative, as theorized by Viart, is situated in the present and is retrospective in orientation. The investigative posture presents knowledge as needing to be conquered. The investigation and the conquest of knowledge are incorporated into the narrative. The reader is thus given an idea of how and where the information was acquired. If the process of discovery is not included, the narrative is not archeological.

When the subject of the archeological novel is the family, it becomes a filiation narrative. The filiation narrative shares the archeological novel's formal and structural characteristics while adding some of its own. "[À] ce modèle [le roman archéologique] il ajoute le sentiment de la dette et le souci de l'héritage" ("Nouveaux" 27). In its aim to obtain something from the past, the filiation narrative turns to testimony and archive in order to better understand one's kin. Often, the narrative unfolds according to the logic of the acquisition of information. "L'Histoire n'est plus racontée chronologiquement mais archéologiquement," writes Viart. ("Nouveaux" 24). According to this retrospective orientation, the narrative is situated in the present and envisions a better

understanding of the past at the horizon. For the most part, rather than seek to reestablish a chronological family narrative which starts at the beginning and proceeds in logical order, the filiation narrative instead reflects a different organizing structure altogether. This new framework is more closely related to the order in which the information is acquired. Viart specifies:

La posture de l'enquête a ceci de déterminant qu'elle s'élabore *a posteriori*, et mime notre position effective par rapport au passé mais un passé qui paraît désormais mal connu, dont on doit rassembler le puzzle. L'histoire se dit donc à partir d'une ignorance de ce qu'elle fut effectivement et ne procède pas du savoir institué. ("Nouveaux" 23)

The incorporation of the act of searching into the narrative itself does at least three things. First, it lays bare the mechanisms of research. This provides an implicit demonstration of how one acquires knowledge and where to look for information. The reader is made privy to the work involved in obtaining a clearer understanding of the past. Second, this approach gives both agency and priority to the narrator themselves. The unique blend of biography and autobiography that the filiation narrative offers requires the perspective of the narrator in addition to the stories of others. The narrative is not solely about their parents, their ancestors, but as much about the narrator themselves and their search for meaning and identity. Moreover, their account has no presumption of impartiality, but rather capitalizes on the individual's unique point of view. Lastly, in recreating the drama of how they arrived at what they know, it allows for the recounting of both successes and failures. It is likely that the narrator will discover something that they couldn't have imagined when they set out. It is equally as likely that something will remain obstructed from their view. These blind spots are just as indispensable as they communicate the impossibility of total reconstruction of the past. It is in sharing both what has been revealed and what remains unknowable that the filiation narrative transmits the complexity of the undertaking, and the elusiveness of the past. It is not uncommon for questions to remain at the end of a filiation narrative. The project is predicated on the idea that history may only be recovered in fragments.

The absences, that which is not recoverable, become equally as significant as what the narrator is able to learn. This is because absence serves as a reminder of all that has been lost and is not recoverable.

By closely examining three filiation narratives, I hope to further reveal the specificities of the genre relating to the investigative posture and the general absorption with the past that characterize the narratives. I explore the ways in which *Mon père, ce harki* (2003) by Dalila Kerchouche, *Les guerres de mon père* (2018) by Colombe Schneck and *L'arrivée de mon père en France* (2008) by Martine Storti correspond to parameters already outlined by Viart. I have chosen these three books, first of all, because they adhere to and contribute to the genre. Not only do they exhibit the main characteristics and structural requisites of the filiation narrative, but they demonstrate the interrelation between the motivating factors inherent in this form and the form itself, and in this way, exemplify the filiation narrative. Moreover, they address similar concerns, like immigration—the question of how to properly accommodate immigrants, migrants and refugees³ being a major preoccupation in the works of all three authors. The works share other common themes, as well, such as a reflection on identity and the role one's parents and ancestors play in the creation of this identity. Finally, the books are all written by female, French writers.

It is perhaps no accident that the three works discussed in this dissertation each include the word father in their titles: *Les Guerres de mon père*, *Mon père, ce harki* and *L'Arrivée de mon père en France*. While each work is largely about the author's whole family, the titles all refer explicitly to the father. In fact, it is quite common for filiation narratives to focus, in part, on the

³ “Émigrés-immigrés-clandestins-irréguliers-sans-papiers” is how Storti refers to them, a nod to the difficulty of knowing what to call the people fleeing their country for another and to the fact that each term has lost its specificity by dint of serving so often as a substitution for another.

father⁴. In the filiation narratives analyzed here, the mother was the primary caregiver while the children were young. The daily presence of the mother is contrasted with the father's absence from the home. The mother's past doesn't present itself as mysterious the way the father's past does. This difference may be one reason behind the prominence of filiation narratives seeking to discover the father's story. Thus, it is the fathers' reticence to speak of the past that frequently occasions an interruption in the transmission of family history. The filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky perfectly expresses this sentiment in an interview with Elianna Kan. Jodorowsky attributes his recent fictional autobiography, *Where the Bird Sings Best*, to his need to confront his father's silence about their origins. "My father hid that he was Jewish [...] My father hid all that from me. I always felt an absence of nationality and never had something of my own, a place that belonged to me. So I took it upon myself to write this novel."⁵ Jodorowsky echoes Derrida's connection between a lack of identity or understanding and the impulse to write, and adds to it a parent's (usually the father) concealment of family origins. We could even call these the three pillars of the filiation narrative, so invariably are they found together in these works⁶.

Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each lament their father's dislike of speaking about the past. Based on their shared attitude on the topic, one can imagine the fathers hitting it off. For Schneck's father, "Le passé n'existait pas, seul le présent comptait" (9). Kerchouche's father echoes this sentiment: "Li fat met," Arabic for "the past is dead." For Storti's father, a dismissive gesture suffices. "Il balayait toujours les questions, un revers de la main, un haussement d'épaule

⁴ While the genre may be, for the time being, dominated by stories about paternal family members, there is no reason to doubt that with the visible popularity of this type of writing, that we will begin to see more works which take the mother, or another female figure, as the principal subject. Especially as family dynamics continue to evolve and mothers are less likely to be a constant presence in the home.

⁵ "Buy High, Sell Cheap: An Interview with Alejandro Jodorowsky", Mar 8, 2018

⁶ While this citation corresponds well with the motivations behind filiation narrative writing, Jodorowsky approaches his book from the angle of fiction rather than investigation and thus the work cannot be considered a filiation narrative.

dont je ne sais s'ils signifiaient que ces années ne méritaient pas d'être racontées ou bien qu'elles étaient irracontables..." (49). A father's dismissal of the past can be found behind almost any filiation narrative but what accounts for this disregard? This preference on the part of the fathers for forgetting rather than remembering represents a different orientation, a different philosophy, and different system of values or perhaps something more. For Viart, this silence has a metaphoric aspect:

Il semble que cette insistance soit liée au symbolisme paternel : celui-ci représente l'autorité, le savoir social, plus que la mère, plus largement vouée aux apprentissages intimes de la petite enfance. Il incarne le Discours. [. . .] Si bien que le silence prend ici une valeur emblématique : c'est la Parole qui s'est tué, le Discours qui n'est plus en mesure d'être tenu, sanction d'un échec des valeurs et des croyances" ("Silence" par. 15).

The link that Viart sees between the authority of historical discourse in patriarchal society and the figure of the father means that at a time when prevailing historical narratives are no longer taken for granted, all that the father previously represented must also be reexamined. At a time when people are sensitive to a disconnect with previous generations and a failure in the transmission of understanding, the figure of the father becomes emblematic of this rupture. Viart expressed this idea 11 years prior in a slightly more comprehensible way. "Les pères n'apparaissent plus comme garants d'un système de pensée, mais comme les victimes d'une Histoire qui s'est jouée d'eux" (Viart, "Filiations" 121).

It is also possible that this silence is as much a result of a break with the place of origin as it is a metaphorical break with received social understanding incarnated by the paternal figure. In *Une histoire de France*, sociologist Nathalie Heinich makes this argument. Rather than attribute a lack of history passed down to her to a failure on the part of her father, Heinich sees the break in transmission as a symptom of exile and attributable to all family members regardless of gender or familial role:

Ce silence sur les décisions et les motivations des uns et des autres, cette absence de transmission concernant l'alternative entre une identité régionale et une identité nationale, me paraissent en soi un symptôme: le symptôme du déchirement de ces Alsaciens sommés d'abandonner leur terre pour demeurer français, ou d'abandonner leur patrie pour demeurer alsaciens . . . (179).

When immigration or exile is the cause of, or compounds, the disconnect with one's family's past, these narratives can be further categorized as what I'm calling second-generation filiation narratives, which I discuss further in Chapter 3. *Les guerres de mon père*, *Mon père, ce harki*, and *L'arrivée de mon père en France* are examples of such narratives.

In *Mon père, ce harki*, Kerchouche undertakes the writing of a filiation narrative in which details of her life are folded into an account of her family's history and the history of Harkis—Algerian soldiers hired by the French Army during the Algerian War—in general. Although taking place many years before she was born, the fact that her parents fled Algeria on July 1st, 1962, after having fought on the side of the French, has completely informed the course of her life. In writing about her parents and her brothers' and sisters' childhood experiences, Kerchouche confronts the years of trauma her family experienced upon their arrival in France, where they were placed in a series of camps for 12 years. As the youngest of 11 children, Kerchouche was born in one of the camps but it was not long after her birth that her family was finally able to move into a house in a village. Because of this, her siblings incessantly remind her that she never suffered the way they did, that she doesn't know what it was like. She wishes to make this story her own, however, to give it context and to inscribe herself within the narrative. "J'aimerais pourtant, à travers ce livre, abolir cette frontière avec les miens, toucher du doigt ce passé que je n'ai pas vécu. Pour me sentir, enfin, membre de ma famille à part entière" (26). Kerchouche embarks on a quest to both connect more deeply with her family and to better understand the reasons why things were incredibly difficult for them at one point in France.

Mon père, ce harki, is the first of multiple works in which Kerchouche seeks to impart the voices of Harkis, who have often been considered traitors by pro-Independence Algerians. Kerchouche explains, however, that it's not that simple. Many of the soldiers who became Harkis, for example, had previously fought for the French in WWII. When they received a summons to join the French army again during the Algerian War, many thought it was compulsory. She also explains that the sides were not clearly defined. In the remote area where Kerchouche's own family lived, intelligence about the FLN, the National Liberation Front who were fighting for independence from the French, was scarce and unreliable. Other Harkis were simply desperate for the bit of food and income that becoming a *supplétif* for the French Army promised. Others still had seen their families murdered by the FLN and feared and hated the group, not to mention those that supported and/or benefited from l'Algérie française. In the case of her own father, Kerchouche says, "Les harkis ont cru aux valeurs de la France. Les harkis se sont battus pour les valeurs de la France."⁷

In *Leïla, avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de Harkis*, a novel in which many of the characters and events are recognizable from her earlier work, Kerchouche assumes the perspective of her older sister in order to tell the story from the point of view of a young woman living in the various Harki camps in which her family lived. And, in her collaboration with photographer Stéphane Gladiou, *Destins de harkis*, Kerchouche turns her attention to the most silenced of this already voiceless group: Harki women. "Si l'on a peu entendu parler du drame des harkis, que dire de celui de leurs femmes? Aucun ouvrage ne les mentionne, aucun article ne les évoque, aucun journaliste ne leur a tendu le micro... Personne n'a pris la peine d'entendre leur souffrance..." (85). The reactions she receives from the women she interviews in the text—reactions she shares in the

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoQ2gMQvzVA>

book—are of gratitude. The Harki women are unreservedly appreciative that someone is at last interested in hearing their story. “J’ai attendu ce moment toute ma vie, nous a dit Mme Séby, qui vit à Cannes-La Bocca. J’attendais que quelqu’un m’écoute. Merci du fond du cœur d’être venus me voir” (85).

Colombe Schneck has also written a number of books relating to her family, starting with her first book, *L’incroyable Monsieur Schneck* (2006), which recounts her investigation into her grandfather’s murder. Testing the techniques she will later hone with *Les guerres de mon père*, Schneck incorporates personal testimony and archival fragments in her piecing together of this enigmatic family tragedy. Her book *Une femme célèbre*, is an assemblage consisting of a fictional narrative interspersed with non-fiction details of producer and tv host Denise Glaser's life, as well as sections that one recognizes from Colombe's other works, notably her autofictional narratives *La Reparation* et *L’incroyable Monsieur Schneck*. Her novel *Val de Grace* also explores her family’s past, as well as the author’s childhood, through the lens of the former family home.

In *Les guerres de mon père*, Schneck interweaves details about her life with stories about her father and her relationships with her uncle and her mother. The text includes much about her own relationships with these family members and just as much about her family’s relationships to each other, especially her grandparents’ marriage. She wishes to better understand the travails of her family, including her parents’ narrow escape from deportation as Jewish children during the Occupation, her father’s experience as a doctor for the French Army during the Algerian war, and her grandfather Max’s murder, about whom a section of the book is devoted. “À quoi puis-je me raccrocher pour savoir qui était le père de mon père? Partout, il glisse, disparaît, s’absente, sans papier, sans traces, il s’exile, fuit, ne demande rien, refuse les cadres” (172).

Like Kerchouche and Schneck, Martine Storti is also the author of a number of works which combine political or societal concerns with her personal history. *L'arrivée de mon père en France* tells the story of Storti's family, her father, uncle, aunt and grandmother who all left Italy for France. Her father arrived in 1931 to join his sister and brother-in-law and their mother followed shortly after. Beyond this, his life remains opaque for her so she sets out to understand it better. Like Schneck's *Les guerres de mon père*, Storti's *L'arrivée de mon père en France* touches on much more than her father's past. Storti meditates on emigration in general, fascism, and inequalities of all sorts, especially economic. In *Un chagrin politique*, the narrator, based on Storti herself, reflects on the economic disparity between her father and her uncle. "J'eus ainsi, tout au long de mon enfance, le spectacle de ces deux manières de vivre, juxtaposées au sein d'une même famille" (29). Storti uses her family as a way to conceptualize economic inequality, exploitation, material gain at the expense of others, class consciousness, injustice, etc. Entire passages from *Un chagrin politique* are reproduced in *L'arrivée de mon père en France*. Storti shows here, and elsewhere, that a reflection on complex global, political and economic questions can quite naturally proceed from taking into consideration one's own experiences and those of one's intimate circle. In *Le féminisme à l'épreuve des mutations géopolitiques*, Storti reflects on the feminist movement of the 1970's as a way to think more productively about the present situation. Her most recent book, also on feminism, *Pour un féminisme universel*, was published in 2020.

This dissertation, "Heritage Repair: Revisiting Familial and Collective Histories in Filiation Narratives by Dalila Kerchouche, Colombe Schneck and Martine Storti," aims, first of all, to contribute to a better understanding of a relatively new and thriving genre. To do so, I analyze the mechanisms by which the filiation narrative offsets an absence of received knowledge of the past by actively pursuing this knowledge. I have chosen the title "Heritage Repair" because

it highlights the work narrators perform in order to restore the deteriorated family histories they've inherited. As Yona Hanhart-Marmor argues in her recent article, "L'ère de la filiation inversée dans la littérature mémorielle contemporaine," "L'emploi du terme 'héritier'... vient paradoxalement mettre en évidence le fait que ses protagonistes sont en fait des *anti-héritiers*, des personnages en quête d'héritage que le père ne peuvent leur donner" (7). Beyond signaling the labor inherent in such an enterprise, as a cross-language homophone 'repère,' meaning point of reference, playfully evokes something essential to the filiation narrative and which the narrators are frequently in search of. Moreover, within 'repair' we hear 'père,' present in the titles of the three principle works in question. Re-père, in this sense, could be a reencounter with *le père*. The subtitle, "Revisiting Familial and Collective Histories," refers to the way the narrators explore and situate their family narratives within a broad historical context and insist on those histories' continued relevance. Finally, the collective aspect points to the narratives' concern with present day social concerns.

In the first chapter, I use the works of Ernaux, Perec and Modiano to situate the filiation narrative within the French literary tradition. I both compare and contrast the filiation narrative with these authors' *oeuvres*, which serves to give a first impression of the filiation narrative genre. I will then continue to contrast it with neighboring genres, thereby establishing its requisite features. Interestingly, filiation narratives resemble a range of modes from the novel to memoir. Some freely boast about the use of fiction in the narratives, others read more like nonfiction. These different approaches are nonetheless united by a set of common characteristics, which will be examined in this chapter. In order to discuss these works, it is first necessary to distinguish between author and narrator. As with autofiction, the texts of this corpus, and of the majority if not all of filiation narratives, present authors and narrators that share a name and therefore appear to be one in the same. However, because filiation narratives are published as novels or narratives and aren't

strictly speaking autobiographies, we cannot collapse the narrator of the narrative with the book's author. The narrators are certainly based on the authors and resemble them in many respects, but it would be overly credulous to assume the feelings and motivations of the narrator are also that of the author. One must presume that everything down to the familial curiosity exhibited and the slow revelation of information are potentially constructs. What's to stop a writer from noticing a lucrative literary trend and wanting to take part without necessarily personally feeling the void of the past. Employing the devices of the genre is different from experiencing the emotions conveyed in the narrative. Thus, when referring to the narrative, and not specifically to the authoring of the text, the names Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti designate the writers' narrative personas.

In the second chapter, I examine the structural and rhetorical devices employed in the filiation narrative, such as the incorporation of the investigative process. Filiation narratives combine intimate and public accounts, drawing on everything from inherited objects to stories passed down by relatives, friends and old acquaintances, to books, newspapers, school records and military files, as well as *in situ* investigation. I demonstrate this by looking more closely at the narratives by Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti. Furthermore, I show where each of these sources falls short and argue that it is by making use of such an eclectic array that the filiation narrative can assemble a vision of the past. Finally, I show how the devices of the filiation narrative are closely related to its motivations and methodology.

In Chapter 3, I propose a subgenre that I'm calling the second-generation filiation narrative, of which Kerchouche's, Schneck's and Storti's books are examples. Following Pinçonat⁸, who uses the term "littératures d'immigrations" to refer to the otherwise cumbersome "oeuvres produites par des écrivains issus de l'immigration," I use second-generation filiation narrative as

⁸ Pinçonat, Crystel. *Endofiction et fable de soi: écrire en héritier de l'immigration*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016.

a shorthand that is also meant to encompass what Philip Kasinitz⁹ refers to as the 1.5 generation (those born elsewhere but living in the destination country by age 12) as well as the grandchildren of immigrants. I examine the ways the narrators situate themselves not just within their own family, but within a sociohistorical context. At the same time, they inscribe their family history within France's collective narratives, thus promoting the inclusion of marginalized, immigrant groups in the fabric of the national identity. Additionally, they challenge received notions of the past when these are seen to be limited or unjust and insist on assigning responsibility for wrongs committed.

While the first three chapters focus on the importance of the past in the filiation narrative, Chapter 4 examines the ways Kerchouche's, Schneck's and Storti's works speak about the present, especially regarding issues of migration. I show that they make use of their family's immigration experiences to argue for a welcoming attitude toward today's immigrants. As Oana Sabo has written about migrant literature, "[a] political message is conveyed: the need for tolerant attitudes toward undocumented immigrants as an alternative to Europe's anti-immigration policies and policing of borders" (25). This chapter shows the way the authors create a dialogue between the past and present and that Schneck and Storti, in particular, tread interesting new ground by making sometimes audacious parallels between the past and present. I will draw on Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" — which sees remembrance as "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" — as a framework for theorizing the cross-referencing present, in varying degrees, in these three works (3). I then consider the affect of multidirectional memory with regards to the filiation narrative. Finally, I ask in what ways these second-generation may be considered political.

⁹ Kasinitz, Philip, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway. *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. New York: Russell Sage, 2008.

Chapter 1: The filiation narrative vis-à-vis the French canon

“Et pourtant, sous cette couche épaisse d’amnésie, on sentait bien quelque chose, de temps en temps, un écho lointain, étouffé, mais on aurait été incapable de dire quoi, précisément. C’était comme de se trouver au bord d’un champ magnétique, sans pendule pour en capter les ondes”
(Dora Bruder 131).

“Je forme une entreprise qui n’eut jamais d’exemple et dont l’exécution n’aura point d’imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature ; et cet homme ce sera moi.” (Rousseau, *Les Confessions* 4).

"If you want to know where you're going, you have to know where you come from. I had to return to all of this to understand why my father was the way he was, why my mother was the way she was, both of them trying to survive in a country that didn't want them. I decided to confront who I was." ("Buy High, Sell Cheap: An Interview with Alejandro Jodorowsky," Mar 8, 2018).

The three narratives selected as the primary corpus of this study, *Les guerres de mon père* (2018) by Colombe Schneck, *Mon père, ce harki* (2003) by Dalila Kerchouche and *L'arrivée de mon père en France* (2008) by Martine Storti, focus on the task of recovering information about the past of the authors' families. There are a number of writers from the 1970's, 80's and 90's whose interest in better understanding where they come from, coupled with a desire to collect the traces of a disappearing past, provide a clear inspiration for the birth of the filiation narrative. The differences between such precursors as Ernaux, Modiano and Perec on one hand and authors of filiation narratives on the other, lie not so much in the catalyst or objective of their writing, as in the form the writing takes.

The discussion presented in this chapter will be structured around two parts. I will begin by situating the filiation narrative within the French literary tradition. Using the works of Ernaux, Perec and Modiano as a point of departure, I highlight both the shared characteristics and the generic deviations. This approach will enable a preliminary understanding of the genre before entering into its specificities. I will then continue to refine the definition of the filiation narrative by briefly contrasting it to other neighboring genres in order to establish its requisite features.

I will continue returning throughout the following chapters to the authors discussed below because, while their works may not perfectly adhere to the set of constraints dictated by the filiation narrative, they are undeniable influences. They continue to help elucidate essential aspects, both formal and catalytic. Furthermore, just as Freud famously said, "Everywhere I go, I find a poet has been there before me," we could say that everywhere the filiation narrative goes, Ernaux, Perec or Modiano has already been there.

Ernaux and the “auto-socio-biographic”

The catalyst behind much of Ernaux’s writing involves a project of rememoration; she recounts her childhood, young adulthood, her parents. In books like *Une femme* and *La Place*, Ernaux tells stories structured around the ruptures which are so important to the filiation narrative. In both cases, this rupture is the death of a parent which provided the impetus for writing. However, another rupture had taken place long before: a rupture with the socio-economic and cultural milieu of her parents, the world in which she was raised. Ernaux grew up in a working-class environment from which she distanced herself through education and choice of career. Because Ernaux had not maintained ties with this milieu other than with her parents, they represented her last link with that world. Their deaths also signify her loss of the world in which she grew up. "J'ai perdu le dernier lien avec le monde dont je suis issue" (*Une femme* 106). Ernaux experienced the passage from one class to another as a break in a certain continuity. "J'ai fini de mettre au jour l'héritage que j'ai dû déposer au seuil du monde bourgeois et cultivé quand j'y suis entrée" (*La place* 100).

She further theorizes this experience in the interview published as *L'écriture comme un couteau*:

Pour schématiser la prise de conscience de la réalité du fonctionnement des classes sociales, de ma situation de transfuge, du rôle déréalisant de la culture, de la littérature en ce qui me concernait, a modifié complètement mon désir: je ne voulais plus faire quelque chose de beau d'abord, mais d'abord de réel, et l'écriture était ce travail de mise au jour de la réalité: celle du milieu populaire d'enfance, de l'acculturation qui est aussi déchirure d'avec le monde d'origine. . . . (76-77)

Ernaux’s influence on the filiation narrative is notably evident in the hybrid nature of these texts, located somewhere between fiction and non-fiction, history, sociology, diary, biography and memoir. Ernaux has located her own work at the intersection of these disciplines. “Ceci n'est pas une biographie, ni un roman naturellement, peut-être quelque chose entre la littérature, la

sociologie et l'histoire” (*Une femme* 106). The filiation narrative likewise plays with the blending of seemingly disparate genres, combining historical writing with fiction, panning between the intimate and the social and navigating between family legend and fact. Ernaux set the scene for this approach. "Ce que j'espère écrire de plus juste se situe sans doute à la jointure du familial et du social, du mythe et de l'histoire” (*Une femme* 23). We might describe the filiation narrative using a term Ernaux uses to refer to her own work, that is, “auto-socio-biographic” (*L'écriture* 21). One aspect of Ernaux’s work that corresponds with a frequent characteristic of filiation narratives is the ethnological slant which situates individuals within society. In fact, her working title for *La place* was originally “Eléments pour une ethnologie familiale” (*L'écriture* 34). For example, in *Une femme*, she writes

J'essaie de ne pas considérer la violence, des débordements de tendresse, les reproches de ma mère comme seulement des traits personnels de caractère, mais de les situer aussi dans son histoire et sa condition sociale. Cette façon d'écrire, qui me semble aller dans le sens de la vérité, m'aide à sortir de la solitude et de l'obscurité du souvenir individuel, par la découverte d'une signification plus générale. (52)

In addition, for Ernaux, identity consists of the tension between where one comes from and what one has become, between the environment of her childhood and that of her adult life. The filiation narrative shares this belief in the importance of one’s background to the foundation of identity. Background is of course only one component among many which contributes to a person’s identity, but the filiation narrative foregrounds this aspect. As Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*: “Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status—more reassuring as well, for the thought of origins soothes us, whereas that of the future disturbs us, agonizes us. . .” (105).¹⁰

¹⁰ Though Barthes does go on to say that this discovery ultimately disappoints because it also reveals the reality of how different family members are from each other. “. . . [B]ut this discovery disappoints us because even while it asserts a permanence (which is the truth of the race, not my own), it bares the

If Ernaux's *oeuvre* represents a definite reference and even starting point for what would become the filiation narrative, the main distinction between her work and the filiation narrative is to be found in the relationship to knowing. The filiation narrative is predicated on the experience of lacunae which provides the catalyst for the quest for information. Ernaux's portraits of her parents represent what she knew them to be. She doesn't aim to unearth secrets or clarify lingering questions. In fact, she'd prefer not to learn anything new about them after their passing. "Maintenant que ma mère est morte, je voudrais n'apprendre rien de plus sur elle que ce que j'ai su pendant qu'elle vivait" (*Une femme* 105). This declaration is the opposite of the filiation narrative, which yearns to know more. Ernaux writes what she already knows; filiation narrative writers create narrators who prefer to focus on what they didn't know but found out, and may even include questions which remain unresolved. This difference is enough, in my view, for Ernaux's work to not be considered as part of the filiation narrative genre. The narrator of the filiation narrative proceeds from a place of dissatisfaction with the knowledge they have and thus seeks to gather disparate traces of the past.

Perec and the unretrievable past

Dissatisfaction with the memories and knowledge he possesses about his family is the catalyst for Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. Perec's name has become synonymous with the effort to collect the traces of a lost past. His book is one of the most well-known literary works grappling with the experience of a hidden child and war orphan and demonstrates Derrida's link between a separation or rupture and the quest *d'histoire et de filiation*. As a result of his

mysterious difference of beings issuing from one and the same family: what relation can there be between my mother and her ancestor, so formidable, so monumental, so Hugolian, so much the incarnation of the inhuman distance of the Stock" (105).

parents' deaths during the Second World War when he was very young, Perec's narrative persona seeks to recollect his childhood and the little that he knows and remembers about his parents.

For this book, Perec interweaves two narratives: one featuring this narrative persona and another featuring the fictional Gaspard Winkler, as dreamt up by Perec as a child. This hybridizing of two very different modes anticipates the genre-mixing characteristic of the filiation narrative. Yet, where the filiation narrative blends genres together to create a new mode of expression, Perec keeps the two forms separate. This approach nonetheless creates dialogue between the two distinct narratives. According to David Noiret, "Les deux récits sont simplement juxtaposés et, de cette juxtaposition, naît la signification que Perec a voulu donner à son œuvre" (16). The structural choice of alternating narratives prompts the reader to find connections between the two and thereby use one to shed light on the other. There are numerous instances when a detail from one narrative is incorporated into the other or that a detail in one narrative invites itself to be applied to the other narrative. The reintegration of displaced childhood memories into the fictional narrative is evident when, recounting a shipwreck, Otto Apfelstahl, a character from the latter narrative, explains that a woman's body had been found and that "ses ongles en sang avaient profondément entaillé la porte de chêne" (84). This detail, incorporated into the fictional narrative invented by young Perec, likely comes from the shock he experienced as a boy when he accompanied his aunt to see an exhibition on concentration camps and saw photos "montrant les murs des fours lacérés par les ongles des gazés" (215). This discovery must have been all the more traumatic for the young man since his mother died in Auschwitz. Thus, as Warren Motte writes, "in many instances one half of *W* clearly says what the other cannot." Given the myriad echoes and reciprocities between the two narratives, it is not only legitimate, but necessary, to read them as mutually informing each other. As Philippe Lejeune has written, "Ainsi *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* entremêle deux récits dont

aucun ne dit au sens propre ce que le lecteur ne peut restituer, stéréoscopiquement, que par leur confrontation, titubant de chapitre en chapitre d'une amnésie à une obsession" (La mémoire et l'oblique 44).

Thus, when Winkler, in a cue from Proust, declares, "Longtemps j'ai cherché les traces de mon histoire, consulté des cartes et des annuaires, des monceaux d'archives. Je n'ai rien trouvé et il me semblait parfois que j'avais rêvé, qu'il n'y avait eu qu'un inoubliable cauchemar" (14), we can infer, as does Motte, that this statement provides insight into Perec's own despair. The search, whether for evidence of the society of W or for traces of one's own family, is never-ending, if not futile. It's through Winkler again that we hear, "Je passai une partie de la soirée à la Bibliothèque municipale, feuilletant des dictionnaires, des encyclopédies, des annuaires, avec l'espoir d'y découvrir des renseignements . . ." (23). All this searching takes place in order to fill the gaping hole that is the absence of information.

And yet, the consultation of archives, a common trait of the filiation narrative, is consigned to Winkler's character in the text. Perec the narrator, on the other hand, refrains from conducting this sort of research and scours, instead, his own memory. The emphasis is not on trying to round out the story of his childhood or to compensate for the failings of memory with documents or information gleaned elsewhere¹¹, but rather on measuring the fickleness of memory and on taking stock of what memories still remain. Perec examines his childhood memories, differentiates the strong and vivid ones from the weak and unreliable ones, the accurate and the inaccurate. "Je ne me souviens pas de l'avoir [sa grand-mère] vue une seule fois pendant toute la durée de mon séjour au collège Turenne (cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle n'est pas venue; cela veut dire que je ne m'en souviens pas)" (165). There are things Perec will never know because their only trace exists in his

¹¹ He does, however, carefully describe photos because that is all he has to say, the memory associated with the photo, having been lost.

fallible memory. “Apprit-elle à lire? Je n’en sais rien. Il m’arrive d’avoir envie de le savoir, mais trop de choses maintenant m’éloignent à jamais de ces souvenirs. L’image que j’ai d’elle, arbitraire et schématique, me convient; elle lui ressemble, elle la définit, pour moi, presque parfaitement” (51).

The most significant memory, the one Perec biographer David Bellos refers to as “in one sense, *the* memory of childhood referred to by the book’s singular title,” is the boy’s memory of the last time he saw his mother (57). Perec was five years old when she took him to the Gare de Lyon and put him on Red Cross transport to join his aunt and uncle on the other side of the demarcation line. The unanticipated finality of this farewell made the moment “crucial only in retrospect,” in Bellos’ words (*ibid*). As the biographer shows, there are variations in the three times the narrator recounts the scene which are “part of the book’s design to keep the child most hidden at precisely those points where he seems nearest to being found” (57). Thus, when Perec declares at the start of the autobiographical section, “Je n’ai pas de souvenirs d’enfance” (17), it is an exaggeration, since the narrator will proceed to share selected childhood memories, but it points to the fact the memories are too hazy to be of much solace to the narrator. This is partly because as a child, Perec would have needed to forget certain memories. As Bellos explains, “How else do you tell a child that it is dangerous for him to reveal [...] that he too is a Jew? Presumably you tell him that he must set aside all his memories of the past, that he is starting a new life, that his name is Breton, that he is French, and that he must never even think of what he has left behind.” (68). The absence of sufficient memories and a clear sense of childhood self is in part the result of a self-imposed censorship for survival of a Jewish child during the Holocaust. “Guilt attached itself to the self-inflicted eradication of Jojo’s warmest memories. He grew into a man always puzzled by memory and sometimes obsessed with the fear of forgetting” (*ibid*).

Perec's *W* shares the yearning for memory and familial connection that characterizes the filiation narrative. Both Perec's book and the filiation narrative are meditations on the limits of memory. What differentiates Perec's writing from the filiation narrative is the emphasis on what is lost as opposed to what is recoverable. The writer of the filiation narrative is aware, perhaps thanks to writers like Perec, of how much is lost for good and yet, this state of loss is the starting point for a search intended to, at least to some small degree, rectify this absence. An investigation is undertaken which deepens the narrator's knowledge. They will have learned something new by the end of the book, even if not as much as they may have wished. Perec, by contrast, collects the few traces of his parents and his childhood available to him, but he does not search for more. Like Ernaux, he focuses on what he does know or what he's able to remember. In *W*, there is a *mise en scène* of the act of consulting archives but this is attributed to the fictional character Winkler and not to Perec's narrative persona. There is no undertaking of an investigation, no quest, no revisiting of key places in search for information. There is instead the feeling of resignation, that there is nothing to be recovered.

Perhaps in an attempt to combat this feeling, the author elsewhere undertakes the exhaustive recording of certain details. For example, he once set out to record a maximum amount of details of the goings-on at place Saint-Sulpice at a particular moment in time. Published the same year as *W* ou le souvenir d'enfance, *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* reveals Perec's desire to collect and preserve the present. As the title indicates, this short text from 1975 is Perec's attempt at cataloging all he sees take place over the course of three days. It is an exercise in sorting the knowable from the unknowable. "On ne sait pas ce qu'il a acheté (des cigarettes? Un stylo à bille, un timbre, des cachous, un paquet de mouchoirs en papier?)" (*Tentative* 25). We know the police officer made a purchase, but what he bought remains unknown. For Perec translator Marc

Lowenthal, this recording of the infraordinary still exudes melancholy. “It is almost in what it doesn’t say that this short text, this noble exercise in futility, conveys such a sense of melancholy” (50). Perhaps what Lowenthal means is that, by focusing on the almost clerical details of life, Perec passes over life’s potentially more meaningful aspects. This is, after all, characteristic of Perec’s writing from the outset. His first published novel, *Les choses* eschews inner life in preference of objects and observable phenomena. Throughout Perec’s oeuvre, there is an exaggerated tension between the things that get recorded, on one hand, and those that do not, on the other. By recorded, I mean both in one’s memory and in some external capacity (ledgers, journals, novels, etc.) In some cases, that which wasn’t recorded is precisely that which one would like to have been recorded. To give an example from the author’s life, the date Perec’s mother was deported from Drancy was precisely recorded¹², however the actual day of her death remains unknown. The date of deportation must then stand in as a pseudo day of death, both when it comes to official paperwork, and for mourning purposes. The tension extends to that between the banality of the things people, and the author himself, remember, even make an effort to record and the truly meaningful, which is demonstrably harder to preserve.

Nonetheless, taking stock of what’s available to record is one method for approaching difficult subject matter. The author outlines this approach in *Récits d’Ellis Island*, co-written with Robert Bober, in which one reads “Au début, on ne peut qu’essayer de nommer les choses, une à une, platement, les énumérer, les dénombrer, de la manière la plus banale possible, de la manière la plus précises possible, en essayant de ne rien oublier” (43). For Perec, this can be a meaningful palliative for the wounds left by the voids of the past but cannot heal them entirely. To put it another way, one can evidently write a book without the letter “e”, but its absence will be palpable.

¹² February 13, 1943.

Modiano and tracking the past

One would be hard pressed to find an author more interested in the collecting and cataloging of the minutiae of daily life than Patrick Modiano, another clear forerunner of the filiation narrative. In *Livret de famille*, published in 1977, the author imagines a manager of a dog kennel who dreams of creating an archive which holds records, photos and videos of any dog, living or dead. At birth, the dog is entered into the record and various media, either professional or amateur, home movies, are added throughout the course of its life. There would also be descriptions of each dog and stories of its exploits, both in written and oral form. Perhaps even the dogs' favorite toys or leashes could be included. In short, anything pertaining to any dog ever having lived. The titular *livret de famille*, is also a record which documents the lives of each member of a family, a civil registry used in some countries to track information of a genealogical or family-centric legal interest. France adopted the practice of families keeping track of important events themselves after the destruction of official records during the fires of the Paris commune in 1871. The family register is meant to provide documentation if records are ever destroyed again. It may also readily furnish future generations with knowledge about their ascendants. The *livret de famille* doesn't typically include pets, however. What happens when pet-parents, themselves, pass on? Traces of the dogs' lives disappear. Dogs are usually only remembered by those who knew them personally and enjoy no posterity beyond a generation or so. The kennel attendant and dog-lover is tormented by the thought of all the dogs that die in anonymity without leaving a trace. "Son tourment à lui, c'était de penser à tous ces milliers et ces milliers de chiens morts dans l'anonymat total et sans qu'ils eussent laissé la moindre trace" (185). If the thought of unknown dogs passing quietly into obscurity is so troubling, how can one cope with the idea of fellow human

beings departing without leaving much of a trace themselves? The dog archive is a passing mention but the thought experiment demonstrates the memorial obsession which Modiano continually portrays. We find this impulse to scrupulously record the present again in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*. In Chris Clarke's translation:

“One of the members of the group... had undertaken a venture of which the others approved. For going on three years he had been taking note of the names of the Condé's customers as they arrived, in each instance jotting down the date and exact time... It was as if Bowling were trying to save butterflies that fluttered around a lamp from being forgotten. He envisioned a great register where the names of the customers of all the cafés of Paris were recorded, with notes made of their successive arrivals and departures” (15).

Whether dogs, butterflies or café-goers, Modiano dreams of registers which will attest to the lives of beings once they've passed and/or facilitate in the act of tracking them down.

Barring one small distinction, which I discuss below, it is difficult to draw a line between Modiano's works and the filiation narrative. It is more appropriate to consider Modiano one of the genre's pioneers. He first established the convergence of features which characterize the filiation narrative. One could argue that Modiano's entire *oeuvre* represents a meditation on a tugging curiosity about the past. Modiano cultivates an environment in which characters are ceaselessly attracted to opaque events and figures. Writing becomes a way of working through a mystery. His narrators collect and process information, form hypotheses in order to sketch loose portraits of people about whom little remains. Modiano links the urge to write with the quest for history and filiation. “Ce n'était pas une vocation ni un don particuliers qui me poussaient à écrire, mais tout simplement l'énigme que me posait un homme que je n'avais aucune chance de retrouver, et toutes ces questions qui n'auraient jamais de réponse” (*Fleurs de ruine* 86).

The principal figure of interest in Modiano's work is often an absent father. The curiosity is engendered not only by the father's absence, but also by the absence of understanding of the father's life. “Je pensais à mon père qui avait vécu toutes les incohérences de la période de

l'Occupation et qui ne m'en avait presque rien dit avant que nous nous quitions pour toujours” (*Fleurs de ruine* 67). While the *mise en scène* of investigation most often pertains to the narrator's father, the gesture extends to the pursuit of others' fathers' lives as well, as in Chapter 12 of *Livret de famille*, where the narrator Patrick sets out to write a biography of his girlfriend's absent father. The absence of these figures engenders a lingering obsession with traces of the past, as small or insignificant as they may seem. Speaking about an acquaintance, the narrator of *Fleurs de ruine* says, “Il avait disparu de cette manière subite que je remarquerai plus tard chez d'autres personnes, comme mon père, et qui vous laisse perplexe au point qu'il ne vous reste plus qu'à chercher des preuves et des indices pour vous persuader à vous-même que ces gens ont vraiment existé” (*Fleurs de ruine* 139).

This fixation on the past manifests itself as both vague revery and active searching. Through the latter, Modiano offers numerous illustrations of the act of investigating the past. His characters consult archives, for example: “Quel lien pouvait exister entre cet homme et mon père? . . . A l'époque où j'habitais square de Graisivaudan, je voulais élucider cette énigme en essayant de retrouver les traces de Pagnon. On m'avait donné l'autorisation de consulter de vieilles archives” (*Remise de peine* 118). Old newspapers also often provide a starting point. “Il fallait d'abord réunir les preuves matérielles du passage d'Harry Dressel sur la terre. Et cela mettrait du temps. Déjà, en consultant tout un lot de vieux journaux, j'avais découvert. . .” (183). Modiano's narrators also seek out people who might be able to inform them about their people of interest. For example,

Je pensais à mes parents. J'eus la certitude que si je voulais rencontrer des témoins et des amis de leur jeunesse, ce serait toujours dans des endroits semblables à celui-ci: halls d'hôtels désaffectés de pays lointains où flotte un parfum d'exil et où viennent échouer les êtres qui n'ont jamais eu d'assise au cours de leur vie, ni d'état civil très précis. (*Livret de famille* 204)

Unfortunately, more often than not, the people who might have known them are themselves not to be found. “Jusqu’à ce jour, je n’ai trouvé aucun indice, aucun témoin qui aurait pu m’éclaircir...” (Dora Bruder 89).

Thus, consulting archives and seeking out acquaintances often prove to be dead-ends. The absence of material traces is a recurring theme. In Chapter 3 of *Livret de famille*, the narrator knows that his grandmother once lived on Rue Léon-Vaudoyer, but knows neither when, nor at which number. In fact, he knows almost nothing about her, not even what she looked like, due to the absence of any photographs. He does know, somehow, that in 1917, she took refuge with a relative, James Levy, who later disappeared and whom she was unable to locate. Hoping to solve the mystery his grandmother was unable to solve, the narrator continues the search. “J’ai voulu moi aussi en savoir plus, mais je n’ai pas encore trouvé la moindre trace, la moindre preuve de passage de James Levy sur la terre. J’ai même consulté des archives à la mairie d’Enghien” (*Livret de famille* 45). This absence of trace is a frequent obstacle to solving the enigmas of the past. The disappearance of the people, places and things that attest to the subject’s life contribute to the impossibility of reconstructing the past. The search proves to have been in vain, as the narrator of *Remise de peine* remarks. “[T]outes ces années n’auront été, pour moi, qu’une longue et vaine recherche d’un garage perdu” (*Remise* 123).

Like the detective novel the protagonist Jean Daragane of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, pretends to be writing, the narrators set out to elucidate some mystery. It would be too much to say that they work to solve the mystery, since, they tend more to bask in the hazy glow of sustained curiosity. Nonetheless, Modiano employs devices found in detective novels and by so doing creates an atmosphere of suspense and intrigue. His works make frequent self-referential allusions to investigative work, like that done by the police. For example, “Il jugeait

qu'elle serait plus convaincante que lui pour l'inciter à parler, comme ces inspecteurs de police qui se relaient au cours d'un interrogatoire" (32). And, "Il eut, à cet instant-là, le sentiment que les rôles s'inversaient et qu'il suffirait de peu de chose pour la faire "craquer", selon l'expression qu'il avait entendue autrefois dans un certain milieu" (54). And again, "Qu'est-ce qui se passe dans cette tête, mon petit Jean? Tu veux me soumettre à un interrogatoire?" (95). In fact, the amnesiac narrator mentioned earlier is actually a private detective and after 8 years in that line of work, turns his skills on himself, declaring he's going in search of his past.

Perhaps because so much remains unknowable in Modiano's representation, the smallest of coincidences can be endowed with great significance, particularly when it comes to places. Locations, being accessible and less mutable, are imbued with much meaning. "On se dit qu'au moins les lieux gardent une légère empreinte des personnes qui les ont habités" (*Dora Bruder* 28-29). This significance given to spaces once inhabited by a sought person, or even *possibly* once inhabited by this sought person is perhaps especially pronounced in *Dora Bruder*. "L'immeuble du 41, précédant le cinéma, n'avait jamais attiré mon attention, et pourtant je suis passé devant lui pendant des mois, des années. De 1965 à 1968. Adresser toutes indications à M. et Mme Bruder, 41 boulevard Ornano, Paris" (9). Modiano manages to imbue such a small coincidence—that he had often passed by the building where Dora lived—with significant weight.

"Je me souviens que pour la première fois, j'avais ressenti le vide que l'on éprouve devant ce qui a été détruit, rasé net. Je ne connaissais pas encore l'existence de Dora Bruder. Peut-être — mais j'en suis sûr — s'est elle promenée là, dans cette zone qui m'évoque les rendez-vous d'amour secrets, les pauvres bonheurs perdus" (34).

No matter the book, Modiano's narrators often experience a feeling that life is rich with meaning while retracing the steps of the person they are preoccupied with. In the above-mentioned case of the grandmother from *Livret de famille*, the narrator wanders around the neighborhood, wondering which shops she might have frequented. The author continually puts multiple time

periods in conversation with each other. In *Fleurs de ruine*, for example, he writes, “Dans la lumière de fin d’après-midi, il m’a semblé que les années se confondaient et que le temps devenait transparent” (43). Or in *Dora Bruder*: “D’hier à aujourd’hui. Avec le recul des années, les perspectives se brouillent pour moi, les hivers se mêlent l’un à l’autre. Celui de 1965 et celui de 1942” (10). Modiano’s narratives often operate in multiple temporalities concurrently. This trope is also frequently found in filiation narratives. Almost by definition, the filiation narrative operates on at least two temporal planes, that of the sought-after past and that of the narrative present. This is necessarily the case when the past is being told along with its discovery in the narrative present, or is echoed in the events of the present. This collapsing of temporalities points to the filiation narrative’s goal of a past made palpable, not a dissipated past.

While Modiano’s works first established many of the defining characteristics of the filiation narrative, there are minor distinctions to be found. In several his novels, for example, an additional obstacle to knowing the past appears to be one’s own self. In the 1988 *Remise de peine*, the narrator runs into someone he knew during childhood. He would have liked to ask this person about the mysterious goings-on and possible criminal activity his guardians were engaged in but which remain obscure to him. He refrains from asking anything in the presence of the man’s companion, concluding that it’s better that he didn’t ask (101). His own reticence despite his incredible drive to seek the truth, is what prevents him from learning more. Similar situations abound across Modiano’s texts. The narrators look forward to some clarification and yet, when given the chance to ask for this clarification, they let the opportunity slip by. “De nouveau, j’eus envie de lui demander ce que faisaient mon père et ma mère à Megève en février 1944. Mais le savait-il? Après trente ans, les souvenirs...” (*Livret de famille* 25). The narrator justifies his inaction with the assumption that the family friend would no longer remember after so much time

had passed. The Modiano's preoccupation with the past exists in the tension of near contradictions like wanting to forget but needing to remember or wanting to remember but needing to forget. While Modiano's narrators often hold themselves back from getting answers about the past, later writers of the filiation narrative and their narrative personas have worked past their inability to ask questions and now seize every opportunity. They have moved beyond frustrated curiosity and resignation to a fully active pursuit of information.

Another difference between Modiano's work and the filiation narratives featured here is the absence of paternal attachment. In *Dora Bruder*, Modiano describes trying to find his dying father at the hospital but getting lost and giving up.

I remember wandering for hours through the vastness of that hospital in search of him. I found my way into ancient buildings, into communal wards lined with beds, I questioned nurses who gave me contradictory directions. I came to doubt my father's existence, passing and repassing that majestic church [...] I tramped the paved courtyards till dusk. It was impossible to find my father. I never saw him again. (13)

Not only did he never see him again, but he never saw him as an adult. As we learn later, seeing him at the hospital would have been the first time he'd seen his father since their last encounter at the police station when the narrator was 18. "I never saw him again after that" (59). To be fair, Modiano's narrator's absence of paternal attachment is both justifiable and understandable. From the little the narrator shares about him, his father seems to have made little effort to have a good relationship with his son. While Modiano, nonetheless, produces a *mise en scène* of searching for the ghost of his father, it isn't out of a sense of familial devotion. This calls to mind Didier Eribon's socio-autobiographical work *Retour à Reims* in which he admits he had no interest in seeing his father before his death. "Mais cela faisait une éternité, déjà, que nous ne nous reconnaissons plus. Le fossé qui s'était creusé entre nous quand j'étais encore adolescent s'était élargi au fil des années, et nous étions devenus des étrangers l'un pour l'autre" (15). Most filiation narratives, on the other

hand, demonstrate a certain familial attachment. For example, in his review of Storti's *L'arrivée de mon père*, historian Michel Dreyfus calls the narrative "un témoignage de piété familiale de la part de sa fille."

A final difference worth mentioning is that Modiano's works do not emphasize the importance of the past for the present in the way many filiation narratives do. In *Dora Bruder*, Modiano bemoans the fact that his writing won't have the "silencing effect" on antisemitic writers he had hoped it would since those writers have already been silenced by other means.

I wanted my first book to be a riposte to all those who, by insulting my father, had wounded me. And, on the terrain of French prose, to silence them once and for all. I can see now that my plan was childishly naïve: most of the authors had disappeared, executed by firing squad, exiled, far gone in senility, or dead of old age. Yes, alas, I was too late. (58).

By declaring he was too late, Modiano ignores the continued relevance of the past and of the importance of denouncing xenophobic and racist discourse. Filiation narrative writers, by contrast, realize that while those authors referenced by Modiano may have been silenced, their ideologies have not.

Despite this notable shift in the filiation narratives following Modiano's influential *oeuvre*, his works exemplify the backward-looking tone foundational to the filiation narrative. His narratives are often situated in the present and, being retrospective in orientation, demonstrate the primary requirement of the filiation narrative. The investigation into people and events of the past is incorporated into the narrative, exemplifying an archeological posture. Finally, the narrative doesn't presume to be an impartial or complete account but rather the subjective point of view of the narrator is emphasized.

The filiation narrative and neighboring genres

While it has been demonstrated that the filiation narrative is defined by a number of distinct elements, it remains, nonetheless, closely related to a number of neighboring genres. These include the historical novel, memoir, autobiography and historical nonfiction. There are, however, clear delimitations between each.

Historical novel

It is easy to see how the filiation narrative differs from the historical novel. While both are inspired by historical events, the historical novel aims to be faithful to details of the time period but may invent the entirety of a plot or storyline — it is a work of fiction. In addition, historical novels often have an omniscient narrator, which is at odds with the subjective, partially informed narrators of filiation narratives. Moreover, while technically possible, it is rare that the author of a piece of historical fiction has a personal connection to the story's protagonists. Finally, on a formal level, the historical novel is unconcerned with the incorporation of the search for information into the narrative, something that is inherent to the filiation narrative. There may well have been research into the time period in question, but the process of research will not be worked into the story. Nonetheless, the archeological novel and the historical novel share an interest in history and its incorporation into the narrative. Both reflect society's desire to better understand its own trajectory. "La collectivité," Viart writes, "se demande plutôt "comment en est-on arrivé là?" et cette question suscite l'incroyable retournement sur le passé accompli par toute notre culture" ("Nouveaux" 17). In Chapter 4, I explore this historical element in more detail.

Memoir

There are many similarities to be found between memoir and the filiation narrative. This is especially true for memoirs born out of the ruptures caused by war or immigration, as they, too, often seek to grapple with a familial discontinuity. Much of Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation*, for example, reads like a filiation narrative. In it, Hoffman confronts the consequences of her family's emigration and the attendant loss of connection with their country of origin and the family history contained through social and material bonds there. The reader encounters the trope of the absence of material traces of the past frequently found in filiation narratives. "There aren't even any photographs which have survived the war: the cut from the past is complete" (8). So complete is the break with her past, in fact, that she is forced to reconsider what was most formative in her life: was it having been born in Poland or the experience of war and escape?

Yet, while filiation narratives, like certain memoirs, reflect an effort to remedy a deficit, they distinguish themselves from memoir in that, while they may well include recollections from one's life and childhood, the emphasis, once again, is on what is not known and the effort to recover or uncover that which can be recovered or uncovered. The memoir of the Spokane-Coeur d'Alene-Native American novelist Sherman Alexie, *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, for example, shares certain characteristics with the filiation narrative as well. In the memoir, he expresses how little he knows about his parents.

This memoir," I said, "It's going to have a lot of blank spaces. I suppose I could really dig into the research and get stuff as accurate as possible. But I like the blank spaces. I like how they feel. I want my readers to feel how I feel. I want them to feel the loss. To feel our loss. I want them to know how guilty I feel for not knowing this stuff." "It's not your fault," my sister said. "Dad never talked about bad things." "And mom lied so much," I said (Sherman Alexie "Love Story").

The narrator's reaction to these blank spaces is what sets the memoir apart from the filiation narrative: Alexie could try to find out more details of his family's past but chooses not to,

preferring to register the absence instead, as they echo the erasure of Native American history. The filiation narrative by contrast makes the blank spaces felt while also seeking to fill in a portion of them. One way this is done is through the form of the narrative. The filiation narrative often, though not always, favors a heterogeneous form to a smooth, flowing narrative. The narrative may jump around, have abrupt transitions—or a lack thereof—and incorporate outside materials like letters and official documents (having an epistolary quality in some sections).

Moreover, while a memoir's main focus is often on the life of its author, the filiation narrative's focus is shared between the author and other relatives. Where filiation narratives are concerned, the impulse to recapture a bit of the past is as much about honoring the past and the people in one's life as it is about better understanding oneself and situating oneself within a larger narrative. "Entre transmission brisée et héritage d'une dette, ces écritures de soi réinventent une identité singulière et plurielle à la fois. Car en restituant les vies dispersées de l'ascendance, l'écrivain contemporain découvre en lui la permanence d'identités défuntes" (Demanze 9). Storti, likewise, emphasizes the dual nature of her filiation narrative project, writing a story that is at once hers and not hers. "[C]e chemin que j'ai emprunté, qui me contraint à reprendre une histoire qui est à la fois *autre et mien*" (48; emphasis mine). The story of her life is inextricable from that of her loved ones. This is, of course, also true of many memoirs. As author Rob Nixon argues, "The most effective memoirists . . . find ways to draw on the form's intimate energies while also offering the reader a social depth of field" (26). Nixon differentiates these types of memoirs from the "if-it's-me-it-must-be-interesting" type. The line between memoir and filiation narrative becomes even more blurred when we realize that the English term most often used to refer to what I call the filiation narrative, is 'family history memoir'. Part of the aim of this study is to offer the alternative

term of filiation narrative, which takes into account the formal differences between the genres that I have taken pains to point out.

Autobiography

Like memoir and autobiography, filiation narratives combine introspection and retrospection. While such similarities exist, there are important differences between them. The distinctions between the filiation narrative and autobiography closely resemble those described in relation to memoir. Autobiography is perhaps even more removed from the filiation narrative due to its emphasis on the individual and the construction of their personality with even less attention paid to others. This is clear if we remember Philippe Lejeune's succinct definition of autobiography as "[un] récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (14). Of course, the definition of autobiography has been complicated over time, including by Lejeune himself. The fact remains, however, that while autobiography is principally about the author's own experiences, the filiation narrative is as much, if not more, about oneself as it is about others. As Rousseau declares in the incipit of what's arguably the first French autobiography, his project is to dress the portrait of himself. Moreover, authors of filiation narratives make no pact with the reader. The fact that the narrators share the first names of the authors no longer constitutes an autobiographical pact, which the tradition of autofiction has significantly complicated.

Historical non-fiction

Due to its interest in the lives of real people and its use of documents and testimony, the filiation narrative lies at the fault line between historical non-fiction and literary fiction. As Ivan Jablonka argues in his *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine*, depending on the era, history and literature have at times been very close, and we are once again entering a time in which they are mutually informative. The first difference between the filiation narrative and a work of historical non-fiction is its incorporation of an investigative component in the narrative itself. However, some historians have undertaken to write filiation narratives whose form closely resembles that of literary filiation narratives. These historians have recognized that history is not limited to well-known figures or events and that even one's own family, seemingly anonymous and otherwise lost to history, is a legitimate line of inquiry. Jablonka is one example. "L'histoire tient donc du raisonnement naturel," Jablonka writes, "L'homme peut l'appliquer à sa propre vie, à la vie de ses proches, à celle de ses disparus ou, ce qui revient au même, à celle des êtres qu'il n'a pas connus, parce qu'ils sont déjà morts ou qu'ils vivent hors de son voisinage immédiat" (*L'histoire* 131). This echoes what he had previously argued in *L'histoire des grand-parents que je n'ai pas eus*, "La distinction entre nos histoires de famille et ce qu'on voudrait appeler l'Histoire, avec sa pompeuse majuscule, n'a aucun sens. C'est rigoureusement la même chose . . ." (164). Jablonka exaggerates here a bit in order to make a point, but the longstanding notion of what constitutes a legitimate subject of historical inquiry has been called into question.

Historians and writers alike have begun turning their attention to their own families. This is precisely what World War I historian Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau does with his *Quelle histoire: Un récit de filiation*. Audoin-Rouzeau traces the effect this war had on his family, notably his grandfathers who fought in the war:

Ce petit livre est le fruit d'une expérience historiographique: ceux de ma lignée dont la Grande Guerre a percuté la vie, directement ou non, j'ai tenté de diriger vers eux un effort historique, de retourner vers les miens des protocoles de recherche jusqu'ici réservés à d'autres. L'écriture spécifique d'habitude mise en œuvre pour parler des combattants des tranchées, des femmes en deuil ou des enfants de la guerre, j'ai tenté de l'appliquer à ceux auxquels, d'une manière ou d'une autre, je *tiens*. (13)

Despite his expertise on the subject, Audoin-Rouzeau realizes that he knows very little about his own grandfather Robert's experience. This is in part because these stories were not passed down to him by his own father. "Avec la Grande Guerre, le fils de Robert [Philippe, le père de l'auteur] coupa donc toute filiation" (97). The historians Ivan Jablonka and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau have both posited that a career as historians allowed them to better understand their own families. Audoin-Rouzeau muses that without realizing it, he may have chosen to study history for just this reason. It was an unacknowledged, perhaps subconscious, desire to better understand his grandfather which led him, not only to pursue a career in the field of history, but to specialize in the First World War. "[A] mon insu, je rétablissais une filiation interrompue" (64). In a similar vein, Jablonka reflects that it was because of his training as a historian that he was able to learn as much about his grandparents' journey and fateful end as he did. For Jablonka, it's more that his choice to study history put him on the path to one day learning more about his grandparents than otherwise would have likely been possible. "Je crois que je suis devenu historien pour faire un jour cette découverte" (*Grandparents* 164-165).

Similarly, Doan Bui, journalist turned author of a filiation narrative investigating her Vietnamese heritage, has established a correlation between her immigrant heritage and her professional interests as a journalist. The narrator of *Le Silence de mon père* realized that by pursuing immigrant narratives she'd been trying to understand her own father. "[P]endant toutes ces années, auprès de tous ces inconnus, je recherchais la voix d'un seul exilé. Mon père" (57). To be fascinated by the stories of other immigrant families is adjacent to being fascinated about one's

own. Writers like Bui, experiencing the revelation that their own story might be an oblique reflection of stories they consider to be outside of their personal experience, express difficulty at turning their gaze inward. "J'ai archivé le dossier Bui, dans le dossier "Naturalisations" de mon ordinateur. Je ne l'ai plus ouvert. Je n'ai pas posé de questions. Je continuais à me passionner pour les autres familles d'immigrés" (124). She found it much more difficult posing questions to her father than to a stranger. The synthesis of these two interests, family and history, takes place, as we saw with Jablonka, the moment one employs one's professional tools to elucidate more intimate questions. Bui writes, "Il est temps d'élucider, de me débarrasser de mon habit de "fille de", et d'endosser celui de journaliste. Retrouver mes réflexes : me documenter, interroger, poser des questions. Je ne peux plus reculer. Ce livre sera le portrait d'un inconnu. Mon père" (62).

Thus, an inherent curiosity about one's own heritage can manifest itself as an interest in history or politics more generally before the family is understood to be the root of this interest. In the case of Audoin-Rouzeau, Jablonka and Bui, for example, this motivation required time to reveal itself. Once one's family has been accepted as a worthwhile avenue for exploration, as a subject of interest ipso facto, many filiation narrative writers then use the particular circumstances of their family as a way of addressing an aspect of history which encompasses their family narrative. This process is also at times reversed: the investigation into their family's past leads to the consideration of the historical factors at play. The family becomes a prism through which to look closely at a series of historical events affecting large groups of people, widening the scope of their attention beyond their own relatives. In either case, their families' experiences become the point from which history can be approached from a new angle. Michael Rothberg's description of Leïla Sebbar's novel, *La Seine était rouge*, describes this very approach, as one that "interweaves the problematic of national and cultural memory with an intimate, familial narrative" (304).

The literary filiation narrative and those written by historians share an acute interest in the past and a desire to reconnect with it. In addition, both potentially bolster a regard for the past among readers and an interest in making connections between the time in which it is written and that which came before. So then what differentiates the literary filiation narrative from a filiation narrative that is a work of historical nonfiction? There are certain fundamental differences that prevent us from treating works in these two genres as interchangeable. First and foremost, Jablonka and Audoin-Rouzeau maintain their posture as historians. “Je suis parti, *en historien*, sur les traces des grands-parents que je n’ai pas eus” (*Grandparents* 9; my emphasis). Audoin-Rouzeau insists as well, “. . . ce livre demeure sans doute livre d’histoire. Mais il emprunte le chemin d’un récit de filiation” (15). And later, “Même si elles s’y apparentent parfois, les pages que l’on va lire ne constituent pas un récit de famille : je m’en suis tenu à ce que la Grande Guerre a fait aux miens, à la manière dont elle a traversé leur existence, quitte à inscrire ses effets au-delà même de leur propre vie” (14). As historians, they adhere to the principles of their discipline regarding verifiable truth and accuracy. Jablonka, for example, is careful to claim only what he can prove empirically and to qualify all else as conjecture. The filiation narrative, when written by trained historians, avoids any speculation or invention. When the facts are inconclusive, the author admits as much and rather than deviate from the facts, prefers to present hypotheses as such. Exaggerating again in order to make a point, Jablonka has said, “Un historien ne romance pas . . . On peut prudemment proposer des scénarios.”¹³ The author refrains from describing a scene using details that are impossible to verify, such as lighting, or feeling:

Je pourrais inventer un bruit de pas dans l'escalier, des coups assénés contre la porte, un réveil en sursaut. Mais je veux que mon récit soit indubitable, fondé sur des preuves, au pire des hypothèses et des déductions, et, pour honorer ce contrat moral, il faut tout à la fois assumer ses incertitudes comme faisant partie d'un récit plein et entier et repousser les facilités de l'imagination, même si elle remplit merveilleusement les blancs. (267)

¹³ *La grande librairie*, January 26, 2018.

And yet, of course, some blurring between the two genres does exist. As Mona Ozouf reminds us in her article “Récits des romanciers, récit des historiens,” historical writing is not the impartial account we sometimes think it to be.

“Rien de plus banal, en effet, que la mise en évidence du caractère arbitraire d’un récit historique : d’une part, les faits sont innombrables, dans leur torrent il faut choisir ; par ailleurs, ils ne parlent pas tout seuls et ne prennent sens que dans l’organisation narrative de l’historien. Et dans cet arrangement sélectif entrent à l’évidence la personnalité de l’historien, sa formation, ses passions” (16).

Such personal biases are evident in Audoin-Rouzeau’s filiation narrative, for example. As Angelique Aristondo demonstrates in her dissertation, “Armored Feelings. Romantic Love, Sexual Consent, and Gender-based Violence in French First World War Narratives,” the first edition of Audoin-Rouzeau’s *Quelle histoire* (2013) completely left out any mention of the women of the family, except to say twice that the author’s grandmother was unable to understand the change that had occurred in her husband. In response to criticism of this oversight, Audoin-Rouzeau published a second edition two years later that included an addendum entitled “Du côté des femmes.” The addendum reads, however, to Aristondo and others, as nothing more than an attempt at allaying disapproval, while failing to consider the experience of the women in his family as integral to History¹⁴.

Another historian turned filiation narrative writer is Leo Spitzer. Like Jablonka, Spitzer uses lingering questions about his family as the entry point into a historical investigation into his parent’s emigration from Austria to Bolivia in the late 1930’s and their subsequent emigration from Bolivia to The United States. Because his parents are no longer alive to answer his many

¹⁴ “When centering on the impact of the war on men, as the book’s initial edition did, what is talked about is history; when centering on the impact of the war on women, what is talked about is “women.” In such a framework, women’s stories can only be self-referential to gender, while men’s stories tell a history, the war, in which gender relations are only peripheral to the narrative” (Aristondo Intro).

questions, Spitzer poses his questions to others whose experiences closely resemble theirs. “I would assume that they would include many of the same factors recalled by other Central European departees . . .” (187). The collective stories of others, acquired through interview and testimony, serve as a stand-in for his parent’s stories that can no longer be told. Luckily, he is not told, like Jablonka, by a woman from whom he tries to elicit information, “Vous n’allez pas calquer l’histoire de votre grand-père sur celle de mon père!” (Grandparents 155).

Spitzer emphasizes the dual nature of his 1998 *Hotel Bolivia*, as at once memoirist and historian. The historian admits to not being totally impartial. This is precisely the dual role characteristic of the filiation narrative in which the author is both participant and investigator. This leads to what Viart has referred to as “un point de vue singulier,” his fourth and final parameter for the roman archéologique. “Aussi l’Histoire n’est-elle plus reçue ni présentée comme une matière objective, mais elle est affectée par ce point de vue” (“Nouveaux” 25). The author is not only an interested party conducting research which concerns them, but the information acquired is filtered through their particular experience. “As the Boliva-born child of refugees, I am both a participant in and the historian of ‘the Bolivia experience’— an interlocutor extracting recollections and shaping what I hear through my own projections” (192). Not only are filiation narrative authors not impartial, but, like Spitzer, they “shape what they hear according to their own projections.

Historical writing being rarely as impartial as it might purport to be, there are filiation narratives written by historians that intentionally blur the lines. Historian Martine Sonnet rejects the divide between the literary and the historical and her approach to writing the filiation narrative *Atelier 62*, provides a contrast to that of Jablonka and Audoin-Rouzeau. In order to write about her father, Sonnet opted for a structure that alternates chapters featuring archival research relating to

the factory where her father worked most of his life with chapters recounting her memories of him. Sonnet has described her work as consisting of “la voix d’enfance” and “la voix d’usine” (“Élargir le cercle” 128). This format echoes both Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance*, which alternates chapters of two parallel narratives, and her colleague Arlette Farge’s *Le goût de l’archive*. With this book, Sonnet achieves a well-rounded portrait of her father by painting not only his paternal role but also his role as a worker. As his daughter, the writer is limited in what she can describe experientially about her father’s life. She is limited by her memories, her understanding of what she saw and heard, and all of this is to a certain extent limited to the confines of family life, to that which took place within and was transmitted by the family. But as a historian, Sonnet gains insight into the realm in which her father spent much of his life and can therefore give shape to the two sides of the single existence.

In an article in which she discusses her approach, Sonnet explains that both tactics were necessary to her. Adhering solely to a historical approach, with the precision required by the discipline, was a hindrance and denied her the range needed to access this intimate part of the past. “[J]e suis bien consciente qu’un essai historique étayé sur les mêmes sources n’aurait pas rencontré un tel écho” (“Atelier 62” 206). She thus gave herself the freedom to take a literary approach to her historical work:

L’écriture d’*Atelier 62*, est « postée » entre littérature et sciences humaines. Je n’ai pu m’en acquitter qu’en me déplaçant de l’histoire – ma discipline – et de ses normes académiques vers la littérature, en même temps que je devais aller puiser des connaissances produites par diverses sciences sociales, notamment la sociologie. Le texte procède donc d’une friction entre plusieurs champs d’écritures et de recherches. (“Atelier 62” 205)

Elsewhere, she explains that for her, treating this subject solely as a historian was not an option for a few reasons. First, she does not specialize in industrial history and therefore does not have the requisite encompassing view. Second, she prefers to approach the newspaper and archival

sources without critiquing them, referring to this as an empathetic approach to the sources. And lastly, she recounts that she is too emotionally implicated in the story to be able to treat it objectively¹⁵. For these reasons, she insists that *Atelier 62* is a fictional work. To call it simply a work of fiction, however, feels inaccurate. Perhaps a more apt term would be that proposed by Viart: *figuration*, a middle term between fiction and representation of fact. Viart defines *figuration* as follows:

La *figuration* est le texte qui entreprend de dire comment l'écrivain (le narrateur) se *figure* que les choses ont pu se passer, en fonction des éléments tangibles dont il dispose, des informations accumulées sur ce type d'événements, sur la période, sur les réalités sociales et les *habitus* du moment, du milieu, etc. ("Le silence des pères" par. 26)

The book's achievement lies in the balance it creates between the objective and the subjective, the personal and the public, fiction and representation of fact. The historical materials provide access to the father's working life, evoking the atmosphere of the factory with which Sonnet, as a young girl, was unfamiliar, the personal reminiscences humanize her father and endow the book with personal, experiential knowledge. Moreover, the project gives Sonnet the opportunity to deplore the difficult conditions of factory work that she witnessed take such a toll on her father. For these reasons, *Atelier 62* exemplifies the filiation narrative in my view. If I have not included Sonnet in my corpus, it is simply because the text doesn't deal with immigration and is therefore not a second-generation filiation narrative (the focus of this dissertation). Moreover, there already exists a noteworthy output of scholarship¹⁶ on the *récit de filiation ouvrière*.

¹⁵ Author talk at NEMLA, Washington D.C., March 21-24, 2019.

¹⁶ See Viart, Dominique, and Gianfranco Rubino, editors. *Écrire le présent*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2013.

Journalism

Writers of this genre employ similar strategies to historians and journalists, regardless of whether they previously worked in those fields or not. In order to gather information, the filiation narrative author seeks out and questions anyone who may be able to inform them about the subject of their investigation and consults any relevant documents. Because of the insight and authentication they provide, archives are an almost indispensable resource. Documents provide material evidence of the past and, whether the narrator draws on them as a last resort when all other traces have been erased or as a correlative to oral history, they offer something concrete on which to ground one's story. It is interesting to note that Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti have all worked in journalism—Storti wrote for *Libération*, Kerchouche for *L'Express* and Schneck has hosted radio programs on France Inter, among others. What sets them apart from journalists in their literary work is that they are not writing as journalists and are therefore not beholden to the conventions of the profession.

In my correspondence with Schneck, I inquired how her work as a journalist has informed her writing. Schneck told me that in order to write a book and not simply an article, she had to unlearn everything she was taught in journalism. She had to learn to lie. She explained that she initially chose journalism because she didn't believe she had access to the literary world but that eventually, she realized she is better suited to the latter: "J'avais du mal à suivre les règles du journalisme mais avec la littérature il n'y a pas de règles." It is unclear whether the "rules of journalism" to which Schneck refers are those having to do with objectivity or simply the expectation that journalistic writing have a certain clarity and cohesion. Nonetheless, the filiation narrative is not bound to verifiability and the authors are operating from a place of artistic freedom to construct their narratives as they choose.

Isabelle Monnin is another journalist who's turned to literature. Her hybrid work—which, if it concerned her own family would be a filiation narrative—*Les gens dans l'enveloppe*, joins together these two approaches. “Je sais faire deux choses: inventer des histoires et enquêter. Romancière, journaliste, deux vies. Je sais imaginer des personnages, entendre leurs voix; je sais retrouver des gens et les écouter. Dans *L'enveloppe*, il y a tout de suite deux livres, un roman et une enquête” (181). Monnin chooses to make use of these two features, she establishes a distinction between two modes of writing, fiction and fact, avoiding any mixing between the two. The real and the fictional are clearly delineated and the reader is aware of exactly which of the two she is reading. In order to do this, Monnin first imagined the lives of the family present in the package of old photos she had purchased. Only after having written this fictional account, did she successfully locate and interview the family. “Pour éviter tout parasitage, il faudra s'interdire de commencer l'enquête avant d'avoir écrit la fiction et il sera impossible de modifier l'intrigue du roman une fois l'enquête achevée. C'est comme ça, un pacte entre les gens dans l'enveloppe, l'idée et moi” (181). It's for this reason, that the coincidences and commonalities between her invention and reality are that much more striking.

Finally, there is the question of readership. The French use the term *vulgarisation* to refer to any book that is aimed at a non-expert public and the term doesn't have the same negative connotation it would in America. By writing family stories, filiation narrative authors make their work more accessible to a public that may be less inclined to reach for a work of history or journalism, even *de vulgarisation*. The popularity of the filiation narrative shows how well this particular blend of personal and societal corresponds to the tastes of contemporary French readers. It would be interesting to count the number of filiation narratives that have appeared on *La Grande Librairie* or even *C à vous*, because it would show just how well-liked the genre has proven to be.

Writers seem to have tapped into a winning formula and are running with it. While still a relatively recent phenomenon, the filiation narrative is no longer new by any means.

History and memory

While the precise distinction between history and memory is still debatable, theorists generally agree that history is located on the side of the verifiable, while memory is subjective, created through a selective process and thus impossible to verify with total objectivity (Todorov). Traverso's concept of hybrid texts challenges this dichotomy by drawing on both in order to discover and transmit a multidimensional account of the past. He speaks of hybrids—"certaines autobiographies rentrent dans cette catégorie—qui permettent à la mémoire de revisiter l'histoire en soulignant ses points aveugles et ses généralisations hâtives, et à l'histoire de corriger les pièges de la mémoire en l'obligeant à se transformer en analyse autoréflexive et en discours critique" (29-30). Storti's, Schneck's and Kerchouche's filiation narratives are examples of such hybrid texts in that they draw on both memory and history in order to impart an enriched, multidimensional account of the past. The highly selective nature of these works, which present a curated assemblage of stories, is in line with the nature of memory. It is not a question here of the supposed impartiality of the historian. And yet, at the same time, the authors not only borrow tools and strategies from the discipline of history, but call upon its authority to substantiate their narratives. The use of personal testimony in conjunction with official archival documents is one example of this. Traverso writes, "C'est dans ce contexte d'élargissement des sources de l'histoire et de remise en cause de ses hiérarchies traditionnelles que s'inscrit l'émergence de la mémoire comme nouveau chantier dans l'écriture du passé" (26). Thus, a broadening of what may be considered historical

material is taking place concurrently with the more personal mementos finding traction as a way of exploring the past.

It is clear that the authors have also conducted background research, i.e. read books about the time periods and events in question and demonstrate historical knowledge. Kerchouche mentions numerous books that have aided in her understanding of the history of Harkis. For example, she cites a report by two sociologists entitled *Regroupement et dispersion. Le rapport des Français musulmans à l'espace résidentiel*. Filiation narratives, thus, combine intimate and public accounts, drawing on everything from inherited objects to stories passed down by relatives, friends and old acquaintances, to books, newspapers, school records and military files, as well as *in situ* investigation. This eclectic array contributes to an experimentation with form.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that while the filiation narrative shares many characteristics with a range of works and genres, especially as it draws on a number of these to achieve its particular hybrid aspect, it is defined by certain immutable features. The first section analyzed the common features and distinctions between the filiation narrative and related works by Ernaux, Perec and Modiano. The second section analyzed the ways in which the filiation narrative resembles and demarcates itself from the historical novel, memoir, autobiography, historical nonfiction and journalistic writing.

There is an apparent disregard for genre in the filiation narrative which freely crosses boundaries and defies previous categorization. Each filiation narrative is a unique combination of personal, familial, societal, historical, contemporary elements and draws on traditions of memoir, historical non-fiction, journalism and fiction. This approach is sometimes referred to as genre-

bending. Memoir, in particular, seems to lend itself well to such genre-bending. This is precisely how CUNY Staten Island Sociology Professor Grace Cho's 2021 memoir is described. "Part food memoir, part sociological investigation, *Tastes Like War* is a hybrid text about a daughter's search through intimate and global history for the roots of her mother's schizophrenia."¹⁷ Everything about this description points to it being a filiation narrative. In fact, one can often safely assume, based on descriptions alone, that a given work is a filiation narrative. Key terms include "hybrid," "part-memoir, part-'X'," "daughter/son's search," "intimate and global history," "roots," etc. The same can be said for another CUNY professor, Michal Dekel's filiation narrative *Tehran Children: A Holocaust Refugee Odyssey*. The author investigates her father's experience fleeing Poland as a Jewish adolescent during WWII via Iran. To do so, Dekel combines memoir with archival research.

While the filiation narrative is often described as genre-bending or genre-defying and seems to break literary rules, it has been circumscribed by literary critics interested in organizing a set of recurring characteristics. Examining questions of genre, as this chapter has done, prepares further discussions about the use of artistic license which will be explored in the next chapter. Chapter 2 will also examine the process of searching for clues and piecing together the lives of one's kin employed by filiation narrative authors. This process often resembles detective devices identified earlier in Modiano's novels. As Susan Rubin Suleiman describes her filiation work, *Budapest Diary. In Search of the Motherbook*: "Next Wednesday I will go to Nyiregyhaza to get Mother's birth certificate. Maybe it will list an address for her place of birth—wouldn't that be interesting? I have the feeling of living an exciting detective story, and yet when you think about it objectively, it's a poor little story of nothing at all. But it's mine, and that makes all the difference" (Suleiman 167).

¹⁷ <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/News/All-News/Detail?id=60888>

Chapter 2: The process of recovery

“I would so much have loved to ask her about her childhood and about some of the small towns she knew” (Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Budapest Diary* 75).

Pizzi had died and I had not been there, I would never sit by her side again and ask her about the past, the steps of Odessa and the Potemkin, the Russian secret police raiding the house, never again be able to ask her about the day my father had brought my mother home . . . never again discuss . . . never again hear . . . never again hear from her lips the tales of how they had survived the hardships of the war . . . (Ariel Dorfman, *Heading South, Looking North* 19).

“Cet après-midi-là, sans savoir pourquoi, j’avais l’impression de marcher sur les traces de quelqu’un” (Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder* 49).

The filiation narrative reflects the desire to know more about one's parent(s) or previous generations of one's family. If familiarity breeds contempt, then the opposite is true as well—not knowing breeds curiosity. The narrators of filiation narratives display an interest in their family history because it was never satisfactorily transmitted to them. In the citation above, Dorfman laments the disappearance of the possibility of communication echoed in the litany of “never again.” At the same time, the “again” signifies that Dorfman had already had the privilege of hearing these stories. He knows them, or at least their outlines. Thus, there isn't a failure to transmit, a rupture with the past. It is simply nostalgia speaking, not a yearning for information, clarity. Pizzi's forthcomingness about the past is in direct contrast to those parents and grandparents whose reticence deprived their descendants of such knowledge. This type of nostalgia is easily confused for a rupture in transmission and yet is fundamentally different. If Dorfman so wished, he could sit down and write his memories of his grandmother the way Andreï Makine does with *Le testament Français*. Filiation narrative writers, on the other hand, must do the work of uncovering their heritage.

The experience of discontinuity at the root of the filiation narrative can be traced back to any number of causes, such as a parent's reluctance to talk about the past. “Héritier problématique, l'écrivain contemporain échafaude des récits de filiation, pour exhumer les vestiges d'un héritage en miettes et raccommode les lambeaux de sa mémoire déchirée” (Demanze 9). As a way to make up for their parents' silence, the narrator embarks on a quest to find out more about their kin, stitching together a patchwork tapestry.

By means of a retrospective inquiry into this dissipated past, the narrator seeks to position themselves within a lineage to better know those who came before them and to better understand

their own identity. “Les “Récits de filiation” entreprennent en effet de démêler les expériences, les désirs et les frustrations des ascendants du sujet, afin de permettre à ce dernier de mieux comprendre ce dont il hérite” (Viart 2009 28). They do this by any means available to them, the consultation of official and familial archives, questioning of relatives and acquaintances, visiting of key places. “Je cherchais ce que je ne connaissais pas, que je devinais trouble, honteux, mystérieux,” writes Schneck (50). The account of the past is then delivered not chronologically, but in a way that reproduces, or is meant to approximate, the slow and sporadic uncovering of information. If the details of one’s family are reorganized, it is according to the logic of investigation. Chronological preference is thus given to the investigation. Additionally, this search for information is incorporated into the narrative itself, whose departure point is the present of the time of writing. Thus, the most fundamental aspect of the filiation narrative is its investigative posture. As Viart has remarked, “En se proposant de l’interroger plutôt que d’en fournir le déroulement narratif, la littérature contemporaine aborde l’Histoire comme une énigme” (“Nouveaux” 23). Each of the authors in this study exemplify this aspect. In not contenting themselves with a rudimentary understanding of their families’ history, but wishing to understand more and delve deeper, Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each set out to uncover clues about the past.

It may be one looming question that gnaws at the narrator, an assortment of questions or a vague wish of better understanding in general. Kerchouche hopes to elucidate two main questions: Why her father became a Harki and why the Harkis were treated so poorly in France. Storti sets out to clarify her conception of her father’s emigration to France, to bring it into focus. “Cette phrase qui surgit à Calais et une curiosité nouvelle, plus intense que jamais éprouvée, celle d’en savoir davantage sur l’arrivée de mon père en France, le désir de me renseigner, d’essayer de

trouver des éléments, des bouts de réalité” (23). Finally, Schneck’s project is slightly less clearly defined. She is interested in an array of questions including, what experiences did her father live through and why did her father marry her mother? “Gilbert qui était si vivant, qui cherchait par tout moyen à être libre, a épousé une jeune femme qui vivait dans un état de peur permanent, emprisonnée à jamais derrière les murs d’un couvent” (43). We know what methods they use in their attempts at answering these questions because they write this investigative process into the narrative, informing the reader of each step in their quest to understand more. The filiation narrative gives as much, if not more, space and weight to process as it does to elucidation. As a posture, this investigative component can at times seem more important than the question itself, more important even than its eventual answer.

In order to take into account the range of sources and strategies employed and the ways they intersect with each other, it may be useful to think about this investigatory process in terms of intersecting sets of floating concentric circles— picture a pair of hula hoops, a smaller one inside a larger one, connected to another pair of hoops by three or four lengths of rope. They can be brought to touch first with the top circles to the left, then with the top circles to the right, etc. Alternatively, you could envision a drum with collapsible sides in which the top and bottom rings can be joined at different places. The first set of circles represents sources of information. The smaller of these constitutes what is most easily accessible for the narrator: other family members and family friends, documents surviving in the family’s possession, mementos, etc. The next circle represents more public sources of information: archives, for example. A second set of circles corresponds to geographic proximity. The narrator starts with what is nearest to them in space before traveling to more distant places. These two sets of circles are not mutually exclusive but rather superimpose in ways that offer a variety of intersecting points representing a multitude of

combinations. The circles do not stack perfectly to suggest that family members are always closest geographically and archives are always farthest away. For example, the circle representing sources of information may intersect with the circle representing geography in such a way that allows for the possibility of official archives to be housed in one's own city while at the same time, consulting family or former friends requires travel.

To reflect the range of resources utilized by filiation narratives, this chapter is structured around three parts. The first part will discuss sources of information which tend to be starting places for the investigations into one's family. These include documents, heirlooms and other "testimonial objects," as well as the information one is able to glean from consulting family members and friends. The second part will consider more distant sources of information, including archives and travel to sites from the past. I will also explore the obstacles encountered with all kinds of sources and the ways the authors compensate for informational inadequacies. This will involve examining formal elements—syntactic devices and narrative techniques—employed by the writers. The third part will explore how writing styles reflect the way the past is experienced as well as propose the term negative history as a way of referring to works which, like the filiation narrative, insist on all that is unknown. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of how speculation and imagination—elements of fiction—are employed in some filiation narratives.

Close at hand- sources of information

Documents, heirlooms and other "testimonial objects"

Frequently, the focus of a filiation narrative is on a family member who is no longer alive or no longer accessible. Even if the person in question is still alive, as in the case of Kerchouche's father, their silence has obliged their descendants to seek out answers elsewhere. Descendants

often turn to personal documents left behind by loved ones as a place to start. Susan Rubin Suleiman zeros in on the importance of such documents for her filiation narrative, *Budapest Diary*.

Why has it meant so much to me to track down these pieces of paper? I cannot say, exactly. I experience deep pleasure in lining up the three “excerpts,” unfolding them and placing them one on top of the other. They tell a story, however minimal: A girl is born, marries, and gives birth to a girl. The continuity of generations has prevailed over war and destruction, and I am the beneficiary of that victory. (219)

For historian Carl Becker, documents may include such unexpected items as notes written to oneself, for example. He playfully refers to a personal ledger as a Private Records Office. Thus, I use the term document in the broad sense, incorporating family letters, school records and photos, newspapers and even bills. In his filiation narrative *Hotel Bolivia*, Leo Spitzer similarly signals the significance with which everyday objects can be imbued. This is the case, for example, of the “memorabilia of which [he] became the keeper when [his] mother died” (148). These are what Spitzer and Marianne Hirsch refer to as “testimonial objects”:

Such ‘testimonial objects’ carry memory traces from the past, to be sure, but they also embody the very process of its transmission. They testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced and, also, to the ways in which material objects carry memory traces from one generation to the next. (*Postmemory* 178)

Even when it is a question of recalling one’s own past, objects may offer the most vivid images. The practice of including objects as a way to access the past has already been advanced by pre-filiation narrative writers like Ernaux and Barthes. In *La Honte*, for example, when Ernaux reflects on the summer of 1952, it is primarily a handful of objects which come to mind. “Quand j’inventorie rapidement 52, à côté des images, je me souviens de *Ma p’tite folie*, *Mexico*, la ceinture élastique noire, la robe de crêpe bleue [...] comme si le temps ne se comptait qu’en objets” (95). In this case, it is those objects which are representative of an era when they were briefly in fashion.

In part two of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes, like Ernaux, also focuses on objects, namely those found in photographs of his mother. While not a filiation narrative, *Camera Lucida* does anticipate the genre in the way it blends two seemingly unrelated topics, one of which is reflecting on a family member—the author’s mother. In this case, however, it is the longevity of the objects that Barthes points to. Objects, after all, do not age as quickly or drastically as human beings do. When it comes to pictures of her dating from before the author’s birth, the presence of familiar objects aids him in recognizing her in the image. “In order to ‘find’ my mother, fugitively, alas, and without ever being able to hold on to this resurrection for long, I must, much later, discover in several photographs the objects she kept on her dressing table. . .” (64). Nonetheless, both citations point to our attachment to everyday objects, whether briefly owned and passingly stylish or lasting staples of the home.

It is such testimonial objects, namely photo albums from his military service in China as well as a Chinese porcelain tea set her father brought with him to France, that allow Storti to make a hypothesis about the conditions of his arrival. Making use of the process of what Viart has called *figuration*, seen in Chapter 1, she concludes that her father Matteo must have taken the train and had an uneventful arrival in France. Had he not, such delicate objects would not have remained intact or, had he embarked on a clandestine journey across the border, her father wouldn’t have bothered to bring them in the first place. Thinking through the transportation possibilities, (boat, car, train), she concludes that the most likely would have been an arrival by train:

Dans son sac de marin, Matteo a mis le service en porcelaine chinoise, et c’est ce détail, ajouté aux albums de photos, qui m’a fait décider d’une arrivée somme toute paisible car il n’est guère possible de l’imaginer entrant en France clandestinement, quelle qu’en [sic] la modalité, encombré d’un précieux et fragile service à café. (50)

Thus, objects can be clues that help the narrator reconstruct narratives of the past. And yet, even such minimal mementoes may not be available to aid in the retrieval or conjectural process.

The resources at one's disposal are clearly different in each individual case, dependent on a number of factors. One factor is the economic class of the family, which affects the degree to which heirlooms are passed from generation to generation and the weight given to the preservation of experience in the form of journals or other writing. If the family was forced to downsize for economic reasons, it's likely that they couldn't hold on to every family heirloom, every document. As Jean Rouaud writes in *Les champs d'honneur*, "Ramener treize pièces en deux nécessitait une sélection cruelle, se séparer non seulement de l'entassement d'une vie mais du legs des générations antérieures: plus qu'une forme d'ascèse, un déblaiement de la mémoire" (28). Didier Eribon expresses the toll this takes on trying to know one's family's past:

Un enfant ne connaît pas grand-chose, finalement, de ses parents, de sa famille. Seule une recherche patiente permet d'apprendre ce à quoi on n'accède pas par le contact direct et immédiat des relations intrafamiliales. Mais cette recherche elle-même se heurte très vite, sauf dans les classes dominantes, à l'absence de matériaux documentaires et de traces inscrites dans les biens immeubles. (159-160)

The absence of heirlooms is also common when departure from one's homeland was so hasty that no conservation of personal affairs was possible. When Kerchouche's parents left Algeria, for example, nearly every possession was left behind: "Et cette absence du passé est, pour moi, la marque particulière de l'exil" (*Mon père* 160). Schneck echoes this sentiment, "Sans passé, les racines arrachées puis détruites, la seule voie possible est de s'inventer. Il n'y a ni lignée, ni héritage, ni meubles, ni immeubles, ni paysages à transmettre, il reste les bagages de l'exilé..." (*Les guerres* 31). In the absence of material clues, one must look elsewhere for answers.

Têtes à têtes

Speaking with other relatives is another logical approach and something we see Schneck, Storti and Kerchouche all do. Schneck turns first to various family members, such as her uncle and

grandmother, and asks them to tell her about her father and about the family in general. Like many filiation narratives, *Les guerres de mon père* includes a family tree so that the reader may keep track of the generations of first names. Schneck's grandmother is no longer alive but she describes having consulted her for an earlier text about her family, *L'incroyable M. Schneck*. "Je m'installai chez Paulette, carnet à la main, notant tout ce qu'elle avait à dire sur notre passé, le sien, celui de son fils, mon père, de son mari, mon grand-père paternel dont je ne connaissais rien" (*Guerres* 20). *Les guerres de mon père* is, in many ways, a continuation of *L'incroyable M. Schneck*, in which she investigates her grandfather's murder. *Les guerres de mon père* gives her the opportunity to do at least three things. First of all, it allows her to include subsequent developments in her investigation which came about after the 2006 publication of *L'incroyable M. Schneck*. Second of all, she is able to explore this event in relation to her own father and attempts to process the effect it had on him. Lastly, it gives her a chance to better develop the narrative her uncle once criticized as having no cohesion. "Ce n'est rien, ce n'est pas un livre, juste un amas de documents bruts sans réflexion" (*Guerres* 16).

Her uncle is, in fact, Pierre Pachet, who is himself the author of a genre-defying book about his father, *Autobiographie de mon père* (1987). In this highly original text, Pachet attempts to imagine what it was like for his father to emigrate from Odessa to France, writing the account from the first person singular, *je*. Pachet serves as both inspiration and as a sometimes-mentor for Schneck's broad remembrance project, spanning multiple books. "C'est en le lisant que j'ai pu comprendre l'exil, le silence, les absents. Ses livres sont mes références, ils m'ont construite. Parfois en accord, parfois en m'y opposant, je n'aurais pas pu écrire sans eux" (*Guerres* 15-16). Her uncle was still alive when she began her investigation and she anticipated him telling her just what she desired to know. "J'en étais certaine, il me révélerait des faits inédits qui rempliraient

d'un coup des années de silence, je n'aurais qu'à écouter et à rédiger sous sa dictée" (22). Unfortunately, it doesn't play out the way she imagines and that evening he talks more at length about the wine than about her father. She is the ". . . nièce, qui ne passe du temps avec lui que pour lui poser des questions auxquelles il ne répond pas ou à côté. . ." (23). Still, he is more forthcoming than a second-cousin, who, when she approached him while writing her first book, claims not to remember anything about her grandfather's murder trial which he attended as a law student. It appears his unwillingness to cooperate may have been due to his disapproval of Schneck's project, which is what he later tells her. Thus, the relatives Schneck would like to consult have either passed away or refrain from offering any assistance in her quest.

Kerchouche experiences similar disappointments. Like Schneck, her first recourse is to speak with other relatives. While her mother, brothers and sisters do share their experiences with her, they are not as interested as she is in speaking about the past. "Pour eux, la page est tournée, il n'y a plus rien à dire sur le passé... Ils veulent tous oublier. Sauf moi." (22). More importantly, they cannot answer one important question in particular: why did her father decide to become a Harki? While still alive at the time of writing, her father is particularly guarded on this front. Kerchouche needs to understand how her father could have "betrayed his country," as she saw it, by not fighting on the side of the FLN for the independence of Algeria. "J'ai longtemps cru que mon père était un traître. Harki, pour moi, valait la pire des infamies" (24). Her mother, lacking in agency and for the most part subject to the consequences of her husband's decisions, doesn't offer the same illumination regarding the rationale behind his choice.

Her grandfather might have been able to give her some insight and she is also interested in his larger perspective on her father, which necessarily differs from those of her siblings. Unfortunately, she was unable to see him before his death, which occurred shortly after she'd

begun her research. She regrets all the knowledge that has disappeared along with him. “Avec lui, tout un pan de la mémoire familiale disparaît. Sans lui, tout un chapitre de mon livre ne sera pas écrit” (53). This passage is reminiscent of Amadou Hampâté Bâ’s famous remark that “En Afrique, un vieillard qui meurt est une bibliothèque qui brûle.” His death is also a reminder of descendants’ responsibility to listen to elders’ stories and to pass them on before it’s too late. “Voilà ce qui attend les harkis: la mort et l’oubli, si, nous, les enfants, ne témoignons pas, si nous les laissons partir sans les écouter, sans leur parler, sans essayer de les comprendre” (53). This race against the clock is a common feature of the filiation narrative, which attempts to preserve what once was in the face of a fugacious past and a disappearing generation. Ivan Jablonka has expressed as much in the incipit of this filiation narrative, *Les grands-parents que je n’ai pas eus*. “Il est donc urgent, avant l’effacement définitif, de retrouver les traces, les empreintes de vie qu’ils ont laissés, preuves involontaires de leur passage en ce monde” (10).

Storti is also faced with relatives’ aging and their simultaneously weakening memories. This is the case with her mother, for example. At the time of writing, Storti’s mother is unable to answer many of Storti’s questions, having forgotten much of the past.

“Sur ces années qui suivent son arrivée, j’en sais davantage que sur les années antérieures, à travers les bribes que me raconte ma mère, même si elle aussi, des débuts de la présence en France de celui qui n’était pas encore son mari, dont elle ignorait l’existence, elle ne sait pas tout, des bribes néanmoins, des éléments définitivement inscrits dans sa mémoire qu’elle me répète à chaque fois que je l’interroge” (56).

Moreover, her mother is unable to answer the kinds of questions Storti would like to ask but doesn’t. She portrays a mother unable to think deeply about events and their sociopolitical ramifications. For example, her mother’s memory of fleeing to the unoccupied zone in 1940 smacks of superficiality and seems devoid of reflection. “L’exode, dans la mémoire de Thérèse, se résume à ce voyage dans un train lent et bondé [...] et un séjour en Corrèze dont elle garde,

somme toute, un souvenir agréable. Trois mois de campagne en plein été, cela ne lui était jamais arrivé!” (95). Storti encounters the same lack of insight regarding her memory of D Day. “Ma mère attache de l’importance à cette audace de monter sur les capots de voitures, elle en rit comme une enfant qui vient de faire une bêtise ou transgresser un interdit, elle séjourne avec plaisir dans ce souvenir et face à ce rire d’une très vieille dame qui ressemble presque à un rire de petite fille, je ne pose pas d’autres questions. Je n’ose pas” (135). She sees no point in even asking.

Other family members that may have been able to tell Storti what she wishes to know about her father are no longer alive. “Quant aux personnes que je pourrais interroger, Matteo, Gino, Lucia, elles sont mortes. Seule demeure Thérèse qui, à ce sujet, affirme ne rien savoir” (140). She could have perhaps learned more about her father’s arrival in France from the aunt and uncle for whom he came to work after leaving Italy. Storti had, however, long since cut ties with this side of her family, the reasons for which include what she deems her uncle’s exploitation of her father’s labor, as previously recounted in *Un chagrin politique*. She reutilizes portions of that book and even begins *L’arrivée de mon père en France* with a line recognizable from her earlier work, a disparaging remark her aunt once made about her father: “*Ton père est un con, il n’a pas su se débrouiller*” (9, italics in original).

Many filiation narratives are the product of internal family conflict, which unsurprisingly contributes to a rupture in the transmission of the family history. Laurent Demanze refers to this type of family as a *communauté défaite*. Sylvie Weil’s filiation narrative, *Le Hareng et le saxophone*, is an excellent example. The author sets out to learn her American husband’s family history. Prior to Weil’s inquiry, he knew almost nothing about his family. A great deal of the problem that the narrator encounters is the dispersed nature of her husband’s family which, like hers, was undone by personal conflict and ruptured relationships, where only family legend has

survived. In Weil's book there is one family member in particular who freely and generously shares what she knows with the author. This is not unlike what Storti experiences with her aunt. Only once Storti travels to Italy as an adult, while writing the book, is she able to consult her father's youngest sister, who is no longer so young. "C'est à sa plus jeune sœur, celle qui a toujours vécu en Italie et qui est la seule survivante de ce passé . . ." (183). The stories her aunt is able to share with her remind Storti of episodes read in *Germinal*. Self-conscious of this apparent novelization, she writes "Qu'est-ce que j'y peux moi, si Mara me narre une histoire digne d'un roman de Zola ! À moins que ce ne soit l'œuvre de Zola qui ressemble à la vie, les romans, les siens et tant d'autres, contenant la vérité des temps qu'ils racontent" (186). Whether the stories resemble pure legend or 19th century novels, it can be difficult to sort myth from reality. Schneck speaks to this problem with regard to her grandfather. "Je me raccroche à ces informations, car tout me paraît fictif chez Max Schneck. Il est un personnage, un mauvais héros, j'aimerais qu'il redevienne un être de chair" (171). Thus, even if they are alive and *a priori* willing to talk, as with Storti's aunt, it isn't necessarily possible to obtain the desired information from one's relatives alone. The narrators' curiosity is far from assuaged after speaking with their kin. The next logical step is contacting those who knew one's parents, their friends and even distant acquaintances.

Kerchouche seeks to consult with as many people as possible in order to obtain a polyphonic account of the past. She searches for other Harkis from the camps as well as people who knew her parents or were simply familiar with the camps. Personal testimony is essential to Kerchouche's project, as Harkis' actual experiences, both those that led to their fighting with France during the Algerian War and those endured once arriving in France, remain known to few as they are marginal to institutional memory. Their voices have not been sufficiently heard and the traitor narrative insufficiently challenged. As Jacques Duquesne writes in the preface to *Mon père*,

ce harki, “La guerre d’Algérie a souffert de mille silences [...] Les principales victimes de ces silences sont sans doute, aujourd’hui encore, les harkis” (9). In the context of such silencing, the filiation narrative offers a platform for voices to be shared. Hearing their perspective gives dimension to the otherwise one-sided accounts of her family and manifests what Maurice Halbwachs writes about family memory. “They will then reorder and bring up to date the totality of family memories by comparing what old people have to say, which may be unreliable, with the testimony of members of other families” (*On Collective Memory* 75). This is especially true of the few non-Harkis with whom her family was in contact, including both the *pieds-noirs* who ran the camps and the rare good samaritan. The words of a French doctor and his condemnation of the treatment of the Harkis when she meets with him carry particular weight as he saw first-hand the reproachable way they were treated. His corroboration is significant in Kerchouche’s project of exposing the level of wrongdoing done to them¹⁸. The other key person Kerchouche is able to interview is Juliette, who showed her family more kindness than anyone and restored their faith in humanity. She is also the first person Kerchouche encounters during her investigation who is able to tell her about her parents and their life in the camp. The ability to finally consult someone helps Kerchouche make sense of the various scraps of the past she’s acquired. Kerchouche is not the first to seek out this woman who was so kind to the Harkis. “Plusieurs sont revenus la voir. Des enfants aussi, en quête de leur passé, comme moi” (81). In addition to asking about her family, Kerchouche asks Juliette if she can take a photograph of her. Juliette’s portrait is one of 35 photos included in the book. Many of these were taken at the time of writing, both in France and Algeria, but some date back to her siblings’ childhoods in France.

¹⁸ More about this in the next chapter.

For Schneck, there is something bittersweet about making contact with her parents' former friends. "Rencontrer les amis de mon père, c'est retourner, dans un pays qui n'existe plus, celui où mon père était vivant, ma mère était vivante" (137). The tone is slightly bitter when she lists the things these living people are able to do compared with that which her dead parents can do. The tone is even more ambivalent when it comes to talking with two of his father's former mistresses. Storti doesn't have much more luck with this approach than she did with her mother. She is able to meet with her father's former friend and colleague, though, and he provides her with some very important information concerning her father's first years in France. "Ton père, c'était un coureur" (60). Needless to say, Storti must keep looking.

Out of the way: distant sources of information

Pilgrimage

Often, the quest for information or spiritual connection inherent in filiation narratives occasions a return to the birthplace of the author or the author's parents or to other key places of the past. This pilgrimage is experienced as a return even when the author had never been there themselves because the principal association they have with the place in question is with their family's history there. Halbwachs argues that the early associations one makes between various objects (place, profession, etc.) and one's family are persistent and enduring. "Our kin communicate to us our first notions about people and things. For a long time we knew nothing of the external world but the repercussions of outside events within the circle of our kin. If we think of a town, it might recall to us a trip we once undertook with our brother" (*On Collective Memory* 61). The only difference here being that the towns are ones once visited *by* family, not *with* family.

Kerchouche cannot hear the name Bias without thinking of her family having lived there. Storti associates Sarzana with her father, as Schneck does Perigueux with hers.

Of the three works in this corpus, Kerchouche's narrative attests to the most traveling for the sake of tracking down the past. Kerchouche is systematic in her revisiting of the six camps in which her family lived and devotes a chapter to each: Bourg-Lastic, near Clermont-Ferrand; Rivesaltes, in the Pyrénées-Orientales; Bagnols-les-Bains, in Lozère; Roussillon-en-Morvan, in Saône-et-Loire; Mouans-Sartoux, near Cannes; and Bias, in Lot-et-Garonne. She chooses to reproduce her family's route and so visits these in the order in which her family occupied them, meaning that the order of events is synchronized with the chronology of the quest. As with her grandfather, Kerchouche appears to have arrived at the camps too late to see much. The first camps she visits have long been dismantled. "Je marche au milieu des gravats, des poutres et des tuiles brisées, errant, bouleversée, sur les décombres de mon passé. Voici donc ce qu'il reste de mon histoire: des baraques en ruine et des lambeaux de souvenirs" (56). Ostensibly, an investigation *in situ* would provide her with the tangible evidence she seeks. Unfortunately, her quest does not prove to be so simple. At Bourg-Lastic, for example, nothing attests to the fact that more than 5,000 Harkis and their families, including more than 2,000 children, spent three months in this location. Her overall impression is that the Harkis' former presence has been erased from these places.

A part les baraques cassées de Rivesaltes, il ne reste finalement rien du passage des harkis. Leurs traces ont été soigneusement gommées du paysage. J'ai conscience, à cet instant, de réaliser un état des lieux du vide, de dessiner une géographie du néant. A quoi bon rechercher des traces qui n'existent plus, ni sur le sol ni dans les archives. (85)

And yet, Kerchouche persists. She continues visiting each camp, one by one. Then, in a reversal of order, she travels to Algeria. "Je calquerais mes pas sur les siens et sillonnerai les camps,

du moins ce qu'il en reste, de l'Auvergne au Lot-et-Garonne, en passant par la Lozère et le Morvan. Comme elle [sa mère], je vais franchir la Méditerranée... Pour découvrir l'Algérie, ce pays haï et adoré que je ne connais pas" (32; ellipsis in original). The part of the quest that takes place in France and its counterpart in Algeria, serve distinct purposes. In her tour of the camps, Kerchouche substantiates her siblings' and mother's stories. She corroborates and elucidates their experience with archival research and interviews. The intention behind her trip to Algeria is aligned with reconnecting with her origins and better understanding her father's motivations. When it comes to her family's life in Algeria, a place she has never known, her understanding is at best an abstract image tinged with her parents' nostalgia:

Si mon père se livrait peu, ma mère, elle, avide de confier ses tourments et dépourvue de cette culpabilité qui a étouffé les harkis, me racontait souvent sa vie de bergère en Algérie et les brimades quotidiennes dans les camps. Certains noms de lieux revenaient fréquemment, "Bias," Bourg-Lastic," "Rivesaltes," et cet univers, lointain pour moi, m'effrayait. Je savais que mes parents avaient souffert, mais j'ignorais pourquoi. J'ai grandi dans cette mythologie familiale, partagée entre la nostalgie de l'Algérie et la souffrance des camps, qui représentaient, dans mon imaginaire d'enfant, le paradis et l'enfer. (25)

In his filiation narrative *Heshel's Kingdom*, referenced in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Dan Jacobson writes about visiting Lithuania, from where his family originates, for the first time. "At the very least I wanted to establish the physical reality of the country" (96). Or as Jablonka puts it, regarding place, "j'ai atteint mon but, d'un pied léger je foule la terre de mes ancêtres" (*Grandparents* 16). Kerchouche also wishes to experience this physical reality. Her return, like those of the return narratives analyzed by Marianne Hirsch, also "comes from a yearning to find a world before the loss has occurred" (214).

Similarly, Schneck travels to where her father was hidden during the Occupation because she knows that he was happy there. While seemingly less systematic in her investigations than Kerchouche, Schneck visits a number of key places in her family history. The narrator of *Les*

Guerres de mon père declares, “J’ai commencé par Périgueux car le seul souvenir que mon père racontait de son enfance se passe ici” (56). That is where he learns to fish by hand. There’s another reason why Schneck visits the town. “Et pour une autre raison, peu avouable. J’avais l’espoir, aussi banal qu’idiot, de retrouver mon père. Je rêvais que, dans ce lieu d’un souvenir heureux de son enfance, il avait choisi de vivre après sa mort, m’attendant sur les quais” (56). This *in situ* investigation also provides access to a feeling of closeness with one’s kin. In situating the start of the narrative in the present day and then revisiting people and places of the past, the filiation narrative operates in multiple temporalities concurrently. These different temporalities are not always kept separate but may in fact be collapsed into one. This is the case when Kerchouche likens her trip to going back in time:

Demain, le 1er juillet 2002, je me rends à Marseille, première étape de mon périple. Demain, le 1er juillet 1962, ma famille est arrivée en France et j’ai rendez-vous avec elle. Demain, je me dissous dans le temps, demain, je ne suis plus née. Bondissant quarante ans en arrière, mon âme va errer autour des miens, invisible, omnisciente, cheminer auprès d’eux comme un fantôme du futur. (32)

Not only is she retracing their steps, but she imagines a kind of atemporal reunion. “C’est ici que, avec quarante ans de retard, j’ai rendez-vous avec ma famille” (34). These imaginings signify the desire to reconnect with the family member and to go back in time, to imagine oneself as a bystander witnessing the lives of one’s own parents. In the filiation narrative, we find both an accentuation of the temporal distance between the past and present and the impulse to obliterate this distance. Even when portions of the past remain unknowable, the investigative work done by the narrators is not in vain. As a result of their searching, they often feel demonstrably closer to their kin than before starting their projects. This is seen in the frequency with which the narrators describe feeling as though their loved ones were standing before them. Similar to her musing that

meeting her father's former friends was akin to returning to nonexistent land where her parents were still alive, Schneck writes:

Sur la route, à travers la forêt de pins, je ne peux pas m'empêcher de penser à nouveau que je vais peut-être retrouver mon père. Cette fois, il aura l'allure d'un petit Savoyard de douze ans. Un blondinet aux yeux bleus auquel je devrai expliquer que, bien que j'aie l'âge de sa mère, je suis sa fille revenue le chercher avec un peu de retard. (125)

Like Kerchouche, who imagines seeing her parents disembark in Marseille 40 years later and like Schneck, who imagines encountering her father as a young boy, Storti visualizes her father among the bustle of a train station. "Dans ce travail que je ne sais pas nommer, mon sujet n'est pas la gare de Lyon en 1931, je ne suis pas en train d'admirer les cariatides et les bas-reliefs, ou de contempler les fresques du hall et les allégories sculptées des façades, je regarde ce jeune type tout seul, planté au milieu de l'agitation de la foule" (48). She settles on the Gare de Lyon, because it allows her to best imagine what it would have felt like to him. Certain details about Storti's father's arrival in France are not significant in and of themselves but in their access to something else, the affective experience of her father's arrival in Paris. She cares less about knowing which port of entry than about better understanding what his experience would have been. "Cette frontière entre la France et l'Italie, que Matteo l'ait franchie à Vintimille ou à Modane, ou ailleurs, qu'importe!" (39).

When she revisits his hometown as an adult, although incapable of locating his childhood home, she feels connected to him nonetheless. "Dans le couvent des Capucins, dans les vignes du parc qui l'entoure, quelque chose de son enfance demeure, inchangé, immuable, quelque chose qui, sans abolir les années, redonne présence à ce garçon . . ." (184). At the same time, knowing exactly which house her father once lived in is of little consequence to her. "Qu'importe!" (184). Knowing the exact building gives her no additional access to the memory of her father. This insouciance is by no means characteristic of the filiation narrative, which tends to set great store

by precision of details and facts like dates and house numbers. For another narrator, knowing the house number might be of extreme importance. This points to the spectrum of literary motivations and requirements visible within the filiation narrative. What it takes to satisfy a narrator's questions necessarily varies greatly and the stock each narrator puts into precisions like addresses does as well. Schneck, for example, gets much use out of an address. Her narrator describes her childhood affinity for phone books:

“Enfant, je passais des heures à lire les annuaires sans savoir ce que je cherchais. Je parcourais des listes de noms, des listes d'adresses, nous étions les seuls Schneck de Paris. Je cherchais sans savoir quoi, j'espérais qu'à travers ces lignes de noms, d'adresses, un familier me fasse un signe discret, me conforte, je n'étais pas seule” (195).

Searching *l'annuaire des Postes et Télécommunications de Strasbourg* between 1930 and 1949, provides her with a single entry for her grandfather but getting ahold of the address cited on his death certificate permits her to find the names of her grandfather's neighbors at the time of his murder. “Je cite tous ces noms... ces inconnus qui ont salué Max Schneck deux fois par jour ou jamais, qui l'ont croisé, lui ont parlé ou non...” (197). In other words, Schneck has clearly assimilated the Modianan absorption in possible past interactions but this attitude is not inherent to the filiation narrative.

“Archive fever”

Traveling to places formerly inhabited or visited by one's parents not only gives their children an opportunity to contact acquaintances still living there and to experience a sort of geographical connection, but also allows the descendant to consult historical archives housed there. At the archives of the chamber of commerce in Marseille, for example, Kerchouche finds photos of the boat on which her family arrived in France: a cargo ship named Sidi Brahim. She also consults the departmental archives of the regions where each camp was located, scouring the

local press. “Dépitée, je glane mes informations dans la presse locale de l’époque...” (43). When the mysteries of one’s family have seemed so impenetrable, archives offer a respite from uncertainty and incomprehension. They offer solace and hope because they provide the information so dearly sought after. In *Le goût de l’archive*, Arlette Farge describes the satisfaction that accompanies archival research. “Ainsi naît le sentiment naïf, mais profond, de déchirer un voile, de traverser l’opacité du savoir et d’accéder, comme après un long voyage incertain, à l’essentiel des êtres et des choses” (14-15). The narrators of filiation narratives project a similar feeling of illumination when at last uncovering a clue or an answer to a long-standing question. The filiation narrative has embraced the archive for the insight and information it provides, in addition to the weight and reinforcement it furnishes, and to such a degree that it has even incorporated it into its own telling. Viart has said this, as well. “[L]a littérature s’ouvre à toutes sortes de matériaux documentaires, insérant dans des fictions des faits avérés et les traces qui en témoignent” (“Nouveaux” 19).

Schneck both consults archives in Paris and travels to various places where her family once lived, which also allows her to consult archives housed in different municipalities. Interestingly, she credits Ivan Jablonka with suggesting to her that she start with archival research as a way to find out more about her father¹⁹. When it comes to her grandfather, she has her work cut out for her since “Une des ambitions de Max était de laisser le moins de traces possible” (194). There isn’t even a *dossier de demande de naturalisation* in his name because he was content with his wife and son’s French naturalization and seemingly preferred to exist in the liminal space of citizen of nowhere. Archival materials nonetheless provide her with tangible supports and benchmarks, especially where other family members are concerned:

¹⁹ *La grande librairie*, January 26, 2018.

Des naissances, des mariages, des vies et des morts de la famille de mon père, dans des pays qui n'existent plus, il ne reste que des fragments. C'est en France que débute notre histoire, une histoire avec des traces, des photos, des meubles. Celle d'avant ne subsiste que dans un monde imaginaire recréé par des romanciers. Actes de naissance, de mariage, dossiers de naturalisation, dossier militaire, dossier scolaire, actes de propriété, nous avons commencé à appartenir à une nation, une histoire, une culture, une langue. Nous étions enfin écrits quelque part. (39)

At other times, the archives serve to explain what Schneck's grandmother Paulette hadn't wanted to disclose, for instance the way her younger brother was killed, which Schneck learns much later. Schneck elicits the help of Bernard Reviriego, an archivist at the departmental archives of Dordogne, which houses "tout ce qui concerne l'application des différentes lois du gouvernement de Vichy sur les juifs" (57). Reviriego played an integral part in the establishment of these archives, which allow relatives of refugees who were relocated to Dordogne during the war to find information that they had previously been told was destroyed. He greatly facilitated the task of those who "cherchaient des traces" (57). When Schneck locates, with Reviriego's help, a mention of her uncle's death in the archived register of births, marriages and deaths, she learns at last that her uncle was shot on March 29th, 1944.

Rather than provide the sole access point to understanding familial events, the archives serve to both substantiate Paulette's stories and help fill in some blank spots in the picture Schneck is trying to assemble. Documents are characterized by an unambiguousness which memories, subject to change over time, simply cannot offer. One can rely on documents in a way not possible with memories. Moreover, France has made these pieces of the past highly accessible. "Il suffit de lire. En France, tout est écrit." (66). The passage below, taken from the incipit, demonstrates what the consultation of archives means to the author and offers an éloge of France's "conservationist obsession."

J'ai cherché de manière absurde, partout, son amour et son passé. / Conversations oubliées, notes perdues, dossiers administratifs, archives publiques. / En France,

l'administration conserve tout et je me suis longtemps demandé la raison de cette obsession conservatrice. J'ai fini par la comprendre et l'admirer. / Alors que nos souvenirs sont des mensonges, nos passés au mieux flous, quand ils ne sont pas transformés, les archives offrent de minuscules assises. Je ne sais rien et cela est si facile, il suffit de prendre le métro, de tendre sa carte d'identité, de remplir une demande et un dossier, alors apparaissent un nom, une date, une lettre, des photos, une clarté. / Grâce à ces archives, je me suis avoué, pour la première fois, que ni mon père ni moi n'étions coupables de nos errances en tout genre. . . . (10)

I quote this passage at length because the essence of Schneck's project is contained in these lines:

The quest for tangible information that will occasion a reconnection with her dead father, the form this search takes and her bafflement that gaining some clarity can be so easy. This is the narrator's attitude at the start of her quest but later she will encounter difficulties which complicate this notion of easily accessible information. Trying to procure the file containing the minutes from the trial for her grandfather's murder, for example, turns into somewhat of a saga. Schneck is first told that the file has been lost. Thanks to an acquaintance with access to the database, though, she learns that this was a lie and that after her request the file had been "bloqué 'par prudence,'" that "Cette histoire de dossiers transmis aux archives départementales, apparemment enregistrés sans mentions des noms, est un mensonge" (223). She then tries once again and is once more denied permission. In her third letter of request, Schneck encapsulates the importance of the archive to the filiation narrative: "Il m'est indispensable d'avoir accès à la vérité judiciaire et ne pas rester dans le mensonge et le silence" (227). She never does gain access to this particular file but is able to learn some important information elsewhere that allows her to set the record straight about her grandfather's murder. "Il avait été facile de découvrir que Max n'avait pas été coupé en morceaux par Simon, il m'avait suffi de lire les comptes rendus du procès pour assassinat qui s'était tenu à la cour d'assises du Bas-Rhin en juin 1950" (*Guerres* 215).

Of course, there are different types of documents housed in archives and just because something was printed and saved doesn't make it true. This is the case with the newspapers which

spread a false, though attention-grabbing, version of her grandfather's murder. Referring to an issue of *Déetective*, Schneck laments that nothing written there is certain. "Qu'est-ce qui est juste à part le prix de 25 francs et la parution hebdomadaire le lundi dans ce qui va suivre?" (172). Moreover, not everything is preserved in an archive. Schneck acknowledges this fact regarding certain events of the past. "Évidemment, il n'existe pas de traces aux archives de ce réseau de résistance clandestin. . ." (111). Not only is there no trace of heroic clandestine acts, but the archives do not necessarily preserve the affective experience of those concerned. "Tristesses, hontes, humiliations, peines restent cachées, non dites, non écrites" (232). There are, however, public files on Vichy officials responsible for the deportation of Jews, for example. Schneck seems to almost want to coax readers to go to see for themselves by including directions to the National Archives: Just take the 13 line to Saint-Denis-Université and turn right.

In the first chapter, we saw the degree to which Ernaux's work represents a precursor to the filiation narrative in terms of a hybrid approach to the exploration of one's past and one's family. Ernaux also gives a *mise en scene* of consulting archives and newspapers. In *La honte* she writes, "Hier, je suis allée aux Archives de Rouen consulter *Paris-Normandie* de 1952, que le livreur du marchand de journaux apportait chaque jour à mes parents" (31). And yet, she quickly registers the shortcomings of this approach. Even when archives are available, the relevant insight they provide may be limited. She realizes that what she had hoped to find—a connection to the family event she is processing—will not be found in the newspaper. "En descendant les escaliers des Archives, je me suis rendu compte que j'étais venue là comme si j'allais trouver la scène dans le journal de 52" (36).

We find a similar experience with Schneck. Despite the fact that she gained surprisingly unimpeded access to her father's military file, "J'ai été étonnée de la facilité avec laquelle les

militaires m'ont ouvert leurs archives sur la guerre d'Algérie" (254), it did not include anything about what she really wanted to know: his experience. Though the file contains numerous details, they are simply "des indications factuelles" and say nothing about what it was actually like to be there. To understand this, Schneck asks a friend of her father who was in Algeria with him. It takes a more intimate account to impart these aspects of an experience. One gains access by either knowing the parties themselves or hearing second-hand. Thus, while documents sometimes make up for what cannot be acquired through speaking with other people, the reverse is also true: that the documents prove insufficient and it is only through speaking with others that one is able to obtain certain information. This apparent paradox demonstrates the indiscriminate nature with which narrators of a filiation narrative may come by the information they seek, drawing on anything from historical archives to less verifiable, sometimes intangible material such as informal interviews and second-hand stories.

Approaches to writing about the past

Fragments of memory—whether archival or vernacular—often provide the starting point and the basis of the narrators' understanding of their family. Such fragments are then often incorporated into the narrative. Some filiation narratives are even arranged as a collection of fragments, as is *Les guerres de mon père*. Schneck the writer has opted for very short chapters with very little transition. The paragraphs are also short, often consisting of a single sentence. The elliptical effect can at times be jolting. The reader is presented with the choppy flow of someone processing emotions and memories as opposed to the smooth, polished narrative of someone that has already worked through the information they are conveying. The reader is often forced to infer transitions in order to make sense of the sequence and is called on to participate in the construction

of the narrative. Episodes are presented as stand-alone segments and short documents are reproduced often without commentary. Letters are reproduced—letters addressed to Schneck, letters from her father to his parents, and letters found in archives—but not to the degree they are in an epistolary novel. The effect of this patchwork, often choppy, amalgamation of fragments is a narrative that sometimes seems to lack cohesion. That is, after all, the criticism Pachet voiced of Schneck’s first book, that it is nothing more than a collection of fragments. At the same time, this style was perhaps an intentional choice to reflect the way the past is experienced. “N’est-ce pas ce que je tente de faire aussi, écrire une histoire qui ne sera jamais la totalité d’une vie, mais de simples fragments?” (172). That fragments are all that remain can be a lesson of the filiation narrative. Sometimes, the best one can hope for is to uncover a few morsels which may lead to a new understanding or something to hold on to, but will never serve to recreate a history in its totality. Complete reconstruction of the past is impossible as too much has been lost already. Demanze emphasizes this aspect:

Le récit de filiation s'inscrit ainsi dans une époque qui a vu sombrer le temps long de la mémoire et s'émietter les communautés familiales. L'enquête généalogique a désormais pour vocation d'exhumer cela même qui s'efface, dans un projet de restitution voué à l'échec. Car le récit de filiation ne croit plus à la restitution du passé. (35)

A fragmentary style is just one way writers convey a feeling of disconnect from their family history and the impossibility of fully recovering the past. Storti’s narrative style, by contrast to Schneck’s, is more tangential than fragmentary. Storti instead conveys a skeptical relationship to her father’s past by freely and frequently admitting her ignorance. Rather than reading like a collection of fragments, *L’arrivée de mon père en France* is an almost uninterrupted stream of thought in which one idea bleeds into another. Storti abruptly transitions between talking about her father and a number of other tangentially related topics, yet the reader easily follows her from one topic to another. This is partly due to the conversational and informal writing style, the use of

slang and rhetorical questions. Storti's narrator doesn't give the impression of holding back her thoughts or feelings but is instead generous with the reader in the way of making ideas explicit. Little inferring is necessary to follow the narrator's train of thought. This uninterrupted stream of thought is visible in the author's description of the 1970's. Once again, one event bleeds into another. This amalgamation is amplified by the absence of punctuation which gives the impression of everything happening at once. The description swells to encompass the major events of the moment and expresses an explosive experience of contemporaneous turbulence.

Etaient-elles vraiment *folles* ou ne le sont-elles que dans un regard rétrospectif ou nostalgique, un roi qui remplace Franco en Espagne la guerre du Vietnam qui cesse et celle du Liban qui commence Pinochet qui dictaturise le Chile Videla de l'Argentine Brejnev l'Union des Républiques socialistes communistes deux Allemagne l'une à l'Est l'autre à l'Ouest un mur à Berlin des Brigades rouges en Italie une Fraction armée rouge de l'autre côté du Rhin des Khmers rouges à Pnom Penh on ignorait alors qu'ils allaient en quatre ans tuer deux millions de personnes soit à peu près un quart de la population de Cambodge. (16)

As different as the writing styles and forms may be from each other, what unites these filiation narratives is the quest for familial connection through obtaining information occasioned by a prior absence of such. At the same time, the acknowledgement remains that not all can be known. Not only have the narrators' identities been previously formed around the absence in question, but there would be no filiation narrative had the absence not existed. As Nathalie Heinich has said, "Je pense que le manque de ce qui nous fait, de notre histoire, fait partie aussi de notre histoire... Notre histoire est faite aussi de ces questions auxquelles nous n'avons pas de réponse et l'absence de réponse est aussi quelque chose qui nous fait, nous fabrique."²⁰ The significance of unanswered questions and other absences in one's life is akin to the negative space which contributes to a full image. In art, the tones of the subject and the space around it, or background, are sometimes reversed to emphasize the negative space rather than the subject, this is called

²⁰ La Grande Librairie Apr. 12, 2018

figure-ground reversal. In the filiation narrative, absence of history is emphasized, much like figure-ground reversal in two-dimensional art. The metaphor of negative space is easily applied to the type of literary narratives we are examining. I propose the term negative history to refer to that history which is unknown and yet without which the subject would have no definition.

Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* provides an excellent example of negative history. When Perec's narrative persona claims to have constructed his identity around the gaps in his memory and understanding of his childhood, he is referring to precisely that.

“Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance. Jusqu'à ma douzième année à peu près, mon histoire tient en quelques lignes : j'ai perdu mon père à quatre ans, ma mère à six ; j'ai passé la guerre dans diverses pensions de Villard-de-Lans. En 1945, la soeur de mon père et son mari m'adoptèrent. / Cette absence d'histoire m'a longtemps rassuré : sa sécheresse objective, son évidence apparente, son innocence, me protégeaient, mais de quoi me protégeaient-elles, sinon précisément de mon histoire réelle, de mon histoire à moi qui, on peut le supposer, n'était ni sèche, ni objective, ni apparemment évidente, ni évidemment innocente ?” (17).

Anytime the absence of history or knowledge of the past is emphasized, it is akin to figure-ground reversal in art. Similar to Perec, who exaggerates here to make his point, saying flatly that he has no childhood memories, filiation narrative narrators frequently insist on how little they know. Schneck, for example, “et il y a mon grand-père, Majer dit Max, dont je ne sais rien, sauf qu'il mesure 1 m 70, qu'il est blond aux yeux bleus, qu'il porte des chemises noires sur des costumes blancs, et cravates assorties, qu'il ne souhaite pas laisser de traces et qu'il aime séduire” (72). The narrator claims to know almost nothing about her grandfather despite the fact that just a few pages earlier she painted a detailed portrait. Doing this both provides a justification for their quest and makes every bit of information they uncover that much more significant. In other words, emphasizing the negative history makes all that is uncovered stand out in full focus. In the case of Schneck and other writers employing narrative fragments, this style also conveys negative history in its very form. Due to the conciseness and self-containment, fragments draw attention to the

negative space around them much the way figure-ground reversal foregrounds negative space, in other words, all that is missing in their family history.

The role of imagination

What to do with the bits of information? A necessary aspect of the investigative posture consists not only in attempting to locate and in locating information, but playing detective—that is, imagining possible arrangements of information and using clues to deduce probable scenarios. Storti, for example, makes educated guesses, often conjuring up hypotheses that are informed by the few clues at her disposal, as in the following passage:

Une curiosité d'ailleurs à jamais insatisfaite, ce qui m'a obligée, pour combler les espaces que la mémoire n'occupe pas, non à inventer, mais à essayer de deviner, sans m'accorder une grande liberté, en restant raisonnable en quelque sorte, c'est-à-dire en demeurant dans ce qui me paraît vraisemblable au regard du peu que je sais. Il m'importe en effet de tenter une approche vraie, quand bien même il s'agit non d'une réalité que je restitue, puisque je l'ignore en grande partie, mais que je construis. (146)

Storti responds to the fact that many of her questions will never be answered with frequent recourse to the realm of imagination, which she directly references. “N’ayant jamais questionné mon père, je ne peux que tenter d’imaginer son arrivée et les raisons de son départ” (33). The catalyzing prompt for the book itself—the thought the narrator claims compelled her to write—contains this element of imagination: *l’arrivée de mon père en France, il faut que je l’imagine*. This imperative becomes an oft-repeated refrain, guiding the reflection throughout the book. “Hypothèses, suppositions, conjectures, j’y suis condamnée, n’ayant à ma disposition aucun élément pour fonder une certitude. Je ne peux qu’imaginer” (160). While the verb imagine has many definitions ranging from ‘to use the imagination’ to ‘to form a mental image of,’ Storti’s use of the verb in the refrain *l’arrivée de mon père en France, il faut que je l’imagine* is close to ‘try to envision.’ In order to

envision, Storti's narrator draws on logic and objective reasoning in order to imagine and is explicit about exactly what she knows and what she doesn't. The book abounds with pluralistic possibilities introduced with such phrases as "Ou bien, autre version" and "je tire non pas un, mais plusieurs scénarios possibles" (33 and 141) and with caveats such as "Il n'est pas impossible en effet que je me trompe" (151) and "Cette version est hypothétique" (144). She is categorical about the fact that rather than invent, she tries to surmise and infer.

While *L'arrivée de mon père en France* was published as a *récit*, Schneck's *Les Guerres de mon père* was published as a novel. It is to be expected, then, that Schneck's narrative is at least partially fiction. Throughout the book, the narrator refers to the role imagination plays in the reconstruction of her family history. "Le monde imaginaire est le seul moyen de remplir les vides laissés par les absents" (87). Schneck is forthcoming about the liberty she takes in writing about the family that took in her father during the war, for example, doing so in order to include them in some way. She attributes the idea of inventing to her uncle, Pachet. When she asks what to do if she's not able to find any information, she writes that he answers, "Ce n'est pas grave. Tu imagineras le reste" (136). Because she knows so little about these important people in her father's life, she chooses to invent their names, history and personalities. "Si la vie imaginaire atteint, parfois, la réalité, les parents se nomment Henri et Monette. . ." (147). This fictionalizing helps fill in the blanks of what is traceable in the archive or testimony and thus knowable and allows her to include the memory of such remarkable people in her narrative. Schneck renders the bravery of the family perceptible through her fictionalized representation. When I asked Schneck²¹ how she chooses between remaining loyal to the verifiable truth and embellishing, she told me that knowing

²¹ <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2021/06/10/world-literature-festival-recap-conversation-colombe-schneck>

the facts is an indispensable part of her writing process and enables her to have confidence in her view of things.

“Je suis une obsessionnelle/ en obsession de la vérité des faits: Quand je travaille sur un livre, je vais chercher tout ce que je peux trouver parce que la vérité me permet de bien m'asseoir, me permet de distinguer le bien du mal. Elle me permet de distinguer, dans le cas de ma famille, par exemple, quelles étaient les victimes, quels étaient les bourreaux.... Quels étaient les faits? Quels étaient les noms? Quelles étaient les dates? M'a permis de définir exactement quelles étaient les victimes: nous; qui était responsable? Qui était coupable? Et ça m'a énormément aidé. Mais parfois, ces faits, vous les avez. Vous ne pouvez pas savoir. Vous n'avez pas de preuves de ce qui s'est passé... Il y aura toujours une part qui m'échappera, une part d'inconnu, et c'est à ce moment-là que l'imaginaire arrive, quand il y a le vide. Il n'y a rien; il y a le silence. Et je ne crois pas qu'imaginer ça soit trahir. Je crois que votre imagination vous dicte une sorte de vérité. Donc, j'imagine quand rien d'autre n'est possible.

Modiano also understood early on that sometimes, in order to be able to include someone about which too little is known, it is necessary to use one's imagination, that imagination can even be a useful tool in the reconstruction of the past. While trying to write a biography of his girlfriend's father, the narrator of *Livret de famille* muses: “Je n'en possédais pas la preuve et mon dossier était bien mince, mais je comptais laisser aller mon imagination. Elle m'aiderait à retrouver le vrai Dressel” (185). Freud anticipates precisely this approach to writing about the past: “Incomplete and dim memories of the past, which we call tradition, are a great incentive to the artist, for he is free to fill in the gaps in the memories according to the behests of his imagination and to form after his own purpose the image of the time he has undertaken to reproduce” (116). As we saw in the first chapter, it is precisely this possibility for fiction to enter the narrative that demarcates the literary filiation narrative from the nonfiction filiation narrative written by historians.

At the same time, even the strictest work of non-fiction or biography necessarily contains a certain amount of fiction as it is impossible to know everything about another's life, nor one's

own, for that matter. This is true even when that person is one's parent. American author Hanif Kureishi discusses this problem in his book about his father, *My Ear to his Heart*:

Having studied my parents at close quarters until I was in my late teens, and having thought and dreamt about them most days ever since, a good deal of what I 'know' must be supposition and fantasy. I guess that that is all it ever could be. Therefore, this free-form work of mine is probably closer to fiction than I would like to think. But this research, I hope, will take me much further. (13)

The child's perspective is in a sense, an outside perspective and subject to all the possible misunderstandings of childhood and the distortions of time. Kureishi has the choice of turning to imagination, research, or a combination of both. Like the writers of many filiation narratives, he chooses to turn to research in order to lend a correcting sweep to his own subjective view of his parents but acknowledges that it is certainly still partly fictional.

This is what Pierre Bourdieu famously argues in "L'illusion biographique" — that biography is necessarily part fiction. "Le secours de la fiction pour le travail biographique est en effet inévitable dans la mesure où il est impossible de restituer la richesse et la complexité de la vie réelle... Le biographe doit faire appel à son imagination devant le caractère lacunaire de sa documentation et les trous temporels qu'il s'efforce de combler..." (57). The difference, then, lies in the intention to invent or to try and be as objective as possible. Even when Schneck incorporates some fiction into the novel, it's with a tension between when it's morally acceptable to imagine and embellish and when it's necessary to be precise and accurate. Schneck's narrator is conscious of this tension. When it comes to her grandfather Max's murder, she is aware of the harm done by the embellishments written in the press about the event. These exaggerations had a destructive effect on her father's life, contributing to his shame. The scandalous rumors printed in the papers, led Schneck's father Gilbert to repress the details of his father's death that much more. Schneck sets the record straight but too late to be able to alleviate the shame and embarrassment experienced

by her father. Perhaps, had he known the facts of his father's death rather than the sensationalized and false version, he would have been able to talk about it. This is why, in this case, Schneck insists on the facts. "Tenter d'être juste, de retrouver les faits, les dates, les lieux, est le seul moyen de dire, pour mon père, que la honte n'est pas de notre camp" (184). Schneck recounts multiple attempts to gain access to the files concerning the murder and subsequent trial. In a letter justifying her need for access by explaining her project she evokes the necessity of knowing the facts. "J'ai rédigé une lettre... sur la nécessité littéraire d'être au plus juste des faits" (224). Knowing the facts is not simply a personal necessity, but a literary necessity for the filiation narrative. She nonetheless invents parts of the lead up to his murder, details she couldn't possibly know.

It's not possible to determine from the text alone which details are fact and which are fiction. The reader has no *a priori* license to be able to differentiate between the two. While certain formal constraints are required in order for a work to qualify as a filiation narrative, the degree of accuracy and the inclusion or omission of fictional invention remains the prerogative of the author. Viart emphasizes this in his early article on the filiation narrative, "Le silence des pères":

Il n'est dès lors parfois plus possible de démêler ce qui relève de l'invention pure ou de la restitution : le lecteur comme la narratrice est condamné à ces approximations, ces incertitudes [. . .] Car c'est aussi un trait de ces récits que de montrer combien l'opposition traditionnelle entre vérité et mensonge, entre fait et fiction, n'est pas aussi tranchée qu'on aime à le penser. (par. 25)

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the process by which elements of the past may be recovered and has shown that the filiation narrative makes use of a wide range of sources and techniques in order to answer questions about the past. The first section has analyzed the use of documents, heirlooms and other "testimonial objects," as well as the information one obtains from speaking to

family members and acquaintances. The second part examined the use of archives and exploratory voyages. This plurality of sources is necessary because, as we've seen, no one source is ever sufficient. Family members and friends die or are unwilling to talk; the anecdotal information they share varies in each telling making "the truth" feel like a bending or evolving subjectivity; records get lost or are superficial. The third part analyzed the use of informed invention, from *figuration* to imagination.

Chapter 3: The Second-Generation Filiation Narrative

“Le maître lui disait souvent, en arabe : ‘Je te parle, je te raconte plus qu’à ma femme et à mes enfants... c’est étrange, et tu as voulu me tuer... Tu comprends ça ? Moi, non.’”
(Leïla Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, 98).

“I wish I could breathe a Nabokovian air. I wish I could have the Olympian freedom of sensibility that disdains, in his autobiography, to give the Russian Revolution more than a passing mention, as if such common events did not have the power to wreak fundamental changes in his own life, or as if it were vulgar, tactless, to dwell on something so brutishly, so crudely collective” (Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, 197).

"Mais je ne savais rien de l'histoire du Vietnam, ni de l'histoire de mes parents" (Doan Bui, *Le Silence de mon père*, 59).

In this chapter, I explore the role immigration plays in second-generation filiation narratives. I start by giving a few examples of the ways immigration can contribute to a breakdown in the transmission of family history, especially from father to child. Next, I show that as children (or grandchildren) of immigrants, Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti situate themselves not just within their own families, but within a national and an international context. This section will raise questions related to the idea of Frenchness with which the authors are in dialogue. Additionally, the authors challenge received notions of the past when these are seen to be limited or unjust and insist on assigning responsibility for wrongs committed. Finally, I show how the authors are agents in the reconfiguration of history. This may be, as in the case of Kerchouche, addressing the stigmatization of Harkis and to correct persistent misconceptions. Or, as in the case of both Kerchouche and Schneck, it involves a re-emphasizing of former injustices. Or, as is the case for all three authors, the inscription of immigrant heritage into the French collective consciousness. This chapter will show the ways these books contribute to collective narratives, promoting, for example, the inclusion of immigrant groups in the fabric of a national identity.

Failed transmission

The silent father

Referring to her parents, Schneck writes, “J’étais seule face à leurs silences, sans savoir même que j’étais seule et que l’on nous [she and her siblings] mentait. Le silence ne donne aucune explication” (144). While there are certainly fathers who speak freely about their lives with their children, filiation narratives tend to feature fathers who do the opposite. A father’s silence, after all, furnishes the writer with a reason for their quest. The filiation narrative, as we’ve seen, is characterized by an active interest in the past, motivated in part by a lack of knowledge and

understanding about one's own family history. The historian Enzo Traverso signals the link between previous generations' failure to pass down knowledge and a current obsession with the past. "L'obsession mémorielle de nos jours est le produit du déclin de l'expérience transmise, dans un monde qui a perdu ses repères, défiguré par la violence et atomisé par un système social qui efface les traditions et morcelle les existences" (13-14).

Schneck's father, for example, refused to discuss unpleasant events. "Ne parlons pas de choses qui fâchent" was a rule of his. (9) She knows that beneath his warm exterior and insouciance, a lifetime of trauma lay buried and that his insistence to accentuate the positive was his way of denying, rejecting and repressing the pain of the past. Speaking about his tour in Algeria as a medic during the war, Schneck reflects, "il n'y a rien, croit-il, à transmettre, pas de leçon, pas d'expérience, de souvenir, de ces vingt mois en Algérie, comme de toutes les souffrances passées" (307).

Kerchouche's father behaves similarly, making excuses each time Kerchouche approaches him with questions.

"L'Algérie et sa guerre sans nom dont mon père rechigne toujours à me parler. Pourquoi s'est-il engagé aux côtés de la France? Pourquoi a-t-il renoncé à son pays? Je ne sais toujours pas. Il ne m'a encore rien dit, ou à peine. J'ai glané quelques bribes, mais, plus le livre avance, plus je m'approche de lui avec mes questions, et plus il fuit, se rétracte, m'échappe, prétextant fatigue, heure du journal télévisé ou de la prière, ou des courses à faire..." (187).

Kerchouche says that she became a journalist and a writer in order to "briser le silence dans lequel j'ai grandi" ("Kerchouche répond"). While there are countless reasons why a parent refrains from speaking about the past with their children, a number of these have to do with immigration. Scholar Crystel Pinçonat makes this link in her study of immigrant literatures. She signals the prevalence

of the figure of the silent father, incapable of assuming his role— of relator of his own experiences and what he knows of his ancestors’ experiences—in the transmission of family history.

“Au sein des littératures d’immigrations, apparaît de façon extrêmement récurrente un même personnage : celui du père silencieux, figure d’un moi effondré, absent, comme destitué des prérogatives paternelles et, par là, incapable d’assurer son rôle dans la transmission de l’histoire familiale. Il est par excellence celui qui tait son passé, silence qui, pour ses fils et ses filles, constitue un legs encombrant et mystérieux, à déchiffrer, à entendre en deçà ou par-delà les mots” (“Émigration et rupture de filiation” 1).

Like authors of filiation narratives in general, the authors of what I refer to as second-generation filiation narratives seek to better understand their families as well as their own place in society by inscribing themselves within a lineage and a narrative, adding to it the experience of immigration. Not only can immigration cause one to question one’s place in the world, but it may contribute to a break in the transmission of family and personal experience for a number of reasons. These reasons range from a desire to spare loved ones from the painful details of the past to a difficulty expressing oneself in the children’s primary language when it differs from one’s own to a preference for assimilation. Storti hypothesizes that the latter may be one reason her father didn’t talk about Italy.

Est-ce seulement parce qu’il appartenait à cette sorte d’immigré qui considère qu’un étranger doit s’intégrer, s’assimiler, se fondre dans son pays d’adoption, ne pas se distinguer? [...] Non seulement Matteo parlait peu de l’Italie, mais il parlait encore moins de la part italienne de sa vie. Sur elle, pas une anecdote, pas un récit, même bref, venant du lointain de l’enfance, de la vie d’avant l’arrivée en France. Comme si un rideau avait été tiré, comme si ces années n’avaient pas existé” (158-159).

Not all silences are the same. Sometimes silence represents a refusal to talk about a painful past. When one has left their homeland so that their children would not have to face the same realities, why burden them with upsetting memories? Leïla Sebbar’s *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* offers an illustration. She imagines her father shaking off her questions as he’d done so often. He sees no point in rehashing old memories, especially when those are painful.

“Je ne peux plus lui demander, lui téléphoner, de Paris à Nice, plusieurs fois par jour pour savoir, quelques décennies plus tard, ce qu’il n’a pas dit, parce qu’il ne parlait pas de ce qui pouvait faire souffrir, il pensait qu’il fallait oublier, ne pas rappeler la peine, encore et encore... De ces années-là je n’ai rien su. Mon père n’en a rien dit, obstinément. Et moi, non moins obstinément, je l’appelle, je téléphone. ‘Qu’est-ce que tu veux savoir encore ?... Pourquoi tu veux savoir tout ça ? À quoi ça sert ?... Il faut oublier...’” (12).

In her memoir, *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman recounts the same dismissal on the part of her father. “‘Ach,’ my father finishes, making an impatient gesture with his hands, as if to throw off these memories. What does it matter? It happened, it happened, what can you make of it?” (24). Later in the book, she describes trying to talk to her father once more. “I see that my father has gone slightly pale. ‘Let’s not talk about these things,’ he says, lowering his head” (252). This later response shows that it isn’t so much that things of the past do not matter but that they are difficult to talk about. As Modiano once put it, “J’ai senti, ce soir-là, qu’il aurait voulu me transmettre son expérience des choses troubles et douloureuses de la vie, mais qu’il n’y avait pas de mots pour cela” (*Remise de peine* 117).

Schneck is confronted with a long-standing familial practice of forgetting the past and of choosing not to transmit stories to later generations. She characterizes her family as follows: “Nous étions des exilés sans mémoire s’accrochant aux joies du présent” (10). She identifies a kind of family tradition of separating oneself from the past, each time following a traumatic rupture. This was the case with her paternal grandfather, Max. When he was 16, Max’s father was shot for being Jewish. Escaping the rampant antisemitism and pogroms in his native town of Sanok—originally part of the Austro-Hungarian empire ceded to Poland in 1918—he makes his way to Strasbourg. It isn’t long before he befriends other exiles but the past is never a topic of conversation, in fact it is implicitly avoided. Many years later, as a traveling merchant, Max revisits the place where he grew up. He pretends to be a stranger, not admitting his ties to the area. This aversion to connecting with and talking about the past was likewise true with his family; as a result, the author’s father

knows little about his own father's life. The unknowing thus becomes intergenerational. "[...] quand on interroge Gilbert [son père] sur sa famille, ses origines, il ne peut rien dire, il ne sait rien" (149). As Viart writes, moreover, "le silence du père ne prive pas seulement l'enfant d'une meilleure connaissance de la réalité paternelle, il tranche aussi le lien avec les générations antérieures..." ("Silence" par. 15).

Schneck's paternal grandmother also wound up in France after fleeing antisemitism and similarly disengaged herself from her past. The narrator wonders about the effect that exile and rupture from one's place of origin has on one's identity. "Qui est-on, quand on apprend dès l'enfance que rien ne reste? Qu'il faut toujours être prêt à tout perdre, même sa langue maternelle?" (35). For her grandmother, recipes became the sole heritage to be passed down. "[P]our Paulette seuls les repas accommodent leur absence d'identité solide et l'exil. Les recettes de cuisine sont ce qui reste quand il ne reste rien. Elle a appris les recettes de sa mère qui lui venaient de sa propre mère. Une lignée, celle de la bouche, la seule qui ne se soit pas interrompue" (38). In this case, food adds joy to family relationships, rather than the pain associated with a family history blighted by tragedy.

In some cases the failure to transmit the past is due to a difference of language. Sebbar contends that had she spoken Arabic, her father might have shared more details of his past with her simply by virtue of his being able to disclose a nuanced story in his native tongue, as opposed to his second language:

Dans sa langue, il aurait dit ce qu'il ne dit pas dans la langue étrangère, il aurait parlé à ses enfants de ce qu'il tait, il aurait raconté ce qu'il n'a pas raconté, non pas de sa vie à lui, un père ne parle pas de sa propre vie à ses enfants... mais les histoires de la vieille ville marine, les légendes... il aurait raconté les ancêtres . . . (21).

When it is already difficult to talk about the past, doing it in a secondary language may add an additional layer of difficulty. Doan Bui expresses a similar sentiment in *Le Silence de mon père*.

Before he became physically unable to speak following a stroke, Bui's father didn't speak his children's language either. Like Sebbar, the narrator partially attributes her father's keeping quiet to the language gap between him and his children, who speak little Vietnamese. "Il rentre, harassé par le travail, presque un étranger dans sa propre maison, il ne peut plus raconter d'histoires à ses enfants, ils ne comprennent plus sa langue, et de toute façon il rentre trop tard pour leur raconter quoi que ce soit" (126). Not only is the father away from the home all day, but he has no energy once he gets home. The role that workday exhaustion plays in the speechlessness of Bui's father is a likewise important theme in Sonnet's and Storti's works. Exhaustion from work is also particularly acute in another subgenre of the filiation narrative: the *récit de filiation ouvrière*.

Fatigue and difficulty with the host language are concrete things that make talking about unpleasant subjects especially taxing. In some cases, the dissimulated obstacle of trauma underlies these other barriers. The histories sought by Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each contain many instances of probable trauma. For example, each author is the daughter of a soldier. Kerchouche's father was a Harki who fought in the Algerian War, Schneck's father was a medic in the same war and Storti's father was a soldier in China. The present study would be remiss not to signal the possibility that the trauma of war, murder, the Holocaust, relocation camps and immigration contributed to the fathers' silence. Trauma studies demonstrates the link between trauma and silence, in which trauma survivors experience difficulty speaking about the events they lived through. "Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies" (Balaev 360). The first wave of trauma studies, pioneered by Cathy Caruth, is heavily informed by Freud and Lacan. In this model, silence is due to psychological phenomena like latency and dissociation. A second and more recent wave of scholarship, referred to as pluralistic trauma theory

has moved away from the clinical view. As the name suggests, this new model conceives the experiences and representations of trauma as necessarily varied. While trauma studies thinkers no longer argue that silence is an inherent symptom of trauma, it is still recognized to be one of a number of possible aftermaths. In this view, silence can be a result of the social and cultural factors at play. “What remains unspoken in a narrative about trauma therefore can be a result of cultural values in contrast to the traditional model that claims trauma’s inherent unspeakability due to its neurobiological functions” (Balaev 367). This also points to the relational factors which affect discourse. Similar to cultural factors, relational factors may dictate that parenthood means shielding one’s children from the traumatic experiences of one’s past. Schneck’s father’s motto “Ne parlons pas de choses qui fâchent,” is a perfect example of his wish to project a positive persona toward his children.

At the same time, while there may well have been specific traumatic events in the lives of these fathers, it may not be the result of those events in particular that turned the men averse to certain types of conversations. This view of trauma explored above makes certain assumptions about the pre-trauma life and mind of individuals. As theorist Lauren Berlant argues, “trauma theory conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe, implicitly suggesting that subjects ordinarily archive the intensities neatly and efficiently with an eye toward easy access.” (10). Berlant pushes up against the idea of a single, pivotal moment of trauma and argues that this understanding of trauma tends to assume that life before the event was untroubled, simple. “‘Trauma’ has become the primary genre of the last eighty years for describing the historical present as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed just to keep going on and with respect to which people felt solid and confident.” (9-10). We could add that in this unrealistic imagining,

the uneventful ordinary life before a traumatic event is assumed to have been full of communication and self-expression. Berlant argues instead for a model which takes into account the crises that people are living perpetually, that all act upon the subject at every moment. This model of a compounding of crises, both on a personal and global scale, is more fitting to the types of pervasive hardship communicated in *Les guerres de mon père*, *Mon père, ce harki*, and *L'arrivée de mon père en France*. She writes that her book *Cruel Optimism*, “thinks about the ordinary as a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine. Catastrophic forces take shape in this zone and become events within history as it is lived.” (10).

Indifference to the past

A family member’s silence, however, is only one possible factor contributing to the breakdown of transmission. Dominique Viart has identified a second factor which is “la faute d’écoute de la génération suivante, plus avide d’avenir que de passé” (“Nouveaux” 26). It would be unjust to attribute the break in transmission solely to fathers while it is possible that they may have tried to share aspects of their past with their children but that the latter were not interested in such details thanks to the inattention, diversions and preoccupation with independence belonging to youth. In these cases, the narrators of filiation narratives attempt to rectify their former indifference to their family’s past. The time and energy dedicated to the lives of their relatives is integral to the filiation narrative is a way to compensate for, if not expiate, the narrator’s guilt around a former distancing from and disregard of the past.

Storti possesses little knowledge of her father’s past and this deficit is due in part to her father’s forgoing sharing much about his life with his daughter in conjunction with her own failure

to press him for information when she had the chance. “Je ne saurais le dire parce que, de l’arrivée de mon père en France, de la manière exacte dont elle s’est passée, j’ignore à peu près tout” (15). Aspects of his life that once seemed self-evident no longer do. There were a few family trips to his hometown of Sarzana, Italy, but her father, Matteo, didn’t talk about himself or his past during these visits. Storti admits to not really caring at the time. “J’ai douze ans, les lieux de son enfance, je m’en fiche. Je n’éprouvais pas à l’époque la curiosité qui est la mienne depuis quelques années...” (178). Even well after that, as a young woman, she could have asked him. The doctors had told her mother that he only had a few days to live. The prognosis was correct and he died six days after learning he had lung cancer. If she had wanted to, Storti could have talked to him about his past but these questions didn’t yet intrigue her. “Même si j’avais eu conscience que sa fin était proche, si j’avais pris le temps ou eu l’idée de l’interroger [...] je sais bien que ces questions sur son arrivée en France, ou sur son enfance, ou sur sa vie avant qu’il ne devienne mon père, je ne les lui aurais pas posées” (19). She regrets her former indifference:

Quand il pouvait encore le faire, je ne lui ai jamais demandé de me la raconter, cette arrivée. C’est ainsi, quand il aurait pu répondre, je ne l’ai jamais questionné, pas le temps, la tête ailleurs, trop prise dans ma propre vie, pas assez curieuse de la sienne, en tout cas pas de cette arrivée en France, au début des années trente. (15)

Jablonka similarly expresses his father’s regret at not having sought out details about his parents’ lives when he had the chance. “Il se sent coupable de cette ignorance: jeune, il n’éprouve pas le besoin d’interroger les cousins, les amis, les voisins, et, quand ces derniers veulent lui apprendre quelque chose, il répond que ça ne l’intéresse pas. [...] À présent, il regrette de ne rien savoir, de ne rien avoir voulu apprendre, il dit avec fureur “j’étais con.” (Jablonka 2012, 14). When Jablonka’s father reaches the point of wishing to know more, there’s nothing he can do—the people who could have informed him are now dead. Mais que faire? Tout le monde est mort” (*ibid*). The death of a loved one is an obvious impediment to future dialogue. The narrator confronts the regret

of not having asked more when they had the chance and the sometimes unbearable irony of questions arising only once there's no one to answer.

For Doan Bui, though her father is still alive, a medical condition has rendered him physically unable to speak. Since he has also lost the ability to write, her father can no longer clarify her questions. It had always been difficult to coax him into sharing details of his past, but it is now nearly impossible. Her filiation narrative, *Le Silence de mon père*, establishes a comparison between her father's silence about his past in Vietnam before emigrating to France, and his current muteness. She describes having previously fallen in line with the hegemonic silence of her parents, recounting: "Je n'ai jamais osé, ou pris la peine, de poser des questions. Comme toujours face à mes parents, moi aussi, je me tais" (Bui 48).

It can be difficult to hear a parents' trauma. If we accept that children are already steeped in it from birth, there may be an unwillingness to look at this trauma head-on. Regarding the related question of second-generational mourning, Gabriele Schwab argues that "Children unconsciously take in not only their parents' grief and pain but also their guilt and shame. And their psychic life is profoundly shaped by parental silences" ("Future's Past" in *Critical Trauma Studies*, 132). The filiation narrative represents a turning point in the trajectory of trauma in which the second-generation, knowingly or not, is poised to face and work through the trauma that shaped their parents'—and thus their own—lives. Amanda Wicks argues that "As a temporal disruption, trauma dislocates individuals from the integrated, narrative context of personal memory and collective history" ("No Other Tale to Tell," *ibid*, 135). Filiation narrative authors, then, are contributing to the repair of this dislocation.

The Writing of a composite identity

The continued legacy of immigration in the life of the writers, the fact that they come from a family of immigrants plays an important role in each of Kerchouche's, Schneck's and Storti's narratives. At the same time, they differ both in terms of the experience of immigration, which ranges from relatively uneventful to traumatic, and the amount of familial information uncovered and indeed recoverable. Nonetheless, the works resemble each other in that the narrators seek to establish continuity and situate themselves not just within their own family narrative, but within society and historical context. In other words, what is the narrator's role within the family and what is the family's role in society? With regards to societal and historical context, the narrators assert their place within French society and shine a light on their community's past. The act of remembrance is part and parcel with the affirmation of one's identity.

What is Frenchness?

When the child of immigrants writes about their parents' lives in their new homeland, not only are they reviewing the peripeteia that brought them to their new land, inscribing themselves within a lineage and narrative, they are also, in a sense legitimizing their family's presence there, anchoring them in a way that they may not have managed to be anchored before. They are inscribing their parents, grandparents and selves within the history of the place. As scholar Nacira Guénif-Souilamas writes, "[U]n renversement générationnel inédit s'opère ici: c'est aux descendants de 'faire exister les parents; de les faire naître' au pays d'accueil" (Guénif-Souilamas, *Des Beurettes*, 114, qtd. in *Endofiction*, 84).

The authors make use of their position as French citizens to revendicate their immigrant heritage while they grapple with the complicated realities they are faced with and confront

prescriptive notions of “Frenchness” which exclude them. They have amassed cultural capital and assume the right to speak up about injustice, a right that their parents didn’t have, didn’t know they had, or didn’t use. As Storti writes, “Sans doute aussi dire à sa [celle de son père] place, lui donner les mots qu’il n’a pas eus, ou dont il n’a pas voulu...” (122). The family members were once voiceless; their children now speak on their behalf, on behalf of the voiceless in general, even. This is what Viart means by the *éthique de la restitution* which is characteristic of the filiation narrative.

Au sens où dans ces textes le travail de restitution s’exerce selon les deux acceptions du terme: il s’agit à la fois de restituer une existence qui ne s’est pas dite, qui n’a donné lieu à aucun récit, à aucune transmission, parce que ceux qui l’ont vécue ne se sont pas accordé à eux-même la légitimité suffisante pour le faire, ou parce que l’Histoire, en démentant leurs croyances et leurs idéaux, les a proprement délégitimés. Et, c’est le second sens de “restitution,” de rendre par le récit leur dignité à ces vies défaites, “indignes,” brisées par l’Histoire. (“Nouveaux” 28)

As Philippe Bernard writes in his article “Le métissage des mémoires : un défi pour la société française”:

Il s’agit d’inverser le regard négatif que porte la société française sur son histoire migratoire, regard qu’intériorisent non seulement les “deuxième, troisième. . . générations” récentes, mais les Français issus de migrations plus lointaines qui ont tendance à considérer comme honteuse cette partie de leur histoire et “à fermer la porte derrière eux.” (34)

This is also one of the motivations behind Isabelle Monnin and Doan Bui’s *Ils sont devenus français*. The result of a year of research conducted at the National Archives, the book features portraits of some of the most famous figures in French culture and history, who happen to have been born outside its borders. “L’idée de ce livre est très simple: remonter aux origines de ceux qui incarnent aujourd’hui l’identité de la France. Si incontestablement d’ailleurs que la mémoire collective semble avoir occulté qu’un jour ces derniers eux aussi furent des immigrés” (15). The authors invert the filiation narrative by starting with an ancestor and then tracking down their

descendants to show them the naturalization file. “Puisque l’immigration est toujours une histoire de transmission, nous voulions savoir ce qu’il en restait, dans la génération d’après” (18).

The authors of second-generation filiation narratives assert their immigrant heritage, thereby validating and normalizing complex backgrounds and identities that have been conceived as Other. Storti does exactly this with her Italian heritage. “Ma part italienne, que j’ai toujours perçue comme s’ajoutant à ma part française, sans que celle-ci en soit diminuée, ou corrompue, ou pervertie” (165). She and others are practicing what writer Amin Maalouf has argued at length, particularly in *Les identités meurtrières*. “Chacun d’entre nous devrait être encouragé à assumer sa propre diversité, à concevoir son identité comme étant la somme de ses diverses appartenances, au lieu de la confondre avec une seule, érigée en appartenance suprême, et instrument d’exclusion, parfois en instrument de guerre” (205). By virtue of being both the children of immigrants and French, these writers challenge certain ideas about what it means to be French. One way Storti challenges ideas of what it means to be French can be seen in the passage below:

Alors l’identité nationale, j’y arrive, ou plutôt non, je n’y parviens pas, tant je suis incapable de dire ce qu’est l’identité française, incapable de la définir, d’en tracer les contours. Je ne sais ce qu’est l’identité française, ou plutôt je sais qu’elle est d’une infinie multiplicité, et que ceux qui prétendent en avoir une idée claire et donc limitée, racontent des bobards. (170)

In telling their families’ immigrant stories, these authors contribute to complexifying the history of France and its collective understanding of itself. In *Endofiction et fable de soi*, Pinçonat describes the effect that reading has on our understanding of the world. “Sur la mémoire historique du lecteur, vient s’adosser un nouveau récit qui modifie ou recompose partiellement sa vision du passé. En ce sens, les récits d’immigration contribuent à modifier la mémoire nationale” (9-10). The reader encounters a narrative different from the one they had known and this new narrative may corroborate their previous understanding or challenge it. This is in line with one of the least

tendentious tenets of empathy studies. As scholar Suzanne Keen writes, “it is certainly demonstrable that experiences of narrative empathy can change attitudes about outgroups, reduce bias, and translate into real-world sympathy for others outside books” (Keen 133). In its capacity to produce narrative empathy, the filiation narrative is an ideal venue for challenging conservative, chauvinistic views and establishing more inclusive narratives.

Constructing a narrative

In her book, *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch might as well have had the filiation narrative in mind when she described projects which aim “to reclaim historical specificity and context, rather than jettisoning these in a familiar postmodern move. In a consciously reparative move, they assemble collections that function as correctives and additions, rather than counters, to the historical archive, attempting to undo the ruptures caused by war and genocide” (228). The second-generation filiation narrative offers stories of immigration which serve to contribute to and complexify the historical archive. Moreover, this move to reclaim historical specificity is not limited to immigration.

Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each demonstrate an interest in sharpening historic understanding by not letting historical specificity fade from memory. They do this by providing the relevant historic details pertaining to their family’s experiences. Such details, which might usually concern only those affected by them or specialists, are then given the chance of surviving into the future in the minds of readers. The names of Vichy officials responsible for compiling lists of people to deport are not necessarily household names. Schneck would like them to be.

In *Les Guerres de mon père*, Schneck is concerned with insisting on and learning from the facts of the past. The author gradually realizes that she wants to find those responsible for putting

her father in danger, for trying to have him deported during the Occupation. She undertakes to hold accountable certain French officials responsible in the deportation of Jews. “Aller dans les archives est devenu un moyen de retrouver l’origine de la peur... Les préfets Maurice Labarthe, René Rivière et Jean Popineau n’étaient-ils pas les premiers responsables des tourments de Gilbert?” (92). She does this in part by relentlessly repeating their names lest their reputation fade into a comfortable anonymity. Le préfet Maurice Labarthe’s name is repeated 11 times, for example. A bit further on, his dossier is transcribed. The insistence regarding his identity is a reckoning. Schneck confronts us with the impunity that many perpetrators and participants in the massacre of Jews enjoyed in the years following the Holocaust. She’s particularly dismayed at the fact that 11 years after his participation carrying out the *rafle* of August 1942, the prefect René Rivière is “pourtant réhabilité et détaché auprès du gouvernement général de l’Algérie” (101). Similarly, the prefect Jean Popineau was later awarded a million francs in back pay. “Gilbert grandit dans cette atmosphère injuste où... des hommes qui ont participé de manière active et volontaire à la politique collaborationniste et antisémite de Vichy sont récompensés par la Légion d’honneur et ont vu toute faute effacée” (105). These prefects rewrite the story of their collaboration and turn it into a tale of resistance. Schneck challenges their post-Liberation account of events with archival evidence showing the extent of their zealous complicity in the roundup and deportation of Jews. Without such insistence on fact, one might be susceptible to taking the prefects’ word.

As important as it is to hold people accountable for their misdeeds of the past, the authors also recognize the importance of honoring the memory of those who deserve special attention. Storti does just this in *L’arrivée de mon père en France* when she evokes Jean Cavallès, a résistant with a promising future in the philosophy of mathematics who was murdered by the Gestapo in

1944. Despite the fact that she had already mentioned Cavaillès in an earlier book, Storti writes, “on a même le devoir de citer à nouveau le nom, de raconter ce qu’il a fait, qui il était” (131). Schneck goes even further in reorienting her search away from identifying those who colluded in the attempted persecution of her father and his parents, toward recognizing those responsible for saving their lives. She realizes that the boyhood friend of her father’s where he’d once hid, may well still be alive. “Il fallait retrouver Guy Moreau pour le remercier d’avoir accueilli dans sa chambre mon père de douze ans” (115).

After seeking out the man who, as a boy, shared his bed with Schneck’s father on raid nights, Schneck wishes to track down the man who rented a small shed to Paulette and Gilbert, followed by M. Schmitt, the director of the school where Gilbert was hidden for a short time. This involves the author traveling to yet another town, Nontron. One after another, Schneck tries to locate the people who contributed to saving her father’s and his parents’ lives, both to see if they can tell her anything she doesn’t know and to thank them. If she can’t thank them personally, she thanks their descendants.

Not only are the authors of filiation narratives inscribing themselves within a narrative, but they are agents in the construction of that narrative. Gérard Lenclud has theorized this idea in the following manner: “L’écriture . . . permet de construire la bonne version de la tradition qu’il convient de reproduire” (122). Elaborating on Lenclud’s idea, the sociologist Jean Davallon argues that “c’est nous qui décidons que tels . . . discours ou telle mémoire vont avoir statut de patrimoine” (10). After a rupture in transmission, there is a reevaluation of which pieces of the past continue to serve in the present. Each generation decides what will be passed on and how the tradition will be modified, which aspects to perpetuate and which to change. “La question n’est plus dès lors de savoir comment est assurée la continuité pour éviter une rupture, mais comment elle est construite

à partir d'une rupture" (10). Davallon argues that the loss of a tradition allows for its rediscovery and it is during the process of rediscovery that a tradition or a narrative can be reconfigured. The rediscovery following a rupture in transmission is the ideal moment for the process of modification.

The process they describe mirrors that which takes place in the filiation narrative. This is especially visible in Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*. First, there is a break in transmission. Because of this, Kerchouche had long internalized the prevailing narrative²² that Harkis, and thus her father, were traitors. This was the version accepted by most French and because France is where she was born and educated, this is the version she heard through popular culture and interactions with her peers, and ended up accepting. For many years, she failed to understand how her father could have "betrayed his country," as she saw it. "J'ai longtemps cru que mon père était un traître. Harki, pour moi, valait la pire des infamies" (24). She often dissimulated this part of her identity before eventually owning it and defending it. After the break in transmission comes the process of rediscovery. During this time, she learns that neither she, nor her father, nor those others dear to her were traitors. Instead, their realities and motivations had not been incorporated into the narrative. Finally, there is the reconfiguration of this idea. The first step in rectifying this misconception is to demystify reasons by which Harkis ended up fighting "on the wrong side" and thus to lift the stigma still attached to them and to their children. They were not simply traitors to their country as the story would have it believed. As with any actual situation, there are myriad

²² Like Kerchouche, Schneck recounts that as a child she had assimilated a negative narrative directed at one of the social groups to which she belonged. In this case, it was an antisemitic narrative. "J'ai neuf ans, je n'ai jamais été victime de ce qui pourrait ressembler à de l'antisémitisme, la guerre n'est presque jamais évoquée à la maison et j'ai intégré cela, que pour beaucoup de gens, si on supprimait les juifs, le monde irait mieux" (91).

factors and causes. For example, as Kerchouche explains, many of the soldiers who would become Harkis had previously fought for the French in WWII and believed they were required to join²³.

Kerchouche is able to reconfigure the story about Harki motives, to rework that which will be passed on after her. Based on Davallon's theory, this is possible because Kerchouche, a nonrecipient of such information, then had the opportunity to seek it out for herself. Furthermore, the rupture in transmission means she is not simply relaying a story just as she heard it. Never having heard the story, and in a sense, discovering it for herself, makes Kerchouche a participant in its construction.

As an active agent in the construction of her family's narrative, Kerchouche also sets out to shine a light on the conditions under which they lived, sequestered in the camps they were relegated to, in short, the deplorable treatment they received on French soil. In doing so, she confronts legacies of colonialism and decolonization. In a novel in which many of the characters and events are recognizable from her earlier work, Kerchouche assumes the perspective of her older sister in order to tell the story from the point of view of a young woman living in the various Harki camps in which her family lived. The project of the novel, *Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis*, is described as follows:

Raconter qu'après avoir été fidèles à la France, ils ont été trahis, abandonnés, parqués, puis effacés de la mémoire collective. Il est temps, aujourd'hui, de rendre justice à nos parents. Car la revendication essentielle des harkis et de leurs enfants tarde à venir: la France ne reconnaît toujours pas sa responsabilité dans le drame des harkis, ni dans l'abandon, ni dans la relégation dans des camps. (151)

²³ See page 10 for more.

Les droits de l'Homme

Immigration also poses fundamental questions about what it means to be French and whether France can deliver on its historical ideal of *les droits de l'homme*. Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each demonstrate an instance in which these principles break down. The reader is invited to consider the sharp contrast between these professed ideals and reality. The illusion of equal chances for newcomers and their children is dispelled, which is the first step in seeing things more accurately.

Kerchouche exposes the prison-like conditions of the Harki camps, the physical and emotional violence, the destitution and the lack of opportunity that all contributed to a devastating psychological effect²⁴. Harkis' opposition to the harassment and subjugation resulted in further harassment and subjugation. Standing up to mistreatment could and did result in the denial of health care, the withdrawal of food, coal and work. Kerchouche interprets this treatment as the continuation of a colonialist posture. "Au fond, rien n'a changé depuis l'Algérie coloniale. Les harkis, qui croyaient avoir gagné l'égalité citoyenne en se battant aux côtés de la France, restent des indigènes" (64). The civilizing mission previously enacted abroad is perpetuated at home. "Pour eux, les harkis sont des sauvages qu'il faut civiliser. Des êtres primitifs, inférieurs et sales que ces bons samaritains ont lavés, évangélisés, élevés au rang de "bons Français" (107). The former camp director and his wife claimed that the Harkis were happy to adopt French ways of life. And this may well have been true to a certain extent, however it cannot have been the case when it meant forcing them to abandon their own customs, such as wearing a veil and giving their

²⁴ For more on the conditions in the camps, please see my upcoming article in *The European Journal of Life Writing*, "A Harki History Lesson in Dalila Kerchouche's Filiation Narrative *Mon père, ce harki*."

children Algerian names²⁵. Those who exercised their power with continuous efforts to gallicize the Harkis against their will wrongly equated assimilation with acculturation. As Frantz Fanon noted in *A Dying Colonialism*, “To speak of counter-acculturation in a colonial situation is an absurdity” (42). One episode featured in both her filiation narrative and her novel is the ripping off of her mother’s veil by the director of the camp. The episode inevitably recalls Frantz Fanon’s essay “Algeria Unveiled.” While Fanon was not a Harki, and in fact fought for the FLN, the link he makes between forced removal of veils and a colonial mission, rings true in the present context. Fanon writes, “If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight,” (*A Dying Colonialism* 37-38). This underscores Kerchouche’s contention that the Harki camps in France were an extension of a colonial program and even an elongation of the war.

One of Kerchouche’s more disturbing discoveries is that this deplorable treatment was instituted from the top. After journeying through the multiple camps her parents were placed in since their arrival in France, Kerchouche turns to the materials she’d amassed in order to inform her quest. One report in particular jumps out to her, a 30-page analysis of the way Harkis were treated in France since 1962. The study confirms what Kerchouche had begun to suspect but couldn’t yet put her finger on: “C’est le gouvernement qui en est responsable,” as doctor Jammes puts it (149). This stings all the more for everything France is meant to represent:

Si la grandeur de la nation française est quotidiennement célébrée, les lois républicaines, en revanche, ne s’appliquent pas à l’intérieur du camp. Les valeurs de liberté, d’égalité et de fraternité n’existent pas dans cet univers totalitaire, où les harkis vivent entre

²⁵ In fact, this continues to be an issue. As a French polemist proclaimed on the popular show *C à vous*, in September of 2016 “Donner un prénom qui n’est pas français à ses enfants; c’est ne pas se détacher de l’islam, c’est vouloir continuer la tradition islamique en France et c’est vouloir transformer la France en un pays de plus en plus musulman.”

embrigadement et répression. Bias [the camp] fonctionne comme une microdictature, un ghetto coupé du monde, géré par une administration omnipotente. (129)

Crapanzano confirms the deplorable conditions and extension of a colonialist atmosphere found in the camps. He cites a press release by Abdelkrim Kletch, an activist with the Collectif National Justice Pour les Harkis²⁶. “The Harkis are kept in the position of the colonized—of little Muslims from the Algerian *départments*. This policy was carried out in a deliberate and knowing manner by successive governments. The Harkis were willingly prevented from developing, constrained by internment and [forced to turn] in on themselves” (143).

The discrepancy between the values the country claims to embody and the reality is something raised by each of our three authors. Kerchouche writes, “La France a trahi les harkis, la France a trahi mes parents... la France m’a trahie. La France s’est trahie elle-même. Toutes les valeurs que l’école de la République m’a apprises, elle les a bafouées, piétinées, méprisées” (167). Storti makes a similar observation. “Je regarde, je suis à Calais, je suis en France, le pays des droits de l’homme, c’est cela qu’on affirme, qu’on rappelle sans cesse, dont on se gargarise, gauche et droite, *la-France-pays-des-droits-de-l’homme*, le message de la France au monde, les valeurs de la République française... De quoi être fier, vraiment?” (21-22). And Schneck remarks with irony, referring to her grandfather’s choice to emigrate to France rather than America, England or Brazil, that it’s partly because he thinks that “en France, au pays des droits de l’homme, les juifs ont le droit de vivre” (29).

²⁶ The association was created in 1988 by Kletch to denounce the moral and material precariousness of this population. More information can be found on the site: <https://www.narbonne.fr/collectif-national-justice-harkis>

Conclusion

The salvaging of histories inherent in the filiation narrative can be read as a way of resisting the erasure of marginalized, under-represented subjectivities. The authors in this study do not confine themselves to speaking about their own families' experiences. In evoking these particular stories, they make use of the familial as an example or a springboard leading to a larger conversation. In the case of *Mon père, ce harki*, Kerchouche begins from her own family's experience in order to evoke the experience of Harkis in France in general²⁷. She learns that injustices her parents and siblings experienced were the same for many other Harki families. Through the course of her research, she discovers systematic discrimination that took place not only at the camps where her own family was placed, but at all the camps where Harkis were relocated to in France, which weren't officially closed until 1975. Thus, in writing about her family's experience, she is also speaking to the experience of countless other families like hers. In *Les guerres de mon père*, when Schneck writes about her grandparents' precarious situation as Eastern European Jews in France before and during the Second World War, she is speaking to the precariousness of all families like them. When Storti writes about the economic exploitation within her own family, she has in mind economic disparity and exploitation at a societal scale. And when she refers to her father's immigration to France, she does so because she is concerned with migrants' experience in general. Storti's father was neither the first nor the last Italian to emigrate to France. Matteo's individual story serves as an example of an unexceptional example of an Italian immigrant to France in the first half of the 20th century. "Est-ce avec cette envie que Matteo a quitté l'Italie, dans un autre siècle, au début des années trente? Je l'appelle Matteo, je pourrais l'appeler Luigi ou Mario ou Antonio ou Giorgio ou Pietro ou Giovanni ou, pourquoi pas,

²⁷ What Margarita Smagina has referred to in her dissertation as "Local Allegories of the Global".

Domenico” (*L’arrivée* 32). His story is not a singular event. The most basic details of his journey were repeated innumerable times by countless others. In this brief litany of names, Storti motions to the multitude of which her father was just one constituent. But also, anything she imagines about her father’s journey to France is therefore also an imagining of others’ arrivals as well. This is especially true where Storti offers more questions than answers, and these could legitimately be posed in regards to anyone else:

Il vient d’arriver dans la capitale d’un pays où il n’est jamais allé et dont il ne parle pas la langue, pas un mot de français, c’est une certitude, il est seul... Est-il triste, déjà dans la nostalgie ou, au contraire, enthousiaste? Regrette-t-il déjà son pays, a-t-il peur ou s’en fout-il complètement, content d’échapper à son père, à l’Italie mussolinienne, à l’errance à la recherche d’un boulot, confiant dans l’avenir, heureux à l’idée de rejoindre sa soeur et son beau-frère et de travailler avec eux? (50-51)

Storti makes a similar move in describing the economic disparity within her family. Locating this imbalance within the family underscores the sense of injustice which may be less palpable on a societal scale.

"J'étais révoltée contre ça, d'autant que j'avais bien vu, au sein même de ma famille, que d'autres pouvaient vivre autrement. L'inégalité, l'injustice, je les avais eues sous les yeux, dès mon enfance, avant même d'avoir lu les livres, ceux qui ensuite me donnèrent une explication technique - la plus-value, et voilà pourquoi mon oncle avait pu s'acheter un manoir en Sologne! - ceux qui me montrèrent que l'histoire de mes parents n'étaient [*sic*] pas une histoire singulière, même si elle avait prise une coloration particulière puisque jouée au sein d'une même famille, mais l'histoire du monde, du maître et de l'esclave, du patron et de l'ouvrier" (56).

The family experiences featured in the works of these authors represent a broader swath of society. The filiation narrative offers a way to retrace collective historical trauma by writing about subjective, intimate experiences. In knowing their experiences, we are not dealing with the exceptional, the singular, the arbitrary, but with the illustrative. As Jablonka argues, “La vie de ma grand-mère n’a pas d’intérêt si l’on ne réussit pas à l’inscrire dans un histoire plus vaste qu’elle”

(*Grandparents* 239). In the case of his grandmother, it is quite easy to inscribe her life within a larger understanding of history as her life was to a large extent dictated by events outside her control. This is the opposite of an approach exemplified by Vladimir Nabokov. In the citation in *Exergue*, Eva Hoffman remarks on the fact that the author of *Speak, Memory*, whose life was no less upturned by events beyond his control, prefers not to elaborate on the details of history. The filiation narrative, by contrast, draws on historical understanding to elucidate not only the lives of loved ones, but also of those subject to similar circumstances.

Todorov has made the distinction between *littérale réminiscence* and *exemplaire réminiscence*, in which the latter permits the use of the past as an example for the present, to serve as a lesson and to help us avoid repeating similar mistakes. "L'usage exemplaire permet d'utiliser le passé en vue du présent, de se servir des leçons des injustices subies pour combattre celles qui ont cours aujourd'hui..." (31-32). Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each make use of *exemplaire réminiscence*. Their reminiscences are not an end in and of themselves but are employed demonstratively. Chapter 4 will explore the exemplary reminiscences of filiation narratives.

Chapter 4: Dialogue between Past and Present

“Et nous ne savons quoi faire, sinon respirer jusqu’à en être asphyxiés cet air venu tout droit des années 1930” (Geneviève Brisac, *Bienvenue!*, 72).

"Il n'y a plus de nos jours de rafles de juifs ni de camps d'extermination. Nous devons pourtant maintenir vivante la mémoire du passé: non pour demander réparation pour l'offense subie, mais pour être alertés sur des situations nouvelles et pourtant analogues. Le racisme, la xénophobie, l'exclusion qui frappent les autres aujourd'hui ne sont pas identiques à ceux d'il y a cinquante, cent ou deux cents ans: nous ne devons pas moins, au nom de ce passé, précisément, agir sur le présent" (Todorov 60-61).

As we've seen, the filiation narrative is characterized by a retrospective orientation of the narrative grounded in the present day. Unsurprisingly, then, the filiation narrative concerns itself not only with the past, but also with the present in which it is written. Since these works were written in the 21st century, this is more or less also our contemporary present. The filiation narrative necessarily proceeds from the present in its investigation of the past. At the same time, to borrow from memory scholar and literature professor Michael Rothberg, the narratives "pull the past into the present" (69). Intellectual historians and other scholars have frequently remarked upon the role the present plays in the investigation of the past. For example, Enzo Traverso writes, "La mémoire, qu'elle soit individuelle ou collective, est une vision du passé toujours filtrée par le présent" (20). For the past to be filtered by the present, means both that it is interpreted from a contemporary point of view and that those aspects of the past that are relevant to us in the present are what stand out.

Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti each make use of what Todorov has called *exemplaire réminiscence*, meaning their recollections are employed to illustrate an idea. This is evident in the way they create a dialogue between the past and present. The authors employ two main strategies: 1) establishing parallels between the past and the present (Storti, Schneck) and 2) establishing continuity and a causal link between the past and the present (Kerchouche). This chapter will explore the relationship between the past and present in the filiation narratives under examination and is structured in three parts, one for each author.

Schneck

Schneck's parallels between the past and the present are demonstrated primarily through the way the text is staged. Adopting a literary equivalent of dialectical montage²⁸, the author demonstrates an association of ideas through textual proximity. This is reminiscent of certain moments of Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in which the meaning is to be found in the relationship of the two narratives. Writing about the efficacy with which residents of Alsace-Lorraine, including her grandmother, were relocated at the start of World War II, Schneck asks, "Pourquoi aujourd'hui, en France, cela est-il impossible?" before going on to evoke the conditions of the migrant camp in Calais. As different as these two situations may be, Schneck invites the reader to ask herself why more isn't currently being done to help refugees in France. In juxtaposing the wartime relocation of the early 1940's and the lack thereof for war refugees today, the author connects two disparate temporal moments in a way that is reminiscent of sociologist Jean Davallon's conception of time as neither cyclic nor linear, but topological. Davallon uses the spatial implication of topology as a metaphor, in which the fabric of time can be visualized as folded over on itself. "[A]vec la prise en compte du passé comme passé dans le présent, le temps présent se redouble; passé et présent se superposent dans le présent de telle sorte que ce dernier en vient à former en quelque sorte un pli" (Davallon, 10). Topological time is a conception of time which allows for a visualization of two distinct moments brought together. Davallon's idea can be taken even further. Within the word topological, there is also topos, in which past and present can be thought to align according to themes, or topoi. For example, a topos such as 'wartime relocation of refugees' permits the author to unite two distinct moments in time thanks to their shared theme, folding the past and present over one another.

²⁸ Dialectical montage, a term coined by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, is a technique of film editing which combines unrelated images to generate a new idea or connection in the viewer.

Another topos, that of torture, prompts Schneck to juxtapose the Algerian War and the Nazi Occupation of France. The narrator attempts to get in her father's head and imagine what he may have been thinking as a French soldier in Algeria watching the atrocities being committed. Did watching Algerian children witness the atrocities remind him of being a Jewish child during the Nazi Occupation? Schneck ironically remarks "Il sait qu'il ne faut pas, qu'on ne peut comparer, cela n'a rien à voir" immediately before evoking Nazi soldiers (291). She acknowledges that this sort of comparison is not generally accepted and yet there is an implicit "*pourtant*" at the end of her statement because she goes on to compare them nonetheless, as if it were involuntary and not the calculated comparison that it is or in a deliberate defiance of the rule. By bringing together these two distinct traumatic histories, Schneck is enacting what Michael Rothberg has called *multidirectional memory*. His book, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, examines works in which "remembrance of the Holocaust intersects with the legacies of colonialism and slavery and ongoing processes of decolonization" (xiii).

Rothberg is motivated by the question of "how to think about the relationship between different social groups' histories of victimization" and notes that "social conflict can only be addressed through a discourse that weaves together past and present, public and private" (2, 285). Rothberg takes issue with a widespread approach to collective memory that sees memory as a "zero-sum struggle" in which public attention and investment can only be directed at one violent history at a time and thus sees various violent legacies as competing against each other for space, referred to as competitive memory. Multidirectional memory is Rothberg's response to competitive memory and he advocates for an interconnective approach to memory studies much in the way scholar Marianne Hirsch has argued for a connective approach: "I believe that such an emphasis on connective histories maps a future for memory studies beyond discrete historical

events like the Holocaust, to transnational interconnections and intersections in a global space of remembrance” (*The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch, 247).

More than just making connections, though, multidirectional memory sees remembrance as “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing” (3). Rothberg identifies varying levels of multidirectional memory in the works of a host of French writers (and filmmakers)—Césaire, Daeninckx, Delbo, Duras, Naquet, Rouch, Schwarz-Bart, Sebbar, etc. This list includes mainly French thinkers because Rothberg focuses on the phenomenon of multidirectional memory between WWII and the Algerian war, in the context of the latter. His observations can nonetheless be applied to any combination of pasts. Referring to André Schwarz-Bart’s juxtaposition of the Caribbean past and Nazi genocide, more specifically of a Guadalupian slave rebellion and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in his *A Woman Named Solitude*, Rothberg writes, “In placing the two histories side by side, the novel does not so much normalize or relativize the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust, but renders it as part of a parallel series of singular events” (148). Multidirectional memory is interested in “uncomfortable echoes” and “partial overlaps” between violent legacies (28, 29). To identify these is not to say the events are identical. Traverso, like Rothberg, emphasizes the fact that comparison is not equation. Pointing out echoes between Auschwitz and Guantanamo, he writes, “Il ne s’agit pas de mettre un trait d’égalité entre Auschwitz et Guantanamo, mais plutôt de se demander si, après Auschwitz, nous pouvons tolérer Guantanamo et Abou-Ghraib...” (81).

Like Rothberg, Schneck— and as we shall see, Storti— takes “remembrance of the Holocaust as [her] paradigmatic object of concern” (Multidirectional 6). The difference lies in what it is that they use the Holocaust as a platform to articulate. Rothberg is interested in the ways

Holocaust memory contributes to the articulation of other *histories* (slavery, the Algerian War of Independence, the genocide in Bosnia, etc.) while Schneck and Storti are primarily interested in parallels between WWII and the present. Still, why do these writers see a need to show parallels to the Holocaust in order to attest to the cruelty of an event or situation, especially when many find it objectionable to make comparisons to the Holocaust? There is a long-standing position of viewing the Holocaust as “a unique, sui generis event” (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 8). Rothberg argues, however, that such parallels between “seemingly incompatible legacies” can, in fact, be productive (1). For one, the well-recognized atrocities committed during WWII provide what Rothberg has called, “a vocabulary of human rights affronted” — in other words, a shared frame of reference for the unacceptable. Multidirectional memory thus allows the use of one widespread reference (the Holocaust) “as a platform to articulate” another.

To explore this question further, let’s consider a well-known triangulation concept: Rene Girard’s concept of mimetic desire. Girard has shown that desire often arises in a subject after that subject has seen the object to be desirable to a different person (the mediator). Thus, the triangulation of desire consists of a subject (the person desiring), an object (the thing being desired), and a mediator (the person modeling desire) between the two. It is said that the object isn’t intrinsically desirable and thus needs the desiring of the second party to be desirable to the first. Rather than the object not being desirable by the subject until the mediator desires the object, I think it is more accurate to say instead that the object is already inherently desirable, just not remarked as such until desired by the mediator. As with desire, registering the cruelty of a situation is not always a linear process whereby a subject immediately seizes an atrocity’s cruel nature but a process which sometimes requires the mediation of an already-known cruelty. The triangulation of cruelty involves a subject (the person faced with potential cruelty), an object (the cruelty), and

a mediator (the already-established cruelty). As with the desired object, the cruel situation is already cruel, just not remarked as such until mediated by the established cruel situation. The Holocaust often serves as such a mediator in the triangulation of cruelty.

Schneck draws on the shared vocabulary of human rights affronted that the Holocaust represents in order to evoke the contemporary crises that preoccupy her. In her projected effort to avoid repeating mistakes of the past, Schneck undertakes to better understand what causes one person in one situation to act in the face of injustice and what causes another person, in another situation, to stand back or turn a blind eye. "La question que je me posais tout au long de ce livre et que je continue à me poser, pourquoi à un moment on va bien agir, on va protéger, on va cacher, et pourquoi à un autre on va détourner le regard on va ne rien faire, on va continuer, on va faire son métier?"²⁹. There is a timelessness to this question, which is as relevant in 2018 as it was in 1944. She asks herself "Pendant la guerre, est-ce que j'aurais accueilli un famille juive...?" (157). Even though she owes her own life to the people that hid her father, she admits that she probably wouldn't have gone to the trouble. "Non, puisque je ne le fais pas aujourd'hui pour les réfugiés syriens ou afghans" (*ibid*). Or, "Je vois des familles dormir dehors, des enfants dans des sacs de couchage dans la rue et je n'agis pas" (156). If she wanted to help such families, it would be significantly less dangerous to do so today than it would have been during the war. In a posture familiar to readers of Rousseau³⁰, Schneck puts her shortcomings on display, confessing her *mauvaise foi*. Rather than blame herself for doing nothing, Schneck instead seems to gain some insight into how it's possible that more people didn't protect the vulnerable during the Holocaust,

²⁹ La grande librairie- Jan 26, 2018.

³⁰ Rousseau's *Les Confessions* contains multiple shameful divulgences. For example, one episode features Rousseau's confession to not only to stealing a ribbon but to attributing the theft to someone else, the young servant Marion. In his description of the event, Rousseau avoids any attempt to justify his actions and directs sympathy toward Marion.

since she, herself, does nothing to protect the vulnerable now³¹. At the same time, Schenck struggles to present herself as someone nonetheless concerned with the well-being of refugees. There is a palpable effort to project the persona of someone concerned with the *sans* (*sans-papiers*, *sans domicile fixe*...) which borders on virtue-signaling and moral exhibitionism³².

In fact, virtue-signaling and multidimensional memory share a similar problem: not only a dismissal of detail, but a disregard for disparity. For virtue-signaling, it's the disparity between one's speech and one's actions and for multidirectional memory, it's the disparity between phenomena. Events have their specificity and there are important differences between Jewish refugees during the Holocaust and contemporary refugees, for example. No one will be sent to camps or killed for taking in a refugee today, the Holocaust was a planned and executed genocide which isn't true of refugeeism, etc., but multidirectional memory prefers to overlook these important differences. Rothberg says it himself: "This project [*Multidirectional Memory*] takes dissimilarity for granted, since no two events are ever alike, and then focuses its intellectual energy on investigating what it means to invoke connections nonetheless" (18). He lucidly acknowledges that multidirectional memory can be "convoluted" and "sometimes historically unjustified" (17). While there is no *a priori* problem with making such comparisons, a problem does arise when differences are "taken for granted" and thus insufficiently acknowledged. This can lead to the "relativization and banalization of the Holocaust" that Rothberg acknowledges exists but attributes mainly to the "culture industry" and not to "marginal or oppositional intellectuals" (10). In fact, as Rothberg shows, in the case of Césaire, preexisting loyalties "sometimes impair his attention to

³¹ This moment in the text represents an additional aspect of what Rothberg means by multidirectional memory: not only does the past give us insights into the present, but the present gives us insights into the past.

³² If moral exhibitionism represents the flaunting of positive actions, virtue-signaling represents its insincere version.

the specificity of the Nazi genocide” (24). Thus, taking dissimilarity for granted, relativization and loss of specificity are the risks multidirectional memory runs.

Tragedies like the Holocaust can just as easily be employed in more questionable equations since nothing is to say what elements of the tragedy will be singled out for comparison and which differences should be ‘taken for granted.’ Theoretically, when events of the past are used to justify moments in the present, the same event can be used to illustrate two opposing ideas. In other words, a single event of the past can be used to defend opposing actions in the present according to the sense and story attributed to it. This happened with regards to a mass demonstration in 1989 Germany. The 32-year-old leader of a new nationalist movement, Pro Chemnitz, references his parents’ involvement in the ‘89 demonstrations and draws a parallel between the movement to end Communism in East Germany with the current nationalist movement, of which he is a leading member. “People were sick of the system then and now they are sick of the system again.” The mayor of this same city draws attention, not only to the error in thinking, but to the danger of making such a parallel. “But we marched for law and order, for democracy, for freedom of speech. They want to undermine all of these institutions” (Bennhold). There is an inherent contradiction between the spirit of the event and what the event is being used in service of.³³ If the past can be mobilized to justify opposing views, behavior and policies, then there is nothing which inherently aligns multidirectional memory with greater understanding and greater good.

The ambivalence of multidirectional memory, when potentially tainted by virtue-signaling, is also visible in the following passage. Schneck’s narrator processes the story of her father once spending the night at a friend’s house, Guy Moreau, in order to evade the roundup of Jews taking place. The narrator expresses fully grasping the weight of this gesture only after thinking about

³³ In a similar vein, Nazism is frequently evoked by the political right in America to dramatize a perceived impingement on freedoms.

today's displaced children. It took looking at the event with contemporary eyes in order for her to measure its significance.

“Il appartenait, je le croyais, à un monde disparu [...] . Puis j'ai fini par ouvrir les yeux, j'ai vu aujourd'hui des enfants sur des routes, de petits enfants en grenouillère en éponge bleue, des tétines, des mentons baveux, des couches qui n'ont pas été changées depuis trop longtemps, des enfants qui n'ont plus de lit et parfois encore un ours en peluche à la main et il fallait retrouver Guy Moreau pour le remercier d'avoir accueilli dans sa chambre mon père de douze ans” (114-115).

Yet, her father at twelve years old had little in common with the refugee toddlers described in this passage. It's not that her father didn't have a bed of his own, but that if he had stayed in his bed that night, it might have led to his internment and deportation. Guy Moreau likely saved his life, but Guy was also her father's friend, and it's quite natural to think he'd sleep there to avoid a rumored round-up. Still, something about the children calls to mind her father and the friend that took him in one fateful night. Let's compare this episode with another example of the insistence on echoes of the past in the present: Bartlett Sher's 2015 revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*. At the end of the show, the protagonist Tevye— whose family is forced to leave their shtetl by the Russian government— is shown in modern dress and lining up among what are clearly contemporary refugees. Sher chooses to acknowledge the present-day echoes of forced migration the way Schneck, insists on the echoes of her family's ordeals in present-day migrations. Where Sher's comparison reads as relevant (though not to everyone), Schneck's seems a stretch. One reason for this, is the difference between premeditated or intentional multidirectional memory (Sher) and involuntary multidirectional memory (Schneck).

Despite the glaring differences between her father and the other children she describes in the passage, Schneck is showing that, on some level, they recall each other. Schneck points to the subconscious connections between disparate events which nonetheless evoke similar states of shame, embarrassment, fear, etc. Was Benjamin not evoking strong emotional states when he said

that involuntary memory necessitated ‘l’expérience du choc’³⁴? When such involuntary associations are examined closely, however, they tend to fall apart. This is perhaps why Schneck refrains from developing the association further. What she does do is show that these two distinct moments, by stirring similar uncomfortable feelings, have merged in some common fold of the narrator’s psyche. This is what Michael Rothberg argues regarding the filmmaker Michael Haneke’s juxtaposition of the Algerian War with torture in Abu Ghraib in the film *Caché*. "These events are not identical; indeed, they are barely comparable. And, yet, in memory they form a series, a circulatory system of cross-references" (Rothberg, 2006, 182). Haneke’s portrayal, as a work of art, is an example of intentional multidirectional memory which registers a more widespread involuntary association.

While not a filiation narrative, Sarah Chiche’s 2019 novel, *Les enténébrés*, provides an excellent example of the interference of involuntary associations evoked by emotional states on the lives of individuals. Rather than enter into the forefront of her thinking, awareness of ecological disaster is primarily a source of shame for Chiche’s narrator, also named Sarah. While she is concerned above all by her love life, it’s impossible for her to ignore the ecological state of the planet (which her husband, through his work, also represents). In one particularly acute example of involuntary associations in the novel, a feeling of guilt connects two seemingly disparate thoughts: that of an ocean filled with plastic and that of her love affair. The narrator stares into the sink where she’s doing dishes and pictures herself drifting among all the plastic bottles, plastic bags and fishing line swirling in the ocean, which she refers to as the world’s largest garbage can. She’s overcome by a feeling of panic and feels the need to confess her affair to husband. “Chéri, lui dis-je, il faut que je te raconte quelque chose [...]” (64). Sarah feels the shame associated with

³⁴ See “Sur quelques thèmes baudelairiens.”

her contemplation of all the plastic in the sea and it is this shame that recalls the guilt she feels for cheating on her husband; both are associated with guilt for the narrator and thus, in a demonstration of mood congruent recall, one conjures the other. Moreover, as with Schneck, this shame doesn't contribute to any action on the part of the narrator. "J'ai honte. [...] Mais ma honte ne produit que de l'impuissance [...]" (101). Like Schneck's passage above, Chiche's can be read as virtue-signaling but is perhaps better read as an illustration of the impact of the state of the world on individuals' inner lives.

Nonetheless, Schneck's particular parallel between her father and refugee toddlers betrays a vying for affective impact. Is it possible to read the evocation of dirty children in rags with nowhere to call home and remain indifferent? By affect, I refer to the potential for unpredictable, imprecise and individualized impact—a combination of thoughts, feelings and emotions—occasioned by a text. Let's quickly further distinguish between affect and emotion. As Lauren Berlant has said, "There is a general, not very clear difference that people make between affect and emotion which is that an emotion is a congealed, recognizable object that has norms associated with it but affects are these inchoate senses that you have in your body that are the affect of the impact of the world."³⁵ As CUNY PhD Candidate Sandra Moyano Ariza explains in her recent article, there are various ways of understanding the term, including the following: "Affect ... offers a lexicon to expand on the analyses of pre-cognitive processes that lead to emotion in order to open a space to think how these processes are represented in literature and artworks" (4).

Evoking the unfortunate circumstance of refugee children is one way of generating affect. Multidirectional memory is another way filiation narrative authors tap into the past for its affective value. Not only do well-recognized atrocities committed during WWII, for example, provide "a

³⁵ [Lauren Berlant - Cruel Optimism \(Online Lecture @ Skopje Pride Weekend 2020\)](#)

vocabulary of human rights affronted” but they are laden with affect. This affect partly accounts for the argument against making comparisons to the Holocaust, an argument which may originate from a visceral reaction to the unparalleled nature of the atrocity. Whether the reaction is to protect the Holocaust as a *sui generis* genocide or to acknowledge echoes in present day, the event leaves few unperturbed. Storti, like Schneck, is interested in generating affect both through the evocation of refugee realities and using triangulation of cruelty. Like Schneck, she employs topological time and multidirectional memory in order to address concerns about immigration. In contrasting Schneck’s and Storti’s uses of multidirectional memory we can see both the potential and the pitfalls of the narrative device. Schneck and Storti provide examples of how multidirectional memory can be both intentional and involuntary, constructive and cringeworthy, thought-provoking and irritating.

Storti

The topos of migration serves to unite her present-day concerns for the well-being of displaced people with her own family history of immigration. The author frequently recounts that it was during a visit to the migrant center in Calais that the thought came to her that she needed to better understand her father’s arrival in France. “Je regardais *les yeux pleins de larmes ces pauvres émigrants* et je songeais à nouveau à l’arrivée de mon père en France...” (32). In fact, she had little interest in her father’s immigration before she saw it as connected to the plight of contemporary migrants. Storti decides to write about her father after a visit to the Sangatte refugee camp, on the outskirts of Calais, in 2002, but doesn’t make much progress until making the trip again four years later. By this point, the official Red Cross camp has been closed and replaced by the precarious,

makeshift refugee and migrant encampment known as the Jungle³⁶. Even as she tries to write about her father, she continues to be more concerned about and drawn to contemporary emigrants.

Quelques pages, celles qui évoquent le surgissement des mots, *l'arrivée de mon père*, le moment, les conditions, l'environnement, l'occasion, *il faut que je l'imagine*, et puis, très vite, l'impossibilité de continuer, ou plutôt cette envie entravée par quelque chose qui m'apparaît encore plus nécessaire, d'une nécessité plus forte, retourner à Calais, savoir comment ça se passe là-bas. (23).

The author teases out what her father might have had in common with the emigrants she encounters at Calais and elsewhere. For example, after evoking the photo albums her father brought with him from Italy, she wonders if the people wandering the streets of Calais also brought a special object with them, “qui leur permet, même en exil, de ne pas être dans le dépouillement de tout, l'absence de leur vie d'avant” (34). Her familiarity with her father's *dépaysement* sensitizes her to the feeling. Moreover, it's a humanizing question because it acknowledges that the person is more than their *situation* irrégulière. Alternatively, after thinking about some of the reasons people emigrate, she wonders about her father's reasons for doing so.

Chaque article de raconter une histoire singulière, en fait toujours la même, la guerre ou la persécution politique ou ethnique ou religieuse, ou, le plus souvent, la misère, l'envie de gagner plus et plus vite, le mirage européen, ceux qui ont réussi à passer et qui appellent, ‘pourquoi tu ne viens pas, pourquoi tu n'essaies pas,?’ le village qui ne survit que grâce à ce qu'envoient les émigrés... Peut-être l'envie de partir, juste l'envie de partir. / Est-ce avec cette envie que Matteo a quitté l'Italie, dans un autre siècle, au début des années trente? (32).

Like Schneck, thinking about today's refugees conjures thoughts of her father. Yet, while Storti has an evident interest in her father's story, it is often employed as a means to evoke other migrant stories. The narrator shows less interest in knowing exactly where her father crossed the border between Italy and France than she is has in understanding her father's legal situation, for example.

“Quelle que soit la ville, ce qui compte, c'est de savoir si, lors du passage de la frontière, quelqu'un — un policier? un douanier? un gendarme? — lui a demandé

³⁶ For more on the history and global context of the Calais Jungle see *La jungle de Calais: les migrants, la frontière et le camp* by Michel Agier et al.

ses papiers et les raisons de sa venue en France. Était-il en règle? Avait-il des papiers en règle? Avait-il déjà en poche un contrat de travail, qui lui permettrait d'entrer en France sans difficultés et d'obtenir rapidement la carte d'identité d'étranger valant permis de séjour et permis de travail? Ou bien n'avait-il qu'un visa de quelques semaines?" (39-40).

Did anyone ask to see her father's papers? Did he have papers? These are the questions that interest Storti because they get to the heart of the matter: his experience of border-crossing. Even if he didn't have papers, she points out, it wouldn't have been a problem since in 1931 one didn't yet need "un contrat de travail ainsi qu'une autorisation ministérielle de séjour avant de quitter son pays d'origine" (57). Such requirements to be "en situation régulière" were implemented the following year (*ibid*).

In gauging her father's level of ease or difficulty of entry in France, Storti seeks to determine to what degree his arrival in France shares similarities with migrants currently at Calais and other camps. Rather than make a one-to-one comparison between her family's immigration experience and the plight of undocumented migrants in Europe, which would be inappropriate considering her father's relatively smooth arrival and integration into French society, Storti instead seems to contrast the two.

"Est-ce que lui aussi, comme ces jeunes types, a dû répéter: *j'ai de la famille là-bas*? Est-ce qu'un jour, il a dû répondre à quelqu'un — des douaniers? des gendarmes? des policiers? — *j'ai de la famille là-bas*, précisant même *j'ai une soeur, un beau-frère, une nièce*? Est-ce qu'il a dû se justifier de vouloir entrer en France, au début des années 30? De vouloir y entrer ou de vouloir y travailler et y rester?" (15).

The author wonders here if at any point her father was made to plead his case the way migrants are sometimes seen to do.

By evoking, elsewhere, the disparity between her father's relatively uneventful immigration and the frequently deadly immigration of so many people drowning in the

Mediterranean and held in camps, Storti invites us to ask ourselves why it should be so arduous for them. Yes, there were camps and shantytowns of Italian and Portuguese immigrants, for example, but her own family members didn't experience them. She also contrasts her grandmother's status as undocumented with the experience of being undocumented today to show how different, indeed more difficult and stigmatized, it is for undocumented immigrants today than it was for some people only one and two generations ago.

“Ce qui semble le plus fou, me paraît, à la réflexion, le plus logique. Je n'y avais jamais pensé avant. Maintenant, plus j'y réfléchis, plus j'en ai la conviction, ma grand-mère est restée presque trente ans en situation irrégulière, elle fut, pendant ces années de vie française, une “sans-papiers”, comme l'on dit aujourd'hui dans cette langue qui généralise, avec ces mots qui ne désignent plus des individus, des figures singulières, mais des entités administratives ou plutôt que l'on place hors de l'administration, hors de la nomenclature. Une “sans-papiers”, dont la situation n'était en rien comparable à celle des femmes et des hommes que la même expression désigne maintenant, ou plutôt stigmatise, ombres errantes, ombres sans autre nom que cette absence de nom, une absence, un manque qui justifient, l'interpellation, l'enfermement, l'expulsion. Ils sont sans-papiers, ils sont [sic] ni dedans ni dehors, ni ici ni là-bas, ils finissent par n'être plus de nulle part et n'avoir nulle part où aller” (155).

Storti points to her family experience to show that in some ways immigration has become more complicated over the years much in the way Schneck asked above why refugees can't be relocated with the same efficacy as when it came to relocating French residents of Alsace-Lorraine at the start of World War II.

Of the three works discussed, Storti's is that which most audaciously and consistently insists on drawing parallels between the past and the present. By keeping most questions about her own father's emigration open-ended, by not advancing any single theory of events, Storti avoids asking the reader to accept her version of things. Rather than elicit any acquiescence from the reader regarding events which are unknown to the author herself, she asks the reader instead to consider the unconventional comparison she draws between the blind eye turned to the plight of Jews seeking asylum prior to and during the Second World War and the disdain toward today's

refugees. As Francisca Rosel says in her article, “Portrait de l’éternel immigrant dans l’*Arrivée de mon père en France* de Martine Storti,” “Martine Storti souligne en même temps les ressemblances entre l’attitude d’indifférence de certaines nations et de leurs citoyens face aux mouvements migratoires qui se produisirent au cours de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, et l’attitude d’ignorance ou de rejet qui caractérise en ce XXI^e siècle la politique en matière d’immigration des pays de l’Union Européenne, soutenue souvent par ses citoyens” (131). She shows that the Interior Ministry’s argument that accepting too many refugees would lead to racism and xenophobia echoes the argumentation by European countries in 1938 who explained that they couldn’t take Jewish refugees simply because “arrivée d’un trop grand nombre de juifs développerait l’antisémitisme” (Dreyfus).

Storti employs a triangulation between her father, migrants in camps in Calais, Lampedusa and elsewhere, and the Holocaust. The author suggests that despite the initial intellectual opposition to such a juxtaposition, there are significant parallels to acknowledge. Storti echoes what Traverso has written about the uncomfortable overlaps between refugee camps and extermination camps.

Penser le rapport d’Auschwitz à la modernité occidentale peut conduire à remettre en cause notre “ordinaire”. Les zones d’attente où sont retenus les étrangers en situation irrégulière et les demandeurs d’asile--elles ont proliféré en Europe au cours de ces dernières années--ne sont certes pas comparables aux camps nazis. Elles possèdent néanmoins, au sein de nos sociétés démocratiques, certains traits essentiels qui définissent le paradigme du camp concentrationnaire, c’est-à-dire, selon Giorgio Agamben, “un espace qui s’ouvre quand l’état d’exception commence à devenir la règle. (84)

One of Storti’s most poignant parallels involves an excerpt from Klaus Mann’s 1939 novel, *Le volcan*. Mann’s descriptions of turning refugees away at the border can be read as applying equally to WWII or to the present.

“Un flot de réfugiés tente de se répandre lors des frontières du pays martyrisé. Où vont-ils? Qui se chargera d’eux?... Des trains entiers pleins de gens qui se croyaient déjà en sécurité... sont obligés de faire demi-tour. Le pays voisin ne veut pas d’eux. Il se dit: ‘ils vont nous porter malheur! Ils vont nous affamer!’ ‘Partez! Allez-vous en!’ Alors on les chasse comme de mauvais esprits. ‘Cherchez un autre asile! Pas chez nous! Votre souffle empeste!’” (in L’Arrivée 69).

The description refers to refugees from the Third Reich but because of an absence of explicit reference to these groups, can be understood to be about refugees from Africa or the Middle East, with the principal difference being arrival by train. Mann’s parody matches the reactions of certain, if not most, of the countries that participated in the 1938 Evian Conference. The conference, held between 32 participating countries including the United States, France and Panama, was initiated by Roosevelt to discuss what to do with the Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism. Future Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974 Golda Meir recounts a similar reaction to the farce of the conference, to which she was only invited as an observer. The not-in-my-backyard tone that pervaded the conference resembles one pervasive today. Storti juxtaposes Meir’s reaction to the Evian Conference with correspondence between French officials at the time. After transcribing these letters attesting to a blatant refusal to accept more (non-rich) Jewish refugees from the Third Reich, Storti underscores the vocabulary used, phrases like “n’accepter qu’une *immigration intéressante pour nous, filtrer les réfugiés, les choisir, s’assurer de leurs ressources [...]*” (75). Words, she says, which are “des mots d’aujourd’hui” (71). She underlines the contemporaneity but it’s almost self-evident. “Est-il possible de ne pas constater la similitude des termes utilisés, des précautions prises, des excuses avancées, des alibis brandis, des mesures décidées?” (75). But the *va et vient* Storti has already established between the early-mid-twentieth century and the present has habituated the reader to making such connections themselves, having read, not very many pages back, about those who board boats off the west coast of Africa and arrive on a European beach “épouillés, affamés, assoiffés, chairs à vif, brûlures du soleil, du sel, du froid, regards vides, corps vidés, déshydratés”

(45). As Storti concludes, “Impossible en effet de ne pas remarquer que ces quelques déclarations et notes [...] tout cela dans la deuxième partie des années 30, font étrangement écho à ceux que l’on entend à l’égard de l’immigration actuelle [...]” (75).

Storti forces the reader to recognize similarities between world powers deciding which refugees to accept during the Second World War and which refugees to accept today before asking if such a *rapprochement* is even acceptable. Unlike Schneck, who as we saw put forward what were either forced comparisons or examples of involuntary multidirectional memory, Storti highlights similarities supported by concrete examples. Moreover, Storti doesn’t simply overlook the disparities between these two radically different moments in history. She acknowledges that France doesn’t refuse people who will be killed if they return to their country of origin and that we’re not facing the planned extermination of millions of human beings³⁷. She speaks what must be on many readers’ minds: “De surcroît, en faisant ce rapprochement, en osant le faire, ne risquent-on pas d’atténuer l’horreur de ce qui s’est passé pendant la seconde guerre mondiale, de masquer l’irréductibilité de la Shoah, sa spécificité, sa singularité?” (77). This acknowledgement of the banalization at risk by making comparisons to the Holocaust and of the key differences involved strengthens Storti’s argument of the similarities at hand. This is multidirectional memory at its best because it doesn’t take dissimilarity for granted. Thus, when she insists on similarities of attitudes, both individual and collective, personal and official, in the leadup to WWII and that of today, it is after already having spoken of difference.

Nous sommes dans un mélange de compassion affichée et d’indifférence réelle, de tolérance de procédures d’exception, d’acceptation de discours manipulateurs. Nous sommes dans une méconnaissance volontaire quant à la manière dont sont traités ces femmes et ces hommes. On se satisfait de ce que l’on sait, de ce que l’on a envie de savoir,

³⁷ She points out, however, that in 1938 refugees weren’t being sent to a certain death due to general ignorance of the genocide that would follow.

de ce que l'on tolère de savoir. On s'émeut de certaines images, de certains articles. Et on tourne la tête. Ne pas voir, ou faire semblant, ne pas savoir, ou faire semblant, sont nos alibis. (78)

Not only does she register similarities of attitudes, but also similarities of character. Near the end of the book, Storti describes a photo of migrants hanging off a fishing vessel taken by an aviation officer in the Italian Army. The author considers the captain of the boat who knew that 29 people were hanging from his nets but did nothing. She describes a fisherman who “n'est pas spécialement salaud” (204). She continues dressing his imagined portrait: “il ne deteste pas particulièrement les hommes accrochés au filet, il a peur, il a des gosses à nourrir, il a peur pour eux, peur pour lui [...]” (*ibid*). In other words, an ordinary man, as historian Christopher Browning has referred to Nazi soldiers. For Storti, moments like this are reminders of people's capacity for barbarity. What she describes is akin to a banal barbarity, the barbarity that arises out of fear for one's own precarity.

Storti continuously pushes up against the opposition to present-day comparisons to pre-WWII and to the Holocaust. For example, she employs the word *rafle* to refer to the roundup of migrants in Rabat. By borrowing the word *rafle* — generally associated with the specific context of WWII — she uses it “as a platform to articulate” contemporary events, to call attention to their severity. Moreover, the use of the word *rafle* signals the unacceptability of events. As historian Michel Dreyfus writes in his review of the book, “[C]e livre comporte aussi une dimension [...] d'une grande actualité : en effet, Martine Storti associe tout au long de son ouvrage et ce, dans le cadre de temporalités différentes, le destin de son père et celui des émigrés de sa génération à ceux d'aujourd'hui” (Dreyfus).

Finally, when Storti argues for the just treatment of refugees, for example, it's not simply empty virtue-signaling. Storti has actively been involved in political struggle and demonstrated a

life-long commitment to justice and equality through her work in journalism and activism. Thus, Storti succeeds in using multidirectional memory in a way that Rothberg refers to as “harnessing [...] the legacies of violence in the interests of a more egalitarian future” (21).

Kerchouche

If Schneck and Storti draw on multidirectional memory to make parallels between the past and present, Kerchouche, on the other hand, does not. Kerchouche is directly opposed to the comparisons that constitute multidirectional memory and says so explicitly in an interview for France Inter regarding *La journée nationale d'hommage aux Harkis*. When asked if she agrees with the comparison of the treatment of Harkis by France and apartheid, Kerchouche replies that she rejects the use of such comparisons. “Je ne veux pas comparer, les histoires qui n’ont rien à voir les unes avec les autres. Moi, j’essaie de trouver des mots justes” (“Kerchouche répond”). While we’ve seen that Kerchouche is interested in the correlation between the way France treated the Harkis and its treatment of minorities in general, she does not employ devices of multidirectional memory nor triangulation of cruelty. Thus, while multidirectional memory is a device used by some filiation narrative authors, it is by no means employed by all. The double temporality—at once interested in the past and the present—lends itself well to such a narrative back and forth and yet is not essential to, or even characteristic of, the filiation narrative.

Instead Kerchouche writes, as we’ve seen, in part to expand both her and the reader’s understanding of how and why men became Harkis and to show the living conditions they were subjected to in France. Kerchouche also advocates for France to recognize its role, not only in the difficulties Harkis and their families faced in the immediate aftermath of the war, but the difficulties that they continue to face and the causal link between them. The author shows that the

current challenges and disadvantages that Harki families in France face today can be traced back to their treatment during the years following their arrival in France, where they were denied the chance to improve their lives. Sequestered as they were in camps, they had no opportunity to find jobs or integrate themselves into French society. Not only were the adults not provided literacy training, but the education given to the children was found to be severely wanting, sometimes totaling as little as two hours of instruction per day. This naturally led to their further disadvantage, the consequences of which are still visible today. “Les séquelles de cette ghettoïsation sont terribles. Au fil des années, les enfants accumulent un retard scolaire de trois ou quatre ans en moyenne” (140). Pierre Bourdieu famously employed the metaphor of Maxwell’s demon³⁸ to demonstrate the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities. In this metaphor, the school system doesn’t inherently create equilibrium, or equity between students, but can instead maintain existing inequalities. Kerchouche demonstrates a particularly acute example of Bourdieu’s idea. “Privés de l’égalité des chances républicaines, les enfants ont raté leur scolarité et sont au chômage, hormis quelques réussites exceptionnelles... Toute une communauté déprimée et brisée par les camps vit en marge de la société française. Rejetée et oubliée de tous” (90). Kerchouche uses what she learns about the past to help explain what she sees in the present.

This folding over of time is easily envisionable where physical places are concerned. In other words, when multiple significant events have taken place at a single location, it’s not unusual to look for connections between the events. Take Rivesaltes, for example. As Kerchouche learns, shortly before beginning her project of retracing her family’s steps, Rivesaltes (one of the camps where her family was placed) was also used to intern 2,000 Jews before they were sent to

³⁸ In physics, Maxwell’s demon is a thought experiment in which fast and slow molecules could hypothetically be sorted by a supernatural being, thereby violating the second law of thermodynamics. Rather than let these molecules mix, the demon ensures the two remain segregated.

Auschwitz. Serge Klarsfeld referred to Rivesaltes as the “Drancy of the Free Zone.” Twenty years later, between 1962 and 1963, this same camp held nearly 10,000 Harkis and their families. As Kerchouche approaches the site, these two moments in history, WWII and the Algerian War, become inseparable. “Toutes ces images s’entrechoquent dans ma tête” (54). Kerchouche describes experiencing a “télescopage entre le passé et le présent” (95). And further on, “[l]es époques se superposent” (121). At the same time, Rivesaltes gives her the impression a void. “A l’image de cette cité en décomposition, l’existence des harkis s’est lentement désagrégée dans l’oubli” (56). Although three steles attest to the history of the place—one for the Spanish refugees in 1939, one for the Jews interned there in 1942, and one for the Harkis—the state of emptiness in which Kerchouche finds the camp is indissociable with the sinking into oblivion of the Harki experience. Due to its emptiness, anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano refers to Rivesaltes as “the very opposite” of what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire* (*The Harkis* 122). It is an empty, negative space. It is also “the very opposite” of Nora’s *lieu de mémoire* because it is indissociable from France’s colonial past, notoriously overlooked by the *académicien*. The site is clearly loaded with French history, but not the type of history prioritized by Nora and isn’t included in his collection. Rivesaltes has, however, been included in Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick and Lydie Moudileno’s important 2020 volume *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France*.³⁹

In many ways, Kerchouche is asking why the Harki relocation was so disastrous? While Kerchouche’s move to join the past and the present is primarily concerned with the Harki’s past and present, she explicitly states that an understanding of the way France treated the Harkis is necessary if one wishes to understand France’s relationship to its migrants in general, as Harkis

³⁹ As the authors show, Nora too often failed to include “references to empire, colonial legacy or (post)colonial topography” in his *lieux de mémoire* (5).

are one of many minority groups comprising the French population. In her novel, *Leïla: Avoir 17 ans dans un camp de harkis*, in which many of the characters and events are recognizable from *Mon père*, the narrator explains, “Si l’on veut comprendre les rapports que la France entretient avec ses minorités, il faut se souvenir du sort qui a été réservé aux harkis dans ce pays” (10). Understanding France’s relationship to its migrants starts by acknowledging the country’s severe shortcomings in the way it dealt with the Harkis’ arrival; it necessitates an examination of what must not be repeated and what improvements can be made. She makes an explicit argument against repeating the mistakes of the past and finding more suitable ways to deal with influxes of people. In *Mon père*, the doctor Jammes suggests a solution that would have been as helpful to the Harkis as it would be to refugee families today. “Des milliers de fermes étaient abandonnées et les campagnes vidées par l’exode rural. Il aurait suffi de donner quelques terres à cultiver aux harkis, qui étaient des paysans et des éleveurs pour la plupart. Au lieu de ça, on a financé un système qui les a détruits (149)⁴⁰. Kerchouche thus invites the meditation on the implications of a situation which is particular to Harkis in France but in which there are parallels to be made and lessons to be had regarding France’s relationship to its immigrants in general. Concern for the well-being of the newly arrived is folded into her account of her family. She knows from experience exactly what doesn’t work when it comes to accommodating displaced people. Her book is as much a warning against making similar mistakes with other refugee communities today and in the future as it is an invitation to improve on the past.

Kerchouche’s incorporation of a host of voices and stories into her historical narrative contributes to an honest representation and is a first step in rendering justice to Harkis. Traverso

⁴⁰ The idea that immigrants (and refugees) can help repopulate areas deserted due to urban migration is also found in Geneviève Brisac’s short story in *Bienvenue! 34 auteurs pour les réfugiés*. “... je leur ai demandé pourquoi ils ne repleuplaient pas leur village désertifié en invitant des familles à se reloger dans toutes ces maisons abandonnées” (72).

argues for the eventual inevitability of an understanding of the Algerian War which takes into account the multitude of voices expressing the multiple perspectives. For him, it is only a matter of time before a composite narrative is constructed, if only because France is home to the various groups implicated in the events, including those who fought for Algerian independence but also Harkis and pieds-noirs, French citizens living in Algeria. These different facets combine into a heterogeneous understanding which incorporates disparate experiences in all their complexity.

Si en Algérie l'indépendance a rapidement donné lieu à une histoire officielle de la guerre de libération, en France, l'oubli ne pouvait pas s'éterniser. Il devait, tôt ou tard, laisser la place à une écriture de l'histoire nourrie de la multiplicité des mémoires. La mémoire de la France coloniale, celle des pieds-noirs, des harkis, des immigrés algériens et de leurs enfants, et aussi celle du mouvement national algérien dont plusieurs représentants portent aujourd'hui l'héritage en exil, s'enchevêtrent dans une mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie qui empêche une écriture de l'histoire fondée sur une empathie unilatérale, exclusive. L'écriture de cette histoire ne peut se faire que sous les yeux vigilants et critiques de plusieurs mémoires parallèles, s'exprimant dans l'espace public. (35)

It is not enough for various narratives to be brought forth in the public sphere, but it is essential to find a common ground and understanding. Otherwise, the risk is of competing memories between different groups. We could think of this as the need to place particular narratives within a larger framework which helps account for their existence in the first place. In his article "Le métissage des mémoires: un défi pour la société française," Philippe Bernard articulates the importance of a historical understanding which incorporates as many groups and perspectives as possible, so that everyone may see themselves represented in that history. A better understanding of the motivating factors at play in the Algerian War, for example, will help put an end to the perpetuation of prejudice which keeps people apart rather than join them as mutually marginalized allies.

Élaborer pour les nouvelles générations une histoire commune ne revient pas à rallumer les conflits mémoriels des aînés, mais à permettre l'identification de chacun à cette histoire

dans sa complexité et ses contradictions et, au-delà, à désamorcer les haines nées d'un passé mal transmis et mal digéré. Face au risque de transmission d'une mémoire communautarisée, éclatée entre enfants de pieds-noirs, de harkis et d'immigrés, il reste à creuser l'idée d'intégrer l'histoire de l'immigration, notamment l'histoire coloniale, dans l'histoire nationale. (34)

We could think of this in terms of synchronic and diachronic narratives, where synchronic represents the concurrent realities of different groups and diachronic represents the historical factors which contributed to such fracturing of peoples. For Bernard, it is essential to incorporate the history of immigration and colonialism into the national history. He continues “Ainsi la ‘deuxième génération’ parviendra-t-elle à arrimer sa mémoire familiale à ‘l'histoire de France’” (34).

Filiation narratives such as *Mon père* can be excellent avenues for contributing to the multiplicity of memories and bringing one marginalized narrative into conversation with other marginalized narratives. Kerchouche combines two very different sources of authority: that which comes from being closely tied to the story she relays and that which comes from substantiation through research. Due to the investigative posture which presents discoveries as such, the reader has the impression of learning alongside the author, eliminating a possibly pedantic element which, in addition to the human-interest element provided by personal story, renders the history lesson both more palatable and absorbable. For Kerchouche, learning more about her father's experience and the treatment of Harkis helped clarify her thoughts and position. Telling her father's and her family's story in *Mon père* gave her a platform from which to broadcast that position.

In his introduction to *Regimes of Historicity*, François Hartog recalls Herodotus's notion of history: the interval, calculated in generations, between an injustice and its punishment or redress (1). While the writing and publication of her book cannot be considered to punish or redress the injustices her family, and indeed all Harkis, were subjected to, it is a step in that direction. It is

a point on the line between injustice of the past and its possible rectification in the future. As Kerchouche writes in the present, when there has not yet been sufficient acknowledgement of the wrongs done to Harkis in France, whether redress will take place or not remains unknown. Still, she is writing toward that future and contributing toward its eventual appearance. The passing of time has already served as the conduit for injustice and its confrontation and exposure. For Herodotus, ‘the historian’s task was to study the delays of divine vengeance, with a view of using this knowledge to identify and link up the two ends of the chain’ (1). Leaving aside the question of divine vengeance, Kerchouche’s project is aligned with floodlighting the interval between an injustice and its redress. She does this by using her family as the prism through which to reexamine a historical moment.

Conclusion

We have seen that filiation narrative authors are not uniquely concerned with the past. They do the work of investigation in order, partly, to suggest things about the present. In *History as an Art of Memory*, Patrick Hutten evokes the long-standing philosophical notion, also built upon by Maurice Halbwachs, of repetition and recollection. Whereas repetition concerns the presence of the past in the present, recollection concerns our present efforts to evoke the past. The act of recollection means to “consciously reconstruct images of the past in the selective way that suits the needs of our present situation” (xx-xxi). Filiation narratives offer such curated expositions. In other words, there is a careful selection of what is put on display. This chapter has explored the ways filiation narratives create dialogues between the present and the past and has argued that they harness the weight of the past to make claims about the present. As we’ve established, the authors employ two main strategies: 1) establishing parallels between the past and the present (Storti,

Schneck) and 2) establishing continuity and a causal link between the past and the present (Kerchouche). When it comes to making parallels, we've seen that multidirectional memory can be used to varying effects, from convincing and constructive to tenuous and tedious. In the words of Todorov, "Une fois le passé rétabli, on doit s'interroger: de quelle manière s'en servira-t-on, et dans quel but?" (33).

Parallels between the past and present are effective precisely because they are affective. Yet, multidirectional memory isn't the sole way the authors activate affects in the reader. Through the recounting of highly personal stories, filiation narratives tend to affectively stimulate emotional states of grief, loss, fear, anxiety and trauma in the reader. Do these states contribute to heightened sensitivity to the contemporary issues presented? Evoking the past is one way literature can create interest in, and eventually affective attachment to, the global issues related to immigration and refugeeism. This is done through affective impact of literary subjects and/or by drawing parallels between the Holocaust and contemporary refugee crises. In his article exploring the relationship between storytelling, affect and ethics, David Palumbo-Liu asks "How can we tell stories that motivate people to act sanely and humanely, rather than only according to a chilling bureaucratic logic that deprives others of their humanity, rights, and dignity?" (43). In trying to answer this question, Palumbo-Liu cites a speech by philosopher Richard Rorty on the subject of human rights. "Instead of trying to argue that human rights might be founded on any principle of transcultural, transhistorical commonality, Rorty focuses upon the pragmatic, contingent, and historical processing of "sad stories" that might produce in the listener or reader a sense of shared humanity on this issue or topic." (51). The goal being to elicit sympathy and a sense of obligation.

In his essay "The Pure and the Impure" in *Literary Debate: Texts and Contexts*, Denis Hollier asks how the events and the tone of 1945 France "marked [by] the advent of a politics of

reconstruction whose two main facets were purges (of wartime collaborators) and nationalizations” affected the literature of the time (4). Similarly, we may ask how the events and tone of the first two decades of the 21st century have affected and continue to affect contemporary literature. It was in the context of reconstruction that Sartre defined his literature as *engagée* and it is in the context of, among other things, a refugee crisis and renewed anti-immigration sentiments that contemporary writers are developing new ways to address these concerns.⁴¹ “For Sartre, when a writer became committed, he assumed responsibility for the ‘historicity of the present’” (Hollier 14). In Sartre’s own words, “Il est donc légitime de lui poser cette question: quel aspect du monde veux-tu dévoiler, [...] quel changement veux-tu apporter au monde par ce dévoilement? L’écrivain ‘engagé’ sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c’est changer et qu’on ne peut dévoiler qu’en projetant de changer” (Sartre, 30). This is, in a sense, acknowledging the significance of the present moment and being on the lookout for what will prove to be remarkable about this moment. What will and should be remembered and why?

In *L’écriture comme un couteau*, Ernaux states that writing is essentially a political act in that it can either contribute to changing the world for the better or to maintaining the current social order. “Écrire est, selon moi, une activité politique, c’est-à-dire qui peut contribuer au dévoilement et au changement du monde ou au contraire conforter l’ordre social, moral, existant” (74). The filiation narrative, as with any literature, has the potential to engage with complex issues of a political nature. This is perhaps doubly true when one writes about history, since as Gramsci wrote, “L’histoire est toujours contemporaine, c’est-à-dire politique...” (Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, quoted in Traverso 2005). The filiation narrative may, in fact, favor such difficult topics in that the

⁴¹ I hesitate to use the term refugee crisis, however. In his keynote speech at the 2019 NeMLA conference, Homi Bhabha argued that framing something as a crisis allows policy to be rushed and seek immediate palliative rather than seek long-term solutions. In his view, since short-term solutions to crises are politically salable, response to systemic problems becomes more and more short-sighted.

subjects have often been affected by History, with a capital H. While they differ in their degree of engagement, the texts are political in at least two ways 1) they oppose the xenophobic discourse which seeks to impose a stable French identity and do so by complicating the notion of what it means to be French and 2) they bring attention to avoidable suffering, both past and present. By complicating the notion of what it means to be French, I mean that they hold immigrant stories up to the light rather than let them be overshadowed by the dominant discourse of “Frenchness.” In the introduction to *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet explains how this discourse typically works: “The official discourse flaunts an ideal of “Frenchness” as a promise to be achieved through the mastery of the French language and cultural codes. Thus, to be “French” is to relate vertically to an ideal image of the French nation...” (2). It is also possible to think of these writers as standing in allegorically, as the children of immigrants, for other immigrants whose voices are not (yet) heard. As Rothberg writes of Marceline Loridan who shares her experience of Auschwitz in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s film *Chronique d’un été* (1961), “Given the enormous state censorship and repression that targeted opposition to the Algerian War... Marceline’s testimony may carry an added symbolic burden: she speaks as a victim whose experiences can finally be narrated and who thus stands in allegorically for those victims whose experiences cannot yet be spoken and recognized” (197).

When it comes to bringing attention to suffering, not only do they visit sites of violence, but they broadcast to the reader the human rights abuses that took place and/or are taking place there. The filiation narratives Kerchouche, Schneck and Storti have written challenge oppression and incorporate an aim to make a positive impact on society. Even if it’s a mere expansion in worldview, such a change in perspective can have larger effects. People’s worldview informs their voting, for example. To put it in the simplest terms possible, if a reader is struck by a story they

read, there is a tendency to want to share the story with others. Powerful, new or interesting ideas spread naturally, as it is common to be compelled to share such ideas.

It is even possible to see the changes that filiation narratives have contributed to. In her contribution to the abovementioned collection of postcolonial sites of memory, Susan Ireland argues that Rivesaltes has become such a central element in Harki collective memories in part due to the publication of memory works like that of Kerchouche (Ireland 230). Rivesaltes has since been recognized as the “multidimensional site of memory” that it is and became an official memorial in October 2015 with the opening of a museum. Still, it’s important to note, as Ireland does, that “The fact that the camp played a role in the Shoah provided much of the initial impetus for the creation of a memorial at Rivesaltes and its eventual transformation into an official place of memory” (228). Moreover, Kerchouche’s works are part of a wave of related writing. “Mostly published after 2000, these works constitute an important part of the memory work that followed the second generation’s activism in the political and legal spheres in the 1980s and 1990s. The texts were also published in the context of a period of official memorialization that marked the end of state amnesia regarding the fate of the harkis – an annual *Journée d’hommage national aux harkis* was established in 2001 and, as one of many regional tributes, a plaque was placed near the entrance to Rivesaltes in 1995 and a stela erected in 2001” (230). Nonetheless, she writes that “Kerchouche’s recounting of life in the camp puts it back on the map” (232).

Kerchouche, like Schneck and Storti, situates her family narrative within a broad historical context and insists on its continued relevance. As we’ve seen, the three authors make use of their own families’ experiences as examples of larger patterns or as examples of policies and treatments to be avoided, always with the question of how to properly accommodate immigrants, migrants and refugees in mind. The blending of memory and history in these texts gives the reader unique

access to the affective experience of immigration and any concomitant politics. After all, the authors grew up the children of immigrants in the midst of continuing immigration to France. In addition, the works share many common themes, including a reflection on identity and the role one's parents and ancestors play in the creation of this identity, a fathers' silence, etc. The authors have worked to restore the deteriorated family histories they've inherited and as such, enact "Heritage Repair."

Afterword

Heritage repair refers to the work narrators perform in order to restore their deteriorated family histories. Filiation narratives are laborious family portraits and filiation narrative writers, like photographers. But they are not behind the camera at the moment the shot is taken. Instead, they are adept users of self-timers and join the group before the flash goes off. Moreover, they hold up former portraits of deceased loved ones in order that they too may be included. But first negatives had to be dug up, developed and prints framed. The negatives, of course, had previously been damaged (stained, punctured, torn) so the prints bare the trace of time. Sometimes, only an eye, a nose, a cheek is visible. The photos are naturally in black and white, so no chance of knowing hair or eye color. Some of the living subjects of the portrait intentionally obscure their faces. It was hard to reach them for the reunion. Some live abroad, some left no forwarding address and some burn their correspondence. Deciding on a date, which could take a year, was reason enough for abandoning the task. Some forgot the date and arrived a month early; others had to be brought by force. Yet, there was some satisfaction to be had in this tedious *assemblage*.

In this dissertation, I have aimed to home in on an affective structure present in many of the filiation narratives I read. That affect has to do with the meaningfulness of the past when it is

brought into conversation with the present. To give structure to this thesis, I chose three works that share several characteristics in order to explore them more deeply. I chose to focus on narratives by the children of immigrants because it allowed for the exploration of a particular articulation of these themes. The past treatment of immigrant ancestry, whether favorable or unfavorable, has informed their family narratives and lives. In undertaking the filiation narrative and corroborating parental anecdotes with archival evidence and supplementary testimony substantiates, the authors bring into sharper focus either the injustices incurred by their own family or by others. The blending of memory and history in these texts gives the reader unique access to the affective experience of immigration and any concomitant politics. Moreover, these authors grew up the children of immigrants in the midst of continuing immigration to France. Seeing the mistakes of the past repeated in the present is perhaps particularly unacceptable to those previously affected by these same mistakes.

The first chapter compared and contrasted the filiation narrative to three well-known French writers from the 20th-21st centuries (Ernaux, Perec and Modiano) and to well-known, neighboring genres. The second chapter considered characteristics necessarily common to the bulk of, if not all, filiation narratives. The third chapter took a closer look at a subset of these narratives—second-generation—which shared additional characteristics. Finally, the fourth chapter explored some of the ways second-generation filiation narratives differ with regards to the ways in which they create dialogue between the past and present.

I was originally drawn to these works because of their political potential. I had been reading theorists like Todorov and Lagasnerie and believed literature was either politically constructive or not. Sociologist Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, for example, has proposed an axis by which to evaluate

the political nature of texts: the *fonctionnel / dysfonctionnel*⁴² axis. By functional, de Lagasnerie means a text that in no way challenges current systems of oppression and injustice. And by dysfunctional— or oppositional— he means a text that calls into question societal systems of domination, exploitation and violence. De Lagasnerie seems to build on what Edward Said has written about oppositional criticism.

“Were I to use one word consistently along with *criticism* (not as a modification but as an emphatic) it would be *oppositional*. If criticism is reducible neither to a doctrine nor to a political position on a particular question, and if it is to be in the world and self-aware simultaneously, then its identity is its difference from the other cultural activities and from systems of thought or of method” (Said 29).

Said goes on to list some characteristics of oppositional criticism such as, “its suspicion of totalizing concepts” and “its impatience with... orthodox habits of mind.” His conception of orthodox habits of mind is not far removed from a support of the status quo that Lagasnerie, extending to literature in general, labels “functional literature.” De Lagasnerie’s work is heavily inspired by Didier Eribon, who writes in *La société comme verdict* that when one judges a text it’s necessary to ask, “à qui, à quoi, son discours entendait-il s’opposer?” (134). Even Storti conceives of literature this way and has coined the term “écriture instrumentale” (AMP 22). “Pas de place pour la solitude, le repli, pas de place pour l’écriture. Ou plutôt écrire, oui, sans cesse, chaque jour, mais pour dire, proclamer, dénoncer, soutenir, une écriture de combat, de défense et d’attaque, une écriture instrumentale” (Storti 22). La réminiscence exemplaire (Todorov), l’écriture dysfonctionnelle (Lagasnerie), écriture instrumentale — so many terms to designate essentially the same thing: writing that seeks to inform and contribute to a better world. Yet, it’s not always possible to differentiate a work that contributes to changing the world for the better from one that simply maintains the current social order. This binary now strikes me as naïve and unnecessarily

⁴² Lagasnerie, Geoffroy de. *Penser dans un monde mauvais*. Paris: PUF, 2017.

moralizing. This conception of literature cuts too much out of the equation, like personal expression, style and beauty. While I no longer agree that all works should be judged according to political criteria, the filiation narratives we've examined here are inscribed with demonstrable political interest.

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