DISORIENTATION

France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality

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"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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Introduction

Growing up in the increasingly nationalistic environment of Vietnam in the 1940s and 1950s, the narrator of Kim Lefèvre's autobiographical novel *Métisse blanche* (1989)[1] is painfully aware of her physical difference from an imagined ideal of Vietnamese racial purity. Born from *"l'union éphémère d'une jeune Annamite et un Français"* [the ephemeral union of a young Vietnamese woman and a Frenchman],[2] she embodies the fundamental problem addressed in this book: how can identity be thought and represented outside of the oppositional categories that divide cultures, histories, languages, and races? As a mixed-race individual, Lefèvre's *métisse* bears the corporeal traces of a politically abhorrent relationship, a scandalous act of collaboration: *"je rappelais, à mon corps défendant, l'humiliante colonisation et l'arrogance du Blanc. J'étais le fruit impur de la trahison de ma mère"* [despite myself, I brought to mind the humiliations of colonization and the arrogance of the white man. I was the impure fruit of my mother's betrayal] (409).[3]

In the context of colonial Indochina, the young *métisse* is viewed as *"une monstruosité"* [a monstrosity] (14), a grotesque and unnatural juxtaposition of conflicting elements that maintain their mutual incompatibility: *"On mettait tout ce qui était mauvais en moi sur le compte du sang français qui circulait dans mes veines ... Moi aussi, je détestais ce sang que je portais. Petite fille, je rêvais d'accidents providentiels qui me videraient de ce sang maudit, me laissant pure Vietnamienne"* [Everything bad about me was chalked up to the French blood that circulated in my veins ... Even I

hated the blood that I carried. As a young girl, I dreamed of providential accidents that would rid me of that cursed blood, leaving me purely Vietnamese] (14). Far from breaking down the opposition between "French" and "Vietnamese," her *métissage* provokes anxious and often violent reassertions of difference. Her aberrant body is suppressed, humiliated, disciplined: in her early childhood alone, she is abandoned by her mother, sexually abused, and beaten. In one particularly harrowing scene, she is forced to demonstrate her loyalty to the anticolonial movement by drinking salt water until she vomits.

The narrator's bifurcated sense of identity is further complicated by her introduction to French culture and an educational path that eventually leads her to Paris. An early moment of contact with the French language occurs at the Oceanographic Institute of Nha Trang, where her mother has been hired as a cook. The director of the Institute, a large French man, takes an interest in the young *métisse*:

> *Il voulut m'initier à la langue française et, dans ce but, m'obligeait à circuler dans la grande salle, touchant et nommant les objets usuels: la soucoupe, la cuillère, le couvercle ... Je circulais, égrenant le chapelet des mots ...*
>
> *Mes leçons se poursuivirent de dîner en dîner. Nous formions un groupe insolite: d'un côté les Vietnamiennes — ma mère et mes soeurs, — menues, réservées, comme effacées contre le mur; de l'autre le directeur, géant flamboyant ... et moi dans l'espace vide entre les deux, petite abeille se posant tantôt sur un objet, tantôt sur un autre, psalmodiant ma litanie de substantifs.*
>
> [He wanted to introduce me to the French language and, to this end, made me walk around the large room, touching and naming ordinary objects: the saucer, the spoon, the lid ... I circulated, telling my rosary of words ...
>
> My lessons continued from dinner to dinner. We made up a peculiar group: on one side the Vietnamese women — my mother and my sisters — slender, reserved, unobtrusive against the wall; on the other the director, a blazing giant ... and I was in the empty space between the two, a little bee landing now on one object, now on another, chanting my litany of nouns.] (165–6)

The importance of this moment in the young narrator's life is underscored by her deployment of a religious vocabulary; indeed, at several points in the narrative, she suggests that it was her French education that "saved" her from a traumatic childhood by allowing her to begin her life anew in France. At the same time, the passage is striking for the theatrical manner in which the scene is staged: the thin Vietnamese women almost hidden

against the wall on one side of the room, the giant French man on the other. The distribution of characters in the room creates a spatial metaphor in which the narrator finds herself, as always, between the opposing poles of "French" and "Vietnamese" — figured here as the masculine power of the colonizer and the almost invisible subjectivity of the colonized women. Oddly, and in spite of the fact that the space between her family and the director is full of the objects named in her "litanie de substantifs," the narrator describes it as an *empty space* — *"l'espace vide entre les deux."* What is the status of this empty linguistic space in which she floats from object to object, herself the object of gazes both French and Vietnamese? Does its emptiness stand as another reminder of the limits of signification, of the fundamental unrepresentability of the narrator's own identity?

I evoke *Métisse blanche* because the humiliation, confusion, and pain suffered by its narrator serve as a particularly stark reminder of the need to consider historical, political, and cultural contexts when formulating theories about the nature and significance of intercultural identities. In the final decades of the twentieth century, analyses of interculturality took on an increasingly important role across a wide range of disciplines and professions, as academic theorists and multinational corporations alike attempted to comprehend the cultural ramifications of global capitalism. Examinations of immigration, transnationalism, and globalization have made invaluable contributions to our understanding of the postcolonial world, while theoretical explorations that privilege *créolité* and *métissage* have revitalized literary and cultural studies. In evoking the suffering of Lefèvre's narrator, my intent is not to deny the critical import of such recent work, but rather to underscore the extent to which celebratory readings of interculturality, which tend to focus on the postmodern, deconstructive play of postcolonial identities, may obscure the rigid and potentially traumatic conditions under which colonized subjects experienced the tensions and contradictions of intercultural identity.[4]

The diverse and fluid sites of identification currently associated with interculturality were mapped far less clearly for those individuals who found themselves — through accidents of birth, like Lefèvre's narrator, but also by virtue of class position and pedagogical/cultural formation — caught between the opposing poles of the colonial system, which sought to maintain rigid distinctions between colonizer and colonized, sovereign and subject.[5] While official statements of French policy gestured toward assimilation, the very nature of the imperial project demanded a firmly established differential hierarchy that could justify the ongoing economic

exploitation and political oppression of entire populations. The crucial difference between the French and their colonial "others" was articulated and reinforced through discursive forms and material strategies that included legal codes, urban planning, and pseudo-scientific race theory, as well as travel narratives and literary texts that trafficked in racial and cultural stereotypes. Anti-colonial resistance movements, as *Métisse blanche* makes clear, were themselves not immune to binary thinking and cultural essentialism; indeed, the rhetoric of such movements often called for a return to an idealized indigenous culture that could restore ties to an untainted, precolonial past. Against this backdrop of polarization and enforced difference, it is hardly surprising that interculturality remained an elusive concept in French Indochina, as in other regions of the colonized world.[6] Nonetheless, intercultural subjects did emerge out of the "contact zones" of empire,[7] often marked by what one contemporary observer described as the *"angoisse d'une jeunesse ballottée entre deux cultures, deux civilisations, deux formes de vie"* [anguish of a young generation tossed between two cultures, two civilizations, two ways of life].[8] These individuals struggled within and against narratives of cultural authenticity that left little room for multiple allegiances and identifications; their attempts to comprehend and express the intercultural condition are the subject of this book.

Disorientation examines representations of cultural hybridity that span nearly half a century, a period marked by major shifts in Franco-Vietnamese relations. Nguyen Phan Long's *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* (1921), one of the earliest works of Vietnamese francophone literature, was published within a few years of the founding of the Constitutionalist Party of Cochinchina, in which its author played a leading role. Albert de Teneuille and Truong Dinh Tri's *Ba-Dam* (1930), a collaborative text that announces itself as a *roman franco-annamite* [Franco-Vietnamese novel],[9] reflects the policies of Franco-Vietnamese "collaboration and harmony" supported by the French at the height of the colonial period. Pham Duy Khiem's *Nam et Sylvie* (1957) appeared shortly after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, while its author was serving as Vietnamese Ambassador to France, and Pham Van Ky's *Des Femmes assises ça et là* (1964) was published as the political and literary landscapes of France were being redrawn in the wake of decolonization and the rise of the *nouveau roman*. Written during and just after the colonial period by authors working in Vietnam as well as in France, these four texts are composed in a variety of literary styles and genres, including epistolary and diary novels, third-person narratives, and

stream-of-consciousness interior monologues. Despite these differences, all of the novels examined in *Disorientation* share a profound concern with the problem of interculturality, which their authors dramatize and interrogate through the narrative foregrounding of characters who must negotiate difficult homecomings after years spent in France or in French schools. In their explorations of intercultural identity, the authors offer a range of responses to the following essential question: can the intercultural subject be understood as more than a site of cultural contestation, as anything other than a confrontation between incompatible binary opposites?

As members of the colonized population, the Vietnamese authors discussed in this book grappled with many of the same issues as their compatriots, negotiating various political responses to French domination while attempting to articulate new forms of identity that could encompass the radical changes taking place in their society. Under the twin pressures exerted by colonial rule and the growth of the revolutionary anti-colonial movement, Vietnamese culture underwent a number of profound transformations in the first half of the twentieth century.[10] The very nature of social interaction was thrown into question as nationalist revolutionaries challenged Confucian class and gender hierarchies. Agrarian communities centered around villages were often fractured by the migration of workers to factories and industrialized urban areas, where the French colonial economy demanded an easily exploitable proletariat.[11] The relationship of the Vietnamese to their written language was fundamentally altered through the colonial regime's suppression of traditional character schools and the widespread introduction of *quoc ngu*, an alphabetically-based system that eventually became a valuable tool in the dissemination of anti-colonial propaganda.[12] The effects of these and other changes were felt throughout Vietnamese society, and the anxieties provoked by such cultural turbulence were certainly shared by the writers examined in the chapters that follow.

In certain ways, however, the experiences of these writers set them apart from the vast majority of Indochinese subjects, whose exposure to the language and culture of France remained minimal even at the height of the colonial period. By 1936, for example, less than ten percent of the Indochinese population was bilingual.[13] Very few students enrolled in the *écoles franco-indigènes* [Franco-Vietnamese (literally, Franco-Native) schools] were allowed to advance beyond the lowest levels; an even smaller group, selected on the basis of factors that included previous academic

success as well as economic and social position, was allowed to pursue higher education in French schools in Indochina or France.[14] The Vietnamese writers who began to produce literary texts in French in the early part of the twentieth century emerged from this small and relatively elite group of bilingual students; professionally, they tended to be teachers, civil servants, journalists, and politicians.

In spite of the increasing institutionalization of francophone studies in American and European universities, Vietnamese literature in French remains remarkably absent on the levels of both curriculum and research. To the extent that a francophone "canon" can be said to exist, it has been constructed largely around African and Caribbean writers, while Vietnamese authors — even those whose work was received with high critical praise, such as Pham Duy Khiem and Pham Van Ky — are infrequently taught, and rarely discussed even in wide-ranging surveys of francophone literature.[15] The notable exception to this trend is Jack A. Yeager's groundbreaking study, *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism*.[16] This work offers detailed summaries and thematic analyses of dozens of novels, as well as a painstakingly researched appendix containing invaluable biographical and bibliographical information on thirteen novelists.[17] While Yeager is attentive to the intercultural dynamics at work behind the production of Vietnamese literature in French,[18] the scope of his project does not allow for sustained readings and close textual analyses: "Because of the newness of the subject," he writes, "the analytical task faced by a researcher in this area must be primarily one of definition and description. It is necessary to delimit this literary corpus and decide where its cohesiveness, if any, lies."[19]

Disorientation seeks to push the study of Vietnamese francophone literature beyond the critical groundwork established by *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, to move beyond the definition and description of a literary corpus toward a deeper textual engagement with specific novels. My approach to these novels combines rigorous literary analysis with cultural and historical inquiry. Throughout this book, I have attempted to engage with the novels under consideration both as highly self-conscious creative works and as reflections of specific colonial and postcolonial situations. I have found it helpful, on occasion, to read them in dialogue with literary critics whose work is not ordinarily associated with colonial and postcolonial studies, not to impose Western models of reading upon them but to respond to and elucidate certain aspects of texts written in often explicit engagement with European literary traditions.

At the same time, the close readings that form the core of the book are inflected by historical and cultural considerations, and informed by a variety of primary documents written by French and Vietnamese authors — training manuals for colonial administrators, literary texts, works of colonial propaganda, tourist guidebooks, and textbooks from colonial schools. While a full account of Vietnamese culture and the history of colonial Indochina would fall far outside the scope of this book, the readings that follow are engaged in crucial ways with extra-literary contexts, and demand some familiarity with certain aspects of the history of the colonial period in Indochina, as well as different formulations of Vietnamese culture. Rather than presenting all of this material in a separate section, I have chosen to integrate relevant cultural and historical information into the readings themselves, working to create contextualized analyses through which I argue that Vietnamese francophone literary representations of intercultural identity were intimately linked, in complex and often disturbing ways, to the prevailing political and cultural conditions out of which they were produced.

All of the authors studied in this book attended French schools in Indochina, and some in the metropole; not surprisingly, the French school emerges as a privileged site of intercultural formation in their novels. *Disorientation* opens with an examination of colonial educational policy in Indochina, and the effects of French education upon those colonized subjects who turned to francophone literary production as a means of expression in the early part of the twentieth century. I focus first on the pedagogical theories put forth by Eliacin Luro, whose *Cours de l'administration annamite* (1875) was used to train aspiring colonial administrators at Saigon's *collège de stagiaires*. According to Luro's proposals, the key element in successful French domination was a colonial educational system that would combine "traditional" Vietnamese instruction with French schooling. Such a system, he believed, would create a class of cultural translators, intercultural subjects whose role in the imperial project was clear: "*diriger sous notre surveillance, sous notre contrôle, sous notre inspection, le peuple vaincu*" [to guide under our surveillance, under our control, the vanquished population].[20] In the decades following Luro's death in 1877, the French sought to position colonial education within a structure of prestige and power, indelibly marking those few Vietnamese who, by virtue of class, geography, and ability, were allowed access to its upper ranks. Later in the chapter, I consider the peculiar position of these individuals — taught to revere and

even identify with a culture that nonetheless held them apart as inferior — through an examination of a number of Vietnamese francophone texts concerned with the colonial classroom.

Nguyen Phan Long's *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, the focus of my second chapter, also takes as its subject the effects of French education on Vietnamese students — specifically addressing the potential dangers of French education for Vietnamese women. This curious novel is written in the form of a journal kept by Hai, a young woman from Cochinchina who returns to the village of her birth after eight years spent at a French school in Saigon. The journal documents Hai's interculturality, a state marked by a sense of alienation from Vietnamese culture, along with a particular scorn for the role prescribed for women in Confucian philosophy. Toward the end of the novel, after having narrowly avoided suicide, Hai emerges from a state of intercultural confusion and seems to be fully reintegrated into her native culture. Rejecting the political and social ideas received through her French education, she closes her journal a few days before her wedding.

In its suggestion that Vietnamese men may benefit from exposure to a French cultural formation that can only be toxic for Vietnamese women, Nguyen Phan Long's novel clearly engages in what Uma Narayan has recently termed "the 'selective labeling' of certain changes and not others as symptoms of 'Westernization'."[21] In *Ba-Dam*, Albert de Teneuille and Truong Dinh Tri's collaborative *roman franco-annamite*, the dangers of interculturality apply equally to men. This novel, which I examine in Chapter Three, recounts the breakdown and ultimate failure of the Franco-Vietnamese marriage between Janine Lassiat and Nguyen Van Sao, a law student living in Paris. When the novel opens, Sao has lived in France for six years, and finds himself struggling to come to terms with his intercultural identity. Soon after their wedding, Sao and his wife travel to his native village in Cochinchina, where their cultural identities seem to shift into the phantasmatic realm of colonial stereotypes, and where barriers created by a rigidly-defined structure of cultural difference eventually prove to be insurmountable.

As these brief descriptions indicate, the terms within which Vietnamese francophone authors framed their investigations of interculturality during the high colonial period often echoed French claims about racial and cultural identity and difference. The stories they tell suggest that crossing cultural boundaries leads to great unhappiness or even death, and that intercultural subjectivity is always vulnerable to the threat

of atavistic return to a unitary cultural origin. Given that *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* and *Ba-Dam* were written by authors active in collaborationist local politics — at a time, moreover, when the French were quick to censor and punish expressions of discontent — their avoidance of explicit denunciations of colonial hierarchies of difference is not surprising. What does shock, from a postcolonial perspective, is the extent to which these novels reiterate racist colonial stereotypes in their descriptions of the minds and bodies of Vietnamese characters. These descriptions challenge assumptions about cultural self-representation and raise difficult questions about the political import of the novels themselves. Do the ignorant *nha que* [peasants] and degenerate opium addicts who inhabit the pages of Nguyen Phan Long and Truong Dinh Tri's novels reinforce the authority of colonial discourse? Or do these reinscriptions of colonialist stereotypes produce the sort of hybridity that Homi Bhabha defines in *The Location of Culture* as "the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects"?[22] In my readings, I argue that these narratives of intercultural confusion put essentialist notions of culture into question even as they seek to reassert the ultimate impermeability of cultural boundaries. While the novels could not be termed "resistant" in any straightforward sense (the status of *Ba-Dam* is all the more complex, given the collaborative nature of its production), their apparent faith in a model of identity that finds the originary and univocal "truth" of culture within the racialized body cannot be taken at face value; instead, it must be read alongside other textual currents that point toward an understanding of culture as *performance*, as a matter of costumes to be worn and lines to be learned and repeated. These currents often work to unsettle the novels' explicit claims about identity, highlighting the power of colonial stereotypes to establish the contours of both cultural performance and cross-cultural comprehension.

In the final chapters of *Disorientation*, I turn to two novels written in the early postcolonial period, both of which are deeply engaged with questions of history and memory, language and writing, culture and identity. Pham Duy Khiem's *Nam et Sylvie*, published during the crucial period of transition immediately following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, was written in part during the author's term as Vietnamese ambassador to France. Like *Ba-Dam*, *Nam et Sylvie* takes as its subject the unraveling of an interracial relationship between a Vietnamese man and a French woman. The story is recounted by Nam himself, who gives shape to a generically hybrid narrative in which his first-person voice alternates

with passages taken from old journals and excerpts from letters exchanged by the couple. Pieced together from these textual remains, the narrative is further complicated by the temporal and spatial disjunctions between the events presented, taking place in Paris in the early 1930s, and the retrospective account of Nam, who reassembles the story in Vietnam over twenty years later. In Chapter Four, I scrutinize the novel's doubled narrative subjectivity, as well as the curious nature of Nam's nostalgia. The emotional force of the novel, I argue, resides not only in the retrospective gaze of its postcolonial narrator, but also in the proleptic nostalgia of the younger Nam, a colonial subject always aware of the future in which his present will be past. Within a framework that shuttles between past and present, France and Vietnam, Nam translates a different kind of narrative — one that unsettles French colonialist nostalgia and undermines efforts to reinterpret willfully the driving force behind colonial domination as *une politique de l'amour*.

In Chapter Five, I consider Pham Van Ky's *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, a text whose narrative complexity and highly inventive use of language and writing reflects the internal divisions and ontological contradictions of the intercultural subject. An occasionally bewildering blend of autobiography, fiction, and philosophy, *Des Femmes assises ça et là* takes the form of an intricate interior monologue related by a Vietnamese writer and former student living in Paris who finds himself caught between his obsessive attachments to a number of French women and his filial duty toward his mother, who near the beginning of the novel sends him a telegram from Vietnam stating simply that she is waiting for him so that she may die. Locked inside his apartment, the narrator sits at his typewriter, spinning out a complex web of language that revolves, like the trigrams of the *I Ching*, around a central concept that he terms the *signification d'ensemble* — the meaning that emerges only when the constituent elements of a system are considered in light of their interdependent relationships. Through a variety of thematic, narrative, and even typographical maneuvers, the narrator evokes the paradoxical simultaneity of the *signification d'ensemble*, cycling through a series of sustained meditations on an assortment of haunting images: coins landing on both sides at once, breaths simultaneously inhaled and exhaled, bodies whose parts are split between Europe and Asia, yet remain somehow intact. Many of the novel's most striking moments arise from the narrator's relentless interrogation of the very act of writing itself, which remains the site of an ongoing cultural negotiation between the ideogrammatic characters

remembered from his childhood and the alphabetic writing system imposed upon him by the French. In my discussion of *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, I attempt to trace some of the ways in which the novel approaches the historically charged opposition between characters and letters; here, as elsewhere, the narrator keeps both terms in play, opening up the possibility of a mode of multiple meaning in which a single typographical mark could signify simultaneously as an ideogram and a letter. Throughout the novel, the narrator's efforts to comprehend and express the elusive structure of the *signification d'ensemble* are intimately linked to his ongoing search for a model through which to represent his own intercultural identity in all its complexity — singular *and* plural, encompassing difference and even contradiction. To read *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, I argue, is to follow its narrator into the paradoxical simultaneity of the *signification d'ensemble* and to face the challenge of rethinking cultural difference.

Afterword

Soon after publishing *Métisse blanche*, Kim Lefèvre wrote a second autobiographical narrative, entitled *Retour à la saison des pluies* (1990). Divided into two sections, this text begins with *"Le passé resurgi,"* a description of the profound impact of the first book on its author's life: a popular success, *Métisse blanche* also generated enough critical interest to earn Lefèvre an invitation to appear on Bernard Pivot's literary talk show *Apostrophes*.[1] Lefèvre became a celebrity of sorts, sought out by other immigrant women who had moved to Paris from Vietnam. For the first time — and after some thirty years of absence — she began to consider seriously the possibility of a return to the country of her birth. "Le retour," the second section of *Retour à la saison des pluies*, presents the narrative of this return, during which Lefèvre is reunited with her mother and sisters and revisits many of the important sites of her past.

Given the traumatic nature of her childhood, it is hardly surprising that Lefèvre's decision to return to Vietnam is accompanied by considerable anxiety. Before leaving Paris, she has an unsettling dream in which she finds herself waiting for her mother in a dark and deserted street. Suddenly, a figure rises up out of the mist:

> *Avec une lenteur extrême, la dame pivote sur elle-même et me fait face. Son visage est sans relief, lisse comme la paume de la main. Je découvre que ce n'est pas ma mère mais une inconnue. C'est une femme blonde avec des yeux exagérément bridés et des pommettes saillantes. Son regard, à fleur de peau, est*

vide de toute expression. Elle m'adresse un sourire inquiétant. Une indicible terreur s'empare de moi, je pousse un long hurlement. L'image de la dame se dissout dans le brouillard ...

[With extreme slowness, the woman turns to face me. Her face is flat, smooth like the palm of a hand. I realize that it is not my mother but a stranger. It is a blonde woman with exaggeratedly slanted eyes and raised cheekbones. Her eyes, flush with her skin, are empty of all expression. She gives me a troubling smile. An unspeakable terror seizes me, I let out a long scream. The image of the woman dissolves into the fog ...][2]

Lefèvre is terrified by the uncanny incongruity of the unknown woman's features, and by the peculiar blankness of her expression. Embodying an exaggeratedly disjunctive *métissage*, this "*inconnue*" can be read as the nightmarish embodiment of Lefèvre's own self-image, an image distorted by her early internalization of political and racial discourses within which her corporeal identity could be articulated only as a monstrous juxtaposition of conflicting elements.

"*Ma personnalité*" [My personality], Lefèvre writes, "*est constituée de deux couches successives: vietnamienne pendant mon enfance, française par la suite. Parfois elles s'entremêlent mais la plupart du temps elles sont strictement cloisonées*" [is made up of two successive layers: Vietnamese during my childhood, French later. Sometimes they mix but mostly they are strictly partitioned off] (122). The dictionary defines *personnalité* as "*ce qui caractérise une personne dans son unité, sa singularité*" [that which characterizes a person in her or his unity, her or his singularity]; at the heart of Lefèvre's "singularity" lies a fundamental division, a split between that which is Vietnamese and that which is French. Written over half a century after *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* and *Ba-Dam*, published in a decade marked by globalization and transnationalism, *Retour à la saison des pluies* seems structured by the same rigid notions of racial and cultural identity that haunt the pages of these earlier texts. For Lefèvre, the transition to a postcolonial world did not bring in its wake a resolution to the intercultural conflict that fissured her childhood. The problems of identity and difference that shaped all of the novels considered in this book linger on, even as cybergurus proclaim that the Internet "will spread to the far reaches of Earth and bring humanity closer together" as it "breaks down geographic and cultural boundaries."[3]

Colonial domination in Vietnam, as elsewhere, was dependent upon the maintenance of clear distinctions between categories of identity.

Nguyen Phan Long and Truong Dinh Tri, both writing in Vietnam at the height of the French colonial regime, produced fictions that reinforced these distinctions through their treatment of interculturality as a pathological condition. And yet, through the very positing of interculturality as a state that must be suppressed, these novels inevitably reflect back upon the ways in which cultures are constituted through selective processes of construction and exclusion. Rather than exploring the potentially productive nature of these processes, both texts reassert structures of identity built around imagined ideals of racial and cultural purity. As I tried to show in my readings, however, these reassertions are themselves fraught with anxiety, undermined by moments at which the texts reveal too clearly the discursive underpinnings of apparently "natural" identities. In a more subtle, oblique fashion, the complex narrative framework of Pham Duy Khiem's *Nam et Sylvie* unsettles both the colonialist desire for naturalized racial and cultural differences, and a post-1954 metropolitan nostalgia that sought to rewrite French colonial history.

If, of all the authors examined in this book, Pham Van Ky comes closest to a sustained rethinking of the cultural divisions and binary oppositions at the heart of the colonial encounter, I would argue that the success of his project arises precisely from his willingness to engage with cultural difference *on a textual level.* In *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, he attempts to write a different kind of text, one whose intercultural origins can be traced at every level of form and content. Instead of reproducing a structure of identity based upon cultural authenticity and racial purity, his narrator struggles to represent the contradictory simultaneity of his intercultural condition. The productive possibilities of this condition are explored through a narrative that refuses to choose one side over the other in the divide between France and Vietnam. The very words of Pham Van Ky's text, the letters and typographical signs that appear on its pages, demand a reading open to multiple registers of signification.

At the same time, *Des Femmes assises ça et là* leaves several disturbing questions unanswered. Why does the narrator choose not to return to Vietnam to comfort his dying mother? Is the success of his textual project — the investigation into the *signification d'ensemble* of his intercultural identity — dependent upon a resistance to this return? Why does the narrator's voice disappear at the end of the text, replaced by letters written by a young French girl who is herself dead by the time her letters are received? It could be argued that the introduction of a second narrative voice merely serves to underscore the text's move away from a rigidly

singular form of identity, and that the dead Eliane lives on insofar as her words are reproduced in the novel. Nonetheless, the final pages of the text are striking in their insistence upon the fragility of the narrating subject — particularly since Eliane's letters are themselves unfinished, their final word ruptured by an ellipsis marking the moment of her death. If Pham Van Ky presents a radically different approach to the representation of interculturality than that of his literary predecessors, the ambiguous ending of his novel once again puts into question the very possibility of such representation.

In a celebrated speech published as *Eloge de la Créolité*, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant envisioned a new form of humanity in which identities would be no longer be constructed around singular points of reference:

> *De plus en plus émergera une nouvelle humanité ... Le fils, né et vivant à Pékin, d'un Allemand ayant épousé une Haïtienne, sera écartelé entre plusieurs langues, plusieurs histoires, pris dans l'ambiguïté torrentielle d'une identité mosaïque. Il devra, sous peine de mort créative, la penser dans toute sa complexité.*
>
> [More and more, a new humanity will emerge ... The son, born and living in Beijing, of a German who has married a Haitian, will be torn apart by many languages, many histories, caught in the torrential ambiguity of a mosaic-like identity. He will have to think this through this identity in all its complexity, under pain of creative death.][4]

This description is striking less for its eulogistic quality than for the underlying violence of its depiction of the intercultural subject: the torrential ambiguity, the evocation of the torture of *écartèlement*, drawing and quartering. For the *créolistes*, this subject is part of an emergent form of humanity, signaling a future in which interculturality will become the global norm. As we have seen, however, the challanges posed by interculturality are not limited to the postmodern age of globalisation; colonialism, too, created its "*jeunesse ballottée entre deux cultures, deux civilisations, deux formes de vie*" [young generation tossed bewteen two cultures, two civilizations, two ways of life].[5] In writing *Disorientation*, I hope to have contributed to the ongoing and crucial project of theorizing intercultural identity *dans toute sa complexité*.

Notes

Introduction

1 On the generic status of this text, which Lefèvre herself has called a novel, see Jack A. Yeager, "Blurring the Lines in Vietnamese Fiction in French: Kim Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche*," in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, eds. Green et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 210–26.

2 Kim Lefèvre, *Métisse blanche* (Paris: Barrault, 1989), 13. Subsequent references will be given in the main text. Except where otherwise noted, all translations in this book are my own.

3 For more on the difficult position of mixed-race children in colonial Indochina, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochine: la colonisation ambiguë, 1858–1954* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1994), 183–4, and Françoise Vergès, "Métissage, discours masculin et déni de la mère," in *Penser la créolité*, eds. Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1995), 69–83. See also Ann Laura Stoler's fascinating discussion of a late nineteenth-century legal case involving the citizenship status of a mixed-race boy in Haiphong, in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 85–7.

4 In *Nationalists and Nomads*, Christopher L. Miller writes of the need to "offset (or complement) a trend that has overtaken the field of non-European literature as it is studied and discussed in the United States: the 'postcolonial' has overshadowed the colonial in the general consciousness." In uncovering colonial discourses surrounding race and culture in French Indochina, and in attempting to understand Vietnamese francophone literary responses to these discourses, I hope to have contributed to the project of reinterpreting old essentialisms without falling into

the camp of the "oppositional critics" Françoise Lionnet describes in *Postcolonial Representations*. These critics, she writes, view the history of colonization to be marked by "an 'alienating' contact between cultures, one in which the dominant group names and circumscribes the subjected one, instilling a colonized or victimized mentality into the latter." While some of the authors studied in this book explicitly embraced a "colonized" or certainly collaborative stance, their works remain fascinating precisely to the extent that they put into question the apparently self-assured cultural "truths" that structured Franco-Vietnamese relations in colonial Indochina. Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2; Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 18.

5 I do not mean to imply that these two fields of potential indeterminacy — the racial and the cultural — are themselves in an oppositional relationship. Indeed, the categories of "race" and "culture" are intimately linked in the colonial context, as Stoler and others have argued. In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, she explores the fraught intersection between colonial discourses of race and culture, highlighting in their interplay "a tension between a belief in the immutability and fixity of racial essence and a discomforting awareness that racial categories were porous and protean at the same time." Stoler continues with a claim that resonates with the notion of racial/cultural atavism deployed by Nguyen Phan Long in *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* (see Chapter Two): "Moreover, the essences that defined colonized and colonizer were asymmetric. Thus Javanese or Vietnamese might at any moment revert to their natural indigenous affiliations, while a Dutch essence was so fragile that it could unwittingly transform into something Javanese." See Stoler, 97–8.

6 In her recent study of colonial Indochina and the work of Marguerite Duras, Jane Winston discusses the particular difficulty of living in racial and cultural borderzones within the context of "a liminal situation that was shaped by and subject to the pressures of French colonial rule." See Jane Bradley Winston, *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 97.

7 I borrow the notion of the colonial "contact zone" as a site of cultural exchange shaped by uneven power relations from Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

8 Francisque Vial, *Le Problème humain de l'Indochine* (Paris: Delagrave, 1939), 53.

9 As a part of French Indochina, Vietnam was divided into three administrative zones: in the north, Tonkin; in the center, Annam; and in the south, Cochinchina. The term "Annamite," however, was generally used by the French to refer to all Vietnamese people and things, not only those from Annam; similarly, "Annam" often referred to all of Vietnam. In my translations, I have followed the example of Truong Buu Lam, expressed in *Colonialism Experienced*: "In this book I use *Vietnamese* to translate the word *Annamites* every time I feel that that word

designates the inhabitants of the entire Vietnam. I use the other names for the inhabitants of each of the divisions of Vietnam when they designate specifically the inhabitants of the particular regions of French Indochina, that is, Tonkinese for northern Vietnamese, Annamites for central Vietnamese, and Cochinchinese for southern Vietnamese." I have also followed his example in deciding not to include the diacritical marks used in written Vietnamese to indicate vowel and tone differences. Vietnamese names and words appearing in the texts under consideration did not uniformly appear with diacritical marks, and I have chosen to maintain the tension implied by the imprecise relationship between written signs in francophone texts and their Vietnamese referents. See Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.

10 For a detailed study of the political issues and cultural pressures facing the Vietnamese population during the interwar years, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

11 A brief discussion of colonial urbanization, and of the proletarianization of Vietnamese peasants under the French regime, can be found in Lea E. Williams, *Southeast Asia: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 149–152, 163–166.

12 This shift from characters to alphabet is one of the major preoccupations of the narrator of Pham Van Ky's *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five. For a thorough and immensely readable history of French efforts to exploit the uneasy relationships among Chinese, Vietnamese, and French, as well as between *chu nom* (the character-based system for writing Vietnamese) and *quoc ngu*, see John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977).

13 Pierre Bandon, "Situation du français dans les trois états d'Indochine," in *Le Français hors de France*, ed. Albert Valdman (Paris: Champion, 1979), 664. Bandon estimates that of an Indochinese population of approximately twelve million, some 930,000 were bilingual in 1935–36.

14 See Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 26–30.

15 A recent survey of francophone literature published by Oxford University Press, for example, makes no mention of Vietnamese literature, despite the otherwise admirable breadth of its coverage. See Belinda Jack, *Francophone Literature: An Introductory Survey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

16 Jack A. Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1987). In addition to Yeager's book, a handful of articles have appeared, as well as three Ph.D. dissertations: Nguyen Hong Nhiem's "L'Echiquier et l'antinomie je/moi come signe et substance du conflit Occident/Extrême-Orient dans les oeuvres de Pham Van Ky," Ph.D. diss (University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 1982), Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen's "Between East and West: A Study of Selected Works by Vietnamese Francophone Writers from 1930 to 1990," Ph.D. diss. (Oxford

University, 1993), and Sharon Julie Lim-Hing's "Vietnamese Novels in French: Rewriting Self, Gender and Nation," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1993).

17 The continued importance of Yeager's work is clearly demonstrated in Hatier's recently published reference volume on the francophone novel, which relies heavily upon *The Vietnamese Novel in French* in its discussion of Vietnamese francophone literature. See Charles Bonn, Xavier Garnier, and Jacques Lecarme, eds., *Littérature francophone 1: Le Roman* (Paris: Hatier, 1997), 99–106.

18 See, in particular, Yeager's chapter on "Initiation and Confrontation: Vietnamese Culture and the Clash with the West," in *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 63–90.

19 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 6. It should be noted that in the years since the publication of his book, Yeager has continued to write on Vietnamese francophone literature, particularly the work of Kim Lefèvre. See in particular "Blurring the Lines," and "Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison des pluies*: Rediscovering the Landscapes of Childhood," *L'Ésprit créateur* XXXIII, 2 (1993), 47–57.

20 Eliacin Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite* (Saigon: n.p., 1875), 761.

21 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23.

22 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.

Chapter 1

1 For an important study of the assimilation/association debate as it was waged around the turn of the century, see Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

2 As Gwendolyn Wright points out in her study of French colonial urban policy, "the two policies and their advocates were often closer together, in principles and practices, than most commentators acknowledged. Both approaches were fundamentally variations on the colonial exercise of power over a subject people." Milton Osborne has called the question of assimilation versus association "a false debate," adding that "the controversy's existence has obscured the fact that a more fundamental belief in assimilation governed almost all French activities in Indochina." See Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 74, and Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia: Rule and Response (1859–1905)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 34. For a brief discussion of Vietnamese perspectives on the assimilation vs. association debate in the early twentieth century, see Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 77–9.

3 See Jacques Thobie et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale 1914–1990* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 14–6, 32–7. In fact, as Gail Paradise Kelly has noted, the French history curriculum taught in Franco-Vietnamese schools "avoided the French revolution of 1789, the Paris Commune, or any French liberal or revolutionary heritages." Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1918 to 1938," Ph.D. diss. (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975), 179–80.

4 For more detailed biographical information on Luro, see H. de Bizemont, "Notice sur l'auteur," in Eliacin Luro, *Le Pays d'Annam. Etude sur l'organisation politique et sociale des Annamites, par E. Luro, Lieutenant de Vaisseau, Inspecteur des Affaires Indigènes en Cochinchine*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897), i–v; see also Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia*, 43ff.

5 The ultimately unsuccessful mission of the Mekong expedition was to trace a trade route that could directly link Saigon with China's Szechuan province. For brief accounts of Garnier and of the impact of the Mekong expedition, see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 91–4; Jean Meyer et al, *Histoire de la France coloniale: Des origines à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), 491–2; and Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy 1870–1925* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1963), 421–3. The most valuable first-hand account of the expedition remains Garnier's own *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine effectué par une commission française présidée par Monsieur le capitaine Doudart de Lagrée*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1873); reprinted in an abridged edition, ed. Jean-Pierre Gomane (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1985). Lagrée himself wrote of the impracticability of the Mekong route in a report published in the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* (Paris: June 1880).

6 Eliacin Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 29.

7 Bizemont, "Notice sur l'auteur," iv.

8 A new edition of this book was published twenty years after Luro's death, accompanied by a biographical note that describes his death in terms that reveal much about French anxiety over colonial contagion: "*En 1876, Luro rentra de nouveau en France, mais il avait dépassé les limites des forces humaines et rapportait en lui le germe de ces terribles maladies de Cochinchine qui ne pardonnent pas. ... nul mieux que lui ne pouvait décrire le sol et la population de notre belle mais cruelle colonie; il l'avait aimée jusqu'à en mourir*" [In 1876, Luro returned to France again, but he had surpassed the limits of human strength and brought back within him the germ of those terrible and unforgiving illnesses of Cochinchina. ... no one could describe the land and the people of our beautiful but cruel colony better than he; he had loved it so much he died from it]. Bizemont, "Notice sur l'auteur," cited above, v.

By the turn of the century, when this passage was written, the trope of tropical Vietnam as a site of lethargy, infection, and death — an environment stunting the mental and physical growth of the Vietnamese and endangering the health of the French — was well-established in colonial writing on the region. See, for example, Paul Giran, *Psychologie du peuple annamite: Le caractère national. L'évolution historique, intellectuelle, sociale, et politique* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Editeur, 1904), 23, 25: "*L'infériorité physique des Annamites est sans doute le résultat de l'action prolongée du climat indo-chinois ... Sous un climat dévorant qui excite les nerfs jusqu'à l'épuisement, qui active la circulation du sang et la combustion animale, l'homme d'Annam mûrit plus tôt et vieillit plus rapidement que les habitants des zones tempérées*" [The physical inferiority of the Vietnamese is perhaps the result of the prolonged effects of the Indochinese climate ... In a ravenous climate that stimulates the nerves to the

point of exhaustion, that speeds up the circulation of blood and animal combustion, the Vietnamese matures earlier and ages more rapidly than the inhabitants of temperate zones]. For an overview of the recurrent anxieties and obsessions found in fictional representations of Vietnam in French writing of the colonial period, see Milton Osborne, *Fear and Fascination in the Tropics: A Reader's Guide to French Fiction on Indochina* (Madison, WI: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1986); for more on European perceptions of the physical dangers posed by colonial climates, see Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 61–78, 105.

9 This oversize volume, available for consultation at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, contains close to one thousand pages of charts, tables, and handwritten text.

10 Bizemont reports that it was Luro's secretaries who lithographed the handwritten pages of *Cours de l'administration annamite*. Bizemont, "Notice sur l'auteur," v.

11 Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 757–8.

12 Writing about the 1920s and 1930s, Nicola Cooper clarifies the ideological force of this mediation as it became a central element of colonial educational policy in Indochina: "Educating the colonised is to gain privileged access to (and ultimately ownership of) their culture, heritage and national history ... Indigenous peoples of Indochina were taught a limited amount about their own culture and their own countries. What they were taught about their own history was clearly a metropolitan view of that history. For school manuals rewrote the history of Indochina in such a way as to emphasise the beneficial influence of French colonialism, and the altruistic motives which purportedly lay behind imperial gestures. These narratives operate principally around an axis which contrasts former disorder, poverty and susceptibility to aggression, with present order, progress and prosperity under French protection. In school manuals, Indochina was thus totally defined by the presence/absence of the colonising nation." See Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001), 52, 58–9.

13 Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 735, 736.

14 Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 760–1.

15 Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 757.

16 In *Noirs et Blancs dans l'Afrique noire française*, Henri Brunschwig has argued that the creation of a class of cultural translators was also crucial to the French colonial project in Africa: *"Les plus importants furent les interprètes, c'est-à-dire des gens qui parlaient français et une ou plusieurs langues indigènes. Leur rôle fut capital au cours de la période d'expansion et d'établissement"* [The most important were the interpreters, that is to say those who spoke French and one or more indigenous languages. The role was crucial during the period of expansion and establishment]. Brunschwig, *Noirs et blancs dans l'Afrique noire française, ou comment le colonisé devient le colonisateur (1870–1914)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 106.

17 Jules Ferry, *Le Tonkin et la mère-patrie*, 13th ed. (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890), 288.

18 The etymologies of the names of the three administrative districts of colonial Vietnam reflect a long history of foreign occupation. Cochinchina was derived

from Cauchichina, a name given to Vietnam by the Portuguese during the sixteenth century: "They labeled the area Cauchichina, deriving 'Cauchi' from 'Giao Chi,' the Chinese characters for Viet Nam, and adding 'China' to distinguish it from Cochin, another of their colonies in India." Karnow, *Vietnam*, 70. Tonkin and Annam were both derived from names originally given to these areas by the Chinese. See Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 16. For a "brief excursus" on the name "Vietnam," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 157–8.

19 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 16. For brief accounts of the French expansion in Indochina, see Meyer et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale: Des origines à 1914*, 487–92, 603–10, 628–32, and Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 1–2, 8–9.

20 See Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy 1870–1925*, 445–51, for a description of the "administrative anarchy" of Indochina in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

21 Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, 165, 166. See also Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 10.

22 Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viêt-Nam: Histoire et civilisation* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955), 401–404.

23 The history of colonial educational policy in Vietnam has been treated extensively in the invaluable work of Gail Paradise Kelly. In particular, see "Franco-Vietnamese Schools"; "Colonial Schools in Vietnam: Policy and Practice," in *Education and Colonialism*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: Longman Inc., 1978), 96–121; and *Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1918–1938: Regional Development and Implications for National Integration* (Madison, WI: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1982). See also Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 35–40, 52–61, Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 26–30, and Winston, *Postcolonial Duras*, 107–16.

24 Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools," 9–11.

25 Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 13.

26 Francisque Vial, *Le Problème humain de l'Indochine*, 19–20.

27 Vial, *Le Problème humain de l'Indochine*, 126, 196, 197.

28 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 126. For more on the links between colonial educational policy and the desire to create an Indochinese elite who would serve as loyal mediators betwen the French and the indigenous population, see Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 36–40.

29 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 127–8.

30 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 44.

31 Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools," 194. It should be noted that Kelly also argues that the assimilationist project of the Franco-Vietnamese schools, considered in terms of the general population, ultimately failed: "colonial schools, if they did

disrupt Vietnamese culture, did not do so permanently, nor did they remove the schooled over the long run from the social fabric" (1).

32 Duong Quang Ham, *Leçons d'histoire d'Annam*, 7th ed. (Hanoi, Imprimerie Le Van Tan, 1939), 217–8. Emphasis in original. The sort of collaborationist praise of French education evident in this passage can also be found in early African francophone texts, notably Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne's *Les Trois volontés de Malic* (Paris: Larose, 1920), mentioned below.

33 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 14–6; Luro, *Cours de l'administration annamite*, 734–5, 745–6.

34 Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools," 150.

35 Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 193.

36 Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viêt-Nam*, 416.

37 For an interesting study on the different political and cultural paths followed by these students, see Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

38 These texts are described by Bui Xuan Bao in "Introduction historique," in *Littératures de langue française hors de France: Anthologie didactique* (Sèvres: Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Français, 1976), 633–4.

39 For more on the history of non-francophone Vietnamese literature, see Maurice Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, *Introduction à la littérature vietnamienne* (Paris: Editions Gustave-Paul Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969); Nguyen Khac Kham, *La Littérature vietnamienne* (Saigon: Direction des Affaires Culturelles, Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 1964 [?]); and Bui Xuan Bao, "Introduction historique," 633–40.

40 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 36.

41 In his introduction to *Colonialism Experienced*, Truong Buu Lam writes of his own attempts to come to terms with this sense of inferiority, which he links not only to the effects of educational and other colonial policies but also to "the unjust, brutal, cruel, inhumane way the colonizers treated the native people ... the daily insult and humiliation that the Vietnamese people had to suffer at the hands of the French colonialists" (4).

42 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 53.

43 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 179.

44 Tran Van Tung, *Rêves d'un campagnard annamite* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1940), 174. Emphasis in original. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

45 Peculiar forms of nostalgia seem to be among the more common psychic ramifications of a colonial discourse that sought to represent imperial domination as a form of love. I address this dynamic further in my discussion of *Nam et Sylvie* (see Chapter Four).

46 In reading these passages as exemplary manifestations of what might be called, after Fanon, *"un complexus psycho-existentielle"* (Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Paris: Seuil, 1952], 9), I am of course leaving aside a consideration of the ways in which Tran Van Tung may have been deploying his autobiographical

persona in an ironic mode, or enacting in a strategic fashion the colonial identity imposed upon him by the French. The seamless textual construction of this identity, however, does seem quite different from what appears in the novels discussed in the following chapters. Soon after the publication of *Rêves d'un campagnard annamite*, Tran Van Tung moved to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1988. Significantly, an element of disillusionment with France began to appear in his work as early as 1946, in *Bach-Yên ou la fille au cœur fidèle* (Paris: J. Susse, 1946).

47 Christopher L. Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 15.

48 Marguerite Triaire, ed., *L'Indochine à travers les textes* (Hanoi: Direction de l'Instruction publique de l'Indochine, Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1944), 182.

Chapter 2

1 Nguyen Phan Long, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* (Hanoi, Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1921), 5. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

2 In colonial contexts, the notion of "tradition" is fraught and complex. When I refer to "traditional Vietnamese culture" here and elsewhere in this book, I do not mean to suggest that such a concept operated in a straightforward, unified, or uncontested fashion for the millions of subjects under French rule in colonial Indochina. Rather, I wish to designate sets of cultural practices that function within the texts under consideration as signs of Vietnamese identity, understood in opposition to French models, and deployed to a variety of narrative and ideological ends. For more on the notion of "tradition" in different cultural contexts, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial; Borrowings and Adaptations in Vietnamese Culture*, ed. Truong Buu Lam (Manoa, HI: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawaii, 1987); Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*; and *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

3 Karnow, *Vietnam*, 112. For more on the history and changing position of women in Vietnamese society, see Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam* (Hanoi, Editions en Langues Etrangères, 1976); Arlene Eisen Bergman, *Women of Viet Nam* (San Francisco: Peoples Press, 1975); Arlene Eisen, *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (London: Zed Books, 1984); and Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 190–251.

4 Cited in Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam*, 38–9.

5 Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam*, 39.

6 An in-depth comparative study of Vietnamese and Chinese government in the period just preceding French rule can be found in Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

7 In "Relata, Relationships, and Context: A Perspective on Borrowed Elements in Vietnamese Culture," Neil Jamieson writes that individualism in Vietnam was "introduced through French textbooks, derived mainly from French literary tradition, and popularized through the new poetry and associated 'romantic' novels and short stories written by and for young products of the French school system." In *Borrowings and Adaptations in Vietnamese Culture*, ed. Truong Buu Lam, 130.

8 Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam*, 105.

9 Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam*, 105–6.

10 In *Dislocating Cultures*, Uma Narayan analyzes precisely the sort of inconsistency that characterizes Nguyen Phan Long's stance on the impact of French culture in Vietnam: "This 'selective labeling' of certain changes and not others as symptoms of 'Westernization' enables the portrayal of unwelcome changes as unforgivable betrayals of deep-rooted and constitutive traditions, while welcome changes are seen as merely pragmatic adaptations that are utterly consonant with the 'preservation of our culture and values' ... Not surprisingly, the gender of the actors seems to be one factor that determines whether a particular change is regarded as an example of 'Westernization that is disrespectful of our traditions'." Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, 23, 26. The relationship of gender to collaborationist politics will be examined in greater depth in the final section of this chapter.

11 Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 191.

12 Le Thi Nham Tuyet and Mai Thi Tu, *La Femme au Viet Nam*, 91, 93.

13 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 18.

14 Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, 2 vols. (New York: Praeger, 1967), I, 199.

15 Buttinger, *Vietnam*, I, 200.

16 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism, 1885–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 268.

17 Commenting on the origins of the Constitutionalist Party, Jay Carter writes that "[t]he precise date of the party's founding is difficult to ascertain, and different secondary sources place it from 1917 through 1923. The party seems not to have been officially registered in France until 1926, and in Cochinchina until 1937. Because these official dates are obviously not useful, it seems reasonable to date the party from what would become its official organ, *La Tribune Indigène*, which first appeared in Sai Gon in the summer of 1917." Carter, "A Subject Elite: The First Decade of the Constitutionalist Party in Cochinchina, 1917–1927," *Viet Nam Forum* 14 (1993/94), 212.

18 Buttinger, *Vietnam*, I, 201.

19 William J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 145.

20 Megan Cook, *The Constitutionalist Party in Cochinchina: The Years of Decline, 1930–1942* (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1977), 16.

21 Carter, "A Subject Elite," 214, and Cook, *The Constitutionalist Party*, 17. The

Colonial Council was an advisory body with limited powers, and a joint French-Vietnamese membership. See Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 13.

22 As Duiker notes, this *cahier* was reprinted in a pamphlet, which is available in the Archives Nationales de France, Section Outre-Mer, Carton 331, Dossier 2677; it also appears in English translation (as "The Wish List of the Vietnamese People") in Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced*, 208–27.

23 This exploitation intensified at the turn of the century, with the arrival of Governor General Paul Doumer in 1897. Doumer, previously France's minister of finance, is generally considered to be responsible for the economic turnaround of Indochina: as Karnow writes, he "almost single-handedly transformed Indochina from a financial loss to a profitable enterprise," largely by transferring the economic burden "from the French taxpayer to the Vietnamese people, not only saddling them with the costs of supporting their own domination, but also exploiting them in order to gain a fat yield on the colonial investment." Karnow, *Vietnam*, 127. For more on the often appalling policies pursued both by French officials and private businesses in Vietnam in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as conditions in French factories, mines and plantations, see Karnow, *Vietnam*, 124–30, and Le Than Khoi, *Le Viêt-Nam*, 425–30.

24 Buttinger, *Vietnam*, I, 201.

25 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 167.

26 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 168.

27 Karnow, *Vietnam*, 189.

28 Buttinger, *Vietnam*, II, 729.

29 For a brief description of the Vietnamese system of naming, see Do The Dung and Le Thanh Thuy, *Le Vietnamien sans peine* (Chennevières-sur-Marne: Assimil, 1994), 33–4.

30 In Vietnam, children are often referred to by the number that corresponds to their position, in terms of age, among their siblings. In southern Vietnam, formerly Cochinchina, this numbering begins with two, not one; hence the narrator, as her parents' eldest (and only) child, is called Hai.

31 Such attempts to describe Vietnamese culture by means of European referents were quite common in French writing on Vietnam during the colonial period. Compare, for example, Hai's description of the *Ong-Tao* with the following passage from Raoul Petit's *Choses et gens de Cochinchine* (Saigon, Imprimerie L. Ménard, 1901): *"Les ancêtres sont vénérés à l'égal des* Dieux Lares, *chez les Antiques. En Annam, comme à Rome, les êtres décédés de la famille reviennent à l'endroit où ils ont vécu leurs joies et leurs souffrances"* [The ancestors are worshipped in the same way that the lares were in Antiquity. In Vietnam, as in Rome, the deceased members of the family return to the place where they lived their joys and their sufferings] (105).

32 As Yeager has pointed out, this type of cultural comparison serves a specific extra-textual function in a Vietnamese francophone novel: to explain and clarify cultural points for a non-Vietnamese, and probably French, reader (Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 54–57). I would maintain, however, that in the case of a narrator

like Hai, cultural comparisons also serve to emphasize her own distance from Vietnamese culture — in a sense, Hai herself is in the position of a French reader, and her relationship to her own culture is largely mediated through Western points of reference.

33 In early twentieth-century Vietnam, as Jack Yeager has written, "fictional prose narration was a newly acquired form. The Vietnamese Francophone novel appears to be an imitation of its French models, especially eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social novels related by third person narrators or confessions told in the first person." Vietnamese francophone novelists did not, of course, merely imitate Western models. As Yeager goes on to point out, these novelists *adapted* the genre, producing texts marked by both Vietnamese and French cultural influences. The fact remains, however, that the novel as a form of literary production in Vietnam did not exist until after the arrival of the French. See Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 7.

34 Among others, Hai mentions or discusses the ancient Greeks and Romans, Rabelais, Racine, Corneille, Pascal, Mme de Scudéry, Honoré d'Urfé, Mme de Sévigné, Rousseau, Alfred de Musset, Balzac, Sully Prudhomme, Théophile Gautier, and Henrik Ibsen.

35 Romanticism, which greatly influenced literature in Vietnamese as well as Vietnamese literature in French, was often attacked by conservative critics in the 1920s and 30s in terms that closely recall those used by Hai's parents and Minh. See Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 126, 206, 269n.

36 Hai is, of course, not the only character in francophone literature to be seduced by Western literature. The protagonist of Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris* (1937), for example, is imbued from an early age with a novelistic sensibility: "*Dès qu'il avait pu sentir ce qu'il lisait, il s'était adonné, avec frénésie, à la lecture des romans. Il y trouvait des amis aux noms bizarres. A certain moment, il aurait souhaité s'appeler d'Artagnan ...* " [From the time that he was able to feel what he read, he had given himself over, in a frenzy, to the reading of novels. He found in them friends with bizarre names. At one point, he would have liked to have been called d'Artagnan ...] Socé, *Mirages de Paris* (1937; Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1964), 14. While Hai survives her nearly fatal encounter with French culture, Socé's protagonist is not so fortunate: at the end of the novel, he throws himself into the Seine and drowns. For more on *Mirages de Paris*, see Christopher L. Miller, "Hallucinations of France and Africa in the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 and Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris*," *Paragraph* 18, No. 1 (1995), 39–63. To name just one other striking example, one of the primary characters in Mouloud Mammeri's *Le sommeil du juste* (1955) volunteers to fight for France during World War II in large part because he has been shaped through his reading of Western literary and philosophical texts. Disillusioned by the violent racism he faces as an Algerian in the French army, he does precisely what Hai's father wishes he had done with her novels, burning the books he read and cherished in the colonial classroom: "*Lentement la flamme caressait les feuilles et doucement gagnait de proche*

en proche Molière, Shakespeare, Homère, Montesquieu, les autres" [Slowly the flames caressed the pages and spread softly, by degrees, Molière, Shakespeare, Homer, Montesquieu, the others]. Mammeri, *Le sommeil du juste* (Paris: Plon, 1955), 146.

37 At least one critic chose not to pardon Nguyen Phan Long for the form of his novel: in her 1937 book on French Indochina, Virginia Thompson writes, "Even a novel like *Le Roman de Mlle.* [sic] *Lys*, written in the purest French, clear and classical in style, suffers from boring digressions and from a lack of unity and direct observation." Thompson makes this comment, significantly, to support her assertion that Vietnamese writers are, in effect, culturally incapable of writing good novels. Thompson, *French Indo-China* (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937), 316.

38 Nguyen Phan Long's anxiety over the generic status of his text is further reflected by the fact that he furnishes the novel with not one, but two subtitles: "*(Journal d'une jeune fille cochinchinoise),*" and "*essai sur l'evolution/des mœurs annamites contemporaines*" ["(The Diary of a Young Girl from Cochinchina)"; "essay on the evolution/of Contemporary Vietnamese Morals"]. As Sharon Lim-Hing remarks in her reading of *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, "[t]he insistence on naming the genre in the title(s) is confounded by the number of different genres: novel, journal, or essay?" Lim-Hing, "Vietnamese Novels in French," 135.

39 The *Nouveau Petit Robert* defines *psyché* both as a "*Grande glace mobile montée sur un châssis à pivots grâce auxquels on peut l'incliner à volonté et se regarder en pied*" [Large movable mirror mounted on a frame with pivots allowing one to tilt it at will and to see oneself full-length], and as "*L'ensemble des phénomènes psychiques, considérés comme formant l'unité personnelle*" [The totality of psychic phenomena, *considered as forming the unity of the self*] (emphasis added).

40 Written almost seventy years after Nguyen Phan Long's novel, Kim Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche* contains a strikingly similar scene. Lefèvre's narrator, seeing her face in a photograph, is confronted by her physical difference from an imagined Vietnamese racial ideal: "*La vision de la photographie me bouleversa au point que ma mère, inquiète, courut chercher la glace de son mari qu'elle me tendit. Je regardai dans le miroir: ma surprise fut profonde. Je n'étais pas du tout comme je m'étais imaginée. Je dus reconnaître que j'étais plus proche de la photo que de l'idée que j'avais de moi-même ... Je pris douloureusement conscience de mon altérité*" [The sight of the photograph upset me so much that my mother, worried, ran to look for her husband's mirror, which she held out to me. I looked into the mirror: my surprise was profound. I was not at all how I had imagined myself. I had to recognize that I was closer to the photograph than to the idea that I had of myself ... Painfully, I realized my otherness] (155).

41 It is tempting to read this passage as an illustration of Hai's shortcomings as a reader. If she were not so eager to have a *roman* of her own, she might hear the obvious Balzacian echo in Lucien Raynal's name: Lucien is also the name of the protagonist of *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843). Hai's own romantic illusions, at this point, are too firmly entrenched to allow her to read this warning sign. Nguyen Phan Long was himself an avid reader of Balzac, and took inspiration from the

Comédie humaine when writing the stories in his 1932 collection *Cannibales par persuasion* — the title story, for example, has strong links to Balzac's *L'auberge rouge* (1831). In the colonial context, Raynal's name also evokes that of L'Abbé Raynal, the eighteenth-century historian and *encyclopédiste* whose *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1772) represents an early indictment of colonialism and slavery. Through the shared name, the anticolonial liberal L'Abbé Raynal is strangely linked to the deceitful mercenary Lucien Raynal — a link that would support the pro-colonial, collaborationist politics of the novel.

42 Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 130.

43 These structures of identity, of course, would be built around another displaced point of origin: as a Vietnamese woman, Hai could only imagine a historical connection to the Khmer culture represented by the temples at Angkor. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the temples could stand in defiance of French claims of European cultural superiority. In "Vietnamese Novels in French," Lim-Hing writes that Angkor "is a pre-colonial wonder which seems to respond to the multiple allusions to European culture in other parts of Hai's journal. The voyage to Angkor is the turning point, after which Hai gives up the idea of French culture as superior" (168). While Angkor certainly has the potential to "respond ... to European culture," I do not believe that the voyage serves as "the turning point" for Hai; in fact, as I have mentioned and will go on to demonstrate in more detail, the trip ultimately fails to reorient her cultural identity.

44 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 179.

45 Henri Gourdon, *L'Indochine* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1931), 193.

46 Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 195. For more on the work carried out by the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient at Angkor, see Henri Marchal, *Angkor: La Résurrection de l'art khmer et l'œuvre de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Office Français d'Edition, 1945). Marchal, a former curator of the site, refers to the Angkor monuments as "*l'orgueil de l'Indochine française*" [the pride of French Indochina] (32).

47 In *Aux Temples d'Angkor avec les voyageurs, les romanciers et les poètes* (Saigon, n.p., 1932), Louis Malleret writes that "*les sites artistiques de l'ancien empire khmer ont été, non pas même des lieux de pélerinage, mais le but vers lequel se sont hâtées des cohortes de voyageurs, pressés de remplir leur carnet de route*" [the artistic sites of the ancient Khmer empire were not even places of pilgrimage, but the destination toward which cohorts of visitors hastened, in a rush to fill up their log books] (2). See among others L'Abbé Bouillevaux, *Ma Visite aux ruines cambodgiennes en 1850* (Saint-Quentin, Imprimerie de J. Moureau, 1883); Henri Mouhot, *Voyage dans les royaumes de Siam, de Cambodge, de Laos ...* (Paris: Hachette, 1868); Francis Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine ...*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1873); Louis Delaporte, *Voyage au Cambodge: l'architecture khmère* (Paris: Delagrave, 1880); Etienne Aymonier, *Le Cambodge et ses monuments* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1897); Marcel Monnier, *Le Tour d'Asie*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1899); and Pierre Loti, *Un Pèlerin d'Angkor* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy Editeur, 1912).

48 Duc de Montpensier, *La Ville au bois dormant, De Saïgon à Ang-Kor en automobile* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1910), 183. In addition to *La Ville au bois dormant*, Montpensier wrote several other books and articles on Indochina, most notably *Notre France d'Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1912–13). Significantly, Hai is familiar with his work: in the first section of *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, she explicitly discusses "Les Disparates, *un article du Duc de Montpensier*" [*Les Disparates*, an article by the Duc de Montpensier] (76).

49 Montpensier, *La Ville au bois dormant*, 183–184.

50 Montpensier, *La Ville au bois dormant*, 249.

51 In "Vietnamese Novels in French," Lim-Hing writes: "In 1296, a Chinese traveler Chou Ta-Kuan visited Angkor and recorded his thoughts. His writing has been the basis for recreating, that is imagining, daily life at Angkor in earlier centuries, given the dearth of other sources. He was probably an important source for Hai's imaginings, though the Chinese chronicler is not credited in *Mademoiselle Lys*" (166). Chou Ta-Kuan's memoir was interesting enough to the French to merit a translation as early as 1819; Paul Pelliot of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient published a revised and extended translation in 1902. It seems likely that Hai's relationship to this crucial non-Western text on Angkor would have been, at best, mediated through layers of French translation and annotation. See Chou Ta-Kuan, "Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge," trans. Paul Pelliot, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* II (1902), 137–77.

52 Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 199.

53 In *Le Tour d'Asie*, Monnier writes that "*une sorte de frayeur vous saisit à la seule idée de cette nuit faite sur l'histoire d'un peuple*" [a sort of fright takes hold of you at the very idea of the darkness that fell over the history of a people] (I, 90), while in *Aux Temples d'Ankgor* ... , Malleret wonders, "*Est-il au monde l'exemple d'une autre nation ayant comme celle-ci égaré le souvenir de son histoire? Est-ce pour cela, qu'au milieu des ruines, s'éveille dans le cœur des Européens une compassion secrète pour les descendants des bâtisseurs d'Angkor?*" [Is there another nation in the world that has, like this one, lost the memory of its history? Is it because of this, that in the midst of the ruins, a secret compassion for the descendants of the builders of Angkor wells up in the hearts of Europeans?] (9). In Malleret's view, these descendants have lost the memory of their own past, and it is the French who must act as curators of their history; compare his "*compassion secrète*" to Hai's "*pitié rétrospective*."

54 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 174.

55 Appiah, *In my Father's House*, 176.

56 Compare, for example, Hai's interrogation of immutable identities with the following question posed by Judith Butler: "what grounds the presumption that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent?" Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16.

57 As Stoler has noted, the specter of atavism — of the resurgence of non-European cultural traits within colonized subjects who have apparently been assimilated to European cultural models — haunted colonial discourses that emerged out of the intersections of race and culture. See Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, particularly 79–111.

58 Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools," 343.

59 Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 34.

60 The other frequently deployed scenario is that of adultery. Cohen, *Sentimental Education*, 38.

61 Cohen, *Sentimental Education*, 34, emphasis added.

62 In her discussion of the historical and political contexts out of which sentimental novels emerged in France in the early part of the nineteenth century, Cohen argues persuasively that the unresolvable tension between individual freedom and collective welfare that characterizes these narratives must be read as a form of mourning for the ideals of the French Revolution, which failed to reconcile the political tension between negative and positive rights. Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 75–6.

63 For more on the *roman à thèse*, see the discussion of *Ba-Dam* in the following chapter.

64 Note how closely the language of this passage echoes that of Tran Van Tung's "Connaissance de la France," in *Rêves d'un campagnard annamite*: "*... ô ma France bien-aimée! C'est toi ... qui m'a donné ... tout ce qu'il y a de plus vivant, de plus impérissable en moi. C'est toi qui me mets dans la possibilité de devenir un homme*" [... oh my beloved France! It is you ... that has given me ... everything that is most alive, most eternal within me. It is you that makes it possible for me to become a man] (197).

65 In her discussion of *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, Lim-Hing reads the novel as an early attempt at Vietnamese national literature, as a text in which women must be controlled or suppressed "for the good of the nation" — an ultimately independent Vietnam embodied in and "centered around Minh the man" ("Vietnamese Novels in French," 174, 161). Such a reading, perceptive as it is in terms of the text's misogynist politics, seems to be founded upon an exaggeration of Nguyen Phan Long's nationalist leanings in the early 1920s. Lim-Hing describes the Constitutionalist Party of Cochinchina as "call[ing] for Vietnamese independence under the aegis of the French" (128); elsewhere, she writes that Nguyen Phan Long "was considered a moderate Franchophile [sic], a politician who worked for an independent Vietnam which would maintain ties with France" (164–165), and that he created in his novel "a model for and of independent Vietnam" (138). This view of Nguyen Phan Long and the Constitutionalists is at odds with the literature on the party's political agenda in the 1920s. In "A Subject Elite," for example, Carter asks, "Were the Constitutionalists nationalists?" His answer: "the party was closer to a 'loyal opposition,' that hoped to modify some

French policies, like attitudes toward civil liberties and economic opportunity, but with continued French sovereignty, at least for the foreseeable future" (226).

66 Cook, *The Constitutionalist Party in Cochinchina*, 130, 131.

67 Milton Osborne, "The Faithful Few: The Politics of Collaboration in Cochinchina in the 1920s," in *Aspects of Vietnamese History*, ed. Walter F. Vella (Honolulu, HI: The University Press of Hawaii, 1973), 161.

68 Understood in this way, *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* seems to put a collaborationist twist on Partha Chatterjee's observations regarding nationalism and gender in the context of Indian nationalism, paraphrased here by R. Radhakrishnan: "questions of change and progress posed in Western attire were conceived as an outer and epiphenomenal aspect of Indian identity, whereas the inner and inviolable sanctum of Indian identity had to do with home, spirituality, and the figure of Woman as representative of the true self. [...] Like any framework whose finitude is the representation of its own limited and ideologically-biased interests, the nationalist framework too thematizes its own priorities: the selective appropriation of the West and the safeguarding of one's essential identity. Unfortunately, in authorizing such a schizophrenic vision of itself, nationalism loses on both fronts: its external history remains hostage to the Enlightenment identity of the West while its inner self is effectively written out of history altogether in the name of a repressive and essentialist indigeny. And Woman takes on the name of a vast inner silence not to be broken into by the rough and external clamor of material history." R. Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity," in *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, eds. Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 84–5.

69 The grotesque implication of this speech — that the loss of Minh's bodily integrity cannot begin to repay France for the benefits of Enlightenment and progress — echoes the dynamic of "continuous debt" described by Françoise Vergès in her discussion of the family romance of French colonialism: "Dependence and debt were the operative elements of the colonial family's dynamics. Its rhetoric displaced social relations determined by the symbolic and economic organization of exchange between the colony and the metropole and replaced them with the theme of continuous debt of the colony to its metropole ... The debt was constituted by the ideal of the French Revolution, of the French republic. In territories where feudalism, barbarism, or backwardness reigned, maternal France had brought Enlightenment and progress. She would save her children and elevate them toward full humanness ... Precious woods, sugar, minerals, bodies to fight her wars, none of this would be enough to repay France for what she had given." Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 6, 7.

The effects of French colonial pedagogy and propaganda that positioned imperial domination as a familial relation may have been particularly potent in the context of Vietnam, where notions of filial piety and moral debt played a central role in structuring social life. Neil L. Jamieson describes the importance

of these notions in the following passage: "First and foremost, children were taught filial piety (*hieu*), to obey and respect and honor their parents. Children were made to feel keenly that they owed parents a moral debt (*on*) so immense as to be unpayable ... Anxiety over repayment of *on* to parents and ancestors was a powerful force for both virtue and achievement ... You were, simply by being alive, in debt to your family — no matter how much you might have accomplished, no matter how wretched you might be." Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 16–17, 22–3.

Chapter 3

1 Truong Dinh Tri and Albert de Teneuille, *Ba-Dam* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1930). Subsequent references will be given in the main text.
2 Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, II, 705. While Cochinchina was a French colony, Tonkin and Annam were officially classified as protectorates, and as such were theoretically not subject to direct French rule.
3 Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2; Koestenbaum's emphasis.
4 It would be fascinating to learn the precise circumstances of the authorial collaboration that resulted in *Ba-Dam*. How did these two men come to write a novel together? What role did each play in the creation of the text? Unfortunately, while some material exists on Teneuille's career as a writer and Truong Dinh Tri's career as a politician, I have been unable to locate any information on the genesis and composition of *Ba-Dam* itself.
5 Megan Cook, *The Constitutionalist Party in Cochinchina*, 8.
6 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 152.
7 As this brief synopsis makes clear, *Ba-Dam* exemplifies the "transracial love plot" outlined by Mary Louise Pratt: "While the lovers challenge colonial hierarchies, in the end they acquiesce to them ... Such is the lesson to be learned from the colonial love stories, in whose dénouements the 'cultural harmony through romance' always breaks down. Whether love turns out to be requited or not, whether the colonized lover is female or male, outcomes seem to be roughly the same: the lovers are separated, the European is reabsorbed by Europe, and the non-European dies an early death." What remains fascinating in the case of *Ba-Dam*, and what will be examined at length in this chapter, is the extent to which the tragic outcome of the plot is denaturalized through the text's attention to the force of colonial stereotypes. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 97.
8 Bui Xuan Bao, "Introduction historique," 633.
9 Jack A. Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 53.
10 This aspect of early Vietnamese francophone literature was reflected by similar ethnographic strains in other colonial literatures of the period. As Guy Ossito Midiohouan has pointed out in his study of African literature in French, such

literary representations of colonized cultures cannot be read as intrinsically resistant to French domination. Ethnographer/novelist Paul Hazoumé, for example, stated in 1937 that his goal as a writer was to "fournir à la colonisation les informations auxquelles elle a droit pour mieux pénétrer et guider les masses" ["to furnish to the colonial project the information to which it is entitled in order better to penetrate and to guide the masses"]. Cited in Midiohouan, *L'Idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), 76. See also Midiohouan, 59–79.

11 Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 83, 84.

12 For a brief overview of this corpus, which consisted of approximately one thousand texts, see Osborne, *Fear and Fascination in the Tropics*.

13 The epigraph takes some liberties with the original English of Okakura Kakuzo's passage, which reads as follows: "So much harm has been done already by the mutual misunderstanding of the New World and the Old, that one need not apologise for contributing his tithe to the furtherance of a better understanding." Note, in particular, the introduction of the word *collaborer* [collaborate] into the French translation. Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1912), 11.

14 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 10.

15 The anxiety generated by the notion of *métissage* in Indochina found one of its most peculiar literary manifestations in the French novel *François Phuoc, métis* (Paris: Charpentier, 1929). Written by Jehan Cendrieux, this melodramatic text narrates the short and tragic life of the Franco-Vietnamese François, who comes to a predictably violent end on the streets of Paris after having unknowingly fallen in love with his French half-sister. A contemporary but considerably more sober look at the legal issues and problems raised by *métissage* in the French colonies in the years leading up to the publication of *Ba-Dam* can be found in Arthur Girault, "La condition juridique des métis dans les colonies françaises," *Revue Politique et Parlementaire* CXXXIX (1929), 126–31. For more on the complex ways in which *métissage* challenged the racial and cultural categories around which colonial rule was constructed, see Stoler's "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: Cultural Competence and the Dangers of Métissage," in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 79–111.

16 Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*, 206.

17 Stoler discusses at length the colonialist desire to bind culture to race, noting not only that the concepts of "racial purity and cultural securing of racial identity" were seen to be threatened by *métissage* and interracial sexual relationships, but also that poor or otherwise culturally marginal whites in some colonies ran the risk of losing their formal or legal racial status. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 67, 34–40.

18 Robyn Weigman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 4.

19 Ruth Amossy, *Les idées reçues: sémiologie du stéréotype* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), 37.

20 Otto Klineberg, *Social Psychology*, revised ed. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1954), 489.

21 Alexandre de Rhodes, *Divers voiages du P. Alexandre de Rhodes, En la Chine, & autres roiaumes de l'Orient, avec son retour en Europe par la Perse et l'Armenie. Le Tout divisé en trois parties*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, Imprimeur du Roy, ruë S. Iaques, aux Cicognes, 1666), 3.

22 Rhodes, *Divers voiages*, 83–4.

23 Paul Bourde, *De Paris au Tonkin*, 3rd. ed. (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1888), 112. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

24 Paul Giran, *Psychologie du peuple annamite*, 119, 90.

25 Such perceptions of Asian masculinity did not disappear at the end of the colonial era — witness the following description in Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant* (1984): "La peau est d'une somptueuse douceur. Le corps. Le corps est maigre, sans force, sans muscles, il pourrait avoir été malade, être en convalescence, il est imberbe, sans virilité autre que celle du sexe, il est très faible, il paraît être à la merci d'une insulte, souffrant" [The skin is of a sumptuous softness. The body. The body is thin, without strength, without muscles, he could have been ill, recovering from illness, he is beardless, with no virility other than that of his sex, he is very weak, he seems to be at the mercy of an insult, suffering]. Duras, *L'Amant* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984), 49. The lover in question, of course, is ethnically Chinese and not Vietnamese; nonetheless, the similarities between Duras's description and those found in colonialist texts on Indochina are striking.

26 Henri de Bizemont, *L'Indo-Chine française*, cited in Edouard Petit, *Le Tong-Kin* (Paris: Lecène, Oudin et Cie, 1892), 202.

27 Raoul Petit, *Choses et gens de Cochinchine*, 38.

28 Edouard Diguet, *Les Annamites: société, coutumes, religions* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1906), 13.

29 The *Pavillons-Noirs* (Black Flags) were Chinese bandits, most of whom had been driven into Vietnam after the failure of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64).

30 The claim that *métissage* leads inevitably to the degeneration of the human races and to the degradation of civilization is the central thesis of one the founding texts of modern European racism, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55). In a chapter defining his notion of racial degeneration, Gobineau writes: "*Je pense donc que le mot* dégénéré, *s'appliquant à un peuple, doit signifier et signifie que ce peuple n'a plus la valeur intrinsèque qu'autrefois il possédait, parce qu'il n'a plus dans ses veines le même sang, dont des alliages successifs ont graduellement modifié la valeur*" [I think, then, that the word *degenerate*, applied to a people, must mean and does mean that this people no longer has the intrinsic worth it once had, because it no longer has in its veins the same blood, since the

worth of this blood has been gradually modified by successive mixtures]; elsewhere, he describes with horror the *"anarchie ethnique"* [ethnic anarchy] caused by *métissage*. Gobineau's racist convictions were echoed by other French writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; social scientist Georges Vacher de Lapouge, for example, declared in the late 1880s that *"les résultats d[u métissage] n'ont rien d'advantageux. Laideur, vulgarité, manque de vigeur, moindre durée de vie, tares physiques nombreuses, nos sang-mêlés ont tout contre eux ... L'incoherence des métis n'est pas seulement somatique, elle existe au point de vue de l'intelligence et du caractère"* [the results (of *métissage*) bring with them no advantage. Ugliness, vulgarity, a lack of vigor, a shorter lifespan, numerous physical defects, our mixed-bloods have everything going against them ... The incoherence of the *métis* is not only somatic, it also exists on the level of intelligence and character]. See Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1967), 58, 158, and Vacher de Lapouge, *Les séléctions sociales; cours libre de science politique, professé à l'Université de Montpellier (1888–9) par G. Vacher de Lapouge* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1896), 179, 183.

31 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 66. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

32 Suleiman notes the crucial interpretive function of narrative commentary in realist fiction: "to the extent that the narrator figures as the source of the story he is telling, he functions not only as 'author' but also as *authority*. Since it is his voice that informs us of the characters' actions and of the circumstances in which they occur, and since we must consider — by virtue of the pact which, in the realist novel, links the teller of the story to his audience — that what the narrator recounts is 'true,' there occurs a blurring of boundaries that makes us accept as 'true' not only what the narrator tells us about the events and circumstances of the fictional world, but also what he tells us in the way of judgment and interpretation. The narrator thus becomes not only the source of his story, but the authoritative interpreter of its *meaning* as well — and this meaning is, in realist fiction, invariably linked to our non-fictional world." Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*, 72.

33 Giran, *Psychologie du peuple annamite*, 87.

34 Senegalese author Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris* (1937), mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys*, also has striking similarities to *Ba-Dam* — both texts recount unsuccessful interracial relationships; both foreground figures of mirages and hallucinations in their descriptions of cross-cultural encounters; both end in the deaths, by drowning, of their male protagonists.

35 Chantal Descours-Gatin, *Quand l'opium finançait la colonisation en Indochine* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1992), 34. See also Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

36 Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam*, 128.

37 Buttinger, *Vietnam*, II, 713.

Chapter 4

1 As a *normalien*, he is reported to have developed close friendships with future Presidents Léopold Sédar Senghor and Georges Pompidou. See "Ils étaient trois condisciples," *Le Monde*, 23 April 1974.

2 Pham Duy Khiem's literary production from this period included a fictionalized memoir, inspired by his experiences as a volunteer in the French Army in 1939–40, and two volumes of stories adapted from Vietnamese tales and legends. Initially published in Hanoi, these texts were all reissued by Parisian publishers during the 1950s. Pham Duy Khiem, *De Hanoi à La Courtine* (Hanoi: Editions Le Thang, 1941), reissued under the pseudonym of Nam Kim as *La Place d'un homme. De Hanoi à La Courtine* (Paris: Plon, 1958); *Légendes des terres sereines* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Taupin, 1942) and *La Jeune femme de Nam Xuong* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Taupin, 1944), reissued together as *Légendes des terres sereines* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1951).

3 For a more detailed biographical sketch of Pham Duy Khiem, see Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 176–8.

4 Pham Duy Khiem [published under the pseudonym of Nam Kim], *Nam et Sylvie* (Paris: Plon, 1957). All references will appear in the text as NS.

5 See "Instantané: Nam Kim," *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 20 November 1958.

6 Kristin Ross examines the interrelationship between decolonization and French postwar modernization in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

7 "Le Viêt-Nam et la culture française" [article containing both Lebois's speech and Pham Duy Khiem's response], *Revue de la Méditerranée* 17 (1957), 641. Further references will appear in the text as VNCF. It is worth noting that Lebois's designation of Pham Duy Khiem as "un des premiers romanciers français de ce temps" praises the writer while simultaneously effacing his Vietnamese identity. As I shall demonstrate, this gesture is perfectly in keeping with Lebois's reading of *Nam et Sylvie*.

8 I borrow the term "phantasmatic Indochina" from Panivong Norindr's study of the discursive practices that allowed for the creation of "Indochine" as "a nineteenth-century French fiction, a fantaisie or geographic romance, created by France to elicit desire for its Far Eastern colonies." Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 17.

9 Consider the following passage, taken from a French school manual published in 1901: "*Il importe de préparer nos fils à cette tâche colossale: il faut leur faire connaître nos possessions lointaines et les leur faire aimer comme leur propre patrie ... il faut enfin, par des exemples probants, réfuter cette erreur funeste qui veut que le Français ne soit pas colonisateur, et inspirer à la jeune génération cette confiance en soi qui fait les peuples forts*" [It is essential to prepare our sons for this colossal task: we must introduce them to our faraway possessions and make them love them like their own fatherland.. we must finally, through convincing examples, disprove that disastrous

fallacy that insists that the Frenchman is not a colonizer, and inspire in the young generation that self-confidence that makes for strong populations]. E. Josset, *A Travers nos colonies: livre de lectures sur l'histoire, la géographie, les sciences et la morale* (Cours moyen et supérieure), (Paris: Armand Colin, 1901), cited in Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 59.

10 Christopher L. Miller, "Hallucinations of France and Africa," 44. Emphasis in original.

11 *Le Temps*, 16 January 1934.

12 Gwendolyn Wright has pointed out that the buildings tended less to reproduce indigenous architectural forms from the colonies than to reflect the orientalizing vision of their French designers. The *Maison des Etudiants de l'Indochine*, she writes, "represented a French perception of Indochinese aesthetics, evoking an exotic distant world for the Parisians, articulating a complex cultural milieu of power and history for the Maison's residents and their French neighbors." See Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 225.

13 McConnell, *Leftward Journey*, 80.

14 This act of self-censorship seems quite reasonable when one considers the fact that Indochinese subjects studying in France were the targets of routine, if not always effective, surveillance. The *Service de Contrôle et d'Assistance aux Indigènes*, organized by the Ministry of Colonies in 1919, compiled dossiers on individual students, opened and read their mail, and monitored their political activity. See McConnell, 86–90.

15 I would like to thank Eric Smoodin for his assistance in locating a copy of the 1932 *Back Street*, the first of three different films based on Fanny Hurst's 1930 novel.

16 This absence is particularly striking, as we have seen, in contrast to earlier treatments of interracial love in Vietnamese francophone literature such as *Le Roman de Mademoiselle Lys* and *Ba-Dam*.

17 Miller makes this point in reference to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition: "It was designed to exhibit *authentic differences*, native cultures transplanted into the Vincennes park, reproduced in cement and papier-mâché, 'protected' by an overarching structure that France provided (Civilization). Solidarity did not mean blending or mixing; it was predicated on segregation and specificity." See Miller, "Hallucinations of France and Africa," 46.

18 Nam makes this argument during a debate with Eliane Tournier, a French writer who has just published a novel entitled *Elle blanche et lui jaune* — a barely disguised reference to Christiane Fournier's melodramatically racist *Homme jaune et femme blanche* (1933). In Fournier's novel, young Marie-Claire Danfreville marries Xuân, an *Annamite*, only to discover that he is a treacherous and cold-blooded spy who is responsible for the murder of her father, a captain in the colonial air force. In a scathing review written soon after its publication, Pham Duy Khiem protested the racist depiction of Marie-Claire's perfidious husband: "*Mais il n'y a pas un Annamite qui puisse se reconnaître, en toute vérité, en la personne de Xuân; pas un qui ne crie à*

l'invraisemblance à chaque chapitre" [But there is not one *Annamite* who could recognize himself, in all truth, in the character of Xuân; not one who does not cry out at the implausibility of every chapter]. Pham Duy Khiem, *Mélanges* (Hanoi: Imprimerie G. Taupin & Cie, 1942), 10.

19 In the wake of the Yen-Bay rebellion in early 1930, Pasquier also attempted to persuade parents in the colonies not to allow their children to study in France, warning them of the grave moral dangers of the metropole. See Pierre Pasquier, *Circulaire aux familles au sujet de l'envoi des étudiants indochinois en France* (Hanoi: [n.p.], 1930).

20 *Le Figaro*, 17 January 1934. Ellipses in original.

21 *Le Temps*, 17 January 1934.

Chapter 5

1 Pham Van Ky, *Des Femmes assises ça et là* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); page references will appear in the text.

2 Pham Van Ky, *L'Homme de nulle part* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1946); page references will appear in the text. In the decade preceding the appearance of this text, Pham Van Ky published a series of dramatic and prose works in various French-language journals, as well as three volumes of poetry. For a complete bibliography of his works, see Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 172–6.

3 A number of such collections were published during the 1940s, including Trinh Thuc Oanh and Marguerite Triaire's *La Tortue d'or* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1940); Pham Duy Khiem's *Légendes des terres sereines* and *La Jeune femme de Nam Xuong*; and Tran Van Tung's *Le Coeur de diamant*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1944).

4 In the prologue, for example, the narrator invokes Pascal by stating that the Jade Emperor "*avait certainement des raisons que la raison humaine ne connaissait pas*" [certainly had his reasons which human reason did not know] (6).

5 Discussing the choice made by Vietnamese authors to write in French, Yeager has written that "[a]mong intellectuals ... creating in another language was perfectly ordinary ... That the language was French rather than Chinese was merely a variation on an old familiar theme." While this assessment may accurately describe the situation of certain authors, in the case of Pham Van Ky it seems inadequate; as this chapter will demonstrate, one of the overriding concerns of Pham Van Ky's work is precisely the profound effects upon identity of different languages and writing systems. See Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 53.

6 Nguyen Tran Huan, "Introduction," in Nguyen Du, *Vaste recueil de légendes merveilleuses*, trans. Nguyen Tran Huan (Paris: Gallimard/Unesco, 1962), 18.

7 As noted in Chapter One, the *Kim-Van-Kieu* — a rendering in Vietnamese verse of an earlier Chinese text — is generally considered to be the national poem of Vietnam. Composed in the early nineteenth century, it was written in *chu nom*, a

demotic writing system that used Chinese characters to represent the sounds of the Vietnamese language. See Nguyen Du, *The Tale of Kieu*, trans. and annotated by Huynh Sahn Thong (New York: Vintage, 1973).

8 For a fascinating if somewhat idiosyncratic biography of Pham Van Ky, see Nguyen Hong Nhiem, "L'Echiquier," 6–29.

9 Originally conceived as a storybook for children, the text apparently suffered when it was rewritten for an adult audience under the advice of a new editor. See Nguyen Hong Nhiem, "L'Echiquier," 23.

10 In a somewhat different form, the legend can be found in Nguyen Du's *Truyen Ky Man Luc*. Nguyen Du, "Histoire du mariage de Tu-Thuc avec une fée," in *Vaste Recueil de légendes merveilleuses*, 128–42.

11 The link between homeland and migrant identity, of course, is far from straightforward or singular, and has become a major focus of inquiry in recent theoretical writing on issues of immigration and culture. See, for example, Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994); *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mae G. Henderson (New York: Routledge, 1995); *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, eds. Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White (London: Routledge, 1995).

12 The description of Tu Thuc's return is all the more striking when compared to the same moment in both Nguyen Tran Huan's translation of the sixteenth-century version of the story (*"En un clin d'oeil, il arriva chez lui"* [in the blink of an eye, he arrived home]) and Pham Duy Khiem's 1942 version (*"Il monta sur le char et, en un clin d'oeil, se vit déjà rendu"* [He mounted his chariot and, in the blink of an eye, saw himself already returned]). Nguyen Du, *Vaste recueil de légendes merveilleuses*, 142, and Pham Duy Khiem, *Légendes des terres sereines*, 2d ed., 48.

13 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 61.

14 Pham Van Ky opens *L'Homme de nulle part* not with the indeterminate *"Il y avait une fois ... "* [Once upon a time ...], but rather with the less mitigated *"A l'origine des temps ..."* [At the beginning of time ...] (5).

15 Tu Thuc's predicament seems clearly reflected in Paul White's description of migrants' attempts to return to their homelands: "To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their 'own' past and place it is rarely fully satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too." Paul White, "Geography, Literature and Migration," in *Writing Across Worlds*, eds. King et al., 14.

16 Pham Van Ky, *Frères de sang* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1947); page references will appear in the text.

17 For interesting commentary on *Frères de sang*, see Thuong Vuong-Riddick's two related articles, "Le Drame de l'occidentalisation dans quelques romans de Pham Van Ky," *Présence francophone* 16 (1978), 141–52, and "Corps et acculturation selon Pham Van Ky," *Présence francophone* 18 (1979), 165–76. See also Nguyen Hong

Nhiem, "L'Échiquier," 64–88, and Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, "Between East and West," 138–88 and 281–327.

18 The last of these novels was awarded the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie française in 1961. According to Nguyen Hong Nhiem, *Perdre la demeure* even sparked the interest of a Hollywood producer, who approached Pham Van Ky with the idea of *"un film à grand spectacle"* [an epic film] to be directed by William Wyler, with David Niven and Alain Delon in starring roles. The author signed a contract with Paramount, but the film was never made. Nguyen Hong Nhiem, "L'Échiquier," 5–6.

19 *Des Femmes assises ça et là* was the last of Pham Van Ky's novels to be published under his own name. One other novel, *Mémoires d'un eunuque*, was published anonymously in 1966.

20 Lisa Lowe, "Literary Nomadics in Francophone Allegories of Postcolonialism: Pham Van Ky and Tahar Ben Jelloun," *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993), 44, 48.

21 Nguyen Hong Nhiem, "L'Échiquier," 284.

22 Nathalie Huyhn Chau Nguyen, "Between East and West," 160.

23 In an interview with Adrien Jans, Pham Van Ky expressed the imbalance of his intercultural condition in terms that echo the notion of the *pause mortelle*: *"J'assume, à Paris, un déséquilibre ... Le déséquilibre inévitable, entre deux cultures ... Je suis heureux de ce déséquilibre, car l'équilibre, pour le romancier, équivaut au point mort"* [I take on, in Paris, an imbalance ... The inevitable imbalance between two cultures ... I am glad for this imbalance, since for a novelist balance amounts to death]. See Adrien Jans, "Paris au reflets du monde III: d'Angkor à Hanoi," *Le Soir*, Bruxelles, 29 May 1954.

24 The narrator appears to have confused Geryon with Gyes, brother of Briareus and Cottus. Collectively known as the the Hecatonchires, the three brothers each had fifty heads and one hundred arms and hands. Geryon, also a monster with multiple body parts, owned a large herd of red cattle that Hercules was called upon to steal. The error could be considered fortuitous to the extent that Geryon's herd serves as an imagistic link to the prehistoric cave paintings discussed on the following page of the novel.

25 The narrator's evocation of the cave paintings is also suggestive in terms of the novel's fundamental concern with systems of writing (see the final section of this chapter). In *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (1955), Georges Bataille describes what he calls the *"signes intelligibles"* [intelligible signs] that can be found on the walls of the Lascaux cave: *"figures géométriques complexes et ponctuations, formant sans nul doute un ensemble autrefois intelligible. Nous pourrions songer à des modes d'expression de la pensée analogues en rudimentaire à l'écriture"* [complex geometric figures and punctuation, forming without a doubt a formerly intelligible whole. We could imagine they are modes of expressing thought analogous, in a rudimentary way, to writing]. Later, he checks his impulse to "read" the signs as writing: *"Nous pouvons toujours énoncer ce que parfois ces signes nous suggèrent, mais nous devrons avouer finalement ne rien savoir"* [We may always express what these

signs sometimes suggest to us, but in the end we must admit that we know nothing]. Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. IX (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 54, 55.

26 In French, the word *main* means "hand," while *tenant* is the present participle of the verb *tenir*, "to hold." *Maintenant* itself derives etymologically from the verb *maintenir*, possibly derived in turn from the popular Latin *manutenere*, "to hold with the hand."

27 The Merseburg Charms are preserved in written form in a ninth-century manuscript belonging to the Cathedral Library of Merseburg, Germany. See J. Knight Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, 2d ed., revised by K.C. King and D.R. McLintock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 26ff.

28 In spite of this revelation, at least one contemporary reviewer seems to have read the title as a description of an exotic and specifically non-European cultural milieu: the narrator, he writes, "*n'a pas oublié son enfance au pays des rizières, une enfance où il était entouré de femmes assisses autour de lui. Et à Paris aussi, il a été entouré de femmes-amies dont il pourrait être amoureux; mais, en bonne Parisiennes, elles ne sont pas assises*" [has not forgotten his childhood in the land of the rice paddies, a childhood during which he was surrounded by women sitting all around him. And in Paris too, he was surrounded by women friends with whom he may have been in love; but, like good Parisians, they are not sitting down]. R.-M. Albérès, Review of *Des Femmes assises ça et là* in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 17 Sept. 1964, 5.

29 In an article published a few years before *Des Femmes assises ça et là*, Pham Van Ky traces the origin of the Chinese writing system back to the trigrams. Responding to the question, "*Qu'est-ce au juste que l'idéogramme?*" [What, exactly, is an ideogram?], he writes: "*Les origines en remontent à Fo Hi ... Un jour, au bord d'un lac, il aperçoit une tortue insolite. Elle porte sur sa carapace une figure. Il s'avise de l'interpreter. Il la réduit à deux lignes, l'une continue _____; l'autre brisée __ __. Il les superpose trois par trois: trigrammes; ou six par six: hexagrammes. En épuisant les combinaisons, il obtient huit trigrammes et soixante-quatre hexagrammes ... Aux _____ et __ __ de Fo Hi, [l'écriture chinoise] ajoute six autres traits, et pas dans le seul sens horizontal: dans les huit directions de l'espace*" [Its origins go back to Fo Hi ... One day, at the edge of a lake, he spied a strange tortoise. It had a figure on its shell. He dared to interpret it. He broke it down to two lines, one continuous _____; the other broken __ __. He superimposed them, three by three: trigrams; or six by six: hexagrams. Exhausting the combinations, he created eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams ... To the _____ and the __ __ of Fo Hi, (Chinese writing) adds six other strokes, and not only on the horizontal: in all of the *eight* directions of space]. Pham Van Ky, "La Croix et l'idéogramme," *Comprendre* 17–18 (1957), 77–78. Following Pham Van Ky's own ideas on the matter, in the discussion that follows I will consider the trigrams to be associated with — indeed, at the very heart of — an ideogrammatic system of writing.

30 Nguyen Hong Nhiem has noted that this "*transfert, forcé, de l'idéogramme à l'alphabet*" [forced transition from the ideogram to the alphabet] occurred in the author's own childhood. "*La mutation profonde qui s'ensuit*," she writes, "*ne cesse de travailler Pham Van Ky, je dirai au corps, et naturellement à l'esprit. Dans son*

inconscient, j'imagine volontiers la persistance rétinienne, et l'obsession, du Maître des Caractères" [The profound mutation that ensued continues to transform Pham Van Ky, his body I mean, and naturally his spirit. In his subconscious mind, I imagine with pleasure a sort of persistence of vision, an obsession with the Character Master]. In an open letter to Jean-Jacques Mayoux, Pham Van Ky himself described the profound impact on Vietnamese subjects of the shift from characters to alphabets: *"qu'advient-il à un Viêtnamien qui abandonne ce mode figuratif pour les alphabets europeens? Une rupture totale"* [what happens to a Vietnamese who abandons this figurative mode for European alphabets? A total rupture]. Nguyen Hong Nhiem, "L'Échiquier," 11; Pham Van Ky and Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Voix d'est, voix d'ouest: un dialogue entre Jean-Jacques Mayoux et Pham Van Ky," *Les Lettres nouvelles* 38, 728.

31 John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam*, 24. Subsequent page references will be given in the main text, along with the abbreviation *CLPVN*.

32 Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia*, 44. In a lecture delivered at the *Collège des Stagiaires*, Eliacin Luro offered the following odd advice to aspiring colonial administrators worried about the difficulty of learning characters: *"Quand pour la première fois, vous vous trouvez au milieu d'un peuple nouveau, noir ou jaune à physionomie complètement différente de la nôtre, vous avez dû constater avec dépit que l'on reste fort longtemps avant de pouvoir distinguer un nègre d'avec son voisin, un Annamite d'un autre Annamite. Cependant au bout d'un an la mémoire des [sic] ces physionomies étranges s'est formée, le cerveau est désormais devenu apte à recevoir l'impression rapide de ces traits inconnus jusque là, et l'on est étonné de ne plus confondre un millier de figures, bien moins différentes entre elles que ne le sont des hiéroglyphes. Messieurs, je suis fermement convaincu qu'il en est de même pour la mémoire des caractères"* [When for the first time, you found yourself in the midst of a new population, black or yellow with physiognomies completely different from our own, you must have remarked in despair that it would be quite some time before you could distinguish one negro from his neighbor, one Vietnamese from another Vietnamese. At the end of a year, however, your memory of these strange physiognomies is formed, and your brain is henceforth ready to receive the rapid impression of these formerly unknown traits, and you are astonished that you no longer confuse a thousand faces, much less differentiated than are hieroglyphs. Messieurs, I am absolutely convinced that the same holds true for the memory of characters]. Eliacin Luro, *Cours d'administration annamite*, 741.

33 Diguet, *Les Annamites: société, coutumes, religions*, 49.

34 Jules Ferry, *Le Tonkin et la mère-patrie*, 13th ed. (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890), 297.

35 Albert Marie Aristide Bouinais and A. Paulus, *L'Indo-Chine française contemporaine*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Challamel Ainé, Editeur, 1885), 215. Later in this volume, the authors explicitly link *quoc ngu* to the *mission civilisatrice* of French colonialism: *"La langue vulgaire, ainsi fixée par nos caractères [sic] latins, nous ouvre une voie facile pour faire pénétrer nos idées civilisatrices, pour vulgariser les sciences de l'Europe ignorées dans l'extrême Orient"* [The vernacular language, thus fixed by our Latin letters,

opens to us an easy path through which we may introduce our civilizing ideas, and make accessible fields of European knowledge unknown in the Far East] (260–1).

36 Comissariat de l'Indochine à l'Exposition de Lyon, *L'Indochine* (Paris, Augustin Challamel, Editeur, 1914), 40.

37 Giran, *Psychologie du peuple annamite*, 123.

38 Paulin Vial, *Cochinchine française. Rapport sur la situation de la colonie, ses institutions et ses finances, par M. Vial, Directeur de l'Intérieur* (Saigon: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), 21.

39 Diguet, *Les Annamites: société, coutumes, religions*, 27.

40 M. P. Vial, *L'Instruction publique en Cochinchine*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Challamel Aîné, Editeur, 1872), 3.

41 Edouard Petit, *Le Tong-Kin*, 227.

42 Jules Roux, *Le Triomphe définitif en Indochine du mode de transcription de la langue annamite à l'aide des caractères romains ou «Quôc ngû»* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la *Revue Indigène*, 1912), 10.

43 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 128.

44 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 169.

45 The opposition between letters and ideograms has been questioned in recent scholarship, as more attention has been paid to the phonetic component of ideographic characters. Discussing what he calls "The ideographic myth," John DeFrancis writes that "Chinese characters are a phonetic, not an ideographic, system of writing ... I would go further: There never has been, and can never be, such a thing as an ideographic system of writing." During the 1940s and 1950s, however, sino-linguists working in France expressed a view of characters much closer to that of Pham Van Ky's narrator: *"s'il est incontestable que l'indication de la prononciation se trouve présente dans le caractère, elle ne modifie pourtant en rien le principe idéographique ... le caractère garde son entité indépendante et ne se rapproche en rien du système alphabétique"* [if it is incontestable that a marker of pronunciation is present within the character, this marker in no way modifies the ideographic principle ... the character retains its indepedent essence, and in no way resembles the alphabetic system]. DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 133; Georges Margouliès, *La langue et l'écriture chinoises* (Paris: Payot, 1943), 81.

46 Lisa Lowe, "Literary Nomadics," 50, my emphasis. According to the *Grand Robert*, *cadenas* can only be used to signify a chest when it is used to designate a specific historical object: a *"coffret fermé à l'aide d'un cadenas, contenant l'argenterie dont se servaient les rois et les grands seigneurs"* [a small ornate chest closed with a lock, containing the silverware used by kings and great lords].

47 With no function beyond its locking and and unlocking mechanism, the *cadenas à combinaisons* also evokes the endlessly fastened and unfastened chains of the women of the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*; indeed, the etymological root of *cadenas* is the Latin *catena*, "chain."

48 Invented about 1879, Volapük was one of the earliest artificially constructed international languages. Underneath the narrator's humorous comment lies the suggestion that the mother's random arrangement of letters could be read as an act of linguistic invention; it seems clear, however, that the "word" formed by the mother's random arrangement cannot be considered as a recognizable linguistic unit of meaning. For more on Volapük, and the intriguing ties between international language movements and Western perceptions of the Chinese language and writing system, see John E. Joseph, "Basic English and the Debabelization of China," in *Intercultural Encounters: Studies in English Literatures*, eds. Heinz Antor and Kevin L. Cope (Heidleberg: C. Winter, 1999), 51–71.

49 Margouliès, *La Langue et l'écriture chinoises*, 75.

50 The narrator's friend Orla insists upon the materiality of the written alphabet during a conversation in which she describes having "read" the letters of his name as if they were pictographs: "*Je voyais dans la première lettre une colonne, une coupe ouverte de potence et son pendu ... Et dans la deuxième lettre: la reprise de contact d'Antée avec la terre, un effort désespéré pour réatteindre l'azur*" [I saw in the first letter a column, the open curve of a scaffold and its hanged man ... And in the second letter: Antaeus touching back down to earth, a desperate effort to touch the sky again], (295–6).

51 In fact, certain Morse signs do represent concepts rather than individual letters ("• __ • • •" = "wait"; "__ • __" = "start"; "• __ •" = "understand"). These conceptual signs, however, are few in number and do not detract from the fundamentally alphabetic nature of the system.

52 The link between Morse code and the trigrams is further strengthened in the novel by the fact that the narrator's mother, soon after having sent her first telegram, sends him a copy of the *I Ching*.

53 The full names of the seven cities can be found in a Biblical passage that itself suggests the power of letters to signify in a transcendental fashion: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, *I am Alpha and Omega*, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." (Revelation 1:10–11, emphasis added).

Afterword

1 The episode aired on Antenne 2 on April 7, 1989.

2 Kim Lefèvre, *Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: Barrault, 1990), 112. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

3 Sky Dayton, "Welcome to the Internet Age," *bLink Magazine* February-March 2000, 48. Dayton's words take on a certain chilling quality when read alongside the French newspaper reports of General Vuillemin's trans-African flight, cited in

Chapter Four ("the Sahara will be practically eliminated, and greater France will finally become a living reality").

4 Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 52.

5 Francisque Vial, *Le Problème humain de l'Indochine*, 53.

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