Voyageurs malgré eux: Silence, embodiment, and exposure in Minh Tran Huy and Doan Bui

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Abstract
In recent Franco-Vietnamese literature written by descendants of immigrants, the liminality of exile is portrayed in all its complexity through migrant bodies – that of parents’ bodies – and through political and social bodies – linked to History and the Viêt Kiều’s positionality in French society. The experience of external movement becomes an internal one, creating porosity between the outside and the body, self and others, places and times. This article argues that, in Minh Tran Huy’s Voyageur malgré lui and Doan Bui’s Le Silence de mon père, by representing their family’s migration, both authors present the silenced histories of the Vietnamese community in France. In order to do so, Tran Huy and Bui first focus on uncovering and writing the stories of their silent fathers: through their embodiment of exilic history, the fathers transmit the wound of their immigrant condition to their daughters. Consequently, daughters come to manifest similar bodily expressions of traumas they have not experienced and know little about. The fathers’ histories are eventually voiced and re-invested by the second generation. This shows how the unearthing of their fathers’ life stories is also about reappropriating a dual identity as well as making Asian diasporic perspectives and histories visible, notably to create new avenues of representation for French individuals of Asian descent.

Keywords
Doan Bui, embodiment, exile, Franco-Vietnamese, Minh Tran Huy, silence, transmission, Viêt Kiều

Introduction
In the epilogue of her collection of essays on various exiled writers entitled Tu écriras sur le bonheur, Linda Lê explores what she refers to as displaced literature by exposing the manifold ramifications of exile on literary production and its reception. In this short text, Lê symbolises exile as an abnormal condition through the image of the heteropagus (parasitic) twin: one dead twin
whom the other, alive, carries and who thus becomes a mute double. For her, it is ‘un lien monstrueux’ (Lê, 1999: 330) that connects a person’s self to their homeland: ‘Un lien où le pays natal, le jumeau done, est couvé et étouffé, reconnu et dénié. Et finalement porté comme on porte un enfant mort’ (Lê, 1999: 330). Exile is expressed through pathological images and bodily metaphors, and this exemplifies the complex internal consequences of the external movement involved in migration. However, Lê is a member of the 1.5 generation as defined by Susan R. Suleiman, and, despite having been too young to fully comprehend her exile or its implications in 1977, she has physically (used here both as ‘actually’ and ‘corporeally’) experienced migration.1 This displacement has created feelings of ‘premature bewilderment and helplessness’ (Suleiman, 2002: 277), which Lê notably expresses in the powerful and disturbing image of the parasitic twin. Interestingly, the focus on corporeality is recurrent not only in works produced by migrants but also in ‘post-migratory postcolonial’ literature (Kleppinger and Reeck, 2018: 2), that of the so-called second generation.

In recent Franco-Vietnamese literature written by descendants of immigrants, corporeality takes various forms and meanings. In this sense, the liminality of exile is represented through migrant bodies – that of parents’ bodies – and through political and social bodies – linked to History and the Việt Kiều’s2 positionality in French society. Because post-migratory individuals did not undergo literal migration, they construct experience through appropriation and exposure at various levels: what starts with personal and familial concerns takes on a larger frame of collective and cultural consideration. To understand the second generation’s relation to the parental homeland and the past, one must comprehend the complexity of the historical situation, linked to the status – then and now – of French Indochina, the decolonisation in Việt Nam, and the exodus due to geopolitics. Indochina held a special place in the French colonial empire as it was the richest – a consequence of being, first and foremost, a ‘colonie d’exploitation’ – and the most populated colony, thereby earning the name of ‘la Perle de l’Empire’ (Héduy, 2015: 340).3 It gained independence after the First Indochina War,4 which ended with the Geneva Agreement in 1954 that divided the country into North (the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and South Việt Nam (first the State of Vietnam, and then the Republic of Vietnam). For this reason, the First Indochina War is either perceived as ‘un conflit de décolonisation’ or ‘une lutte contre l’hégémonie communiste’ (Edwards and Klein, 2013: 19), a distinction that complicates the ways the former colony is represented and the war commemorated. This leads to a lack of visibility, notably ‘dans l’espace mémoriel et identitaire français’ (Edwards and Klein, 2013: 19), of the history of former French Indochina. As a result, the First Indochina War is perceived as being occultée (Cooper, 2000: 126) or oubliée (Frank, 1990: 604).5

This lack of visibility is exacerbated by subsequent events that tend to eclipse the first war – the Second Indochina War6 which set the communist North against the South and the United States till 1975, the fall (or liberation, depending on one’s political convictions) of Saigon and the ensuing conquest of the South by the Việt Cộng and the People’s Army of Việt Nam. These events led to one of the most important exoduses of the twentieth century as millions of Vietnamese, as well as Cambodians and Laotians, fled the region to take refuge in various parts of the world. History also forced others, who had already moved abroad (particularly to France) to study and/or work, to remain outside of their country of origin. Even though, starting in the early twentieth century, there were several waves of Vietnamese immigration into France,7 the three waves that are crucial in relation to the History explained above are the most recent: at the end of the First Indochina War in 1954, between 1954 and 1975, and after 1975. These recent waves of immigration give rise to questions regarding the perception and integration of the Vietnamese population into French society. As Alec G. Hargreaves observes, echoing the words of Edwards and Klein, the reasons that
led Vietnamese nationals of the aforementioned immigration waves to leave their country are, for the French, analogous and primarily linked to communism:

Memories of the Indochina war of decolonization [. . .] appear to have been effaced subsequently by two decades of war between South and North Vietnam, at the end of which anti-communist middle-class South-East Asians were welcomed as victims of the Cold War rather than as former adversaries associated with anti-colonial nationalism. (Hargreaves, 2007: 145)

This clarifies in part why Vietnamese people are perceived more positively than other migrant groups. Numerous other factors add to this vision to explain their apparent acceptance in France: their ancestral values, especially ‘their attachment to their family’ and ‘their respect of order and hierarchy’ (Blanc, 2005: 1166); their conformity in adaptation; as well as their historical and cultural links to France, particularly through a knowledge of or at least an exposure to the French language. I would also suggest that (Vietnamese) self-erasure, in order to conform to France’s Republican universalism and to enable assimilation, further reinforces the French’s lack of hostility towards this minority ethnic group.

The creation of a narrative, or even a myth of an ‘integration réussie’ (Le Huu, 1990: 7) affects how the Vietnamese diaspora in France is perceived: their experiences and history are homogenised. In the same way that the French Indochina War is overshadowed, the diversity of migration from Việt Nam is likewise downplayed. It is thus imperative to (re)consider the diachronic processes that highlight the significance of the past in the present, for the first and 1.5 generations as well as for the second generation. And although the act of silencing is carried out by the Vietnamese exiled in France, in what I have referred to as self-erasure, there is also a process of (French) erasure. Both need to be examined together as they feed off each other, so to speak; they further engulf post-migratory individuals in silence and amplify their voicelessness, in the family and in the nation. In order to discuss how silence endures and how passages from the personal to the collective operate, I will focus on two recent texts by Franco-Vietnamese writers: in Voyageur malgré lui, Tran Huy (2014) tells the story of Line who tries to connect the stories of other wanderers with her father’s migration from Việt Nam. Focusing on the causes and effects of migratory experiences, she associates the impulse to wander with an internal sense of dislocation and social erasure. In Le Silence de mon père, Bui (2016) recounts her quest as a daughter to understand her father’s silence and almost misplaced presence, which echoes that of the Việt Kiều. Bui’s and Tran Huy’s position of liminality is an essential aspect to address: both authors were born in France from Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s – Bui in 1974 and Tran Huy in 1979. Bui and Tran Huy belong to the Người Pháp gốc Việt (the Vietnamese diaspora in France) and as such, they aim to re-incorporate their heritage into official History and to present the silenced histories of the Vietnamese community in France.

Since Tran Huy and Bui extend the question of identity and representation from the personal to the collective, I use a similar approach in this article: the two texts are first examined from a personal perspective, that of migrant fathers, before broadening to their descendants – and, especially here, daughters – and to the community. The first part of the article addresses the personal expression of migration by the fathers and how, for them, migration becomes an open wound that is hidden under a veil of silence. These mute fathers refuse to transmit stories of their past to their children; the unwillingness to tell persists and eventually stifles them through illness, as though this silence has been embodied. In this regard, Voyageur malgré lui and Le Silence de mon père portray numerous layers of silence and complex interactions between the internal and the external: the internalisation of the traumatic past into the fathers’ wandering body crypts leads to secrets, what psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok (1987) refer to as phantoms. The family secrets
manifest themselves indirectly: numerous symptoms reinforce physical and psychological mutism. Through their embodiment of exilic history, the fathers transmit the wound of their immigrant condition to their daughters. In the second part, I will show how, as a consequence, and following a pattern of pathologic solidarity, daughters come to manifest similar bodily expressions of traumas they have not experienced and know little about. The fathers’ histories are eventually voiced by their daughters, appropriated and re-invested by the second generation. In the final part, I will examine how, for Line and Doan, the unearthing of their fathers’ life stories is also about reappropriating a dual identity as well as making Asian diasporic perspectives and histories visible, notably to create new avenues of representation for French people of Asian descent.

Questions of exposure and visibility are often central to art produced by Franco-Asian, especially Franco-Vietnamese, individuals. Literature written by Southeast Asians, individuals from Việt Nam, Laos, or Cambodia (formerly French Indochina), has, proportionally to other postcolonial minorities, received less attention in Francophone studies; when discussed, the scholarship tends to focus on the experiences of migrants, members of the first or 1.5 generations. I propose not only to address an underexplored postcolonial region but also to concentrate on representations through the lens of the second generation. This article thus participates in the recent focus on post-migratory experiences of French Southeast Asian individuals along with other scholars, such as Leslie Barnes, Jennifer Howell, Catherine H. Nguyen, Emmanuelle Radar, Angelica P. So, and Yen N. Vu. Yet, despite the growing numbers of scholars interested in post-migratory Southeast Asians and the increasing attention devoted to their artistic and literary productions, the postcolonial aspect present in these works is often overshadowed. For instance, in her article ‘La Filiation et l’oblique. Le Silence de mon père de Doan Bui,’ Gnocchi (2019) focuses solely on questions of (auto) biography, familial transmission, and literary heritage. Similarly, in her excellent study of several of Minh Tran Huy’s novels entitled ‘Vietnam by Removes: Storytelling and Postmemory in Minh Tran Huy,’ Nguyen (2018) sets aside any discussion of postcoloniality, despite discussing it at length in her introduction in relation to the first and 1.5 generations, to concentrate on storytelling and postmemory. It is my contention that post-migratory concerns linked to transmission and family history should be analysed along issues of historical and social visibility of this postcolonial minority. Like the processes undertaken by Bui and Tran Huy, it remains a question of countering silences and filling representational voids for French individuals with Southeast Asian postcolonial heritage.

While it can be argued that because the Southeast Asian population in France has not experienced discrimination to the same degree as other ethnic minorities, this does not mean that Bui and Tran Huy do not engage with postcolonial questions linked to difference, diversity, and multiculturalism. Hargreaves and McKinney maintain that, in many works produced by artists of Southeast Asian descent, there is an emphasis on recover[ing] cultural memories repressed or obliterated by the circumstances that led their parents into exile from Indochina in the 1960s and 1970s’ (Hargreaves and McKinney, 2018: 262) which create detachment from ‘the patterns of domination characteristic of colonial and neocolonial power relations’ (Hargreaves and McKinney, 2018: 258). However, I would argue that such representational focus should not be detached from a postcolonial dynamic. Indeed, the works’ emphasis on exposure, making what is internal external and thus visible, pertains to correcting marginal representations and resisting an imposed invisibility. Sociologist Le Huu Khoa emphasises the importance, for the second generation, of countering and de-tabooing Asian invisibility: ‘Pour eux [les jeunes formés par l’école française], la visibilité sociale d’une communauté est un droit’ (Le Huu, 1996: 98). This is linked to Tran Huy’s and Bui’s desire to expose silenced histories and transform the ways in which migrants from former Indochina and their descendants are represented and perceived, transforming silences into resonant echoes and silhouettes into visible individuals with specific yet common experiences.
Fathers: from silence to indirect transmission

The father figures present in Buy’s and Tran Huy’s texts share similar backgrounds and journeys. Both fathers have gone to Paris as academic migrants: Line’s father Hung to study engineering in 1964 in *Voyageur malgré lui*; Doan’s father to study medicine in 1961 in *Le Silence de mon père*. In each case, History ‘avec sa grande hache’ (Perec, 1975: 17) rules out any possibility of returning home and thus indefinitely extends a stay that was supposed to be temporary. While this History is known, the fathers’ respective histories are concealed as the conditions of their exile remain unspoken. Silence is a recurrent phenomenon in both works: it defines the fathers and shapes their interactions with their offspring. In *Voyageur malgré lui*, Hung’s silence was ‘son élément naturel’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 93), one in which he immersed himself and which had prevented any meaningful communication with his curious daughter. In *Le Silence de mon père*, it takes centre stage in the very title as it defines Doan’s relationship with her father: during her childhood, he fades into ‘une ombre silencieuse’ (Bui, 2016: 34) and remains thus ‘un inconnu’ (p. 62) who further exiles himself from his family. The dominance of the lexical field of silence in the descriptions of the paternal figures not only illustrates their introverted personalities but is also connected to their personal experiences of exile, their ‘histoire difficile’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 93).

Silence also relates to cultural and social characteristics of parents, especially fathers, particularly through their role as providers for their family. Sociologist Mong Hang Vu-Renaud asserts that, many Vietnamese in France, as in their homeland, perceive the male parent to be the organising principle of the family with ‘le père dirigeant l’ensemble de la famille’ (Vu-Renaud, 2002: 75). This hierarchical superiority is notably related to work outside the home. Both Tran Huy and Bui emphasise this connection by repeatedly describing the fathers in relation to their occupation. In *Voyageur malgré lui*, Line discusses her father’s profession and underlines the idea of movement through his recurrent business trips (Tran Huy, 2014: 50, 197, 200, 216, 226). She highlights that he worked all the time: ‘Il avait travaillé, travaillé, travaillé, afin de s’assurer que les siens ne manqueraient de rien’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 92). The repetition of the verb *travailler* further links Hung’s identity to his profession. Likewise for Bui: her father is a ‘bourreau de travail’ (Bui, 2016: 198). As a consequence, ‘harassé par le travail’ (Bui, 2016: 126), he always returns home late, rarely seeing his children. The emphasis placed on their fathers’ professions points to the disconnect that exists between male parents and children, reinforced by the respect that the latter are expected to show the former.

Paternal superiority is furthermore related to cultural attitudes linked to *không giáo* (Confucianism) and the idea of sacrifice, *hy sinh* in Vietnamese. Cultural anthropologist Merav Shohet defines *hy sinh* as entailing ‘the moral expectation that persons anticipate and fulfill others’ needs and wants “intuitively,” by sanguinely forgoing certain comforts and freedoms themselves for the sake of an intimate other’ (Shohet, 2013: 205). She asserts the links that exist between the ethic of *hy sinh* and patriarchal hierarchy: fathers sacrifice for their children, which in turn means that children must show filial piety (*hiếu*) (Shohet, 2013: 204). The same idea of parental sacrifice is put forth by Vu-Renaud who considers it to be the role of parents according to their generational status (Vu-Renaud, 2002: 153). However, though *hy sinh* regulates the relations between parent and child, what particularly interests me here is the idea that ‘sacrifice is mute and secretive’ (Bác Thu, cited in Shohet, 2013: 205). In *Le Silence de mon père*, it is Doan’s mother who verbalises her husband’s sacrifice for his children: “Il travaille si dur, et c’est comme ça que vous le remerciez!,” traduisait alors ma mère’ (Bui, 2016: 55). The agent of (self-)sacrifice remains quiet, never acknowledging the hard work he performs to support his family. A translator is needed to voice these efforts. On this basis, I suggest that *hy sinh* is further complicated in exile as one is far away from home while nonetheless still attached to Vietnamese ethics, whether they be linked to familial
hierarchy or the expectations related to sacrifice (for both performers and receivers). The responsibility of taking care of his family is exacerbated; the burden is made heavier by distance, both geographical and temporal. Doan’s father explains the duty of caring for his mother and sisters left in Việt Nam and the guilt he feels for not having been there with them (Bui, 2016: 192); this shame (Bui, 2016: 197–198) must not be verbalised. The organising principle of *hy sinh* is thus additionally complicated because of added sacrifices, thus further silenced. Multiple layers of silence are at play within the mute fathers of *Voyageur malgré lui* and *Le Silence de mon père*.

As the experience of exile and its consequences are stifled, trauma invades mind and body. The intrinsic connection between exile and the body, both a literal and symbolic one, results in an incorporation of the fathers’ traumatic histories. The wandering body becomes the space in which secrets lie; Line’s and Doan’s fathers have kept their stories hidden inside of them: ‘Pendant plus de soixante ans, il avait gardé ses souvenirs enfermés en lui’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 92). There are two interesting elements here, whose interactions with each other are particularly important. First, the desire or rather the necessity for memories and complex emotions (related to familial hierarchy and *hy sinh*) to be silenced transforms those secrets into a psychic phantom. In both texts, they are family secrets that the first generation cannot reveal, ‘unspeakable because of the pain and shame it would evoke’ (Yassa, 2002: 83). Second, the idea of a container in which the secrets are kept: bodies have become crypts, receptacles of repressed memories and feelings. The use of the verb *enfermer* illustrates this containment, and the incorporation is further emphasised by the preposition *en*. Doan’s father and Hung are, to use the terminology of psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok, cryptophores. Each man’s body is a crypt, an ‘intérieur secret’ (Derrida, 1976: 12) in which they bury their stories. It is interesting to note that the crypt is, similarly to exiled bodies, characterised by liminality: ‘Ce [lieu] n’est ni l’Inconscient dynamique ni le Moi de l’introjection. Ce serait plutôt une enclave entre les deux’ (Abraham and Torok, 1987: 254). The liminality of exile, in which the relationship to the homeland is characterised by presence and absence and the subject is caught between yearning for Việt Nam and building a new life in France, is incorporated and transcribed into the creation of a crypt. In the in-between space created in their bodies, the past haunts the fathers’ and their children’s existence; unexpressed, it seeks indirect channels of manifestation.

This specific situation of concealment, consequences of personal history as well as collective values, makes it so that the longing for a lost homeland can only be expressed in and through the body. In *Voyageur malgré lui*, an illness slowly takes over the body and mind of Hung: Alzheimer’s disease erases the silenced memories. The disease mimics and takes on the mechanisms voluntarily put in place in the past. While towards the end (of both the novel and his life), Hung’s illness has pushed him to speak continually, his nonsensical torrent of words is tantamount to his silence: ‘Le goût du mouvement est ancré en lui comme le silence l’a été et l’est encore, d’ailleurs, à présent que ses logorrhées, tournant à vide, ne livrent plus rien de lui’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 216). Here and throughout, Tran Huy parallels silence with movement, connecting them in their bodily manifestation. In *Le Silence de mon père*, before his cerebrovascular accident, Doan’s father is both asthmatic and prone to allergies, pathologies that appeared after he arrived in France. For Doan, it is as if her father’s body expressed ‘paroles suffoquées’ (Kofman, 1987), those representing his past but which he is physically unable to utter. Like silence, his asthma and allergies are the embodiment of exile: ‘[p]our ceux qui ont fui comme pour ceux qui sont restés, le passé n’est jamais passé, il colonise le corps, c’est une maladie dont on ne guérit pas’ (Bui, 2016: 194). The corporeal colonisation of the past migration and present state of exile through disease is pervasive in Bui’s text. It is interesting to note her choice of vocabulary: *coloniser* points to a personal experience as well as a collective one, that of France’s colonial rule in former French Indochina. I argue that the disease described pertains not solely to physical/individual trauma but also to historical trauma. Moreover, she uses the vocabulary of movement to describe her father’s physical
condition after his stroke: aphasia becomes a ‘pays lointain’ and a ‘mer de silence’ on which her father ‘continua de voguer’ (Bui, 2016: 30). This lexical field which refers to his status as an exile further exemplifies the liminality of trauma in which ‘mind and body coexist in a dynamic and interconnected relationship’ (McDonald, 2012: 250): he is ‘arraché’ from his home (Bui, 2016: 68), which not only conveys the violence of dislocation as he is torn away (body), but also suggests its durability as he is undeniably uprooted (mind).11

There indeed exists a complex relationship between silence and what I would call the exiled/wandering body crypt. I have shown above how the body comes to speak the silenced experiences of exile through illnesses. However, the symptoms give rise to a physical and literal inability to speak, further exiling, so to speak, the fathers in their body crypts. For instance, Hung admits that Alzheimer’s disease brings him to the past as he is imprisoned in what feels like dreams but are actually experiences of his past. Describing his rapid deterioration, Hung states that he does not feel that he is forgetting; he is simply spending ‘un peu plus de temps chaque jour dans un songe familier, qui m’appartient et auquel j’appartiens, et dont je ne parviens pas à croire qu’il va s’évanouir avec moi’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 210). Those dreams are in him and he uses the term ‘englouti’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 210) to express this incorporation; his body crypt is acknowledged as such, as it contains his story but also the story of others:

[L]e passé continue de vivre en moi avec une telle netteté, une telle clarté . . . Toutes ces années où je me suis tu, je n’ai pas pour autant perdu la mémoire. Buffle, Sun, mon père, mon grand-père, Thinh, Hoai, Linh, le juge : mes morts sont demeurés dans mon cœur et mon âme quand bien même je m’interdisais de les évoquer [. . .]. (Tran Huy, 2014: 210)

Hung’s crypt contains all the individuals who were part of his life and who have been impacted by History. For instance, his cousin Linh decided to return to Việt Nam in to join a South Vietnamese commando (Tran Huy, 2014: 177) and later died while trying to escape from a reeducation camp (Tran Huy, 2014: 196). Derrida states that ‘la crypte elle-même se construit dans la violence’ (Derrida, 1976: 13), a fact illustrated by the aforementioned (long) list of individuals who have disappeared because of History.12

While the crypt is, according to Derrida, a ‘lieu de silence’ (Derrida, 1976: 18), one in which ‘[i]ncorporation se tait, ne parle que pour taire ou pour détourner d’un lieu secret’ (Derrida, 1976: 18), it is the fathers’ silencing diseases which spur transmission. In Le Silence de mon père, faced with her father’s permanent inability to speak as a result of his stroke, Doan attempts to transform silence into language. In this sense, she views ‘silence and speech, paradoxically, [as] parallel communicative events in addition to opposite poles of a binary’ (Acheson, 2008: 543). By recognising silence as communication, she enables the breaking down of the walls of his crypt. Doan’s father has kept his dead relatives inside of him, mirror images of the ones that Hung has incorporated: the ‘boat people’, the ones left behind, and the victims. Furthermore, the world Doan’s father inhabits is described as a space between present and past, places and languages: ‘C’était son lot à lui, l’immigré, n’être jamais ici ou là-bas, mais en transit, coincé dans un bouchon perpétuel qui l’empêchait de rentrer chez lui’ (Bui, 2016: 127). This liminal space is both exterior (made of geographical displacements and perpetual movements that lead nowhere) and interior (an enclave). It is only when the latter is opened through the act of sharing that the secrets are uncovered. The aphasia of Doan’s father allows for the rest of his family to finally tell stories: the years in hiding, the exile from North to South because of ông nội’s13 fight alongside the Việt Minh, and then the exile to France and his first wife, a Frenchwoman with whom he had two children. The transmission is never uttered by the male parent but nonetheless destroys the crypt; the discovery that all is known brings relief and joy: ‘Mon père s’illumine. [. . .] Sa bouche sourit. Ses yeux
sourient. Il tente de me parler’ (Bui, 2016: 250). The succession of short sentences shows the simple yet overwhelming emotions that knowledge creates. The apposition of ‘il’ and ‘me’ linked through the attempt to speak illustrates how a message has gone through and a passage has been excavated.

Transmission is textually visible in Tran Huy’s novel: when Hung faces the prospect of forgetting his past by the rapid progression of Alzheimer’s disease, he records his story, finally voicing his crypt. It is only at the end of the novel that one realises that Hung’s parts are said in his voice, quite literally: he has left audio tapes where he has recounted his story. The transcriptions of his tapes appear in the second part of Voyager malgré lui: ‘Retours’ comprises two alternating texts. One recounts the story of Line, her childhood and past discussions with her father (text written in roman letters), and the other narrating Hung’s memories (in italics). Absence guides Hung’s recounting and this void is transcribed through the constant shift between both narratives, two tales linked to the past. The text in italics, Hung’s words, fills in the gaps of Line’s narration as they complete the little she knows. The alternation yet combination of the two texts points to the filling of the void, and the opening and subsequent destruction of the crypt. When the body crypt is overtaken by silencing illness, paradoxically, transmission becomes possible and allows for a different relation to the past for all members of the family.

Daughters: from embodied appropriation to writing

Both daughters, the autodiegetic narrators, are, throughout their childhood and much of their adulthood, under the grip of silence (l’emprise du silence), which historian Nadine Fresco perceives as solely allowing the transmission of trauma: ‘Aux enfants, à qui la mémoire était refusée, on transmettait seulement la blessure’ (Fresco, 1981: 208). The wound is not only transmitted through silence but comes to symbolize this very silence. Fresco demonstrates the strong interrelation between memory, transmission, and the body for the second generation. In this vein, psychoanalyst Anne-Lise Stern refers to the transgenerational transmission of trauma as a ‘transmission parentérale’ (Stern, 2000: 18). Stern uses medical terminology to emphasise the depth of transference and internalisation; these processes are perceived as simultaneously cognitive and corporeal. In Voyager malgré lui and Le Silence de mon père, before the long-awaited transmission of the fathers’ histories, silence also swallows Line and Doan. For Doan, silence creates similar corporeal effects than those of her father: ‘Le silence est comme l’asthme chez nous. Ça se transmet de père en fille’ (Bui, 2016: 154). Throughout Le Silence de mon père, she affirms that, in many ways, she is her father’s double. In her chapter entitled ‘Fille de’, she explains that it is as if a chain of resemblances and subsequent effects occurs: their need to wear glasses with thick lenses leads them to find solace in silence, which in turn has transformed into an asthmatic cough. This last stage causes her to admit that she has become her father: ‘Je me suis tue. Et de mon silence un son a émergé : la toux asthmatique de mon père. [. . . ] J’étais devenue mon père : je sonnais comme lui’ (Bui, 2016: 74). The attempt to establish causality between physical conditions (myopia, asthma) and silence shows their intrinsic connection. Silence is ‘corporalized’ so as to be viewed as a hereditary condition that is reproduced. It constitutes a family’s heritage: their phantom.

The fathers’ secrets are borne by the second generation: it is this particular transmission – paradoxically based on a non-transmission, that is ‘pour n’avoir pu s’énoncer en paroles, pour avoir dû être couvert par le silence’ (Abraham and Torok, 1987: 450) – that creates a situation of haunting. This phantom returns ‘dans des paroles et actes bizarres, dans des symptômes (phobiques, obsessionnels . . . ) etc.’ (Abraham and Torok, 1987: 391), finding different ways of expression: corporeally for Doan as shown above, but in the two daughters’ professions as well. Indeed, in Voyager malgré lui, silence has shaped Line’s choice of career (she records different sounds that
are put into a database) and her initial quest, to capture different types of silences, an endeavour she knows to be impossible (Tran Huy, 2014: 64). She defines herself as a ‘gardienne de traces’ and collects remnants that would seem ‘humbles et même insignifiantes’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 61). Furthermore, these traces/silences point to absence and thus establish a connection to her complex familial history. Doan, as a journalist, ‘consigne les traces, enregistre le passage des vies, nos vies si fugaces, aussi immatérielles que les songes’ (Bui, 2016: 143). The recurrence of the word *traces* illustrates Doan’s and Line’s common endeavour. Doan further states, ‘[j]e suis la greffière de ce qui n’est plus’ (Bui, 2016: 143). Here, Doan not only points to her work as a journalist but also to the writing of *Le Silence de mon père*. Passage is emphasised in the nature of her job: the passage of time complements the transmission of memories, as if one could enable the impossible other. She adds that ‘le journaliste sert aussi de réceptacle pour tous les mots qui n’ont jamais été dits’ (Bui, 2016: 57). The idea of a repository points to a possible filling of the void left by silence, a transmission that could be passed on through her/the journalist. The same impulse directs the two: absence, or what Doan calls the ‘Grand Néant’ (Bui, 2016: 143). The image of the void recurs in the justification of Line’s and Doan’s work. Because memory is lacking, full of holes (the *mémoire trouée* of the second generation as defined by Henri Raczymow, 1986), it points to its very absence. The consequences of silence on the daughters place them at the threshold of memory, leaving an open wound

The daughters’ professions also require them to travel, which results in them reproducing their fathers’ exile and feeling of displacement with their own bodies. Line feels ‘désorientée’ on her travels, as if her ‘esprit peinait à suivre le rythme de [s]on corps’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 15). The disconnect between mind and body allows her to silence her identity troubles and the many questions she has. Likewise, Doan regularly travels to collect the stories of other immigrants (Bui, 2016: 57–58). A process of substitution allows the daughters to inhabit the threshold that characterises their (non-)belonging: ‘[une] existence comme une sorte d’exil [. . .] d’un temps révolu qui aurait été celui de l’identité même’ (Fresco, 1981: 211). Their identity is one of wandering: linked to their parents’ exile, and one which is reproduced in and by them, corporeally inscribed and (un)consciously imitated. Marianne Hirsch defines this exile in identity as ‘characteristic of postmemory’ (Hirsch, 1996: 662). However, I would suggest that it is not yet postmemory since it is solely based on silence. In this respect, Hirsch affirms that unlike Fresco’s and Raczymow’s emphasis on silence and absence, she has heard many stories about her parents’ past. This allows her to invest such stories and to imagine them, unlike, I would suggest, Line and Doan. It is worth noting here that the very displacement that Line and Doan perform in their work alludes to the absence of (post)memory. This points to a contention in Hirsch’s definition of postmemory, a paradox that exemplifies the situation of those children caught at the threshold.

Line and Doan occupy an in-between space – one which is cultural, historical, memorial, as well as physical – because of their status as daughters of immigrants. In this sense, the gap of memory I have introduced above is also a separation of two cultural heritages. In *Le Silence de mon père*, Bui asserts the duality that exists within her: if she uses ‘*je*’, she is Doan and belongs to the French community, ‘une enfant banane’ (Bui, 2016: 88). When she is Thuy, her real first name, she belongs to the ‘*nous*’ of her family and the Vietnamese community. In relation to Afrodescendants, Malanda (2014) speaks of this double identity as an instance of ‘habiter la frontière’ and, although she uses Léonora Miano’s title (who perceives this in-betweenness as powerful and potentially subversive), underscores the *mal-être* resulting from cultural hybridity, a sort of disintegration (Djouder, 2006). I argue that a similar uneasiness exists for Line and Doan, notably due to the lack that defines their relationship to their two cultures: ‘loin d’une identité frontalière garantissant l’accès à plusieurs’, the daughters are lost ‘entre deux mondes qui leur ferment leur porte’ (Malanda, 2014: 184). Vietnamese history is silenced so that cultural referents are incomplete. For instance, Line and
Doan speaks little Vietnamese, although both narrators point out that it is their mother tongue. Consequently, they feel excluded at family gatherings and even in Việt Nam (Bui, 2016: 237; Tran Huy, 2014: 218). They are also not ‘fully’ French, despite being born and raised in France. Physically marked by their difference, but also officially and administratively, as both have to formally establish their Frenchness through a decree of reintegration issued in 1981 (Bui, 2016: 101; Tran Huy, 2014: 118), they are constantly made foreign in their birth country, perceived as associated with Asia and/or Việt Nam.

The gap created by the daughters’ cultural identity similarly symbolises the relationship between the first generation and their descendants. This relational rift is further widened by silence. In Portrait du décolonisé, Memmi discusses the gap (‘un hiatus’ [Memmi, 2004: 169], a word connoting both discontinuity and paradoxicality) that exists between immigrant parents and their children. He affirms that ‘ils n’ont pas la même mémoire, pas la même conception de l’avenir, ils ne sont presque pas du même monde’ (Memmi, 2004: 169). The state of memory for many children of immigrants remains different from that of their parents. Bui conceptualises this hiatus through the image of a Möbius strip in her relation to the past and the future: ‘Je trace sans relâche mon anneau de Möbius, il s’enroule autour du vide et fait le va-et-vient entre passé et futur’ (Bui, 2016: 143). Caught between her parents’ past, which is also incompletely her own, and the future she is supposed to move towards, she is only made aware of the gap of her missing memory that has been neither uttered nor written.

The ‘blessures de mémoire’, as termed by Michel Schneider (1980), are the results of the suppression of the parents’ memories. In turn, the trauma of exile is transmitted because of and through silence. This paradoxical transmission allows the daughters to narrate their prehistory as well as their present, and to inscribe themselves into their history. Malanda (2014) affirms that to truly claim a border identity, one ought to return to one’s origins (pp. 185–186). Voyageur malgré lui and Le Silence de mon père exemplify this desire to look back in order to finally be able to escape the Möbius loop. Writing allows for a (re)appropriation of the past through its formulation: for Bui, she writes a book that ‘sera le portrait d’un inconnu. Mon père’ (Bui, 2016: 62); for Tran Huy’s Line, the archive of her father’s silence turns into an act of transmission and reception (Tran Huy, 2014: 227–228, among others). The holes in the children’s memory, which was silenced, only making those gaps larger, are slowly filled up, so to speak. Those wounds can then be treated: ‘les [trous] reboucher, panser les plaies’ (Bui, 2016: 252). It is only then that the children’s mémoire trouée can become postmemory. Their need ‘to feel and to know, but also to re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace and to repair’ (Hirsch, 1996: 661) happens through processes of ‘imaginative investment and creation’ (Hirsch, 1996: 662) that writing enables. It is thus not surprising that Bui’s text ends with a succession of several verbs in the future tense: finally out of the Möbius loop, she and her family can move forward.

In her essay ‘Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile’, Hirsch (1996) clarifies that she has developed her notion of postmemory in connection to her family history and the Holocaust. However, she affirms that ‘it may usefully describe the second-generation memory of other cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences’ (Hirsch, 1996: 662). I also believe in this multidirectional use of theories related to trauma and memory developed around the Second World War. I have referred to several writers and theorists who have written about the Holocaust and its consequences. Through the reliance on this specific critical apparatus, I do not intend to conflate different traumatic histories; quite the contrary. I seek to identify connecting points between various forms of historical and memorial representation of events, enabling the representation of silenced perspectives. Bui and Tran Huy themselves operate a similar dialogue as they both cite writers who occupy analogous positions as theirs, though with different temporal, cultural, and spatial referents: Patrick Modiano and Georges Perec respectively. Bui’s epigraph is a citation from Modiano’s Rue des boutiques...
The narrator laments his lack of ties to the past: ‘( . . . ) lui aussi avait perdu ses propres traces et toute une partie de sa vie avait sombré d’un seul coup, sans qu’il subsistât le moindre fil conducteur, la moindre attache qui aurait pu encore le relier au passé’ (cited in Bui, 2016: 7). Tran Huy cites a passage from Pèrenc’s *Ellis Island*, thus connecting traumatic history with migration. In this epigraph, the narrating ‘I’ likewise deplores a lack of transmission. Consequently, the void differentiates this ‘I’ from his people:

Quelque part, je suis étranger par rapport à quelque chose de moi-même; quelque part, je suis « différent », mais non pas différent des autres, différent des « miens » : je ne parle pas la langue que mes parents parlèrent, je ne partage aucun des souvenirs qu’ils purent avoir, quelque chose qui était à eux, qui faisait qu’ils étaient eux, leur histoire, leur culture, leur espoir, ne m’a été transmis. (cited in Tran Huy, 2014: 9)

The unfamiliar, almost uncanny part of one’s identity as a child of migrants points to the intrinsic void that characterises their sense of belonging. There exists a commonality in terms of experiences that allows for connections to be formed and echoes to appear. The reliance on the literature surrounding the memory of World War II and the Holocaust should nonetheless not remain unquestioned. The hegemony of this criticism reveals another gap: a critical one. It is my contention here that the memorial void that impacts the migrant and their children is, in the specific context I am examining, linked to a larger void in representation, both ethnic and historical.

**The community: from invisibility to polyphonic inscription**

Confronted with the void resulting from a lack of transmission on a familial and national scale, Bui and Tran Huy aim to generate avenues of representation for the Vietnamese population in France, both migrants and their descendants. In this regard, more than just a personal memory, the two authors are interested in the articulation of a collective memory at the glocal level to counter the *Việt Kiều*’s voicelessness. In *Le Silence de mon père*, Bui accentuates a duality in the silencing of histories: it is not only the ‘I’ of her father that is suppressed because of his non-spoken and non-recognised story; it is also the ‘we’ of the *Việt Kiều* community. Bui describes the Vietnamese diaspora in France as ‘la plus invisible des minorités visibles’ (Bui, 2016: 175), having undergone a self-erasure in order to integrate: ‘Croyant bien faire, nos parents se sont interdits de transmettre leur culture, ils sont resté muets sur leur histoire. Je retrouve tant de secrets dans toutes les familles asiatiques, imbriqués dans les parcours d’exil’ (Bui, 2016: 177–178). Tran Huy remarks on similar processes of non-transmission based on the belief that it will benefit integration (Tran Huy, 2014: 132–133). Oftentimes, the Southeast Asian population in France is viewed as having successfully integrated (Le Huu, 1990: 7), a direct result of the ‘clear break with [the] country of origin’ due to the ‘tragic circumstances of emigration’ (Beauchemin et al., 2010: 26). The fathers’ silence, to allow for a faster ‘incorporation’ into the receiving country, resonates in their community, becoming a paradigm as it creates silent echoes that come to define the *Việt Kiều* themselves.

By excavating her father’s history, Bui reveals the stories of other members of the *Việt Kiều* through a metonymic displacement based on contiguity. The articulation of one story works to reintegrate her family *and* others like her into History (Bui, 2016: 182), countering the silences and the expectations of the French Republic. Bui thus becomes a *passeuse de mémoire* as she recreates a familial archive as well as ‘a migrant archive’, as termed by Oana Sabo (2018), through a re-incorporation of the Vietnamese community into official discourse. Sabo states that *Le Silence de mon père* won the National Museum of the History of Immigration’s *Prix de la Porte Dorée* in 2016 because Bui’s text tries to counter ‘the suppression of one’s cultural roots’ encouraged by assimilation and instead ‘highlights hybridity as a productive literary technique for interrogating
French models of national belonging’ (Sabo, 2018: 106). The definition of national identity and one’s conformism to it pertains, according to Tyler Stovall, to an ideology of republican universalism (Stovall, 2013: 260); it encourages, through assimilation/integration, the adherence to the Republic’s values and a normative model of citizenship. I do not claim that Bui necessarily argues against integration; however, I do believe that she aspires to new models of belonging based on multiculturalism.

The attempts to define a French national identity relates to history and one’s knowledge of it. In this regard, Bui fuses her ignorance of her family’s history with the private and public silencing of Việt Nam’s history: ‘il n’y avait pas d’Histoire, il n’y avait d’ailleurs pas d’histoires du tout’ (Bui, 2016: 60). The apposition of History (with a capital letter) with histories (in the plural form to refer to microhistories) in negative structures illustrates the dispossession that characterises the immigrants’ children’s relation to the(ir) past. Bui reiterates that, although she studied other aspects of French national history, enumerating all its most striking historical periods and events (‘La litanie des dynasties, les Carolingiens, les Mérovingiens, les Capétiens, la beauté majestueuse des arbres généalogiques des princes et des rois, la Révolution, la Première Guerre mondiale, la Seconde’ Bui, 2016: 58), she never learnt about Việt Nam, not even in relation to French colonial history. Her father’s family position is even more problematic and further silenced because her grandfather was labelled a Việt gian (i.e. a traitor) due to his alleged collaboration with the French. This position in the grey zone further reinforces the silence as Bui maintains that her father’s story has been effaced from official History: ‘Mon père n’a pas d’Histoire. Son passé a été gommé’ (Bui, 2016: 182). There exists a dual process of erasure, in Việt Nam and in France, which further complicates the articulation and recognition of certain histories. This invisibility is also observable through my own use of theories in this article as I need to rely primarily on other events, immigrant populations, and instances of immigration in order to address the literature produced by Asiascendant authors. By writing the story of her family, Bui aims to stand for all Việt Kiều families and the History of her parents’ birthplace; she calls for visibility in literary as well as cultural, social, and political realms.

In her study of Beur fiction, Laura Reeck points out that the formulation of a social identity remains an essential aspect of the writing of second-generation immigrants (Reeck, 2011: 15). In their desire to represent themselves, French(wo)men with an immigrant background seek to (re) construct an identity that incorporates the numerous aspects of their interstitial position. From this standpoint, Amin Maalouf affirms that the individual who can accept their own diversity will have the specific role of an intermediary to play (Maalouf, 1998: 46). I contend that Bui re-positivizes Franco-Vietnamese liminality (linked to the migratory but also to the diasporic) at the personal and collective levels. She becomes the cement (Maalouf, 1998: 46) between her two cultures, trying to operate as a liaison between communities. Although Bui first establishes a dichotomy between the je (France) and the nous (Việt Nam), she then expresses her Việt Kiều identity as a ‘double je’ (Bui, 2016: 174), though she views it rather negatively: it is a role she has to play depending on where she is or with whom. It is only after understanding her father’s past and how he was himself torn between his French life and Vietnamese family that her self comes to include the duality of her identity: she is, like her father, ‘une addition de visages, un grand patchwork bariolé’ (Bui, 2016: 213). Moreover, her being a mother of two Eurasian girls is a part of her patchwork as it requires her to perform such a liaison between her daughters’ two origins. For instance, she finally learns how to cook pho with her mother’s help (Bui, 2016: 92), while throughout her childhood she had only ‘swallowed’ France: ‘Ma mère cuisinait vietnamien pour mon père, français pour nous. [. . .] Nous avions ingéré la France, nous les enfants “banane.” Nous la parlions, nous la mangions, nous la digérions’ (Bui, 2016: 88–89). Like her parents before her (Bui, 2016: 88), Bui finally connects to Việt Nam through the making and sharing of food.
Writing also becomes a means of connecting French identity and Vietnamese history for the children of Vietnamese immigrants. This is observable in the clear evolution of Bui’s relationship to her diverse identity in the text, one that connects the intratextual with the extratextual, the particular with the collective. By choosing to live, as an adult, in the Asian neighbourhood in Paris, the thirteenth arrondissement, she joins her two identities geographically and to form a collective locality that she can inhabit. Having avoided living there before, she finally settles in Chinatown, ‘aimantée’ (Bui, 2016: 90) by the thirteenth district. As a bordescapes (Brambilla, 2015) inside France, the thirteenth arrondissement is a connective space that welcomes the liminality of Franco-Vietnamese individuals. As both a milieu de mémoire and a lieu de mémoire, the Asian neighbourhood in Paris enables members of the same community to establish memorial and historical connections.

The interstitial nature of identity relates to the form of Le Silence de mon père. Not only does it consist of short chapters, letters, emails, an exchange on an Internet forum, and MSN and WhatsApp chat transcripts, but it also touches upon the stories of various individuals. This text is characterised by dissemination and fragmentation. In this respect, it becomes an ‘autobiographie éclatée’ linked to ‘la representation du transculturel’ (Grell, 2014: 107): as both shattered and split, it opens up the text to others. Interestingly, Grell writes such comments in relation to autofiction, and yet, the similarities between Bui’s autobiography and the autofictional genre are unsurprisingly striking.18 Serge Doubrovsky stipulates that autofiction engages with remnants: ‘Fragments épars, morceaux dépareillés, tant qu’on veut : l’autofiction sera l’art d’accommoder les restes’ (Doubrovsky, 1993: 213). I maintain that it is the case of any form of ego-writing when considering situations of errantry and experiences of trauma. Both autobiography and autofiction, concerning the writing of individuals characterised by cultural duality, deal with unearthing and making sense of unknown (hi)stories. It is not only a matter of (re)constructing one’s personal and familial history but also creating parallels with others’ histories. Bui gathers traces by attending to her story as well as to others’, offering a plural representation of the suppression of the past and countering these erasures/silences.

Fragmentation and a focus on traces are also recurrent in Tran Huy’s text, and this becomes all the more relevant since Voyageur malgré lui is, I would argue, an autobiographical novel, Line being the fictional alter ego of the author. Indeed, Tran Huy and her character Line occupy a similar position of Franco-Vietnamese liminality implied by their post-migratory and postcolonial status. Tran Huy herself has specified that she drew her inspiration for Line’s family on her own background (thus suggesting that her disguised autobiography is contingent on disguised biographies): ‘évidemment pour cette histoire, je me suis un peu inspirée de mon propre père qui est d’origine vietnamienne [et] qui a gagné la France dans les années soixante’ (in Mollat, 2014: 02:56-03:06). The autoreferential clues are numerous and encourage the constant drawing of parallels between the author and her character. For instance, Tran Huy’s great-grandfather and grandfather disappeared under similar circumstances to Line’s so that their existence, in Hung’s words, ‘mais aussi toute trace d’eux avaient été effacées du monde’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 147). Tran Huy has established several comparable displacements to invoke the stories of her father, his family, and his friends, and to make them visible: ‘j’ai construit ce roman en m’appuyant en fait sur tous ces itinéraires généralement vrais, que j’ai recomposés, déplacés, un peu reconstruits mais qui viennent de là, qui viennent de cette source-là [de son père] ’ (in Mollat, 2014: 04:13-04:25). The use of three verbs – recompose, displace, reconstruct – pointing to appropriation and re-incorporation shows the complex process of investment. The fictional nature of the text creates distance to allow for the disguised formulation of the author’s history and, above all, to speak for many others who have disappeared. Tran Huy has only been able to recount her family’s history indirectly, in the same way as her characters. In an almost perfect circle, echoing Bui’s Möbius strip, the indirectness is also at the core of Voyageur malgré lui as Tran Huy as written the text that her father might have written but could not19 because he kept these stories inside himself.
The slippages between reality (extratextual) and fiction (intratextual) create a synecdochic and metonymic chain in order to give voice to numerous stories of exile. Tran Huy stipulates that the anonymity of those who have left little behind is countered by writing (itself a connected slippage from Line’s work with audio recordings) to escape a repetitive process of concealment. These continual shifts that are encouraged and written in the text are potentially empowering for the people who recognise their own history of exile or their family’s secrets in Line’s, as well as for the receivers and readers of such stories. Tran Huy’s voice is Line’s; the two are merged, so to speak. However, she also enables others to take this ‘I’ as their own, thus becoming a plural voice. Anyone can become the signified or referent of this deictic pronoun which recounts a history of traumatic disappearance and errantry. It is in the particularities that universalism is drawn, thus evoking republican practice and, once again, displacing and, I would suggest, making it more inclusive.

Furthermore, Tran Huy incorporates a global perspective into her story of displacement. She re-enters time and memorial/historical concerns into experiences of migration, recognising that it does not solely pertain to a specific geography, that would be here exclusively linked to Việt Nam, but to a multitude of other elements, whether they be political or cultural. The extrovertedness of her work is manifold: it echoes Bui’s text in the formulation of Line’s extended family’s multiple trajectories of exile – whether forced, wanted, or even failed – but it also connects to individuals in distinct temporalities, in various geographies, and from different cultures. These strangers’ paths bear similarities to some of her family members. In this sense, those others work as what Catherine H. Nguyen has termed ‘intertextual mediators’ (Nguyen, 2018: 108): they lead her back to her family history and allow her to connect what they have lived through to what others have experienced in different parts of the world and at various times. For instance, Albert Dadas’s dromomania (in the nineteenth century) recalls the uncontrolled movements of her uncle Thinh: ‘Mon père et moi avions connu quelqu’un qui avait été dans la même situation qu’Albert’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 43). The story of Samia Yusuf Omar, an athlete who represented Somalia at the 2008 Olympics Games and who died in the Mediterranean Sea in 2012, echoes that of her aunt Hoai whose only son died during their crossing of the Pacific and whom Hung has never heard from since her arrival in the United States, mimicking the erasure of Samia’s disappearance by the media. By being the scribe of these various stories, both close to and far from her, Line finally manages to create the records of silences she wanted to gather: she has recorded those passing ‘silhouette[s] ’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 112) and has created a multidirectional archive.

Voyageur malgré lui answers one of the questions that Line poses when juxtaposing the stories of Albert Dadas and of her uncle Thinh: unlike Dadas’s dromomania that has been recorded by Doctor Philippe Tissié, ‘qui se souviendra de la tragédie de Thinh ? ’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 60). By using the verb se souvenir in the future tense, Line works to ensure that his story is heard and that, unlike the final word of her last chapter about Albert and Thinh, the latter will not remain ‘inaperçu’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 60). And yet, Line wonders if those words are enough, if Thinh and Hoai can be remembered as they remain shadows, having left no traces of themselves, ‘mis à part dans les mots de mon père et dans ces quelques lignes où palpite l’ombre qu’ils sont devenu[s], qui bientôt s’évanouira, qui s’évanouit déjà’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 114). However, I argue that writing a personal fiction that nonetheless addresses the biographies of others breaks the lines between singular and plural. Voyageur malgré lui offers a complex intermingling of reality and fiction that allows connections to be drawn: the various stories recounted represent the liminality of experiences of wandering. Tran Huy, by creating parallels between microhistories of exile (Thinh and Albert, Samia and Hoai, Line and herself, among others), has written a transdiasporic text: a web of similar stories that, put together, assure that each story is remembered in their connections to others. I believe that this can be connected to the restrictive vision of identity and representation that would focus on one aspect or a ‘racine totalitaire’ (Glissant, 1990: 23), and which would reinforce
introversion and silence. Building on Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of rhizome, Glissant proposes to focus on a poetics of Relation ‘selon laquelle toute identité s’étend dans un rapport à l’Autre’ (Glissant, 1990: 23). Identity is thus not to be perceived as unique and unchanging, but as multiple, multilingual, and always connected to Others. As such, thinking errantry is considering this Relation: focusing on the fluctuating nature of identity and how this affirms itself in our relation to Others. I suggest that this can be applied to microhistories and their remembrance: if remembered alone, Thinh’s story might disappear, but when written and recalled in its relations to other stories, in their commonalities and anchor points, Thinh might live on. Consequently, it is essential to represent and recognise various experiences of exile. This opening up is linked to one’s Relation to Others, whether experienced or written. This new relational poetics considers extroversion as the possibility of living one’s own complex identity fully in one’s recognition of both singular and plural histories.

Conclusion

In their respective texts, Minh Tran Huy and Doan Bui focus on various processes of exposure, starting with the personal and concluding with a collective approach. Both authors are interested in telling the stories of their fathers and families to break reductive cleavages pertaining to identity, (post)migratory situations, and (post)colonial History. The daughters aim to fully inhabit the complexity of their history, so that they can recognise the past in order to project themselves into the future. This future is plural, in the sense that it conveys multiplicity, in terms of geographies, temporalities, and perspectives. Moreover, it relates to Others. In her discussion of exile, Keller-Privat maintains that exile is not solely a physical or accidental experience, but that it ‘devient la condition même de notre véritable relation à autrui, bouleversant les frontières commodes entre le dedans et le dehors’ (Keller-Privat, 2012: 329). In this regard, Tran Huy and Bui constantly play with frontiers: between one’s interior exile and an external experience of errantry/migration, self and others, and genres. This constant blurring shields Line and Doan from an ideology of the unique: in a resistance to what is perceived as a brutal erasure of one’s double cultural identity through a traditional Republican view of integration, the daughters want to reformulate their identity in their diversity. Their Vietnamese side is to be re-incorporated into their sense of self. To return to Hargreaves and McKinney’s statement discussed in the introduction, I would suggest that Southeast Asians in France and their descendants subtly fluctuate between detachment and entrenchment, showing that postcolonial demands should open Republican values through their reformulation and the recognition of all histories. The family appears as a microcosm of externalising processes that must be undertaken at the societal level. And this, in turn, shows that French society should practice an unconditional hospitality à la Derrida in its acceptance of and openness to all individuals. Far from a romanticised vision, Tran Huy and Bui show in their texts that it remains a complex process that requires the demolition of many barriers or, in this case, crypts. This recalls the question of borders and their crossing involved in migration: the circulation of bodies but also of ideas constructs a relational future.

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Notes

1. Born in 1963 in Đà Lạt, Lê was fourteen years old when she immigrated to France with her mother in 1977. She belongs, according to Suleiman’s model, to the group comprised of ‘children “old enough to remember but too young to be responsible” [. . .]. By responsible, I mean having to make choices (and to act on those choices) about their own or their family’s actions in response to catastrophe’ (Suleiman, 2002: 283).
2. The Việt Kiều refers to members of the Vietnamese diaspora. For a history of the term, see ‘La Diaspora vietnamienne : Retour et intégration au Vietnam’ (Phong, 2000).

3. ‘Heureuse et féconde période, fascinant orient de la Perle de l’Empire, époque de la métropole sans confins et de la France sans fin’ (Héduy, 2015: 340).

4. From 1946 to 1954. Also known as the French (Indochina) War or the Anti-French Resistance War.

5. It is interesting to note that Cooper and Frank seem to disagree here: for the latter, the Indochina war is not occultée or taboue (like the Algerian War was), but truly forgotten. The difference between occulter and oublier pertains to how one remembers and commemorates the war: to forget implies a process of permanent erasure (‘vider la mémoire de ses souvenirs’ Frank, 1990: 604]) whereas to occult involves concealment and containment, thus containing a possibility of resurfacing. To read more about the reasons for this lack of visibility of the Indochina War, see M. Kathryn Edwards’s Contested Indochina: French Remembrance Between Decolonisation and Cold War.

6. Also known as the Vietnam War or the American (Indochina) War.

7. Marie-Eve Blanc (2005) considers there to be six waves of Vietnamese immigration to France (p. 1159): during World War I, in the 1920s and 1930s, during World War II, at the end of the Indochina War in 1954, between 1954 and 1975, and the final wave starting in late April 1975. This article will focus on the fifth migration, despite being, according to Blanc, ‘not well documented’ (Blanc, 2005: 1160).

8. See Hargreaves’s Table 4.1 in Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society for an overview of French perceptions of different minority ethnic groups in 1984 (Hargreaves, 2007: 144). Edwards adds that this positive perception is still predominant today: ‘The narrative of a successful Asian immigration as one that has resulted in a high degree of assimilation, as compared to the perception of a problematic North African, predominantly Muslim immigration, is one that continues to resonate today’ (Edwards, 2016: 138).

9. Vu-Renaud clarifies that the supremacy of the father is a result of male superiority (Vu-Renaud, 2002: 81), hence gender prevails over age in the hierarchical organisation of the family.

10. Kofman refers to the existence of a ‘double bind’: a state of suffocation emerges from the inevitability of speaking and the inability to formulate these words. The voice (a sort of signifier), in trying to express words (the signified) to represent the event, asphyxiates the speaker: parole is muffled, blocked. The duty to speak becomes a ‘devoir suffoquer’, both a duty and an inevitability, playing on the polysemy of the word devoir in French.

11. As suggested by the verb’s etymology: the Latin verb eradicare means to pull up with all the roots.

12. ‘En une poignée d’années, j’ai vu disparaître de nouveau presque tous ceux qui m’étaient chers. [ . . . ] De mon existence au Viêtnam ne subsistait plus aucun témoin, à part ma mère, avec qui je ne parlais plus de tout cela que je ne l’évoquais avec toi’ (Tran Huy, 2014: 196).

13. Paternal grandfather.

14. Both on the body, to recall the original meaning of trauma in Greek, ‘an injury inflicted on a body’ (Caruth, 1996: 3) and on the mind in its psychoanalytical usage.

15. It has been suggested that though assimilation was used during colonial times, integration has been preferred in the postcolonial period and has been formulated primarily for extra-Europeans immigrants (Bancel et al., 2005: 29–30). Because of Bui’s and Tran Huy’s postcolonial and post-migratory position, I purposefully use the two.

16. ‘Cette idée que je m’étais faite de lui [mon père] – résumée en quelques mots (exilé, nostalgique, père de cinq enfants, AVC) – vacille. [ . . . ] Le frère absent, le fils cher, l’étudiant, la mascotte de la bande du Quartier latin, le père aux deux familles et aux deux vies. Connait-on jamais quelqu’un ? Et pourtant, un être, c’est une addition de visages, un grand patchwork bariolé où patiemment la tisseuse de nos vies rajoute un bout de velours ici, un morceau de crin rugueux là’ (Bui, 2016: 213).

17. To read more about the links that exist between food and group identity in relation to another work by a descendant of immigrants, see ‘Vietnamese Foodways and Viet Kieu Postmemory in Clément Baloup’s Graphic Narratives’ (Howell, 2015).

18. I do not suggest that autobiography and autofiction are synonymous. I only point to their common elements and effects on readers in relation to the representational void discussed here.

19. ‘Et je pense que c’est le livre que mon père aurait pu écrire mais que, par définition, évidemment, il n’allait jamais écrire’ (in Mollat, 2014: 04:26-04:35).
Because egocentric particular, a deictic pronoun is ‘un signe unique, mais mobile’ (Benveniste, 1966: 254): the first-person pronoun is a signifier that remains (reasonably) stable with an infinity of possible signifieds at any given moment.

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