Intersections and Crossings: Navigating Boundaries in Immigrant Women's Works in France

Leah Kiraly Sigle Holz
*University of Colorado at Boulder, leahksholz@gmail.com*

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INTERSECTIONS AND CROSSINGS:
NAVIGATING BOUNDARIES IN IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S WORKS IN FRANCE

by

LEAH KIRALY SIGLE HOLZ

B.A., Gettysburg College, 2008
M.A., University of Oregon, 2010

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Intersections and Crossings: Navigating Boundaries in Immigrant Women’s Works in France 
written by Leah Kiraly Sigle Holz 
has been approved for the Department of French and Italian 

________________________________________
Warren Motte

________________________________________
Élisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield

Date _______________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
In this dissertation, I examine how Josephine Baker, Annie Ernaux, Irène Némirovsky, and Nathalie Sarraute navigate notions of home, nation, and belonging in their lives and works. Chapter One focuses on categories and their formation, how they act as limits that have real effects on those within them. That chapter also centers on the theme of borders and boundaries as limiting, and how physical borders are used (un)officially to restrict access. In Chapter Two, I examine borders as liminal, conditional, transitory, and threshold spaces. I also inspect cases of border crossings and what it means to acknowledge arrival onto the other side of a borderline. Chapter Three investigates the flexibility to cross back and forth across a borderline, which demonstrates the border as permeable for some and not for others. I address changing spaces and immigration: border crossings and arrival into a new place, looking at depictions of arrival and how arrival is ultimately impossible as is returning to the past as it becomes apparent that the border-crosser is recognized by others and by themselves as an outsider. Lastly, in Chapter Four, I focus on issues of belonging in France as a particular location from which all the authors in my project lived, where assimilation is impossible because it falsely moves in a singular direction. In my conclusion, I reexamine each author individually, investigating how they write from the space of the border, establishing their dexterity as border-dwellers. Finally, I demonstrate how each author claims a space for herself in the novel and in France, addressing her agency in her writing.
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INTRODUCTION

Many artists and authors have moved from one place to another for personal reasons, to pursue artistic endeavors, or even to seek refuge. My project focuses on the case of four immigrant women writers in France and their navigation of home, nation, and belonging in their lives and works. At first glance, the authors I have chosen to study for this project only have superficial features in common: they are all women, they have all emigrated from one physical location to another, they are all writers, they all called France their home. Yet when we push the boundaries of those categories and go beyond the surface, we find that these authors fit together in much more complex and engaging ways. I chose to work on these four women because I see a link between how they each navigated multiple “othered” identities and their artistic projects. Furthermore, each of them entered into France as outsiders, navigated the social structures within that nation, and produced cultural artifacts within that nation. Education and autobiography are both recurrent themes for some of the works in each author’s repertoire, and the ways in which they chose to write about the self and the notion of becoming, also connected to education, is similar from one to the other. This work is not exhaustive, and I plan to add other authors to the project as it becomes a larger and more comprehensive monograph on writers from 1919 to the present.

Josephine Baker (born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1905 and died in Paris in 1975) was an American expatriate who remains most famous today for her banana skirt dance, but her story is much more complex than that one image. She moved to France to perform in 1925 and learned French after her arrival. Her work includes problematic portrayals of the French colonial “other” in films like *Princesse Tam Tam*, and in 1931 she was crowned “la reine des colonies” at the
Paris Colonial Exposition. During World War Two she used her celebrity status to help the Resistance. She was deeply involved in the American Civil Rights movement and was even asked to become the new face of the movement after the assassination Martin Luther King, Jr. She turned that down to spend more time with her famous “Rainbow Tribe” of adopted children. Baker was seen as a cultural icon prominent in dance, film, and even politics, yet her novel Mon sang dans tes veines (1931) gets little attention. In this project I focus mostly on Baker’s novel, but I also expand my scope to include her song “J’ai deux amours, mon pays et Paris” (1930) and after World War Two: “J’ai deux amours, mon pays c’est Paris,” and her roles in films, including La sirène des tropiques (1927), Zouzou (1934), and Princesse Tam Tam (1935).

Irène Némirovsky (born in Kiev in 1903 and died after being deported to Auschwitz in 1942) is perhaps best known today for the sensational story of her novel Suite française (published posthumously by her daughters in 2004), an unfinished novel that resurfaced in the twenty-first century and deals with the devastating loss of war. Jewish by heritage, she converted to Catholicism but was forced to go into hiding during the Nazi Occupation because of her religion and citizenship status (she never became a French citizen, though she tried). Her family came to France after fleeing the Russian Revolution in 1917 and she looked at France as her home; it was a place where she frequently vacationed as a child and she learned French as a baby from her French-speaking nanny. In this project I focus on Suite française as well as other novels, including Le bal (1930), Le maître des âmes (1939), Les chiens et les loups (1940), David Golder (1929), Les feux de l’automne (published posthumously in 1957), and Le vin de solitude (1935).

Annie Ernaux (born in Lillebonne, in Haute-Normandie, France in 1940 and still living today) is the only one of the authors in my project who was born in France. I claim her work as
immigrant literature in order to illustrate her movement across socioeconomic boundaries within her native country. Ernaux’s family remained anchored to the region of her birth, while she left to study and live in other parts of France such as Bordeaux and Annecy. Her grandparents, as she writes in *La place*, spoke only patois while for her father, “le patois était quelque chose de vieux et de laid, un signe d’infériorité” (77). Perhaps even more explicitly so than the other authors in my project, Ernaux writes about personal experience; she anchors her work in autobiographical stories that we could call autofiction. For this project I focus on the writing of her childhood and her play with the autobiographical form in her novels: *La place* (1983), *Les années* (2008), and *Mémoire de fille* (2016).

Nathalie Sarraute (born in 1900 in Ivanovo, Russia and died in Paris in 1999) is best known as for work on the *nouveau roman* and her first novel, *Tropismes*. She lived between Russia and France after her parents’ divorce when she was two years old, then moved to Paris with her father when she was eight. Like Némirovsky, her family had an elevated social status and she learned French as a child and was later educated in France. She, too, faced the problem of being a Russian Jew living in France during World War Two. In this project I focus on Sarraute’s work in subverting literary norms in *Tropismes* (1939), and its success after its secondary publication in 1957. I examine her notion of the tropism that comes up in her other novels as well, for example in *Portrait d’un inconnu* (1948), and *Le planétarium* (1959). Finally, I explore how Sarraute writes about her childhood in *Enfance* (1983), which she wrote in the form of a dialogue between split selves.

My project focuses on women, as a part of my personal political commitment to feminist archival work, but it also puts into conversation works from different locations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that address similar issues of identity in France. What does it mean, for
example, to be female and Jewish and upper-class and white and an immigrant and not a French citizen (as in Némirovsky’s case)? While writing from individual locations, the authors in my project all speak to broader feelings of uncertainty, which is why all these authors and some of their works resonate with contemporary audiences. Whether explicitly stated or not, they write from certain locations of nation at specific moments in time and these contexts color the works, either openly or more covertly. What draws me to the authors is their transgressions of multiple borders and their capacity to take a step back to interpret a broader picture. For Sarraute, it is a question of liberating the form of the novel. For Ernaux, it is her crossing of personal and interpersonal, as well as borders of genre. For Baker it is her play on colonized/colonizer, French, female, identities in her works that continues to permeate pop culture in the twenty-first century. For Némirovsky it is her negotiation of religious and national identities at a turbulent time in France and her portrayal of a nation that she loved but that ultimately betrayed her.

To say that my project has nothing to do with the fact that these figures all identify as female would go against facts of what it means to be female in France. As Nivedita Menon writes in *Seeing Like a Feminist*, one is never outside of categories that define one. Undeniably, all four women deal with the category of gender in different ways. Sometimes they played on their femininity for success (Baker), hid their female identity to get published (Némirovsky), wrote about gender relations and even questioned traditional gender roles (Ernaux), or articulated strong feelings against the link between gender and authorship (Sarraute). The authors in my project cannot escape their gender, and gender as an identity that comes up in their works. However, they unbind gender as a singular category: Baker, for example, writes about gender alongside race and class. Némirovsky, while writing about gender roles, such as mother/daughter relations in *Le bal*, also writes about socio-economic status that cuts through all aspects of
identity (religion, race, gender, etc.). Ernaux paints a portrait of elle in her collective autobiography *Les années*, but an elle that has facets anyone could relate to. Sarraute plays with traditional gender roles of stock characters to show their universality, for example in *Portrait d’un inconnu* with the miser and his daughter. Yet, in an interview for the *Paris Review*, Sarraute says that she never thought about gender in her writing, claiming that there is a difference between “gendered writing” and writing about feminine subjects like motherhood.

It would be impossible to look at these authors and their works outside of certain constraints; categories are necessary for definition but they are not static. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes about interior self and external influences on the body. For her, the idea that the self is impermeable to the outside world is an impossible one: “For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability. This sealing of its surfaces would constitute the seamless boundary of the subject; but this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears” (182). She continues, writing that the body is not a “being” but a “variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (189). The boundary between self and other is blurred, as Julia Kristeva writes in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*: “Face à l’étranger que je refuse et auquel je m’identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites” (276). This boundary, as Butler states, is structured by outside forces. For this project I am looking at gender (and other identities) in a Butlerian sense, constituted by a series of performances that in turn help create social norms. The women in my project are, in a sense, doubly or triply “other”—and yet, their works have pushed against certain societal norms and released them from singular, static identities.
I write about gender in my project in an intersectional way, also looking at race, class, nationality, religion, and at how they all come into play in the works I examine. I untie these women from constraints of gender in my analysis, acknowledging that gender is fluid; instead I focus on a postmodern analysis of fluid identities and gender as it fits into a more intersectional analysis of their works. Susan S. Lanser, in *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*, writes that intersectional feminist narratology recognizes “pervasive inequalities wrought by global structures of power” and questions “not only gender binaries but all notions of fixed categories read outside their specific configurations in time and place” (27). By using a flexible intersectional analysis, with historical and spatial components, feminist narratologists are able to put into question the use and status of terms and categories and their implications. I would like to be careful with how I am using the term “intersectionality” here—I do not want to neglect its origins nor dismiss or misappropriate Kimberlé Crenshaw’s use of the term. My use of this term for this project is similar to Lanser’s, who focuses not on simple, reductive or crude analyses of narratives, but intersectional practice, along the lines of Franco Moretti’s models in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, as Lanser references when she writes about: “bringing an intersectional understanding of time and place to an analysis of how individual narratives and groups of narratives work out the dynamics of identity (i.e., character) and movement (i.e. plot), and then map those dynamics across the vast field of the world’s narratives in a new kind of historicist project that would offer a ‘distant reading’ of narrative form” (Warhol and Lanser 29).

Borrowing from the postmodern feminist narratological work in *Narrative Theory Unbound*, I take an intersectional approach to Némirovsky, Baker, Sarraute, and Ernaux’s works that blurs the boundaries between these disciplines in an attempt to open up, or *unbind* my analysis of each author. I situate each of the authors and their works on the surface of the
temporal and physical sites from which they were writing, but throughout my project I open up each author’s work as being situated at the intersections of multiple identity, literary, and even artistic categories. I chose to organize my project by theme in order to represent the fluidity of these works as fully as possible. The main focus of each chapter will be to unpack this multiplicity by anchoring my project in textual examples, looking at genre, form, and narrative.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb “to immigrate” as: “to come to settle in a country (which is not one’s own); to pass into a new habitat or place of residence (*lit.* and *fig.*).” I adopt this basic definition of the verb “to immigrate” and apply it to a broader view of immigration that involves questions of settlement, home, and belonging as well as addressing issues of entrance and acceptance. Instead of the word “country,” I open up this definition to “state of being”: “to come to settle in a new *state of being* (which is not one’s own).” All four of the authors I chose for this project can be viewed as immigrants in this sense of the term, and their works are full of immigrant themes: the journey, arrival, border crossings, home, and belonging. Using this expanded term, I examine the idea of both spatial and temporal immigration, focusing on movement into a space that was previously unknown, where the mover was also previously unknown.

Chapter One focuses on categories and their formation, how they act as limits that have real effects on those within them. That chapter also centers on the theme of borders and boundaries as limiting, and how physical borders are used (un)officially to restrict access. In Chapter Two, I examine borders as liminal, conditional, transitory, and threshold spaces. I also inspect cases of border crossings and what it means to acknowledge arrival onto the other side of a borderline. Chapter Three investigates the flexibility to cross back and forth across a borderline, which demonstrates the border as permeable for some and not for others. I address
changing spaces and immigration: border crossings and arrival into a new place, looking at depictions of arrival and how arrival is ultimately impossible as is returning to the past as it becomes apparent that the border-crosser is recognized by others and by themselves as an outsider. Lastly, in Chapter Four, I focus on issues of belonging in France as a particular location from which all the authors in my project lived, where assimilation is impossible because it falsely moves in a singular direction. To question what it means to be at home in the nation, I use Avtar Brah’s “homing desire” and Sara Ahmed’s notion of home as permeable skin, where subject and space leak into each other, where boundaries begin to blur and disintegrate. In my conclusion, I reexamine each author individually, investigating how they write from the space of the border, establishing their dexterity as border-dwellers. Finally, I demonstrate how each author claims a space for herself in the novel and in France, addressing her agency in her writing.

My project is partly a feminist archival one, bringing works like Baker’s *Mon sang dans tes veines* into a literary discussion and a broader conversation about social activism, nationhood, and race relations. Lifting that novel and some of Némirovsky’s less-read novels into a discussion that includes more canonical writers like Sarraute and Ernaux is also a political choice that partially answers Warhol’s and Lanser’s calls in *Narrative Theory Unbound* to blur disciplinary and canonical boundaries. By looking at the book as cultural object, my project’s investigation of borders and boundaries, and the representation of the “other” in France, participates in contemporary discussions about immigration in France, the United States and elsewhere. My project sits at the intersection of literary, cultural, and feminist studies, and I take an intersectional approach to my primary authors, offering a reassessment of each author apart from the interpretive parameters that have thus far been imposed by literary, cultural, and feminist frameworks.
Borders are sometimes fixed and defended; borders are sometimes loose, free, or even fictional. At some borders people, things, and ideas pass through with ease while others are stuck behind. A border can be limiting for one person and freeing for another. It can exist temporarily for one person, be a permanent cordon for another, or may never appear for another. Borders are concrete or abstract, spatially or temporally situated, literal or metaphorical—and sometimes many things simultaneously. Just as one can be trapped behind or denied at the border, one can also be stuck on the border, in a state of neither here nor there. Borders are like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s assemblages: they are not created arbitrarily but are contingent upon certain logics of organization. In Erving Goffman’s Frame Analysis, a book that is itself organized as a container of frames within frames, Goffman continually questions each preceding frame he introduces. He posits that the framing of activity can create meaning while simultaneously, it establishes more than that: “it also organizes involvement” (345, my emphasis). Indeed, participants in the activity of framing, are implicated in the results of this framing. In Frames of War, When is Life Grievable? Judith Butler writes about the framing of photographs and how affect can be channeled through certain structures. Certainly, our perspective is shaped by borders and frames; photographs can create flows of affect and images have the power to move us. The framing of images, and putting them together to create certain narratives, is an exercise of power: who is inside the frame, who is outside of it, who makes it? Butler writes about what happens when the act framing itself is not visible: “But when one does see the framing of the frame, what is it that is going on? I would suggest that the problem here is not just the internal to the life of the media, but involves the structuring effects that certain larger norms, themselves
often racializing and civilizational, have on what is provisionally called ‘reality’” (74). An audience possesses a preconceived notion of how they will interact with frames they encounter while the frames simultaneously generate the audience’s perception. The frame can actually constitute the audience, the “we,” however, “we” can also refuse to be subsumed into that collective and therefore the frame allows us to resist. Reading identity categories as frames is productive for understanding their utility, solidity, and their flexibility.

In this chapter, I articulate different limiting categories Josephine Baker, Annie Ernaux, Irène Némirovsky, and Nathalie Sarraute navigated during their lifetimes. My purpose here is to explore examples of both visible and invisible limits and their real, lived implications. I investigate how these figures created and implemented boundaries in their works, and how they navigated boundaries imposed upon them by outside forces. I look at national borders, border checks, and passport issues, examining the border or frame and who injects these with power. I also inspect identities as categorical and confining to these authors and their works. Finally, I investigate limitations encountered by individual works by these figures in their publication and dissemination. This chapter follows and expands upon the introduction as a way to help situate the reader in my project. I have chosen to organize it by author, containing each figure to their individual section. I have placed the authors in alphabetical order, which I acknowledge as an arbitrary formal choice that in fact echoes my investigation in this chapter of the creation of boundaries and restrictions. My intention is to separate the figures by section in the first chapter in order to make it easier for the reader to follow the flowing, back-and-forth movements between them in subsequent chapters.
1. Josephine Baker: Caught Between Multiple, Bounded Identities

Les fleurs d’Afrique ne sont pas faites pour les salons. (Max in Princesse Tam Tam)

1.1 Baker the Performer

Josephine Baker came up against multiple borders in her country of origin, the United States, and she continued to be forced into categories after she moved to France. Baker escaped Jim Crow laws by moving to France in 1925 and spent the rest of her life continually remaking herself in an attempt to conform to a certain French ideal, while simultaneously playing up French stereotypes of the colonial “other.” Singer, actress, dancer, writer, she appeared on the stage and in multiple films, and continued to perform throughout her life. Her infamous banana skirt performance has bound her to a particular frame as that image has persisted in contemporary consciousness. If we take an intersectional approach to Baker and think about the implications of her skin color along with her gender identity, we can argue that as a black woman she was already doubly-othered as she navigated existing societal restrictions in both the United States and in France. Baker performed each of these identities in the public persona she created, taking on various roles and playing with the color of her skin in different national, racial, and ethnic identities. She also played with her gender and racial identities together with her gender-bending short, slicked-back hair that became a part of her iconic image. Baker remains controversial in that she is impossible to pin down: “Celebrated as icon and decried as fetish, Baker has been viewed as either a groundbreaking performer or a shameful sellout” (Cheng 39). She took on roles as colonial “other” in her films, and I argue that in her own way she was
subverting those images from the inside. I examine Baker’s social activist projects in subsequent chapters, but in this section, I focus on the various identity frames she negotiated with her performances and public image. I explore these images of Baker as a performer stuck in the reenactment of colonial “other” identities, such as her leading roles in *La sirène des tropiques* (1927), *Zou Zou* (1934), and *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935). I also inspect limits and boundaries in her writing project, as I begin to examine her forgotten novel *Mon sang dans tes veines* (1931) in this section.

1.2 Colonial “Other”

*La sirène des tropiques* is a silent film with Baker in the leading role playing the character Papitou. This film tells the story about Papitou who is in love with André, a Frenchman in the West Indies whom she secretly follows back to France. Papitou becomes a music hall sensation in France, echoing Baker’s own success, with the French public obsessed with consuming her performances of the exotic. Throughout the film, Papitou is stuck within the male gaze. In one scene for example, the camera reveals Papitou on the island playing outside on a tree with delicate guitar music underneath. Thinking she is alone, she spins around, dances, pulls up some dirt, takes off her shoes and starts to go in the water. Meanwhile, the character Alvarez comes to watch her. The camera pans back to Papitou who is innocently splashing the water with her hands. Alvarez starts to attack her when suddenly, André, a figure dressed in white, rides in on a horse to rescue her. In between tableau-esque film sequences there is text that depicts the characters as fixed within certain identities. Papitou speaks simply: “Vous bon pour Papitou” in a sort of pidgin French while the other characters speak a much more formal French, thus
indicating the boundary that exists between the two linguistic worlds and Papitou’s performed linguistic distance between herself and the others. This also echoes Baker’s own limitations with French at the time, as she learned the language after she moved to France. The story ends with Papitou encountering André, whose love is unrequited. She explains that: “Papitou venir à Paris pour retrouver toi,” which reveals André, the white French male, as impetus for her departure and the frame within which Papitou’s story operates. In the end, realizing that she cannot stay within this narrative, Papitou cries and decides to escape elsewhere, far away to America, with its own draw of exoticism for Papitou. And yet, moving to that elsewhere is also going back in the same cardinal direction from whence she originally came. The back-and-forth references to travel reverberate with Baker’s experience between France and the United States at the time.

On the island, Papitou is depicted as sub-human, more relatable to the animals in the surrounding area rather than to the other people. In the film we see images of Papitou as either perched on top of a cabinet like a bird or dancing wildly or moving about passionately and with lots of emotion, like in the water scene, as though she cannot contain her movements. Another example is when she meets Denise, André’s fiancée, and glares at her through slitted eyes recognizing her as a threat, then runs away. Juxtaposed to the guarded, “civilized” French, Papitou’s performance is the epitome of the exotic. When Papitou sneaks onto the boat to go to France, her racial identity shifts; as though this were only possible within the ambiguous space of the boat, her skin color changes multiple times, and she still remains stuck within an identity of colonial “other.” Yet, her perception as “other” shifts from docile, sexualized, exotic figure to one that is feared. Entering the water before she makes it to the ship, Papitou’s skin is darkened with mud and once on the ship her skin is made even darker when she falls into a pile of coal. Her presence frightens the other passengers and they chase her around the ship. Papitou hides in
a flour bin and at that point she is layered with performances of multiple colors: white on top of the black on top of her true skin color. It remains impossible for her to pass as white and even with lighter skin, she remains trapped in an image of a menacing presence: “Elle est blanche maintenant. Un spectre!” (La sirène des tropiques).

Several levels of demarcated space reverberate in both the music and the text of this silent film. The non-diegetic sound is one of the most striking elements that clearly distinguishes Papitou from other characters. The distinction between European and non-European is made in the instruments and rhythms underlying the images; anything of European reference is emphasized with a classical sounding piano while everything “other” is guitar with Caribbean rhythms. When Baker and Alvarez are in the same scene, for example, we hear the guitar for her and the piano for him. Music is an important element in a scene at the end when Papitou performs at a jazz club in Paris. The jazz music distinguishes that space as outside of the singular and more distinctly Caribbean guitar and classical piano that depict the island space. In this scene Baker’s own performances outside of the film leak into her portrayal of Papitou, and it is unclear where she ends, and the character begins. Baker the performer is a narrative frame of the film, and the strategic performance in the jazz club borders on advertisement and underscores her presence as a figure outside of the role she took on within the film.

In Zou Zou, Baker’s character Zouzou is also trapped within a love story. Like in La sirène des tropiques, her love for a Frenchman follows the same rules: it is always unrequited, and never possible within the national and societal frameworks within which the characters operate. In her song in the film, “C’est lui,” Zouzou sings about her love and it is clear that she is stuck within and blinded by that love: “Y en a qu’un qu’a su me plaire / Il est méchant, il n’a pas le sou / Ses histoires ne sont pas claires / Je le sais bien mais je m’en fous / Pour moi, y a qu’un
homme dans Paris / C’est lui / Je peux rien y faire, on cœur est pris / Par lui.” Bennetta Jules-Rosette writes about this song as frame for the narrative of the film and plot device that “sets in motion the multiple love stories that complicate the film’s plot” (88). She continues, writing about how aspects of the song

reflect the basic semiotic motif of jealousy in which the excluded person becomes a spectator who occupies the spatiotemporal position of a powerless observer who cannot affect the action in the scene. Zouzou’s observations of the emerging affair between Claire and Jean reflect her exclusion and powerlessness both as a woman and as a marginal cultural outsider in France. (88)

Indeed, jealousy is an element of the unrequited love framework and this emotion reveals and amplifies the boundary between one who has the capacity to act, the actual love, and the jealous one, who lacks agency in the situation. The song’s depiction of Zouzou as doubly-othered and incapable of escaping that framework is reflected in the iteration of Zouzou as caged figure is a physical representation of the character’s incapacity to act outside of the national societal restraints within which she finds herself trapped.

The animalistic portrayal of the caged character in Zou Zou is one of Baker’s most iconic scenes. In that act she portrays a songbird trapped in a cage and longing for Haiti. Mentions of “tes grands horizons” are repeated and juxtaposed with her imprisonment in the cage as she sings of them. References to the enclosure itself appear in the song: “La plus belle cage n’est qu’une prison” as though Zouzou is already imagining herself outside of the restrictions of the cage while she is physically stuck inside it. Baker’s depiction of a figure longing for Haiti, which France lost control of in 1804 with the Haitian Revolution, can be read as a flipped narrative of her other portrayals of a woman who falls in love with a Frenchman and longs for France.
Reading the role in this manner, it is as though Baker has entered into the colonial space and has taken on that identity, which of course is true of her real life as an expatriate in France. Or perhaps, she is subverting the role from the inside by projecting and perpetuating simplistic, colonial images that to contemporary eyes are almost too easy to read in this way.

In *Princesse Tam Tam*, the protagonist Alwina is trapped within multiple cages, including another impossible love story. The entire plot of the film takes place within a dream inside another dream. Within the film narrative the borders between reality are slippery but very real for the characters navigating those spaces. Max, a Frenchman decides to go to Tunisia to get inspiration for his new novel. He encounters Alwina, Baker as a Tunisian woman, while touring Roman ruins and decides to bring her back to France with him. He calls her the “Princesse de Palindor,” which is a complex and unclear distinction: in the film “Palindor” is referred to as a place in India but it is really either an imaginary place or a misspelling of “Palidor,” which is a part of St. Bart’s in the Caribbean. Of course, it is meant to represent a far-off, exotic place and the name is not important. Instead, the title echoes the slipperiness of Baker’s role within the film and her other performances at the time. Max calls Alwina “princess” because he is trying to get back at his wife, who, during his absence in Africa, became romantically involved with a Maharajah. Ripe with cultural appropriation and Orientalist imagery, even the Maharajah is problematic and played by a white man whose face is painted brown. Alwina’s transformation to a princess displays the problem of the performance of this identity; Alwina, a Tunisian woman who plays the role of an alleged Indian princess is the mise en abyme of Baker, an American playing the role of a Tunisian. Race, nation, and ethnicity are so confused in this film and the contemporary problem of the perplexity remains in the fact that there are no veritable distinctions of those identities in the film. Everything “other” is “oriental,” as the Maharajah calls it at the
end of the film. Incidentally, Alwina’s reception as a princess in Paris reflects Baker’s reception in Europe as a sensation, all over the tabloids and in the public eye. And like Baker, she, too, is publically criticized.

The end of the *Princesse Tam Tam* demonstrates a symbolic separation of two worlds. The Maharajah shows Alwina two windows—one that opens toward the Occident and the other toward the Orient, as he calls it. On the western side we see Max kissing his wife Lucie in a car, while on the Eastern side we see Tahar, Max’s Tunisian servant who also happens to be Alwina’s future husband. Alwina must choose one world; she cannot remain in that figuratively liminal space. What is more, the Maharajah declares that she should go back home, where she belongs. Indeed, the choice is already made for her; Alwina is destined for one world and she cannot escape her trajectory. There are other clues of this geographical and cultural distinction throughout the film, including when Max says that “Les fleurs d’Afrique ne sont pas faites pour les salons” and at the end, when he affirms that “Alwina est mieux où elle est.” These separations are apparent at multiple levels, but more precisely with the scenic contrasts between the representation of Tunisia and France: “Alwina’s native Tunisia and Parisian society are co-temporal but spatially and visually contrasted: exteriors, expansive space, sunlight, and sea, on the one hand, versus interiors, enclosure, telephone and radio, glass flowers, birds, fish, and palm trees, on the other. Not surprisingly, Paris/civilization is shown to be artificial, shallow, self-absorbed, and uninformed” (Julien 52). Effectively, in Paris Alwina is almost always trapped indoors, never outside. While there are real animals in Tunisia, such as the goat she carries at the beginning of the film, in Paris there are only sculptures of animals; everything “natural” is rendered artificial and false, just as Alwina is ultimately just an imitation of a princess.
1.3 *Mon sang dans tes veines*

In 1931 Baker published *Mon sang dans tes veines*, which she co-wrote with Félix de la Camera and Pepito Albatino, who were also involved in her films *Zou Zou* and *Princesse Tam Tam*, respectively. This book has had limited publication and has almost been forgotten in history: its current existence has been restricted by boundaries of time and limits of memory. Written in French and published in France, it was also restricted to a French-speaking public. The novel takes place in the South of the United States and is a tale about a wealthy white family and their servant, Joan, a young black woman who grew up with their son, Fred. Racial and cultural boundaries are blurred through the eyes of the children and they are the best of friends. Their lives take different directions and they seem to be forever separated when Fred grows up, leaves home, and gets engaged to Clarence, an idealized white woman of Gatsbyesque wealth and style. Yet, when Fred is in a bad accident, Joan secretly volunteers to donate her blood in order to keep him alive and she is a perfect blood match. It is soon discovered that Fred now has mixed blood in him, which, under Jim Crow laws, prohibits him from marrying Clarence.

Cinematic and dramatic like Baker’s movies, *Mon sang dans tes veines* is written in a similar style to the roles we see Baker in at that time. Analogous themes from her other works such as dreams of *là-bas*, the black woman who is in love with the white man who does not reciprocate, and issues of being stuck in one’s place all structure the narrative. The novel opens with a preface written by Baker alone, who composes the protagonist Joan as an archetype—a Joan like every other Joan: “Cette pauvre Joan, dont vous allez lire l’histoire, je l’ai connue . . . Ou plutôt non, ce n’est pas elle que j’ai connue, mais des dizaines de Joan, des petites filles de Saint-Louis qui étaient toutes noires” (3). Baker blurs boundaries within this figure, writing
about race and how the randomness of life gave the character, as Baker puts it, three different colors of blood running through her. Baker questions origins of skin color as barrier, wondering about blackness: “Était-ce parce que nous habitions dans un quartier plein d’usines qui fument [sic]?” (3). The preface frames the narrative with multiple metaphors such as the black swan who enters the white world and introduction of contrasts that will organize the novel.

There are multiple firm binaries in *Mon sang dans tes veines* and juxtapositions between being closed up inside and dreaming of outside, of forests and cities, white and black, sunlight and shadows, day and night. Inside the house Joan confronts firm boundaries put into place by Mrs. Barclay and Clarence. It is only outside of the house that she is able to find a certain freedom. But this is taken away from Joan, along with her autonomy permitted in reading, when Clarence is horrified to find that in all of Fred’s childhood photos Joan appears alongside him. After the photo incident, Mrs. Barclay cedes to Clarence’s demands and: “avait dès lors le soir même, interdit les longues rêveries de Joan sous la véranda, supprimé les lectures quotidiennes, suspendu les petites conversations familières. Elle s’était d’un coup, privé des mille petits soins attentifs” (80). In contrast to Joan as a pious, devoted, invisible figure, who even expects that Clarence only has good intentions when they first meet, Clarence is depicted as the anti-Joan: a frivolous, silly, and calculating figure trying to claim her space in Fred’s world. In contrast to a Black Madonna image presented at the beginning of the text, it seems clear that Clarence has different intentions than Joan. In the portrayal of Clarence, she strikes a cloying pose, wearing a see-through gown. And yet, when Joan needs Clarence’s help, Clarence is given some depth of character; she hesitates to help because her parents are glad that their “turbulente enfant allait enfin devenir une femme respectable et une épouse américaine” (117). Clarence, too, is a product
of her upbringing and surroundings and is bound to the societal norms and expectations she is forced to navigate.

References to invisible barriers in *Mon sang dans tes veines* perpetuate the Jim Crow laws as frame of the action of the novel. Joan is trapped inside the social rules of the house if she chooses to remain inside: “Avec mélancolie, elle regardait la fenêtre” (37). Joan dreams of an impossible future and is stuck in her place if she stays within that space. Under the written and unwritten social laws within which the characters operate, Joan can never end up with Fred. Ultimately, with the blood transfusion she saves his life and then disappears into the forest at the end of the novel. After the transfusion, Clarence can no longer be with Fred because he has now become a “nègre blanc” (178). Within the rules of the house Joan is reduced to an object with no voice: “Joan circulait sans rien dire” (60). She moves about unnoticed by Fred: “Ne faisait-elle pas partie du décor? . . . Pour lui elle n’était peut-être qu’une forme sombre se détachant sur les tapisseries mauves et bleues des salons” (55). When Mrs. Barclay hesitates to show Clarence old photos of Fred as a child, but realizes Joan is in all the pictures, she says: “Parce que Fred est toujours accompagné de choses inutiles” (78, my emphasis). Within the house Joan remains trapped and her fixity is articulated in art deco-style images at the beginning of each chapter. For example, the opening image of Chapter Seven is of a half-white, half-black hand attached to a ball and chain. Inside that space Joan remains trapped even in her perception of self and realizing the futility of wanting to be like Fred: “Elle aperçut soudain son profil entier dans une des grandes glaces. —Qu’aurais-je, pauvre moi, à vouloir ressembler à un garçon ? même si je pouvais devenir un Fred Barclay, devrais-je songer à rivaliser? J’ai été créée pour être une petite Jô, toute simple, il faut jusqu’à la mort, rester la même chose” (53-54).
Themes of solitude are echoed in moments of personal growth as Joan begins to realize and question her place within the house: “Cependant, elle sentait obscurément le fossé incompréhensible, la barrière inexplicable contre laquelle se heurtaient sa douceur, sa reconnaissance envers ses maîtres, que des préjugés, qu’elle ne comprenait pas, éloignaient et glaçaient” (38). Outside of the house, Joan comes across a chapel, the entrance blocked with a metal gate: “la grande, celle qui protégeait le parc, empêchait l’accès de la chapelle à tous ceux qui n’habitaient pas la propriété des Oaks” (22). Technically an inhabitant of the property, but also an outsider within it, she makes her way through, as though it is only outside of the social regulations of the house that she has any agency. Joan enters the church and sees a statue of a black Virgin Mary: “la Madone, sa Madone noire!” (28). She continues to return to that image: “Aussi le visage doux de la Madone noire fut soudain dans la vie de Joan un rayon de la magie divine, et la chapelle, le principal but de ses promenades” (35). Joan becomes obsessed with the Black Madonna, which opens up a world of questions for her, feeding into her dream of a unified future like the one Baker crafted in real life with her “rainbow tribe” of adopted children. She holds the image of the Black Madonna as a beacon of hope and it becomes a new frame through which she contemplates her surroundings. For example, when Fred’s mother, Mrs. Barclay, talks to Joan about how she will be expected to take care of Fred’s children when he marries Clarence, at first Joan is content, then thinking about her own imprisonment, she has a glimmer of hope: “Ne seraient-ils pas, ces petits êtres, plus tard, séparés d’elle, derrière cette même barrière inexplicable qui déjà l’isolait. Non, elle était sûre que non! Elle saurait leur parler, leur dire . . . Elle leur montrerait la Madone noire” (40). The Black Madonna image frames the narrative and represents Joan’s fixation on this figure and the agency she is capable of through this powerful image.
Jules-Rosette writes that Baker plays different versions of her life story in her film performances and “[t]he various permutations of primal, glamour, political, and everyday images propel the master performances and narratives of Baker’s life” (5). In *La sirène des tropiques*, she partly performs the figure of a foundling or a Cinderella type, but ultimately her portrayal is that of a “doudou” figure. Edwin Hill uses the term “doudou” to describe Baker as meaning, among other definitions, a black woman or mixed Créole who loves a white Frenchman, but who can only sing with melancholy of the impossibility of their relationship. Hill describes Baker as a “doudou” in *Princesse Tam Tam* and in *Zou Zou* and of course, there is resonance between the term and title of the film. Indeed, Baker is almost always stuck in the image of the “doudou” in this and her other films, like the protagonist Joan for most of the novel. In *Princesse Tam Tam*, Hill describes a boat scene where Alwina sings longingly of là-bas, and he investigates the “doudou” performance as problematic in terms of her place within France: “The languorous scene of Alwina singing her solo romantic plaint on the bow of a ship posits music as the channel for her ‘civilizing’ amorous development. But her fall from innocence will be a specular localization of her distance from and alienation within (French) civilization” (38). This scene is problematic because it shows the attempted transculturation of the character that is possible through performance but that in the end will neither give her access to her love nor to that new “civilized” world. Like the boat scene, many of the images projected and roles taken on by Baker include dreams of là-bas that show the border space as a strategic plot device representing both interiority and internal movement. Echoing the in-betweenness of the “doudou,” Baker’s performances as such occur within the out-of-bounds, interstitial, and even peripheral border.
space of the boat—neither here nor there, but behind each space and within the border space. Joan, in the novel, navigates the same type of space in the church outside of the house, which ultimately pushes her to move beyond that space. Baker herself is stuck within the “doudou” image, in those roles and in perceptions of her real life, which by definition is mixed, complex, impeded by outside forces, and yet, also open to movement and interpretation.

2. Annie Ernaux: Framing Time and Place

   Leitmotiv, il ne faut pas péter plus haut qu’on l’a. (Ernaux, La place 59)

2.1 A Foreigner

   Annie Ernaux’s novels are explorations of memories and events in her life. In her books she navigates her identities as daughter, mother, female, French, and educator, and writes about her past identities such as her sheltered experience growing up in the country. Woven throughout her œuvre are references to her identity as female, treating issues that are unique only to the experience of being a woman, such as her abortion in Les armoires vides or her navigation of patriarchal French society as another sort of doubly-othered figure of provincial female outsider. In La place, for example, she writes about her experience as foreigner within her family and within the bourgeoisie and the French education system. While Ernaux fits into France as a privileged figure because of her citizenship status (French), the color of her skin (white), and her socioeconomic status (bourgeois), she still grapples with issues of feeling foreign in the country that is her home. Ernaux uses the space of the novel to work out memories and events form her
past and claims a space for them within this framework at the same time that she leaves a place for others to insert their own stories. In this section, I examine firm, formal parameters, thematic frames, and the use of a borderline to demarcate one space from another in Ernaux’s novels *La place* (1983), *Les années* (2008), and *Mémoire de fille* (2016).

2.2 Writing Style

Ernaux writes in an “écriture plate” style, which she describes in *La place* as: “Aucune poésie du souvenir, pas de dérision jubilante. L’écriture plate me vient naturellement, celle-là même que j’utilisais en écrivant autrefois à mes parents pour leur dire les nouvelles essentielles” (24). In this novel and in *Les années* and *Mémoire de fille*, she uses short, seemingly simple words and sentences. This style can be read in multiple ways: firstly, it appears one-dimensional or limiting, but it can also be seen as representative of the surface of what is left unsaid underneath the text. In this chapter some of the frames that I examine only appear fixed or closed; Ernaux’s titles that frame her novels, for example, encapsulate her *écriture plate* style as they seem simple yet are open to interpretation. The titles appear on the border space of the novels’ covers and orient the reader toward time or place while simultaneously disorienting the reader: *La place* is spatially oriented and *Les années* is temporally oriented, but to which or to whose place and time? *Mémoire de fille* proves more difficult to classify easily via the title that is not “*Mémoire d’une fille*” but, like the other titles are situated, this one is positioned in girl’s memory. As we enter the narrative of *Mémoire de fille*, it becomes clear that this text is a combination of time and place. As Mieke Bal writes: “Memory is [. . .] the joint between time and space” (*Narratology* 151). Leaving out the article in the title, Ernaux leaves the word
“mémoire” ambiguous—is it “le mémoire,” an academic essay that references her education, which is a major theme that frames the novel, or is it “la mémoire,” referring to memory? Taking it a step further, the word “fille” is similar to “fil” and with a slight change in pronunciation, we could even read the title as Mémoire de fil, which relates to the theme in the novel of tracing the thread of her memory of 1958 through time to the present.

2.3 On Temporal Borders

At some points in her works, Annie Ernaux anchors her stories to specific dates, a firm temporal boundary, but with various other temporal locations peppered into the narrative alongside those benchmarks. The year 1958 is a firm boundary; it is in that year that she worked at a summer camp and lost her virginity and the entire novel spins around that precise moment in time so much so that the character Annie D. is referred to throughout as “fille de 58.” There are no photographs of her from that year and the absence of the girl’s presence in the world is what drives Ernaux to write the memory of the girl, and the girl’s memory of the event. Ernaux writes the story of the “fille de 58” moving in and out of that year throughout the text with references to films, popular songs, and literature that she was encountering not only at that time but before and after the moment of her first sexual encounter. Stretching back in her memory, she anchors the text to 1958 with references to events that occurred outside of the event. “C’était un été sans particularité météorologique, celui du retour du général de Gaulle, du franc lourd et d’une nouvelle République, de Pelé champion du monde de foot, de Charly Gaul vainqueur du Tour de France et de la chanson de Dalida Mon histoire c’est l’histoire d’un amour” (Mémoire de fille 13). At the end of this first section on the page the words “L’été 1958” appear on their own line.
on the page, as though to further anchor *Mémoire de fille* to that particular moment in time. There is space on the page after this line, which gives the reader time to let this temporal location sink in. It also displays the significance of the year, that it merits its own line on the page. While Ernaux’s writing might not indicate clear boundaries, the repetition of “fille de 58” and references to that year throughout the novel creates a clear temporal frame within which the story takes place.

In all three books Ernaux includes simultaneously precise and imprecise references to time. *La place*, for example, is oriented around the event of her father’s death. This novel is temporally situated in precise increments, but without specific dates: “Mon père est mort deux mois après, jour pour jour [. . .]. C’était un dimanche, au début de l’après-midi” (13). Some examples of Ernaux’s temporal reference points in these works, especially in *Les années*, are public examples of collectively experienced, generationally-situated events. September 11, 2001 occurs as an event in both *Les années* and in *Mémoire de fille*, for example. In the former, it represents time as globalized: “Le 11 septembre refoulait toutes les dates qui nous avaient accompagnés jusqu’ici. De la même façon qu’on avait dit ‘après Auschwitz,’ on disait ‘après le 11 septembre,’ un jour unique. Ici commençait on ne savait pas quoi. Le temps aussi se mondialisait” (*Les années* 211). In the latter, this date becomes a link back to a memory from 1958, and she is unable to separate the two:

Le 11 septembre 2001, à Venise, sur le Campo San Stefano, le long du Rio dei Mendicanti, sur le Fondamente Nuove—trajet reconstitué après coup—j’ai sans doute pensé au 11 septembre 1958, à cet anniversaire—ce sacre de ma folie—que celui de l’effondrement des tours de Manhattan ne réussira pas à reléguer au second plan, les deux étant maintenant associés, fussent-ils décalés de quarante-
trois ans. La nuit où, sans qu’il s’en aperçoive, sans qu’il le sache jamais, H est devenu mon premier amant. (*Mémoire de fille* 70-71)

While in *Les années* time is experienced globally and an event sends shockwaves around the globe, in *Mémoire de fille* it sends shockwaves through her memory and brings the event of 1958 to the forefront. Mieke Bal writes about memory as “an act of ‘vision’ of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory” (*Narratology* 150). The date September 11 becomes the *fil conducteur* between past and present and the present location augments the memory of the past but the one who remembers is always already occupying the space of the present.

Encountering her father’s death in *La place*, Ernaux comes up against the event of her father’s death, also an inevitable border crossing. In *Les années*, while Ernaux creates a narrative of her generation and herself as a part of it, she omits the first-person subject pronoun “je” and “in a simultaneous counter-movement writes herself out of it” (Jordan 146). Taking a meta view of the writing process in *Les années*, Ernaux inscribes at the end: “C’est maintenant qu’elle doit mettre en forme par l’écriture son absence futur” (237). In *Mémoire de fille*, acknowledging that she is approaching the border of her life with her own death on the horizon, Ernaux writes about the necessity to capture the “fille de 58” before it is too late:

> Le temps devant moi se raccourcit. Il y aura forcément un dernier livre, comme il y a un dernier amant, un dernier printemps, mais aucun signe pour le savoir.

> L’idée que je pourrais mourir sans avoir écrit sur elle que très tôt j’ai nommée ‘la fille de 58’ me hante. Un jour il n’y aura plus personne pour se souvenir. Ce qui a été vécu par cette fille, nulle autre, restera inexpliqué, vécu pour rien. Aucun autre projet d’écriture ne me paraît, non pas lumineux, ni nouveau, encore moins heureux, mais vital, capable de me faire vivre au-dessus du temps. (18)
Ernaux writes about this border as one that anyone could be coming up against: “Souvent, je suis traversée par la pensée que je pourrais mourir à la fin de mon livre. Je ne sais pas ce que cela signifie, la peur de la parution ou un sentiment d’accomplissement. Ceux qui écrivent sans penser qu’ils pourraient mourir après, je ne les envie pas” (Mémoire de fille 77). There is a certain urgency here that is also articulated in Ernaux’s references to the experience of her generation encountering new technologies in Les années. She captures the feeling of the year 2000 as a limit to cross over and that reference also corresponds to the fact of her approaching death that is on the horizon.

2.4 Demarcating Place

Acknowledging or claiming one’s place in the world is an example of a boundary that one creates between the self and the world. In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux revisits memories of the “fille de 58” and reconstitutes this figure in the novel, claiming a space for her. In Les années, the narrator almost obsessively refers to dates and events, articulating her generation’s place in French society and the wider world; Ernaux captured either precise moments in time experienced by her generation, such as Sputnik, or 1968, and weaves them with references to life events and experiences that could be about anyone. Her experience as a youth who cannot relate to her parent’s generation, and vice versa, could be about any generational conflict in any time period: “Au souper, il fallait nous arracher les mots de la bouche, on laissait de la nourriture, s’attirant le reproche ‘si tu avais eu faim pendant la guerre tu serais moins difficile.’ Aux désirs qui nous agitaient était opposée la sagesse des limites, ‘tu demandes trop à la vie’” (64). At the end of this novel, Ernaux shows how her generation is now in the place of her parents’ generation and
younger people exist in worlds separate from her own. By situating her generation to a time period, even though it crosses multiple years, Ernaux preserves it within the frame of the novel for future generations.

In *La place*, there is a leitmotif of knowing one’s place in the world that starts with Ernaux’s father. As we see in the epigraph to this section, Ernaux’s father’s world is starkly different from her own current linguistic and cultural surroundings and she demarcates that space with her use of italics in the line to represent his words, as well as with her inclusion of multiple linguistic registers. Ernaux marks her place as different from her father’s and conveys his obsession with remaining in (his) place. In the novel, Ernaux is coming to terms with her father’s death alongside her recognition that she no longer belongs in her father’s world. In life, her world became separate from her father’s after she started school and became even further detached with her father’s departure from the physical world. Ernaux writes about a childhood memory of knowing her place in the world in her new town after the war: “Mesure de la privation, une image: un jour, il fait déjà noir, à l’étalage d’une petite fenêtre, la seule éclairée dans la rue, brillent des bonbons roses, ovales, poudrés de blanc, dans des sachets de cellophane. On n’y avait pas droit, il fallait des tickets” (*La place* 51). Blocked by the fact that she does not possess the correct “passport” in order to enter into that space, she realizes the hierarchy of space in the world within which she spends her life navigating a place for herself.

Ernaux writes about the way her father crafts his place in the world and desires to forever remain in place: “Il ne buvait pas. Il cherchait à tenir sa place. Paraître plus commerçant qu’ouvrier. Aux raffineries, il est passé contremaître” (45). *La place* is framed by references to knowing one’s place in the world. For Ernaux’s father that also means a projection of a certain image of his place as he would like others to perceive him. The novel is written through the filter
of Ernaux the author; her father’s place is from her vantage point. For example, Ernaux places her father even outside of his generation, drawing a border between his world as old-fashioned: “Quand je lis Proust ou Mauriac, je ne crois pas qu’ils évoquent le temps où mon père était enfant. Son cadre à lui c’est le Moyen Âge” (29). She chooses negative terms to describe her father, crafting an image of him with what he is not: “Il était sérieux, c’est-à-dire, pour un ouvrier, ni feignant, ni buveur, ni noceur. Le cinéma et le charleston, mais pas le bistrot. Bien vu des chefs, ni syndicat ni politique” (35). Her doubled boundary of distinguishing herself from her father and then using negative language to make this distinction is a demonstration of the amplified distance between Ernaux and her father after his death.

2.5 Formal Parameters

Ernaux depicts the borderline between herself and her father in the way she writes, putting anything in her father’s words in italics and thus separating herself from her father’s world and drawing a simple but important contrast and line in the sand between them, or around herself. Words are limited, and her father’s words represent the world that he inhabits, where she used to belong: “ces mots et ces phrases disent les limites et la couleur du monde où vécut mon père, où j’ai vécu aussi. Et l’on n’y prenait jamais un mot pour un autre” (46). Her father differentiates his world from his daughter’s world at school and Ernaux magnifies this separation with italics: “Il disait toujours ton école” (73). The use of italics takes on a different meaning in Les années. Élise Hugueny-Léger writes that they are “le signe d’une intertextualité qui nourrit et caractérise chaque individu [. . .]. Les absents, portés à la vie par la parole des autres, permettent aux enfants d’être, à leur tour, présents. L’usage extensif des italiques et des citations souligne
cette idée que chaque individu est formé d’un tissu de mots, de citations” (372). For example, Ernaux references rhetoric in the media that permeates society and creates borders between French and “Others” that echoes physical separation within the nation: “Le langage construisait avec constance la partition entre nous et eux, les circonscrivait en ‘communautés dans les ‘quartiers,’ sur des ‘territoires de non-droit’ livrés au trafic de drogue et aux ‘tournantes,’ les ensauvageait. Les Français sont inquiets, affirmait les journalistes” (Les années 213). In Mémoire de fille, italics act as temporal anchors, referencing songs, poems, books, films and newspapers that inject the narrative with intertextuality. Read separately they take on a meaning that frames this Bildungsroman, or the author’s feeling of necessity to access that lost period of time, for example the Dalida song she mentions: “Mon histoire c’est l’histoire d’un amour” (13), her encounter with Simone de Beauvoir’s Le deuxième sexe (110), and Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu (149).

In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux draws a distinct separation between the “je” and the “elle” in order to represent the stark contrast between herself in 1958 and herself writing the novel. In doing so, she is also able to separate her current self and simultaneously protect it from the past self and further explore the past: “dois-je fondre la fille de 58 et la femme de 2014 en un ‘je’? Ou, ce qui me paraît, non pas le plus juste—évaluation subjective—mais le plus aventureux, dissoicier la première de la seconde par l’emploi de ‘je’, pour aller le plus loin possible dans l’exposition des faits et des actes” (22). Ernaux plays with the use of pronouns and sets certain parameters for their meaning. Limiting herself to “elle,” “nous,” or “on” in Les années, she creates a novel that is removed from herself and could be about almost anyone or about everyone. She strategically chooses to omit the self, or to write herself out of the text, and as Shirley Jordan writes: “This autobiographical tour de force is a remarkable ontological exercise
not so much in consolidating the self at the end of a successful life of writing, but in evacuating
the self and consigning it to memory” (147). Ernaux effectively creates a space between the self
and the text that does not exist in her other novels. What is more, the absence of “je” from this
text undermines the novel as autobiography and opens it up to a more shared ontological space.

Photographs or snapshots are present as global and local themes in each of these novels.
Like Ernaux’s *écriture plate*, there is a lot underneath and outside of the frame of the photograph
that is left unsaid and provides depth to the image that is not apparent on the surface. Ernaux
uses a description of a photograph as a way of framing the novel *La place* around the image of
her father that haunts her: “J’ai seize ans. Dans le bas, l’ombre portée du buste de mon père qui a
pris la photo” (78). This novel can be read as a recapturing of the image of her father, of the
shadow who appears within the frame of her current life. In *Mémoire de fille*, Ernaux layers the
narrative with a mixture of forms that include photographs. She laments that there are no photos
that exist of the “fille de 58” to preserve this figure and the entire novel can be read as a
photograph of her memory of 1958. At one point in the novel Ernaux focuses on an identity
photo from 1957. The framing of the photograph is constructed into the narrative with pairs of
words in a rhythm with almost identical syllabic space between them: “C’est une photo carrée
words effectively create the four corners of the photograph and generate a frame from the
surrounding text. In *Les années*, the form of the novel is a series of randomly selected
photographs that become increasingly frayed at the edges. As soon as the beginning of the novel,
Ernaux indicates that these images inhabit a slippery present: “Toutes les images disparaîtront”
(11). Toward the center of the novel, away from the edges, sentences and references are more
concrete and solidified. At the edges, the borders of the novel are not solid ground.
2.6 Straddling the Border

In *La place*, Ernaux’s father’s world is strictly outside of her world of traditional education: “Il n’a jamais mis les pieds dans un musée. Il s’arrêtait devant un beau jardin, des arbres en fleur, une ruche, regardait les filles bien en chair” (65). She points out that for him, words have their place just as he has his place in the world: “work” is meant solely for working with hands: “Il disait que j’apprenais bien, jamais que je travaillais bien. Travailler, c’était seulement travailler de ses mains” (81). Education is a useful frame for analyzing Ernaux’s novels as a borderline. In *Les années*, it is a major theme throughout that echoes the life education of her generation growing up after World War Two. In this novel, education frames and marks the passage of time, which is experienced in a radically different way by her generation than her parents’ childhood: “Mais nous, à la différence des parents, on ne manquait pas l’école pour semer du colza, locher des pommes et fagoter du bois mort. Le calendrier scolaire avait remplacé le cycle des saisons. Les années devant nous étaient des classes, chacune superposée au-dessus de l’autre, espace-temps ouverts en octobre et fermés en juillet” (33). The transition between home education and school education alters the experience of time, decelerating it from normative outside parameters: “le temps infiniment lent des études” (62). In *Mémoire de fille*, the event of her first sexual encounter is framed by references to her education. Preceding the event Ernaux references books, songs, and magazines she encountered before that threshold moment that would shape her understanding of the event through a literary lens: “Elle crève d’envie de faire l’amour mais par amour seulement. Elle connaît par cœur le passage des *Misérables* sur la première nuit de Cosette et Marius: ‘Sur le seuil des nuits de noce un ange est debout, souriant, un doigt sur la bouche. L’âme entre en contemplation devant ce sanctuaire où
se fait la célébration de l’amour’” (29-30). After the event occurs Ernaux writes about her inability to read, and then traces her path toward the world of literary studies. *La place* is framed by an education border-crossing, the first page of the novel describes the experience of her *Capes épreuve*, a teaching qualifying exam, during which she articulates the moments before, during, and after and the entire time can picture herself in the beyond of that border. As a frame to the novel, education border crossings are repeated throughout the text and represent the continually increasing distance between herself and her father. She recognizes in this scene that once she crosses the line there are no possibilities to return to who she was before. This scene represents the liminal space Ernaux straddles between the two worlds of before and after the exam.

Ernaux paints a picture of her parents who are stuck on the border: “Mi-commerçant, mi-ouvrier, les deux bords à la fois, voué donc à la solitude et à la méfiance” (*La place* 42), a place that Warren Motte calls: “a sort of social no-man’s-land” (59). Ernaux’s position to her own experiences of leaving home and moving across multiple borders into new spaces is juxtaposed with father who is almost obsessed with staying put and remaining in place. While her father is stuck, she is not, and yet, she becomes stuck in-between identities, generations, and even careers in this complicated border space. Ernaux works out the in-between space of her childhood in writing, describing invisible but lived barriers of recognizing one’s place in the world:

> Voie étroite, en écrivant, entre la réhabilitation d’un mode de vie considéré comme inférieur, et la dénonciation de l’aliénation qui l’accompagne. Parce que ces façons de vivre étaient à nous, un bonheur même, mais aussi les barrières humiliantes de notre condition (conscience que “ce n’est pas assez bien chez nous”), je voudrais dire à la fois le bonheur et l’aliénation. Impression, bien plutôt de tanguer d’un bord à l’autre de cette contradiction. (*La place* 54-55)
Ernaux’s experience breaking into the cannon echoes the immigrant’s experience moving across national borders; yet while Ernaux becomes stuck at points she is able to write herself out of it, using the act of writing to work her way through some of those barricaded locations to articulate the immigrant experience of being caught in-between, straddling multiple worlds.

3. Irène Némirovsky: Restrictions and Reprieve

Il s’est levé, il colle son visage à la fenêtre, mais elle forme une barrière entre lui et l’image de la nourriture. (Némirovsky, *Le maître des âmes* 53)

3.1 Family Frames

Irène Némirovsky was, in no particular order: Russian, French, Jewish, Catholic, white, immigrant (not expatriate, not citizen) bourgeois, author, female, daughter, wife, and mother. She came up against a variety of strict categories throughout her short life because of perceptions and implications of her citizenship, religion, age, gender, and time. Némirovsky’s familial relations affected her contemporary and arguably her current success as an author. She had a contentious relationship with her mother, which is echoed in her 1930 novel *Le bal*. Némirovsky’s husband had a similar upbringing; he, too, was a Russian Jew who fled with the Russian Revolution, giving him a similarly privileged status. Because he spoke German, during the war he befriended some of the German soldiers billeted in their town, which was a move that at once set him apart from the French in his town and blurred the boundaries between the friend and the enemy, a theme that Némirovsky explores in the “Dolce” section of *Suite française*. Her daughters are involved in her story in that after their father’s arrest, they escaped with their
caregiver with the manuscript and Némirovsky’s notebooks in a suitcase. They were the ones who decided, decades later, to finally edit and publish their mother’s work, which, in addition to the sensational story of the end of her life, created Némirovsky as an iconic figure breaching the limits of time.

3.2 Religious Identities

One of the most stifling identity categories Némirovsky was forced to confront was her Jewish identity. Her family was Jewish, but she was not practicing and in fact, she converted to Roman Catholicism as an adult. Jonathan Weiss, in his biography on Némirovsky, analyzes Madonna themes in Némirovsky’s books to make a convincing argument that she did not only convert to Catholicism to save her life, but that the religion indeed spoke to her. In her earlier books, especially her first and perhaps most famous one, *David Golder* (1929), she plays up stereotypes of the Jewish miser and includes one-sided, prejudiced representations of Jewish characters. Yet, Olivier Philipponnat complicates these images by pointing out that she was not producing infamous stereotypes but distorting them. He notes that these stereotypes have been a part of the French literary panoply since Voltaire and the Enlightenment, and Némirovsky’s characters, before being Jewish, are exiles and their peculiarity is the effect of economic, racial and ideological violence (*Le maître des âmes*, 22). During the Nazi Occupation of France, Némirovsky was denied access to the publishing world in which she had once been very active. Toward the end of her life, before and after she was on the “Liste Otto,” she published under pseudonyms in one of the most anti-Semitic journals at the time, *Gringoire*. She came up against
a barrier for publishing and compromised her Jewish identity, with which she did not really identify, in order to support her family during the war with her writing.

Némirovsky’s novel *Le maître des âmes* appeared in episodes in *Gringoire* in 1939 and it is another example of a novel in which we encounter religious stereotypes. It is a story of foreigners in France that centers on Dario Asfar, a doctor trying to make a living in that nation in which he is always considered an outsider. As Angela Kershaw points out in her biography on Némirovsky, Asfar’s origins are obscure: “This is a novel about immigration and xenophobia but not explicitly about Jews and anti-Semitism” (125). In the novel, Jewishness is equated with “Oriental,” “Otherness,” and “foreignness” to the French public who consumed it. Indeed, Némirovsky’s life story echoes a long line of problems with anti-Semitism in France. With the onset of “outsiders” in France during the interwar period with an increase in Russian Jews coming to the country, there was a rise in divisive rhetoric regarding those who did not fit a national ideal. Even though she was officially rejected from France, Némirovsky chose to publish in *Gringoire* and to write in French, what Philipponnat calls “la langue de l’antisémitisme de plume” (*Le maître des âmes* 20), thus creating and claiming a space for herself and her work within the oppressive structure of the journal. Religion in Némirovsky’s novels took an interesting turn toward the end of her life. In her earlier works, while she had some problematic Jewish characters and themes of Jewish characters who were unable to escape their Jewishness, in *Les chiens et les loups* she begins to undermine these references. As Weiss points out: “Each time the anti-Semitic discourse rears its head in this novel, there is a corresponding commentary that shows its incoherence” (103). As her own relationship to her religious identity and heritage became complicated by outside events, Némirovsky used the
space of the novel, published in *Gringoire*, to subtly yet powerfully react to the injustices done to others and herself at that time.

3.3 Citizenship Regulations

Némirovsky wrote about immigrant populations and border checks, or the reality of the regulation of national boundaries for some. And yet, she was coming to the location of France from a very privileged family. Némirovsky felt a strong pull to France and its culture early on in her life; she learned French as a baby from her French-speaking caretaker and her family spent vacations in France throughout her childhood. Of course, her linguistic abilities also represent her family’s privileged social status they enjoyed in Russia prior to the Russian Revolution. While Némirovsky came to France from a privileged background, and her family used her later success as a writer in France to attempt to gain citizenship, the paperwork became lost as France entered World War Two, and they never became citizens. Scenes that echo immigrant citizenship and visa issues appear at the same time in her later works, such as in *Les chiens et les loups*, when the main character Ada must leave France for Eastern Europe: “Pourtant, le jour où expirait son permis de résider en France, elle dit adieu à sa tante, embrassa Mme Mimi, muette et en pleurs, et, abandonnant Ben, son souvenir et celui de Harry, abandonnant l’espoir, elle partit seule. On lui avait accordé un visa pour un petit pays de l’Europe Orientale” (324). Julia Kristeva writes about the sacrifice of the immigrant: “Puisqu’il n’a rien, puisqu’il n’est rien, il peut tout sacrifier. Et le sacrifice commence par le travail: seul bien exportable sans douane, valeur refuge universelle en état d’errance. Quelle amertume alors, quel désastre quand on n’obtient pas . . . sa carte de travail!” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 32). Themes of the unstable nationhood and the
privilege of remaining in place are woven throughout Némirovsky’s later works. Indeed, the denial of citizenship is a central theme of Les chiens et les loups. After a friend in the neighborhood was expelled from France, the women of the community realize the precarity of their situation as outsiders, that it is only a matter of time before they too must leave: “attendre un passeport promis qui n’arrivait pas, partir et chercher ailleurs de précaires moyens d’existence” (320). In Le maître des âmes, Némirovsky paints a picture of nation, that in the preface to the novel, Philipponnat declares is a response to the duperies of the West, of a France that is no longer the welcoming mother of the orphans of the earth (24).

3.4 Borders of the Novel

The edges of the novel are borders that are both fixed and in flux. Gérard Genette writes about the actual, physical space of the novel as the “‘vestibule’ qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d’entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin. ‘Zone indécise’ entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse” (Seuils 7-8). Indeed, the space of the novel as borderland outside of certain constraints; anyone can enter and find their way into the story. Némirovsky’s incomplete work Suite française has physical borders that are rendered more indistinct as the author’s notebooks with ideas and plans for its continuation were also published with the novel. Due to its publication as such, the reader is invited to enter and spend time imagining other possible outcomes of the different sections, filling in the gaps left by the author’s death with their own versions of the stories. In a book published with the notes at the end and the story of the fate of the author haunting the entire novel, it is virtually impossible to separate the author’s identities
from the story itself. Facts about her life and death are what envelope and border the novel both metaphorically and in the physical copy of the book.

Yet, at the edge of the novel *Suite française*, there are clear border markings of the changing of seasons. For example, the opening of the first section “Tempête en juin”: “Chaude, pensait les Parisiens. L’air du printemps. C’était la nuit en guerre, l’alerte. Mais la nuit s’efface, la guerre est loin” (33). The end of this section, which the author was able to complete before her death, echoes the opening with its anchoring to a seasonal shift that reflects the historical shifts in Paris and elsewhere in France and the seemingly endless, boundless, period of the war that violently changes as the seasons viciously and subtly transform:

Le monde était trop malheureux [. . .]. “Ça passera, il reviendra et la guerre finira!” disaient les gens. Non! Non! Elle ne le croyait plus, ça dureraient et ça durerait . . . Le printemps lui-même qui ne voulait pas venir . . . Est-ce qu’on avait jamais vu un temps pareil en mars? Bientôt la fin de mars et cette terre gelée, glacée jusqu’au cœur comme elle-même. Quelles rafales! Quel bruit! [. . .] Le vent s’était tu; né il ne savait comment, il était reparti elle ne savait où. Il avait brisé des branches, secoué les toits dans sa rage aveugle; il avait emporté les dernières traces de neige sur la colline, et maintenant d’un ciel sombre et bouleversé par la tempête, la première pluie de printemps tombait froide encore mais ruisselante, pressée, se frayant un chemin jusqu’aux racines obscures des arbres, jusqu’au sein de la terre noir et profond. (302-303)

War is a seemingly endless space to navigate but it always eventually ends. Némirovsky strategically uses meteorological changes to move the plot forward and these also act as metaphors for her characters’ feelings about the war. This scene, which blurred the border between
winter and spring, is a fitting transition to the second part of the novel, “Dolce,” a story that appears serene but remains tumultuous as it questions national and citizenship borders. This section of *Suite française* is a love story between a French woman and the German officer billeted in her mother in law’s house. Love is stronger than nationhood and it traverses borders of France and Germany at war. Némirovsky deliberately chooses to blur the image of the German soldiers and depict their humanity and the complications of war in this love story. Indeed, Némirovsky herself lived in-between during the war, hiding in the Occupied Zone and not actually French and actively pushed out of the nation toward the end. Additionally, her husband’s friendliness with some of the German soldiers in their village put into question the individual intentions of different citizens and who indeed has the right to reside within which nation space. The difficulty of these questions is also reflected in the end of the first section with the changing of seasons. As a whole, *Suite française* ends abruptly without closure because Némirovsky never finished it. The novel’s incompleteness captures an essence of the ravages of war, of lives in tumult and many, like the author’s, extinguished without closure.

While anchored to certain historical events in some novels, Némirovsky plays with temporal fluidity in other novels. In *Le maître des âmes*, the sequence of events is slippery at the narrative level; actions occur as events that one person recounts to another. This novel is full of strangers, with the plot centered on foreigners living in France. The story focuses on the chaotic space of the “pension de famille” full of outsiders: “À travers les planches minces parvenait jusqu’à eux le bruit de la pension de famille; là vivaient, se querellaient, pleuraient et riaient des émigrés qui mangeaient leur dernier argent, se haïssaient ou s’aimaient” (35). The perceived foreignness of the characters reverberates across the narratological borders as Némirovsky actively played with the technique of the reader picking up a story told by a story someone told
them, and the narrator inhabits the in-between. Like the barriers the characters face in the novel, the narration creates a stark barrier between the reader and the story by moving erratically through time and situating the plot a few steps away from the reader; a story told by a character recounting a story to another. Likewise, Némirovsky creates a distance between herself as writer from the situations her characters must navigate that echoes her own troubles in France at the time she was writing.

3.5 Invisible Borders

National borders are sometimes invisible, but they have very real implications for both those within and those outside the nation. Outside of national boundaries, there are other definite yet unseen restrictions such as with social conventions and identity categories. Certain restrictive identity categories similar to the national visa and citizenship ones I mentioned above are prevalent throughout Némirovsky’s novels. For example, there are examples of people who are very aware of their place in the world, living within imaginary, but not unreal, socially constructed identities. A difference that is apparent in these novels is between knowing one’s place and being told one’s place in the world. Birth is a large determiner of a set identity for Némirovsky: “L’argent est l’argent, mais la naissance est la naissance” (Les chiens et les loups 32). Wealth status can be shifted, for some more easily than for others, but one has no control over one’s birth and its consequences. For example, in Les chiens et les loups, birthplace (both birth socioeconomic status and birth location), is an important factor that determines citizenship in France and also acceptance into French society. This of course echoes Némirovsky’s own experience coming to France and her death that was a result of her identity as
Jewish, but only by birth. Death was an invisible but ominous border that loomed over Némirovsky during the German Occupation of France. The end of her life was a limit she was aware she was coming up against as she frantically tried to progress with her masterpiece *Suite française*. This novel is as a sort of cultural archive, a collective biography that captured snapshots of her generation in writing. The sense of urgency in this type of writing is especially apparent in Némirovsky’s commentary on the novel. In a journal entry from June 2, 1942, she writes about this book as though she knows her death is immanent and she’s stuck in limbo, equating finishing the work to a Sisyphean task: “Pour soulever un poids si lourd / Sisyphe, il faudrait ton courage. / Je ne manque pas de cœur à l’ouvrage / Mais le but est long et le temps est court” (Preface to *Suite française* 25). She was very aware of her place in the world and the implications of her birth that would ultimately lead to her untimely death and this is echoed in her journal entries leading up to her arrest.

An awareness, or not, of one’s place in the world is a character trait that Némirovsky plays with in her novels. In *Les feux de l’automne* for example, she criticized the place of privileged populations in France and their lack of reflection and awareness of the repercussions of their privilege. In the novel’s synopsis on the back cover, the position of the French public is articulated in this story that takes place during the inter-war period and into World War Two: “Habité par le climat fiévreux et délétère de l’entre-deux-guerres, ce magnifique roman est tout autant une peinture cruelle et saisissante de la bourgeoisie emprisonnée dans ses conventions et son hypocrisie que le portrait plus intime d’hommes et de femmes en quête d’une impossible liberté.” Others are very aware of their place in the world and of which socially constructed boundaries prohibit them from accessing certain spaces. For example, in *Les chiens et les loups* when Ada recognizes her place within that society: “Elle regardait de loin les églises catholiques
et les faisceaux brûlants des cierges, visibles par les portes que l’on laissait ouvertes en ces journées si chaudes. Mais elle s’arrêtait comme devant la maison de Laurence: tout cela faisait partie d’un ordre différent où elle ne pouvait pénétrer” (309). The inability to breach the different order in this scene is an example of the various imaginary but real borders that people who did not fit into the French ideal had to navigate at the time that are echoed into Némirovsky’s own experience with those invisible limitations.

3.6 The *repus* and the *affamés*

In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal writes about determining semantic axes, or “pairs of contrary meanings” in the characters’ characteristics in the novel as a means to determine broader ideological significations of the novel (127-128). The most important semantic axes found in Némirovsky’s oeuvre are articulated in *Le maître des âmes* with the *repus* versus the *affamés*, or the haves versus the have-nots. Perhaps the most limiting borders exist between those groups in her novels and, as Kershaw mentions in her biography on the author, Némirovsky set out to show how economic status cuts across race lines (125). There are constant references to belonging and the desire to belong that go along with the theme of thresholds, and the opening and closing of doors and windows that reflect opportunities and impossible attainment of success. *Les chiens et les loups* also refers to socioeconomic status and the clear juxtaposition of the haves with the have-nots and the desire for something else, either an elsewhere or a different, better situation. This novel links up with themes of immigration borders and tells the story of young immigrants coming to Paris. The separation of classes is represented physically and even before leaving Ukraine to come to France; hence, socio-economic status exists beyond and traverses national
borders. In their hometown in the Ukraine for example, classes are physically separated and those lines cross through religion, with poor Jews alienated from the wealthy Jews: “les Juifs n’étaient tolérés que dans certaines cités, dans certains districts, dans certaines rues, et même, parfois, d’un seul côté d’une rue, tandis que l’autre leur était interdit” (Les chiens et les loups 10). The town is topographically disjointed by rivers and hills and rich Jews live literally above the Ghetto where the others live. But in Paris, everyone appears to live together at the same physical level. And yet, there are still stark contrasts between groups based on socioeconomic status. Those socioeconomic boundaries are also woven throughout both parts of Suite française, distinguishing sharp differences between the haves and the have-nots. During the chaos of the mass exodus from Paris, Némirovsky stretches the tempo for a detailed scene during which, amidst the turmoil and commotion of the outside, the novelist Gabriel Corte ends up inside a swanky hotel eating chips and olives while some people are trying desperately and unsuccessfully to reserve a room and others are starving outside. He is obsessed only with saving his manuscript and uses his name and social status to gain access to certain spaces that are denied to others in the novel.

3.7 Shifting Borders

Némirovsky came up against multiple barriers and restrictions in her lifetime. Characters coming up against firm socioeconomic borders appear throughout Némirovsky’s œuvre but because of her family’s privileged status, she most likely never came up against many of those same restrictions. However, Némirovsky experienced other sorts of strict borders that limited her such as her religious identity label by birth with her Jewish heritage, and her lack of French
citizenship, that ultimately led to her death in Auschwitz. She found a way around certain identity restrictions by hiding her age and gender when she first submitted David Golder for publication, and later on during the war when she published under a pseudonym in Gringoire. I would not argue that Némirovsky the author found much respite in the border space of her identities; she considered herself French, which was clearly untrue at least based upon governmental records. She considered herself Catholic, a religion to which she chose to convert, as she never quite identified as Jewish. Her family did not fit in with other Russian immigrant families either due to their privileged status or because they chose not to associate with certain other groups. The solid border between identities is muddied by historical events, the passage of time, and individual perspectives. The examples I have chosen to analyze in this section represent only a few of the multiple references in Némirovsky’s work of barriers and boundaries. Like the window scene in the epigraph to this section, within these examples there are glimpses of what lays beyond the limit and the porousness and fluidity of certain borders.

4. Nathalie Sarraute: Micro-Fluidity

Le temps se tient presque immobile. Les instants, fermés sur eux-mêmes, lisses, lourds, pleins à craquer, avancent très lentement, presque insensiblement, se déplacent avec précaution comme pour préserver leur charge de rêve, d’espoir. (Sarraute, Le planétarium 74)

4.1 Women’s Writing

Nathalie Sarraute navigated similar identities to the other three authors in this project: she was Jewish, survived the German Occupation (unlike Némirovsky), and she is a woman.
However, unlike the others, she puts up firm boundaries in most of her works between her personal life and the worlds she creates in her novels. With the exception of *Enfance*, which is a memoir of her childhood written in the form of a conversation between a split self, the other books I examine in this project remain apart from her personal life and true to her literary goals of pushing on the boundaries of the novel. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Sarraute states that the idea of women’s writing shocks her: “I think that in art we are androgynous,” she says (“Interviews: Nathalie Sarraute”). She also reveals that she hardly ever thinks about gender with her characters. One can also make the argument that although the author’s intention was not to classify herself as a woman writer, we all operate within gender identities as social frameworks imposed upon us. That being said, gender and Jewish identities as restrictive categories are not the focus of this section. I take a more meta-view with Sarraute as I examine other boundaries in her early works, and regarding identity, I focus on the navigation of her familial identities and writing of the self and memory depicted in *Enfance*, in subsequent chapters. Sarraute’s entrance into the literary cannon is important to note: she came up against limitations of success with the first publication of *Tropismes* in 1939. Indeed, she writes about the literary reaction to her first two books as certainly not making a splash: “Mes premiers livres: *Tropismes* paru en 1939, *Portrait d’un inconnu*, paru en 1948, n’ont éveillé à peu près aucun intérêt. Ils semblaient aller à contre-courant” (*L’ère du soupçon* 10). Her novel *Tropismes* first appeared with little recognition, and momentum started with *Portrait d’un inconnu*’s publication with Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to the novel and a second edition of *Tropismes* in 1957 that announced her arrival on the literary scene. In this section I examine the notion of being stuck, the imposition of conventions, and how Sarraute’s novels operate at the edge of these concepts and push against them from within.
4.2 The Tropism

Still waters run deep; in Sarraute’s work there are many exceedingly slow, interior moments that appear stagnant. She creates these with “tropisms” that play with normative novelistic limits of time and action. In her essay *L’ère du soupçon*, Sarraute defines tropisms as the following: “Ce sont des mouvements indéfinissables, qui glissent très rapidement aux limites de notre conscience; ils sont à l’origine de nos gestes, de nos paroles, des sentiments que nous manifestons, que nous croyons éprouver et qu’il est possible de définir. Ils me paraissaient et me paraissent encore constituer la source secrète de notre existence” (8). A tropism is intangible, it is “felt” instead at the edges of our human consciousness, a feeling that is fleeting, and exceedingly challenging to articulate. While the rest of us are limited by our linguistic abilities, Sarraute deftly displays her aptitude for capturing ephemeral sensations within the frame of prose and the novel. Sarraute also articulates the free-moving form of her tropisms as: “l’expression spontanée d’impressions très vives, et leur forme était aussi spontanée et naturelle que les impressions auxquelles elle donnait vie” (*L’ère du soupçon* 8). Tropisms are thus always in flux, unsuitable to a formal analysis in this chapter that focuses on solid, firm parameters, and yet, they also make up the frame within which Sarraute formulated her writing and she argues, constitute our human existence. In this chapter I use Sarraute’s tropism as a form that is decidedly in flux to analyze seemingly fixed boundaries to both display their surface fixity, and reveal their permanent, imperceptible flow. This form leaked out for Sarraute, as she says in her interview with the Paris Review, when asked: “How did you know when you found one?” she replies: “I didn’t always know, I might discover it in the writing. I didn’t try to define them, they just came out like that” (“Interviews: Nathalie Sarraute”). Tropisms are impossible to pin down and yet, they are the

4.3 Stuck

Sarraute’s *Tropismes* contains twenty-four disparate glimpses that center around common places such as the home, a local store, or a park bench. Christine Cormier, in her article on Sarraute’s use of tropisms in *Portrait d’un inconnu*, associates the lieu commun with death and the tropism with life, juxtaposing the two: “Sarraute semble instaurer une hiérarchie constamment réitérée à travers l’opposition vie/mort: tout ce qui est fixé, figé, étant à mettre du côté de la mort, relèverait du lieu commun; la vie étant synonyme de mouvement, de nouveau, de découverte, renverrait, dans l’œuvre de Sarraute, aux tropismes” (109). Cormier continues with an analysis of Sarraute’s tension between the two, which I further examine in Chapter Two. For this part of my analysis, I am most interested in Cormier’s claim of the association of common space with fixity and characters who are stationary, unable to leave. Cormier writes about the tropism as a form that encloses: “L’écriture précise de Sarraute introduit le tropisme qui cerne, englobe son objet, s’impose par petites touches, établissant un climat en poursuivant la comparaison avec le jeu” (113). On a micro-level, Sarraute captures a moment and then weaves it into the text with this fluid form. The slow movement of tropisms can represent various sentiments such as immobility, which carries through to the physical movements of characters in the narrative.
In the second section of *Tropismes*, “Un homme qui souffre de la médiocrité de pensée de son entourage,” we encounter a sort of border-scene, with a man trapped in a relentless cycle of unexceptional actions:

Et il sentait filtrer de la cuisine la pensée humble et crasseuse, piétinante, piétinant toujours sur place, toujours sur place, tournant en rond, en rond, comme s’ils avaient le vertige mais ne pouvaient pas s’arrêter, comme s’ils avaient mal au cœur mais ne pouvaient pas s’arrêter, comme on se ronge les ongles, comme on arrache par morceaux sa peau quand on pèle, comme on se gratte quand on a de l’urticaire, comme on se retourne dans son lit pendant l’insomnie, pour se faire plaisir et pour se faire souffrir, à s’épuiser, à en avoir la respiration coupée . . . (16-17)

The man is stuck, unable to stop the madness and Sarraute encapsulates the repetitiveness of her descriptions of these cyclic actions with ellipses at the end, with the reverberation of examples beginning with “comme on” continues ad nauseum, as a ripple effect, eventually trailing off.

Huguette Bouchardeau, in her biography on Sarraute, referring to the tiny worlds she creates with common spaces: “Car tout ici dit l’enfermement: celui du cercle familial, celui des clichés, de la culture partagée et obligatoire” (93). People can be stuck in categories put in place as normative societal expectations. The narrator in *Portrait d’un inconnu*, for example, categorizes a group of women he encounters as one in the same; the more closely he gazes at them the more they begin to resemble each other to his eyes, as though their similarities were a natural occurrence: “Ces pauvres gens tournent toujours en rond dans un cercle assez étroit” (74).

Conventions are formulaic and Sarraute writes her characters who operate within linguistic and
other societal systems: “habitués qu’ils étaient à avancer le long des mots, dans les formules courantes, comme des chevaux qui suivent” (Portrait d’un inconnu 97).

The women in Sarraute’s tenth tropism: “Des femmes jacassent dans un salon de thé” are enclosed within a physical teahouse and have also enclosed themselves within their own clearly demarcated world within the space of the teahouse. There is an energy surrounding them as they flit about their group like birds in a cage:

Tout autour c’était une volière pépiante, chaude et gaïment éclairée et ornée. Elles restaient là, assises, serrées autour de leurs petites tables et parlaient. Il y avait autour d’elles un courant d’excitation, d’animation, une légère inquiétude pleine de joie, le souvenir d’un choix difficile, dont on doutait encore un peu (se combinerait-il avec l’ensemble bleu et gris? mais si pourtant, il serait admirable), la perspective de cette métamorphose, de ce rehaussement subit de leur personnalité, de cet éclat. Elles, elles, elles, toujours elles, voraces, pépiantes et délicates. (Tropismes 63-64)

Sarraute underlines the steadfastness of the group’s actions by situating the scene within not one singular afternoon, but every afternoon: “Dans l’après-midi elles sortaient ensemble, menaient la vie des femmes. Ah! cette vie était extraordinaire!” (64). She plays with time in this scene, expanding the frame of the afternoon as a temporal marker to not only a moment during that period, but entire afternoons that pass fluidly within the teahouse: “Elles restaient là, assises pendant des heures, pendant que des après-midi entières s’écoulaient” (64). These women are bounded by the group’s and society’s expectations of them. Sarraute imposes these expectations by demarcating the world within which they operate: “la vie des femmes.”
Sarraute works within fluid temporal limits to portray a flow of tropisms. In *L’ère du soupçon* she writes about the author as translator of a series of emotional states: “il n’était possible de les communiquer au lecteur que par des images [. . .]. Il fallait aussi décomposer ces mouvements et les faire se déployer dans la conscience du lecteur à la manière d’un film au ralenti. Le temps n’était plus celui de la vie réelle, mais celui d’un présent démesurément agrandi” (9). Time is stretched and incalculable in *Le planétarium* and is also a parameter that the protagonist is almost obsessive about establishing, attempting to become the master of his own time: “Mais maintenant, il est libre, il est le maître. Il dispose de son temps. Il faut se préparer. C’est la période de recueillement, de purification qui précède les corridas, les sacres” (74). The narrator in *Le planétarium* demonstrates this period of pause, a necessary pause, before action. That is followed by his experience with time as impossible to control:

Mais le temps, tout à coup . . . mais quelle heure est-il donc? Le temps—cela ne pouvait pas manquer, cela devait lui arriver pendant qu’il était là, en train de s’amuser à regarder jaillir et retomber les gerbes crépitantes des mots—le temps, oublié, délivré, a fait un bond . . . Plus que quatre minutes, bon sang . . . et il n’est pas prêt, il lui aurait fallu encore quelques instants de recueillement pour se préparer, il aurait eu besoin de franchir d’abord une zone de silence . . . quelque chose a été faussé dans le mécanisme qu’il avait si bien agencé, il a tout compromis par une insouciance coupable, une impardonnable distraction, il est poussé, bousculé, il va mal prendre son élan. (76)

Within this fluid frame of a stretched-out present, the character is frantically attempting to grab on to any temporal bearings, but he has instead found himself lost within the ambiguity, unable to grasp anything to help him measure.
In *Portrait d’un inconnu*, the protagonist is depicted as a spider awaiting its prey on a web: “Immobile comme une grosse araignée dans sa toile, il a l’air de savoir qu’il n’a pas besoin de bouger—il n’a qu’à attendre. Ils ne manqueront jamais de venir, attirés comme des mouches” (151). References to the spider waiting in its web are repeated in the novel and depict not only the character’s incapacity to move, but lack of need to do so. A similar thing occurs in Sarraute’s fifth section of *Tropismes*: “Une femme est figée dans l’attente.” The main character’s immobility is described as natural, and it is experienced as such by anyone else in the scene: “Elle ne bougeait pas. Et autour d’elle toute la maison, la rue semblaient l’encourager, semblaient considérer cette immobilité comme naturelle” (35). The woman has blended into her surroundings, disappearing unnoticed. It is curious that this tropism is the first in the series that does not open with a third-person subject pronoun. Instead it opens with a fluid temporal anchor and the imposition of a boundary: “Par les journées de juillet très chaudes, le mur d’en face jetait sur la petite cour humide une lumière éclatante et dure” (33). There is no necessity to move; all of the action is internal, for any physical movement would break the spell:

Elle restait là, toujours recroquevillée, attendant, sans rien faire. La moindre action, [. . .] paraissait une provocation, un saut brusque dans le vide, un acte plein d’audace. Ce bruit soudain de l’eau dans ce silence suspendu, ce serait comme un signal, comme un appel vers eux, ce serait comme un contact horrible, comme de toucher avec la pointe d’une baguette une méduse et puis l’attendre avec dégoût qu’elle tressaille tout à coup, se soulève et se replie. (34-35)

The only action is the interrupting sound of water and yet, this scene unfolds and is full of suspense, both in the sense that it creates anticipation on the part of the reader, and that it is a scene suspended; normative time, noise, and external action are all barred from this space. When
a noise does cut through it completely disrupts the ecosystem of the moment and the tropism shifts.

4.4 Imposed Boundaries

Periods of fixity are sometimes represented as imprisoning, with physical effects of suffocation, and the feeling itself precludes action in the scene. In the sixth section of *Tropismes*, “Une femme impérieuse écrase autrui sous le poids des choses,” the woman takes out her suffering on others and is trapped inside her own natural and debilitating reaction to stress. In opposition to the previous tropism, where any movement occurs inside the mind, this woman’s movements are physical, and she flits about the house with no respite. She attempts to round up the boarders for breakfast and in her mind there is nothing worse than leaving the breakfast wait. “Les choses! les choses! C’était sa force. La source de sa puissance. L’instrument dont elle se servait, à sa manière instinctive, infaillible et sûre, pour le triomphe, pour l’écrasement. Quand on vivait près d’elle, on était prisonnière des choses, esclave rampant chargé d’elles, lourd et triste, continuellement guettée, traqué par elles” (40-41). This woman is a prisoner of her own obsession with making her boarding house run a certain way, and she implements rules and regulations and imprisons others who inhabit that closed system. Societal regulations are imposed on inhabitants of *lieux communs*, and sometimes there is another layer of imposition that can be a burden. For example, in the eighth tropism, “Un grand-père, qui promène son petit-enfant, exerce sur lui une protection étouffante, et lui parle de sa mort,” the title provides strong language of burden (“exerce sur lui”) and a stifling level of protection. Harkening back to the smothering July heat from the fifth tropism, the surrounding air in this scene is stagnant: “L’air
était immobile et gris, sans odeur [. . .]. Et le petit sentait que quelque chose pesait sur lui, l’engourdisait” (52-53). The little boy suffocates under the weight of his grandfather’s impending death that is imposed upon him.

In the preface to *L’ère du soupçon*, Sarraute references the “grille conventionnelle que nous appliquons sur la vie” (10), which can represent multiple types of borders and boundaries imposed upon inhabitants of a space. Established boundaries are apparent in *Enfance* in reference to national borders: “Et puis au mois d’août, le tambour a annoncé la mobilisation générale. Et après, des feuilles collées sur la mairie nous ont appris que c’était la guerre. Maman s’est affolée, il fallait qu’elle rentre en Russie immédiatement sinon elle serait coupée, retenue ici” (259-260). Her mother must leave France or else she will be trapped within that nation when the border closes. Boundaries are constructed in familial worlds with rules and the repetition of words. For example, in *Enfance*, Véra, Sarraute’s step-mother, responds to a question “Pourquoi on ne peut pas faire ça?” with a firm boundary that the two will never be able to break down: “‘Parce que ça ne se fait pas’ est une barrière, un mur vers lequel elle me tire, contre lequel nous venons buter . . . nos yeux vides, globuleux le fixent, nous en pouvons pas le franchir, il est inutile d’essayer, nos têtes résignées s’en détournent” (187). In this same text, the narrator works through issues with her mother by fixating on specific phrases that represent her digestion of childhood memories as she converses with her split self. Certain chapters are focused on very specific expressions, as though the author is stuck on the phrase, continues to work through the implications, and has to write herself out of it. For example, referencing Sarraute’s challenging relationship with her mother, the phrase: “On ne t’a donc pas appris, chez ta mère, comment on doit passer des ciseaux?” (161) is repeated several times. This is not only limited to her mother;
while sifting through childhood memories the narrator also reveals her fixation on hearing the words “tu m’aimes” and “je t’aime” from her father.

Sarraute the author imposes space on the reader in her works. She played with and even rejected novelistic conventions and created a unique rhythm within which to experience her works. For example, in *Enfance*, the space on the pages appears randomly, echoing the random order of the memories accessed by the doubled-narrators. This text is also separated into different chapters, but with no chapter titles, only the demarcation of a new section with space on the page. In *Tropismes*, there is blank space between each tropism and each has a number and a title. The titles are a microcosm of each tropism. Sarraute uses tropisms and border space of the novel strategically; time as we perceive it is absent, and the narrative is instead measured, if it even possible to quantify, in tropisms that seep from one into the other in an immeasurably stretched present. And yet, perhaps in order to resituate the reader, each tropism is neatly arranged and framed within the space of the chapter. Sarraute plays with blank space to reiterate a silence or stagnation, for example, after a period of silence is penetrated by the sound of a door closing in this novel, there is a large space on the second page before the text: “Étendu dans l’herbe sous le soleil torride, on reste sans bouger, on épie, on attend” (34). In *Enfance*, Sarraute uses space on the page to represent a border crossing. For example, at the beginning of the section: “Je me souviens parfaitement d’une petite gare entourée de neige scintillante où nous avons attendu dans une salle éclairée par de grandes baies, les uniformes des employés avaient changé, je savais que nous étions à la frontière” and after some space on the page: “Et puis Berlin” (109).

While some formal elements can situate the reader in Sarraute’s texts, the reader must also work to enter into the worlds she creates. She writes that novelists who deliver themselves
from constraints also lose the protection and security that they offer the reader and oblige them to
work: “Le lecteur, privé de tous ses jalons habituels et de ses points de repère, soustrait à toute
autorité, mis brusquement en présence d’une manière inconnue, désarmé et méfiant, au lieu de
s’abandonner les yeux fermés comme il aime tant à le faire, a été obligé de confronter à tout
moment ce qu’on lui montrait avec ce qu’il voyait par lui-même” (L’ère du soupçon 114).
Sarraute likens the traditional use of punctuation imposed upon novelists to how it must have felt
for cubist painters encumbered by rules of perspective: “non plus une nécessité, mais une
encombrante convention” (L’ère du soupçon 125). Like the fluidity of the tropism as form, the
frame for the reader in her works is one of slow fluidity, without any reference points, like
magma as she puts it:

Alors le lecteur est d’un coup à l’intérieur, à la place même où l’auteur se trouve,
à une profondeur où rien ne subsiste de ces points de repère commodes à l’aide
desquels il construit les personnages. Il est plongé et maintenu jusqu’au bout dans
une matière anonyme comme le sang, dans un magma sans nom, sans contours.
S’il parvient à se diriger, c’est grâce aux jalons que l’auteur a posés pour s’y
reconnaître. Nulle réminiscence de son monde familier, nul souci conventionnel
de cohésion ou de vraisemblance, ne détourne son attention ni ne freine son effort.
Les seules limites auxquelles, comme l’auteur, il se heurte, sont celles qui sont
inherentes à toute recherche de cet ordre ou qui sont propres à la vision de
l’auteur. (L’ère du soupçon 91)

Sarraute demands that we put aside our experience reading “comfortably” and makes the reader
work in order to enter the narrative. Le planétarium is a perfect example of one of her works
whose fixity is in its ambiguity and lack of normative textual markers: “As always, the book
begins in medias res. There is no exposition or external description, no background of character or situation” (Besser 67). Portrait d’un inconnu is similar, with ambiguous narration and plot within what appears to be a conventional novel but is in fact perplexing. In the preface to the novel, Sartre calls it the “anti-novel”: “un anti-roman, qui se lit comme un roman policier. C’est d’ailleurs une parodie de romans ‘de quête’” (8). Using novelistic conventions and conserving the appearance and contours of the novel, those actually contest the form of the novel and reflect upon it. (7-8).

4.5 Touching the Edge

Imposed borders are in fact permeable, malleable, able to transgress at the weak points, as Sarraute depicts for characters waiting to cross through: “ils attendent toujours derrière les portes, prêts, au premier instant de défaillance, à venir” (Portrait d’un inconnu 154). There are precise moments in Sarraute’s novels when characters interact with edges, both physical boundaries and unattainable horizons. In Portrait d’un inconnu, this anti-roman contains many references to moving toward the edge, or pushing against boundaries. For example, the narrator in this novel takes delight in the idea of projecting shadows of movement onto an immoveable wall: “Il n’y a rien de tel aujourd’hui pour donner à un mur quelque chose d’un peu tragique, de scénique, d’assez hallucinant, que de projeter sur lui la forme noire, irréelle, et aiguë d’un fiacre” (55). The edge is a limit that the narrator acknowledges in the background of the scene: “Ce mur me convient très bien comme fond. Nos silhouettes sombres se découpaient sur lui” (55). He likes how his shadow brushes up against it and operates within it, as though disrupting it from the inside, just as Sarraute does with the form of the novel. The edge of the novel is frayed:
“Tout s’arrangera . . . Ce ne sera rien . . . Juste encore un pas de plus à franchir” (238). Mieke Bal, in her article “Embracing the Horizon” writes that a horizon “is a boundary, but one that cannot be crossed. The moment you approach it, it recedes” (415). What is more, she distinguishes border space, that is, space within the horizon, as space that one can master. Therefore, a horizon is not a firm boundary, but a sort of unmeasurable edge that is constantly shifting. It is precisely in the border space, at the edge of convention, where Sarraute explores the limits of the novel. In his preface to Portrait d’un inconnu, Sartre writes about finding the edge of certain expectations and limits put upon his subjective reaction: “On me laisse, en somme, le loisir d’être subjectif dans les limites de l’objectivité. Et plus je serai subjectif entre ces frontières étroites, plus on m’en saura gré : car je démontrerai par là que le subjectif n’est rien et qu’il n’en faut pas avoir peur” (10). His subjectivity leaks through as though it were not only impossible to demarcate it from the objective, but that it is not necessary to do so in the first place. Sarraute’s writing operates on the border space of novelistic conventions: she writes tropisms within the boundaries of the novel while pushing on those limits, and the tropisms emerge within the slow action at the edge of consciousness.

5. Conclusion: Leaky Horizons

5.1 Frames Revisited

As we can see from the examples I chose to offer in this chapter, neither the figures nor my examples fit neatly into singular categories or boxes. Instead, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, they are in fact representative of borderlines that are permeable, or “leaky
horizons.” Indeed, frames and borders are often permeable, porous, saturated, moving, unfixed. Boundaries are constantly reiterated, and because they need to be continually recreated, they are actually vulnerable. Identity depends on who does the framing and how solid the frames are. Bodies do not belong solely to themselves and identity “is not thinkable without the permeable border, or else without the possibility of relinquishing a boundary. In the first case, one fears invasion, encroachment, and impingement, and makes a territorial claim in the name of self-defense. But in the other case, a boundary is given up or overcome precisely in order to establish a certain connection beyond the claims of territory” (Butler, *Frames of War* 43-44). Lines drawn to create one’s place are in fact ways to constitute the self by defining what is “not me”: “a subject emerges through a process of abjection” (*Frames of War* 141). This framing of the self is not always passive but can be active: “We can think of the frame, then, as active, as both jettisoning and presenting, and doing both at once, in silence, without any visible sign of its operation” (*Frames of War* 73). Frames are solid enough to both “jettison” what they are not and to continually (re)present themselves. If we tie this into identity formation, there is a link to what Judith Butler also writes in *Undoing Gender* about how identity is a series of performances: there is decidedly a dismissal of “who I am not” and a performance of “who I am.” In *Frames of War*, Butler does not want us to think of frames as preconstructed and then applied to the world; instead the construction of the frame is producing social relations at the same time social relations are producing the frame. While Butler seems to be against the framing of identity, the frame itself leaks out an identity.
5.2 Là-bas

While borders are permeable, sometimes what lies beyond them is impossible to access. Scenes of longing for là-bas while simultaneously demarcating one’s own place or discovering one’s place within social frameworks are central themes in immigrant literature. While navigating and even implementing strict borders in their lives and works, each figure in this chapter possesses the capacity to move between and through seemingly firm limitations; they are masters of their domains, but also stuck within certain restrictions, unable to access the beyond that is always in-sight but impossible to reach. All four figures operate within border space and include metaphors of the beyond in their work. For Némirovsky, the image of the window perfectly describes the real physical limitations of certain borders but because the gaze can cross through, they are not impermeable. That image for Ernaux appears in the form of the photograph that acts as impetus and key to unlocking past memories; she is able to “see” the past, but within the location of the present. We also encounter that form in the description of her Capes exam, for example. Sarraute works within the form of the novel itself and pushes against it, seeing past it to innovative literary futures but still operating from within. The horizon space for Baker is in her performances, either via song interludes in boat scenes or dance scenes that occur in the peripheral space of a jazz club in Paris.

Julia Kristeva writes about the foreigner as not being tethered to any place, existing in an in-between, transitory state: “N’appartenir à aucun lieu, aucun temps, aucun amour. L’origine perdue, l’enracinement impossible, la mémoire plongeante, le présent en suspens. L’espace de l’étranger est un train de marche, un avion en vol, la transition, la transition même qui exclut l’arrêt” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 17-18). The liminal space of borders and boundaries can act as
barriers, excluding entrance into, but these can also be points of departure that represent what lies ahead. In literature, Roger Bromley writes that this area has “shifting grounds” and “narratives are involved in a process of endlessly locating and undermining: belonging is always problematic, a never-ending dialogue of same with other” (5). The transitory nature of the journey itself can also be a liminal space, a space outside of certain external parameters such as time, and without the notion of fixity. As I have shown in this chapter, borderlines are not as solid as they may seem at first glance. And yet, like the window, they have very real implications. I will settle this section on border space as in-flux, like Sarratte’s magma; dangerous and destructive at times, but, like Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s war machines, with a possibility for change in its wake. The leaky horizon is transitory and impossible to pin down.
II. BETWEEN, OVER THERE: ON DREAMS, TRANSIT, AND THRESHOLDS

When one enters into border space it can become possible to see what lies beyond. While the horizon may be unattainable it also embodies both the journey involved in a transition and what could be possible on the other side of the border. Border space can be a place of respite, outside of normative societal and physical parameters. The border is also an equalizing place where everyone is a traveler and no one is at home. The transition that occurs in the intersectional space of the crossroads must be examined when exploring the formation of individual and group identities and their implications. In this chapter, I examine intersectionality as a theoretical concept that allows for considering the simultaneous configuration of multiple identities. Taking up intersectionality as theoretical framework is an example of me stepping into an in-between space where I do not exactly belong: intersectionality has its roots in Black Feminist thought with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s first use of the term in reference to exposing power structures as they effect women of color. Intersectionality has been appropriated and has even become a buzzword in pop culture feminism. And yet, intersectionality as an approach “has been enormously effective in challenging the singularity, separateness, and wholeness of a wide range of social categories” (McCall 1778). I use it in this project as a tool to illuminate the navigation of multiple identities simultaneously and the intersections of multiple power structures as they effect individual and community identity formations, while challenging the assumption of identity as singular, separate, and whole.

Identities are malleable, in transit, and in-process, and yet, the process of transition is often conflated with a stagnant and finalized identity: “Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather it is induced by it;
epistemological correctives cannot apprehend ontological becomings; the complexity of process is continually mistaken for a resultant product” (Puar 50). Nathalie Sarraute, Irène Némirovsky, Annie Ernaux, and Josephine Baker actively shift and even defy categories as they work out individual and group identities; they embody multiple intersections while they are also each acted upon by different intersecting power structures. The process of becoming is key for each figure and this chapter is determinedly situated in the developmental part of border space, where possibilities come into fruition, identities are negotiated, and coalitions are formed.

While my first chapter was more firmly organized by authors and their works, in this chapter I open up many of the examples from the previous chapter and add others to my analysis around themes that move between one another and also correlate to a forward motion from here to there across a border. This chapter represents the hesitation, tension, and negotiation that occurs in the border space during a crossing. In the first section, “Là-bas,” I examine the conditions under which a view of the other side is possible, and I look at specific physical and non-physical locations from where the là-bas comes into view. In the second section, “In Transit,” I examine the border spaces as liminal and as transitory, at once in-between and where self-growth and possibilities become closer to reality. In the third section, “Thresholds,” I look at liminal moments where hesitation occurs, a pause during which multiple identities are negotiated. Finally, in order to represent the hesitancy to cross, I include a fourth section, “Cases of Crossings,” close readings of four key threshold moments from each of my authors that depict essential steps in border space before crossing: glimpsing là-bas, transit, hesitation, negotiation, and acknowledgement of arrival. Apart from the close readings, this chapter does not include instances of arrival. Instead of concluding the journey or transition in this chapter, I shall turn toward my analysis of acknowledgement of arrival at the start of Chapter Three.
1. Là-bas

Rêves; / La brise au loin se lève. / La vague nous soulève, / nos yeux perdent la grève, / Le cœur nous bas plus fort. / La mer s’offre à nos efforts, / et demain ce sont des forts. / Des palais, d’étranges villes, / des trésors des îles / Oh! doux réconfort! / Rêves (Baker, “Le chemin du bonheur” from Princesse Tam Tam)

1.1 Glimpses of Beyond

There are certain spaces from which one gains the ability to see beyond; these are border spaces within which it becomes possible to dream of a là-bas. In this section, I analyze border representations of the horizon and the desire for “over there” that one can only experience on the border or within border space. The border is leaky and things can seep through this area. Dreams of, or desire for, a promising future are projected through the borderline and allow the dreamer access to a conceivable world that is either within their reach or just beyond it. Baker, Ernaux, Némirovsky, and Sarraute all possess the ability to take on a role, whether in writing or in real life, of the dreamer who can see through a barrier and into a possible—or impossible—future. In this sense, these figures inhabit the vantage point of someone who can see “over there” but who has not yet arrived.

Là-bas scenes take place in peripheral border space, such as at windows and on boats, with an eye toward the horizon. Dreaming of là-bas can happen only in those types of outlying spaces, only at the edge or within the border space. What is more, it is possible to take on different identities in those spaces; in the in-between, the dreamer has entered a unique psychological space with endless possibilities. Dreamers for là-bas are anchored in a border space that is not the “over there.” While they are within border space they possess the capacity to
see through and as they make the transition over a border they lose their ability to return to their original homes. The dreamer is no longer “here,” no longer belongs to the “there” of the past, and not yet belongs to the “over there” of the future. Sometimes they dream of là-bas and end up on the border out of necessity, out of an inability to return home. Other times they dream of là-bas out of curiosity for what lies beyond. And yet, this is not an easy space to enter into; only certain figures can see là-bas, even if they are physically in the same place as their companions who might not be able to see it. The immigrant who dreams of là-bas is an explorer, a visionary, and an exile, a refugee.

1.2 On Windows

What lies in the beyond of the horizon can be accessible from the border. For example, with the image of a window, while the glass is a firm boundary, if you get close to it you may be able to see through it to what lies on the other side, into the là-bas. Throughout many of the novels in my project there are repeated references to windows: they include up-close references to faces pressed against panes of glass, characters who open, close, or gaze through a window, and others who sit near a window. In her book Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface, on Baker and modernist architecture and art, Anne Anlin Cheng writes about the desire for a “pure” modern surface and transparency as alluring. She queries: “Is the twentieth-century fascination for transparency a pleasure about seeing into or through things?” (Cheng 1). The appeal of seeing là-bas clearly and without difficulty resonates in the examples in this section. Desire for what could happen, for opportunities on the other side, drives characters to pursue a path through the border space and into the là-bas. I choose to focus on references to windows in
this “Là-bas” section because of the way they are used in the text as borderlines and as facilitators of possibilities. Windows are objects that firmly demarcate the difference between inside and outside space, and yet, there is always a way for some things to seep through.

In Narratology, Mieke Bal writes about inside and outside spaces that have different meanings based on who is experiencing them and how they are being experienced with the senses: “These meanings are not fixed. An inner space is often also experienced as unsafe, but with a somewhat different meaning. The inner space can, for instance, be experienced as confinement, while the outer space represents liberation and, consequently, security” (137). In the in-between space of remaining inside and looking outside through a window, one can experience the relief of another place outside, “over there,” a possible world that represents imaginable futures on the other side. For the immigrants navigating Némirovsky’s novels, inside and outside spaces are indeed continually in flux in their meanings. Like Ada who knows the church is not a place where she would be welcomed in that society: “tout cela faisait partie d’un ordre différent où elle ne pouvait pénétrer,” she takes refuge in the external world (Les chiens et les loups 309). Némirovsky’s investigation of socioeconomic status as a barrier in Le maître des âmes is depicted through her use of material boundaries such as windows between the hungry and what they need to feed them. The protagonist Dario Asfar closes the window to protect his wife and new baby in their hospital room, and he tries to sustain himself on the lingering smell of food. Dario presses his face against the window looking at a restaurant across the street: “Il s’est levé, il colle son visage à la fenêtre, mais elle forme une barrière entre lui et l’image de la nourriture” (53). A poor doctor trying to make a place for his family in France, he cannot afford to nourish himself on the food smells that waft in from the restaurant on other side of the street. Dario, who closes the window to protect his family sees the inside confinement as a place of
safety and protection. And yet, he still has a need for the outside to leak in. Mieke Bal writes about how space is linked to the characters within it and “the primary aspect of space is the way characters bring their senses to bear on space” (Narratology 136). The primary senses she references here are sight, hearing, and touch. The room within which Dario finds himself is confining, which is clear from his move to the window, which he presses up against. He knows his place and that he cannot afford the food from the restaurant across the street, and yet, the smell drifts into the room, tempting him and also making the space at once more confining and less so. It is clear that Dario’s world is limiting, while the other side seeps across the seemingly firm border of the glass.

The window is a tricky object because it can be see-through, and it can be easily opened while one may be stuck inside a building. In a contrary scene to the beginning in the hospital room, Dario opens the window in La Caravella and the là-bas sounds and smells of where he is physically located float into the room: “Il avait ouvert la fenêtre. Il écoutait et reconnaissait les bruits particuliers de ses vacances à la Caravelle: la respiration profonde et égale de la mer, le lointain sifflement d’un train” (Némirovsky, Le maître des âmes 199). In Les chiens et les loups for example, Ben, Ada’s cousin, looks out the window, from which the outside is never clear: “de temps en temps, il se glissait hors de sa place; il s’approchait de la fenêtre, collait sa petite figure pâle et aiguë aux carreaux, mais le gel recouvrait là-bas: the appearance of the outside is blurry or blocked by the view of the inside pane. If the pane is unclear, there is always the possibility of opening the window. In Le bal, the protagonist Antoinette is on the cusp of being old enough to attend her parents’ ball and she has been continually denied access to that space. There is an urgency in Antoinette’s desire to access
the là-bas that further impedes her from doing so; even by opening a window, entrance into the “over there” cannot be forced:

Elle regarda la cour noircie et profonde sous la fenêtre. [. . .] Elle recommença à guetter; la vitre s’embuait sous ses lèvres; elle la frottait avec violence et, de nouveau, y collait son visage. A la fin, impatiente, elle ouvrit tout grands les deux battants. La nuit était pure et froide. Maintenant, elle voyait distinctement, de ses yeux perçants de quinze ans, les chaises rangées le long du mur, les musiciens autour du piano. (105)

At this point in the novel, Antoinette is stuck within the inside space, a place where her parents have banished her for her protection, where she feels claustrophobic and yearns for opportunities she will one day have as an adult.

Windows provide access to another world and the border-crosser is a daydreamer:

“Comme c’était laid, misérable et sinistre, ce petit appartement noir où on la traînait depuis des années . . . Tandis que Mlle Isabelle disposait les partitions, elle tourna furtivement la tête vers la fenêtre . . . (Il devait faire très beau au Bois, au crépuscule, avec ces arbres nus, délicats d’hiver et ce ciel blanc comme une perle)” (Némirovsky, Le bal 69). Antoinette is stuck in the dark room with her piano teacher and she imagines herself outside, in a more desirable world than her present location. A window can provide an out for the border-crosser, a way to transport oneself elsewhere. For example, Joan in Mon sang dans tes veines experiences both respite and melancholy as she gazes through the window: “Avec mélancolie, elle regardait la fenêtre” (Baker 37). In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux as writer finds an escape to a present that is not, and will never be, a possible present to inhabit:
Je me demande si je n’ai pas voulu, en fixant interminablement cette photo, moins redevenir cette fille de 1959, que capter cette sensation spéciale d’un présent différent du présent réellement vécu—celui où je suis en ce moment assise à mon bureau devant la fenêtre—un présent antérieur, d’une conquête fragile, peut-être inutile, mais qui me paraît une extension des pouvoirs de la pensée et de la maîtrise de notre vie.

Au moment où j’écris, quelqu’un que je ne peux appeler moi emplit la chambre d’Ernemont, quelqu’un réduit à un regard, une ouïe, avec une forme corporelle floue. (83)

Ernaux sits in front of the window and can see the possible present of 1959 from a photo of that year, the one after the year she attempts to situate for the “fille de 58.” She writes, in front of a window in the in-between, neither of the past nor of the future, but of a présent antérieur world that she attempts to explore and create while gazing at the photograph.

Once entering border space, a window could provide a fleeting glimpse of the past that will no longer be possible to access, neither legally—once one has passed into the immigration process—nor legitimately, as the place of origin will continue to go on without the traveler. For Ernaux, when she looks back at the memory of leaving home, she watches her mother through a window: “Par la fenêtre fermée, elle regarde sa mère, immobile sur le quai, qui a dû descendre, surprise et défaite d’être interdite d’aller plus loin, d’accompagner sa fille dans l’espace sous douane, jusqu’au bateau, et qui lui sourit bravement” (Mémoire de fille 126). Instead of a future là-bas in this case, Ernaux experiences a glance backward, to another sort of là-bas, one of the past to which she will never be able to return. Much of Ernaux’s writing, and especially in Mémoire de fille, involves the writing process as attempt to give life to a past memory, or to
revisit the past, although doing so always proves to be an impossible task. In Némirovsky’s *Les chiens et les loups*, windows are the catalyst for the dreamer’s daydream of the past: “Elle se souvenait vaguement d’un tableau de l’école française où *des fenêtres semblables à celles-ci* ouvrent sur un parc où, dans un pavillon dallé de blanc et noir, dansent des femmes en robes à paniers, glacées de rose” (136-137, my emphasis). In this case, the windows of the present are like Proust’s madeleine, sending the character back to the memory from their childhood, a *là-bas* of the past that is recalled with enjoyment and pleasure.

Windows are made of glass, which is an amorphous solid: it is neither liquid nor completely solid. Glass as a slowly shifting substance resonates with Sarraute’s liquidity in her immeasurably stretched tropisms, specifically with her first one in *Tropismes*: “Une foule se trouve devant des vitrines.” In the opening line of the section she undermines the solidity of borders by combining words describing boundaries such as “murs” or “arbres grillagés” with verbs such as: “sembler,” “s’écouler,” and “suinter”: “Ils semblaient sourdre de partout, éclos dans la tiédeur un peu moite de l’air, ils s’écoulaient doucement comme s’ils suintaient des murs, des arbres grillagés, des bancs, des trottoirs sales, des squares” (11). Time oozes by as people remain fixed in front of the windows: “Ils regardaient longtemps, sans bouger, ils restaient là, offerts, devant les vitrines, ils reportaient toujours à l’intervalle suivant le moment de s’éloigner. Et les petits enfants tranquilles qui leur donnaient la main, fatigués de regarder, distraits, patiemment, auprès d’eux, attendaient” (12). As time seeps by, the reference to children breaks up the scene, both as an indicator of a moment when the adults would eventually turn away from the windows, and as an interruption to the ambiguous third person plural “ils” that we see to describe the group up until this point of the section.

Sometimes what can be seen through the window is a realization of a future that is not
desirable: “Le régiment passa sous les fenêtres de Lucile. Les soldats chantaient; ils avaient des voix admirables, mais ce chœur grave, menaçant et triste, moins guerrier semblait-il que religieux, étonnait les Français” (Némirovsky, *Suite française* 344). Looking down at the German soldiers from the safety inside, one can watch, think, and reflect from the protection of the inside. Without a window, there would be no access to a glimpse of that precarious and inevitable future. In a sense, in the context of the German Occupation of France, Lucile has become an outsider in her home, and the reference to the soldiers who sing in a surprisingly religious way instead of like warriors, forebodes the prohibited interactions Lucile will have with her German soldier, and Némirovsky’s writing about the Germans that injects the soldiers with humanity, making all characters human first, citizens second.

Agents at the border who provide the protagonist with choices of a future may have their own agendas. In Némirovsky’s *Le maître des âmes*, Dario is tempted by Mme Wardes, who helps him see the là-bas, or the possible futures he could possess. They gaze around the room: “Il montra d’un geste incertain les murs, le parc sombre par la fenêtre, les roses qui décoraient la table. —Cela est vrai que je n’ai jamais rien vu de pareil, mais je savais que cela existait” (105). The immediate area is simple but desirable while the view through the window of the park is murky, which echoes Dario’s future if he continues on the trajectory of leaving his wife for Mme Wardes. Sometimes there is help getting across, or the là-bas is pointed out by another figure who translates possibilities. In *Princesse Tam Tam*, there is a scene during which the Maharajah shows Alwina, through windows facing west on one side of the room and others facing east, the potential lives she could have on one side or the other. She is only capable of seeing those “possibilities” when the Maharajah shows them to her; and yet it becomes clear to Alwina that
she never really had a choice. She was fated to the “Orient,” and there was never really a place for her in the “Occident.”

1.3 Boats

While there are many references to windows and glimpses of là-bas in Némirovsky’s, Sarraute’s, and Ernaux’s works, in Baker’s works the boat is a more likely place from which one can access a vision of là-bas. Like Sarraute’s liquidity, boat scenes are also vague spaces that are neither inside nor outside and are both inside and outside. In a key scene from Princesse Tam Tam, after she falls in love with Max, Alwina goes out on a boat and sings her first song of the film: “Le chemin du bonheur.” She takes on a new role in the boat scene, where it is clear that Baker is the performer, singing in an operatic European style, which is in stark contrast to how Alwina the character is portrayed in the first part of the film. When we first encounter Alwina she is portrayed as a young, “uncivilized” Tunisian woman who does not know how to play the piano, wear high heels, write, do basic math, or other “European” activities. In the boat scene, Alwina is with Tahar, one of Max’s servants whom she eventually marries, and she sings of her dream of travelling with Max to France. “Rêves,” the song begins, with close-ups of Baker singing interrupted by cuts to waves on the shoreline, Tahar steering the boat from the stern, and the bow of the boat pointing forward. Alwina is fixed on the idea of là-bas and the sea as a way of accessing that space. When she tells Tahar how much she loves the water, he responds that for them, the unknown is happiness and: “Le chemin du bonheur c’est la mer!” she sings. Alwina dreams of idealistic futures là-bas: “La mer cède à nos efforts / Et, demain nos yeux verront / Des palais, d’étranges villes, / Des trésors, des îles, / Naître à l’horizon / Rêves” (Princesse Tam
Tam). It is only possible for her to access those dreams from the peripheral space of the boat just off the coast of Tunisia, just as it seems that it is possible for Alwina to be transformed into Baker and her style of singing only within that space. It is also within the border space of the boat that she acquires a voice in the story: for most of the film Alwina is only reacting to Max and what he wants for her. However, she accesses and projects her internal thoughts when she is in the littoral, border space of the shoreline—no longer in Tunisia, not yet in France—and can share her dream of another place. What is more, the music echoes the frontward direction of the boat, and Alwina’s dreams of the future: the last note of the song on the word “amour” is in the highest part of Baker’s range in a light, airy, but clear tone that dissipates into the horizon.

1.4 Dreams and Escape

Dreaming of là-bas references are found throughout Baker’s other works as well. In addition to “Le chemin du bonheur,” whose English translation for marketing purposes is: “Dream Ship,” in Baker’s song “J’ai deux amours” she also sings of Paris as là-bas. The singer is not in Paris but dreaming of that city in song: “Le voir un jour / C’est mon rêve joli / J’ai deux amours / Mon pays et Paris.” In Baker’s novel Mon sang dans tes veines, Fred approaches his mother to tell him that he may take a job in Cuba. This idea activates Joan’s dream of the island, which of course echoes island references in her films:

Elle aussi songeait à une île lointaine . . . Devant ses yeux apparaissaient
d’immenses visions de forêts vierges, d’étranges fleurs aux couleurs violentes, des fleurs sur lesquelles se posaient de grands papillons, des papillons aux ailes noires à bordure blanche . . . Que le soleil doit être clair là-bas, dans l’île du Rêve! . . .
Est-ce que son rêve pourrait un jour se réaliser, vivrait-elle jamais-là-bas, dans ce sanctuaire de la nature? (67)

She wonders to herself if she will ever live over there, in her place of dreams, where black and white work together in harmony, as the dual-colored butterfly represents in this scene. Indeed, further painting her characters’ personas that echo her own as natural, in Baker’s works là-bas is often conceived of in references to natural elements such as islands, flowers, as well as in man-made wonders of cities like Paris. Dreams of nature are also apparent in elements in Sarraute’s Portrait d’un inconnu: “Le monde s’étendait devant moi comme ces prairies des contes de fées où, grâce à une incantation magique, le voyageur voit se déployer devant lui sur l’herbe éclatante, près des sources, au bord des ruisseaux, de belles nappes blanches chargées de mets succulents” (88). Here, like Joan who imagines herself basking in nature, this traveler imagines himself in a fairytale, prairie landscape that becomes possible for him to imagine during the journey itself.

Daydreams are a means to escape present circumstances. Indeed, in dreams of elsewhere we can find references to an urgency or a yearning. Rosi Braidotti in Nomadic Subjects reflects on the way bel hooks sees “yearning” as a “common affective and political sensibility, which cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice and that ‘could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy’” (2). The capacity to see into the là-bas and the yearning for this space unites all of the works of the four figures in my project. In Les années, Ernaux starts imagining her life as it could be outside of the situation in which she finds herself: “la question qui l’obsède: ‘Serait-je plus heureuse dans une autre vie?’ Elle a commencé de se penser en dehors du couple et de la famille” (120). Sarraute, in Enfance, emulates her father’s conviction of already desiring to be là-bas as he leaves the house in the morning: “Chaque matin
à heure fixe, avant de refermer derrière lui la porte d’entrée, mon père disait à la cantonade: ‘Je suis parti,’ Pas ‘Je pars,’ mais ‘Je suis parti’ . . . comme s’il craignait d’être retenu, comme s’il voulait être déjà loin d’ici, là-bas, dans son autre vie . . . Et moi, je m’élançais au-dehors avec la même impatience” (165). Many times, the place that is desired is Paris. In Némirovsky’s *Les chiens et les loups*, for example, Lilla thrusts her gaze toward Paris as a place where she could create a home as a young Jewish woman:

Rien n’était impossible aux Juifs. Tous les chemins leur étaient ouverts. Ils montaient jusqu’à de vertigineuses hauteurs. La grande Russie tout entière n’était pas un théâtre assez vaste, assez brillant pour Lilla! (D’ailleurs, Moscou et Pétersbourg étaient interdits aux Juifs). Non! C’était Paris qu’il lui fallait! À Paris seulement il valait la peine de courir sa chance, de jouer le tout pour le tout. (116)

Recognizing that she no longer belongs in Russia, she shifts her perspective to Paris where she yearns to be. Even before leaving home, she notices traces of Paris in the distinctive space of a ball: “La salle des fêtes était ornée de guirlandes en papier, de plantes vertes et de petits drapeaux tricolores” (113). Not one of the characters I mention here is an “insider”: they are all discontent with their present circumstances and are doing their best to think beyond them as they yearn for a better future.

1.5 Là-bas and Horizons

Dreams also happen when one sleeps, but they are impossible to recollect in waking hours. The act of falling asleep is not a border crossing for which one can be consciously present. The moment of touching the edge between awake and asleep is like a horizon that is
unattainable. Bal conceives of the horizon as “a boundary, but one that cannot be crossed. The moment you approach it, it recedes” (“Embracing the Horizon” 415). Sarraute writes about shifting into a state of sleep at the end of a chapter, as though disappearing into this state as the words finish on the page: “je sens que le sommeil vient, alors tout sera pour moi très bien, je ne sentirai plus rien et tu pourras tranquillement me laisser, t’en aller” (Enfance 54). She writes about falling asleep as though she is crossing into a different sort of consciousness to unconsciousness of life into death: she acknowledges its approach and reassures her family. The future tense here echoes that move toward the certain future of entering into a sleep state, but she is only able to write about the approach and the likelihood that everything will be fine for her and she will no longer feel anything. She can be neither conscious nor present for the transitional moments when she crosses the horizon into the new state of being.

Ernaux examines her own mortality in her writing as something on the horizon that she looks toward. She never longs for the event, but steps into the space of the novel and the process of writing to inspect that horizon, try it out, and acknowledge its existence. Ernaux operates from the vantage point of being able to see the horizon, “over there” to her future. Certain dreams of là-bas are possible to imagine as one approaches the horizon, and yet, unlike death, they can be impossible to attain. Jacques Derrida, in Le monolingueisme de l’autre, writes about the horizon as a projection of ethereal possibilities of a different language: “Ils laissent trembler à l’horizon, visible et miraculeux, spectral mais infiniment désirable, le mirage d’une autre langue” (44). But this language can never be attained, as it is only a figment of the imagination and a language above and beyond what already exists for him is impossible (43). In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux’s memories of the summer camp and her first lover have become a part of the horizon of her memories, the edges are fuzzy: “Mon premier amant était là-bas, là où commençait l’obscurité. Il
me semble que je ne souffrais pas. Mon rêve avait changé de forme. Il était devenu un horizon, celui de l’été prochain où, j’en étais sûre, je retrouverais H à la colonie” (93). As a horizon, her dream has become impossible to attain, and Ernaux acknowledges that impossibility as she reimagines the certainty of it from the perspective of the “fille de 58.” As the “je” describing this fille, and from the vantage point of the present, she calls it a horizon, and at once captures the hope for this possibility and concedes its improbability.

1.6 Conditions

Once someone dreams of là-bas they no longer fully belong to their place of origin. As soon as someone looks toward what is coming, they have already departed. Dreaming of là-bas is not unidirectional, it is not always forward-facing, it can also be a dream that is a nostalgia for a past là-bas that is no longer accessible or that no longer exists. One never truly arrives in the là-bas and they can no longer return home nor fully arrive in the present. Dreams of là-bas partially fit into the “grass is always greener” narrative and a longing for a possible future that is not only attainable, within reach, but also possible to imagine. In reference to Søren Kierkegaard’s mental borderland, Michael Seidel writes that: “the line marking the end of the familiar is the same as that marking the beginning of the unknown. The line that limits is also the line that dares. [. . .] The imaginated outland is a version of the inland; the possible a version of the previous” (Exile and the Narrative Imagination 3). The “over there” is symbolic of seeing through or past the border line, the ability to imagine a different future, to see something that others who are not in the border space do not see. And yet, for the border-croesser, the immigrant who is indeed going to cross over the border and arrive into a new space, it is only feasible to
render possible worlds in the imagination that are anchored to past and present realities. I argue that the conditional tense is key to thinking of là-bas: what possibilities could be imagined if I left home and stepped into the border space? The conditional tense is essential in order to conceptualize potential futures “over there” as it is both contingent upon specific environments (windows, boats, horizons), anchored to certain parameters (“the possible a version of the previous”) and representative of attaining (imagining) the possibility of something else (là-bas) if those requirements are met.

2. In Transit

C’était un habitat transitoire, de plus en plus personnel et familial, où l’on n’admettait pas les inconnus—le stop avait disparu—, où l’on chantait se disputait, faisait des confidences en fixant la route sans regarder le passager, se souvenait. Un lieu à la fois ouvert et fermé. (Ernaux, Les années 165)

2.1 Liminal Border Space

In this section I explore liminality as a space that can also be considered transitory. Liminal space is both between here and there and neither here nor there. Liminal border space can be freeing, and it can also be suffocating: just as one can be trapped behind or denied at the border, one can also be stuck on the border, or straddling the border with one foot on each side. In Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality, editors and contributors Ágnes Horváth, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra revisit the term liminality to use it as an analytical tool, “a concept—a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world” (1). I
use liminality in their sense of the word for its usefulness as a cross-temporal approach to the authors in this project:

This book intends to gauge cultural dimensions in contemporary sociopolitical processes, especially through the prism of sudden interruptions of existential crisis in people’s lives, loss of meaning, ambivalence, and disorientation. As a fundamental human experience, liminality transmits cultural practices, codes, rituals, and meanings in-between aggregate structures and uncertain outcomes. As a methodological tool it is well placed to overcome disciplinary boundaries, which often direct attention to specific structures or sectors of society. Its capacity to provide explanatory and interpretive accounts of seemingly unstructured situations provides opportunity to link experience-based and culture-oriented approaches to contemporary political problems, and to undertake comparisons across historical periods. From a perspective of liminality, the cultural dimension of human experience is not an obstacle to a more rational and organized world but could be creative in transforming the social world. (2-3)

The possibility inherent in border space, the idea of an even playing field and existential crisis as part and parcel of the human experience goes back to bell hook’s use of yearning as a common emotion that could be useful for creating coalitions across identity boundaries.

*Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality* acknowledges the origins of liminality in anthropology with Arnold van Gennep’s and Victor Turner’s works, and describes original work on the topic as a part of the “process approach” that is crucial to their understanding of liminality: “Originally referring to the ubiquitous rites of passage as a category of cultural experience, liminality captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the
dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (2). The absence of concrete structures in liminal space is key to this section of my project: in this chapter I focus on border space as liberating, outside of normative temporal and societal parameters, a space within which the future is uncertain, and the present is full of growth and possibilities. In border space it is possible to try on identities, and rules and regulations that existed in the past, behind this space or outside of it, are no longer relevant. Liminal space allows time for one to pause and process the journey before continuing on.

Intermezzo: Liminal can be Transitory

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Mille plateaux* write about the “*Intermezzo.*” This term is linked to the authors’ references to plateaus as a metaphor for the book, as we see from the title. In music, the intermezzo is a composition that is in-between. While being performed between other parts of the larger performance, it at once a part of what comes before and after it and a separate, stand-alone piece. It can provide comic relief, it can add to the drama, but it changes the mood from the beginning of the performance and shifts the meaning of its origins. In the beginning of their text Deleuze and Guattari write: “A book exists only through the outside and on the outside” (4). While their book has a sort of unified existence, it seems to have solid boundaries and its contents are contained within the covers, for each person who picks it up it exists in different forms because of that individual’s multiple experiences and background. Thinking about the book in this way brings us back to categories and how things can escape from
categorization and can also be reassembled into new categories, they are never unchanging, they are constantly shifting and moving, they are always slippery like the rhizome.

2.2 Transitory Border Space

Transitory space is temporary, it can also be considered liminal; it is not permanent for the person in transit within that space. It is public space: no one can take up residence in this type of space, there is a turnover of people who navigate the area. Unlike liminal space, there is always a movement in a direction associated with transitory space; it is the car, the bus, the train, the airport, the passageway, the staircase. Julia Kristeva articulates the state of the foreigner as not being tethered to any place, existing in an in-between, transitory state:

N’appartenir à aucun lieu, aucun temps, aucun amour. L’origine perdue, l’enracinement impossible, la mémoire plongeante, le présent en suspens.
L’espace de l’étranger est un train de marche, un avion en vol, la transition, la transition même qui exclut l’arrêt. De repères, point. Son temps? Celui d’une résurrection qui se souvient de la mort et d’avant, mais manque la gloire d’être au-delà: juste l’impression d’un sursis, d’avoir échappé. (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 17-18)

We can think of the foreigner as a traveler, a border-crosser, one who takes up residence in a temporary home in transit. In this section I explore the representation of transitory border space in the works by Némirovsky, Ernaux, Baker, and Sarraute. When we examine transitory border spaces in the works by these figures there is a repetition of versions of the word “pass” such as:

passager, passerelle, passer, passage, etc. I look at how identities of the passenger are
represented and how those identities can shift and transform within transitory border space: like the passengers in transit, their identities can also be on the move or catching up to them. The border-crosser in transit is passing through this space. Unlike liminal space where it is not always clear if someone will make it through the sometimes stagnant state of the in-between, navigators of transitory space are always passing through and negotiating identities in the process.

2.3 Liberating

Because border space is between places, it is outside of normative rules, regulations, and societal expectations. There is room in transit to pause and take a moment to gather one’s bearings on matters other than physical location. Border-crossers may take pause on the liminal threshold and acknowledge and enjoy a moment of freedom before continuing on their journey. In Némirovsky’s *Le maître des âmes*, Dario can only find relief in the in-between space of the threshold: “il lui arrivait d’attendre quelques instants au seuil de sa demeure. C’était la seule minute où il eût l’esprit libre” (128). Dario no longer feels free in the home he made with his wife and son and he also finds respite in a forbidden place of Mme Wardes’s home, a woman with whom he has an affair: “Je viens de si loin, je monte de si bas. Je suis si fatigué. C’est une halte que vous m’offrez aujourd’hui” (107). And yet, Dario’s relation with his new home in France is complicated. In the border space of the window there is a candle indicating that all was well with his family:

Elle avait allumé la lampe, mais, comme à l’ordinaire, elle laissait les volets ouverts, la fenêtre ouverte. Lorsqu’il reviendrait auprès d’elle, lorsqu’il serait encore dans la rue, parmi les étrangers, il lèverait les yeux, il apercevrait cette
lumière et son cœur se réjouirait. [. . .] En Europe, entre les mille lumières de la rue, il apercevait sa fenêtre éclairée . . . et aussitôt il se sentait réchauffé, rassuré, il pensait: “Tout va bien.” (112-113)

For Dario, the sight of the candle in the window provides him with relief and liberation from his worries. Sometimes, whether forced to remain in a liminal state, or choosing to remain in one, this space provides the border-crosser with a feeling of happiness, even though this place is not their own. For example, Sarraute writes about happiness in solitude in her third tropism: “Dans le quartier du Panthéon, des personnages solitaires, sans souvenirs, sans avenir, sont heureux”:

“Aucune tenue n’était exigée d’eux ici, aucune activité en commun avec d’autres, aucun sentiment, aucun souvenir. On leur offrait une existence à la fois dépouillée et protégée, une existence semblable à une salle d’attente dans une gare de banlieue déserte, une salle nue, grise et tiède, avec un poêle noir au milieu et des banquettes en bois le long des murs” (Tropismes 21-22). Like the simple sign of the candle in the window indicating safety and security, the pared down nature of this space offers protection and security in its simplicity and transience.

2.4 Outside of Temporal Parameters

Because border space can be freeing, sometimes one might desire to remain there: “Assis là, immobile, il a de plus en plus, à mesure que les années passent, une impression de liberté, de puissance. Il n’a pas besoin de bouger” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 116). Time does not exist in border space as it does outside of it; the experience of the passage of time is no longer important and it allows for new possibilities to take shape. In liminal states, time either does not exist, is unpredictable, or it takes on its own rules. Sarraute plays with time in her tropisms,
which because of the temporal pliability associated with them, they unfold outside of normative
temporal parameters and are possible only within the border space of the novel. I argue that her
tropisms represent not only the edge, but they are also representative of transitory space that
depict the sometimes tediousness of the journey. In L’ère du soupçon, Sarraute writes about the
author as translator of a series of emotions with her tropisms, where she describes how the author
creates these moments for the reader:

[I]l n’était possible de les communiquer au lecteur que par des images qui en
donnent des équivalents et lui fassent éprouver des sensations analogues. Il fallait
aussi décomposer ces mouvements et les faire se déployer dans la conscience du
lecteur à la manière d’un film au ralenti. Le temps n’était plus celui de la vie
réelle, mais celui d’un présent démesurément agrandi. (9)

Like a border-crosser in transit, time moves forward in the tropism, but it is stretched and made
strange. Additionally, Sarraute extends the border space by describing a single moment and
prolonging the duration of this moment.

Like the novel, and Sarraute’s tropisms that are possible within that space like a “film au
ralenti” (Sarraute, L’ère du soupçon 9), actual films are also artistic modes in which time no
longer exists as it does in reality. In Princesse Tam Tam, for example, which takes place as a
dream inside a dream, a double-dreamed distance that I looked at as cages in Chapter One, in this
chapter I claim the doubled distance of the dreams as an augmentation of the unreality of the
narrative told in the film as medium. Time is not only slowed, but because the whole plot takes
place within a dream, the imagined plot never actually happened within the film’s reality, and
yet, because the plot takes place in the in-between space of the dream, there is plenty of room for
the imagination and for trying out possible realities. In film, as in the novel, time is malleable: it
can be slowed with a stretch or even pause, as in the boat scene where she sings “Le chemin du bonheur,” or it can be accelerated with summary, as in the montage scenes depicting Alwina’s becoming European. With Sarraute’s tropisms the reader simultaneously gains time because of the present moments that are prolonged and loses time because of the time it takes to read the passage and the same is true for the medium of film.

A loss of time is used strategically in narrative to represent the loss of bearings that occurs after being thrown into a state of neither here nor there. For example, Ernaux finds herself in a liminal state, neither adult nor child, when her period stops: “Exclue de la communauté des filles, celle du sang perdu régulièrement chaque mois [. . .] j’étais sortie du temps—sans âge” (Mémoire de fille 90). She also references a loss of a sense of time in La place: “C’était perdre la notion du temps, celui où les espèces doivent se mettre en terre, le souci de ce que penseraient les autres” (67). When she looks back on her school days, Ernaux equates school as a sort of liminal space in which time is collectively experienced differently than outside of this space, “le temps infiniment lent des études” (Les années 62). The way time is organized in school also affects the dwellers within that space and can feel strange upon reentry: “Mais le lendemain, dans le silence de la salle d’études, au sentiment de vide qui nous envahissait, on savait que la veille avait été, même si on n’en défendait, qu’on avait cru rester extérieurs et s’ennuyer, un jour de fête” (Les années 62).

Ernaux organizes her novels Les années and Mémoire de fille either in the form of a series of photographs as in Les années, or the novel as a photograph trying to reconstitute the “fille de 58” in Mémoire de fille. Photographs represent a suspension of time, a moment that will never again be accessible as it was, but that is also always accessible to a point with the physical snapshot. In Les années, it is through the form of the photograph that it becomes possible to
suspend time and access the ephemeral horizon of the moment, as Élise Hugueny-Léger writes: “En effet, la suspension du temps est permise entre autres par la nature de la photographie, qui parvient à fixer le fugace” (365). Indeed, Hugueny-Léger argues that Ernaux’s use of suspended time, or as I argue, how she writes within the liminal space of time suspended, allows for the author to find the right words, play with language: “Le temps est le matériau principal de ce texte, pas tellement dans la mesure où c’est ce que la narratrice cherche à saisir, mais surtout car l’écriture même du texte est rendue possible par une suspension du temps afin de mieux trouver les mots justes pour évoquer souvenirs, sensations, faits et anecdotes” (363). Ernaux the writer is the border-crosser who pauses and takes respite in the liminal, transitory, border space of the writing process where time no longer exists and possibilities are endless.

2.5 *Lieux communs*

Many of the spaces I explore in this chapter are public or semi-public spaces such as boats, staircases, passageways, celebrations, and experiences such as adolescence. Christine Cormier writes about Sarraute’s use of *lieux communs* as being associated with death in contrast to the tropism that is life. Cormier writes about common places as linked with fixity and I argue that in this sense they are liminal as they are fixed to a definite, stagnant location in-between other locations and passers-through enter into the space and may be stuck for some time within it before they can move on. Furthermore, it is in the border space between life and death that Sarraute’s work operates and is even rendered possible: “L’œuvre s’écrit bien plutôt dans une conception complexe du langage, porteur de cette tension vie/mort, d’une tension qui ne sera jamais résolue et qui rend possible cette œuvre” (Cormier 110). What emerges from the tension
is only possible because of the clash of the two concepts of life and death on the border between them. Furthermore, negotiating life and death is related to common places in that they are unifying human experiences: everyone lives, everyone dies. The *lieux communs* central to Sarraute’s novels paired with her tropisms describing characters in those spaces echoes the tension of the human experience and the precariousness of life itself as a liminal, transitory state.

2.6 Automobiles

In *Les années*, Ernaux writes about the automobile as a transitory space, creating a boundary between the self and others:

*C’était un habitat transitoire, de plus en plus personnel et familial, où l’on n’admettait pas les inconnus—le stop avait disparu—, où l’on chantait se disputait, faisait des confidences en fixant la route sans regarder le passager, se souvenait. Un lieu à la fois ouvert et fermé, où l’existence des autres dans les voitures qu’on dépassait se limitait à un profil rapide, des êtres sans corps dont la réalité brutale dans un accident sous forme de pantins effondrés sur leur siège horrifiait. (165)*

Here, in contrast to the *lieux communs* that belong to everyone and to no single person, the automobile can be a semi-public or even private space. It encloses the passengers within it and anyone else outside appears not quite human. And yet, the automobile moves within a public space of road systems. Outside of it there are compulsory rules and regulations the driver must follow, these are systems in place that are immovable and they exist in order to protect passengers. And yet, within the space of the automobile things can happen that are not possible
outside of it, like singing, fighting, secret-telling, and remembering as Ernaux points out in the abovementioned quote. The lull of the wheels on the road can send the driver and passenger into meditative states, possible worlds that are only possible within a space like the automobile:

Quand on roulait longtemps seul à la même vitesse, l’automatisme de gestes sus depuis longtemps faisait perdre la sensation de son corps, comme si la voiture se conduisait toute seule. Les vallons et les plaines glissaient dans un mouvement ample, arrondi. On n’était plus qu’un regard dans un habitacle transparent jusqu’au fond de l’horizon mouvant, qu’une conscience immense et fragile emplissant l’espace et, au-delà, la totalité du monde. (Les années 165)

Ernaux references this same moment at the end of the book:

Le minuscule moment du passé s’agrandit, débouche sur un horizon à la fois mouvant et d’une tonalité uniforme, celui d’une ou de plusieurs années. Elle retrouve alors, dans une satisfaction profonde, quasi éblouissante—que ne lui donne pas l’image, seule, du souvenir personnel—, une sorte de vaste sensation collective, dans laquelle sa conscience, tout son être est pris. De la même façon que, en voiture sur l’autoroute, seule, elle se sent prise dans la totalité indéfinissable du monde présent, du plus proche au plus lointain. (238-39)

When “elle” becomes a part of the collective, her being dissipates into the horizon that represents the beyond. Indeed, her feeling of becoming a part of a whole as she disappears as a singular being echoes Sarraute’s tension of life and death as a common experience. Ernaux experiences this feeling in the automobile, and, like in the “Là-bas” section, this is a specific transitory space with certain conditions within which one could see outside of that space and imagine the beyond.
if the necessary conditions occur, such as the lull of the movement on the road and the automated movements that send her outside of that space while she is anchored within the automobile.

2.7 Boats

Boats can provide the vantage point away from reality of other possible worlds, as I wrote in “Là-bas” with Baker’s performance of “Le chemin du retour” from Princesse Tam Tam. In the ambiguous space of the boat in the film La sirène des tropiques, the main character Papitou’s skin color changes multiple times as she moves about the ship, getting muddy from the water, falling into coal, ending up in a flour bin. Within this space Papitou in a sense accidentally tries on different racial identities that are possible in this space. Her enactment of identities on the ship echoes her broader questions of identity and belonging before she leaves and once she arrives in Paris. The boat space is a microcosm of the outside world but because it is neither in the islands nor in France—and in international waters—the boat is a space wherein it is possible to negotiate various racial identities and experience people’s reactions to them. Indeed, Papitou gains the ability to perform her various takes on identity only within this transitory space. It is important to note that the boat as a vehicle that provides passage is only semi-public: one must have a ticket in order to enter into this space. Papitou does not pay her way into the boat: she tries to purchase a ticket, does not have the money, then she jumps into the water to swim to the boat where a sailor pulls her up and she ends up a stowaway until a wealthy passenger pays her way and she works for the loan as a nanny. What is more, the boat scene is elongated and represented as a sort of intermezzo in the plot. While it may seem like a frivolous moment, there are multiple racially charged elements that add meaning to the boat as a transitory space but that
may still have remnants of outside space within it. For example, after Baker is caked in flour and coal and mud, she is shown splashing about in a bathtub, which of course can be linked to the French practice of the *mission civilisatrice* in the colonies and the notion of “purifying” and whitening the Black body.

2.8 Adolescence

Adolescence is a commonly experienced liminal state that is also transitory. In Némirovsky’s *Le bal*, Antoinette, who transitions between childhood to adulthood in this book bears witness to this transition as she glimpses her life to come: “un étrange plaisir l’envahit; pour la première fois de sa vie, elle pleurait ainsi, sans grimaces, ni hoquets, silencieusement, comme une femme . . . Plus tard, elle pleurerait d’amour, les mêmes larmes” (52). She is enchanted by the fact that she is seeing herself become a woman, but she cries “like” a woman, not *as* a woman, for she has not yet arrived in that state. Two pages later it is clear that she is only seen as a little girl to the outside world, even though she has caught glimpses of other possibilities: “L’esclavage, la prison, aux mêmes heures répéter de jour en jour les mêmes gestes . . . Se lever, s’habiller . . . les petites robes sombres, les grosses bottines, les bas à côtes, exprès, exprès comme une livrée, pour que personne dans la rue ne suive un instant du regard cette gamine insignifiante qui passe” (54). Looking back on adolescence, Ernaux captures it and boils it down as such: “(Monter en ville, rêver, se faire jouir et attendre, résumé possible d’une adolescence en province.)” (*Les années* 56). This description is of a liminal state of adolescence experienced in the countryside and it is further demarcated by her use of parentheses to contain and articulate this state of in-between. In *La place*, Ernaux writes about her adolescence similarly
to how Antoinette sees her moments of womanhood arriving, as a transitory space that she is will make it through: “C’est le temps où tout ce qui me touche de près m’est étranger. J’émigre doucement vers le monde petit-bourgeois, admise dans ces surboums dont la seule condition d’accès, mais si difficile, consiste à ne pas être *cucul*” (79). Within this space, Ernaux is emigrating, that is, she is already moving away from the past and her childhood, and toward her future life where she will arrive in a different socioeconomic state from that of her childhood.

### 2.9 Celebrations

Some key threshold moments between childhood into adolescence, and arrival into adulthood take place in celebrations or balls. Indeed, the entire plot of *Le bal* is situated around this threshold moment. Banquet or ball scenes are strategic and ephemeral moments in the plots of many of Némirovsky’s works and they occur outside of normal temporal and social parameters. In *Les chiens et les loups*, a ball is thrown at the Alliance Française that changes Ada’s life: “Comme on tourne un film à rebours, de même elle était revenue au point exacte où s’était interrompue autrefois sa vie réelle, la seule réelle malgré les apparences: cet instant où elle était entrée, tenant la main de Mme Mimi, dans la salle décorée de fleurs et de petits drapeaux français, à la rencontre de Harry. Voici qu’elle avait aboli les années” (220). It is in this rare space that exudes freedom in which certain borders are allowed to be breached and characters can move beyond their own inhibitions. Celebration scenes are transitory in the sense that there is an inner movement, a development, the plot moves forward and the characters are given a space within which to explore and negotiate this growth.

Just like Dario who finds respite at the threshold in *Le maître des âmes*, certain events
that provide reprieve happen in the suspended, transitory space of the ball. I will refer to celebration scenes in Chapter Three as peripheral spaces, which they also are, but here I focus on these scenes as representative of subjective transformation that can only happen within an in-between, transitory space. Julia Kristeva writes about suspended yet fleeting moments in reference to the banquet of hospitality: “Miracle de la chair et de la pensée, le banquet de l’hospitalité est l’utopie des étrangers: cosmopolitisme d’un moment, fraternité de convives qui apaisent et oublient leurs différences, le banquet est hors temps. Il s’imagine éternel dans l’ivresse de ceux qui n’ignorent pourtant pas sa fragilité provisoire” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 22-23). Banquets are important aspects of a celebration. For Ernaux, the meals of the fête, which are regulated and institutionalized in the sense that they are rituals that are repeated, occur in private, as Élise Hugueny-Léger writes:

Parce qu’il donne le sentiment d’être présent tout en étant absent, le repas de fête—événement qui se situe certes dans la sphère privée, mais dont la dimension de rituel lui donne un aspect institutionnalisé—engage à poser un regard sur les autres. Écrire ces repas de fête, c’est pour l’auteure des Années l’occasion de mettre en avant sa conception à la fois de l’écriture et de l’identité, une identité formée plus que jamais par le contact avec les autres—leur présence et surtout leurs paroles. (371)

Within those liminal spaces mixed with private and public elements, Ernaux experiences them as transitory, and it is precisely within the space of the celebratory meal where she transitions identities, which are formed through the participation of the other guests in the celebration.

Like Kristeva’s hospitality banquet that happens outside of time, the banquet is also marked in time in the sense that an invitation may be required for a precise date, time, and
location, and these situations live on in memories and photographs. Celebrations also allow a
distanced vantage point. For Ernaux, these celebrations, especially the funfair, mark the passage
of time: “L’exemple de la fête foraine me semble significatif pour éclairer les ambivalences du
projet d’Ernaux, celui d’une mélancolie distanciée. […] Dans l’œuvre d’Ernaux, le motif de la
fête est toujours associé au passage du temps et à une dose de distanciation qui permet, in fine,
l’écriture. […] La fête, les fêtes, sont en effet des manières de marquer le passage du temps”
(Hugueny-Léger 368). Celebration scenes are ways in which Ernaux distinguishes the passing of
time in her novels and what is more, it is by making those references that it is possible for her to
write this story of her generation. Hugueny-Léger distinguishes between Ernaux’s references to
parish celebrations and public ones and writes that the funfair exists in between the two: “La fête
foraine se situe dans un entre-deux: pas spontanée, elle a un caractère extrêmement ritualisé et
reconnaissable, mais son organisation et son déroulement relèvent d’individus extérieurs aux
institutions officielles” (369). Border space is regulated, its parameters can be clearly and
precisely drawn, yet within this space, because it is created by atypical, outside forces, the within
allows for a freedom of movement for the border-crosser.

In her tenth section of Tropismes, “Des femmes jacassent dans un salon de thé,” Sarraute
depicts a group of women operating within the world of “la vie des femmes.” She anchors the
women to the tea house and there are constant references to the inside and to interiority as
though it is only inside this space that it would be possible to experience life: “C’est une femme
d’intérieur qu’il lui faut . . . D’intérieur . . . D’intérieur . . .’ On leur avait toujours dit. Cela, elles
l’avaient bien toujours entendu dire, elles le savaient : les sentiments, l’amour, la vie, c’était là
leur domaine. Il leur appartenait” (64-65). The room is decorated, further distinguishing it as
different from the outside: “Tout autour c’était une volière pépiante, chaude et gaîment éclairée
et ornée. Elles restaient là, assises, serrées autour de leurs petites tables et parlaient” (63). For the women sharing a meal at the tea house, this space provides respite from the outside world and it is also necessary transitory space like that of the ball or funfair where they can experience and process anything that happened outside of this space; it is only in the border space of the tea house that this is possible.

In many of Baker’s cinematic performances there are party scenes or theatrical performances of celebrations within the film at the end of the story when the true nature of her characters is revealed. For example, at the end of Zou Zou there are many cages on the stage that undermine the freedom found in the performative and transitory space of the stage. The film ends with a performance where she sits on a swing in a giant cage and sings about longing for Haiti. In the third and final song scene in the film Princesse Tam Tam, which takes place at the Maharajah’s party, Baker performs Alwina in a dance sequence song entitled “Ahe, la Conga!” This scene represents the transitory nature of the party and its liminality as the song begins and continues in an increasingly tangential reality. The director plays with images of the dancers and musicians; they spin in and out of the frame as though they are in a kaleidoscope. It seems as though the performance is no longer a part of the film’s storyline but is happening outside of it, at the edge of reality, and yet, it still remains within the actual film. Alwina is transformed by the music—she is transported by the rhythm of the drums, rips off her clothes, and cannot stop herself from dancing. Edwin Hill explains the effect the music has on Alwina: “Representations of the doudou consistently involve attempts to ‘out’ her; music typically serves to disrupt the doudou’s attempts to mask her true colonial self. Through the doudou’s musical hypersensitivity to drums and rhythm, the primitive racial atavism lying under the veneer of French assimilation, or the mask (read possibility) of exotic civility, surges forth” (38). Eileen Julien, in her chapter in
Black Europe and the African Diaspora, reinforces the problem of the drums in this sequence—they are clearly of sub-Saharan African origin and not from North Africa and what is more, they are played in a style of Cuban rumba (53). It is precisely in the conflation of national borders and cultural traditions where Alwina transitions from her new-found “Frenchness” to her “true” self. Furthermore, this song is an interlude that moves the plot forward: the next scene after the dance sequence is where the Maharajah shows Alwina her choices of east or west through the windows; she has made the transition and her choice has become obviously no longer really a choice—she has already chosen where she belongs during the previous dance sequence.

2.10 The Novel

The novel is a liminal space in that what is inside of it is between two covers. While it is typical practice, one is not required to read a novel unidirectionally. The space of the novel is like a borderland in that it is outside of certain constraints, as Gérard Genette writes in Seuils about the novel’s physical borders, the “‘vestibule’ qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d’entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin. ‘Zone indécise’ entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse” (7-8). The novel is also without firm boundaries, and yet, we can also think of the physical book as a container and thus the novel as a bordered space between two covers. What strikes me about Genette’s quote for this chapter is the reference to the space as a “zone indécise” between inside and outside, which is representative, like the title Seuils of the novel as threshold space, of a space within which there are possibilities that are unthinkable outside of the zone. Michael Seidel writes about space within narrative for these possibilities and that there might not be escaping this place: “The space of narration is all allegorical potential, and from
such a space, if that is one’s only space, there is no escape” (15). Indeed, all the authors in this project are always in-between multiple identities and they create characters who also reside in-between. In this sense there is an impossible move past the border space of possibilities for là-bas if they remain in place in the in-between. Seidel also claims that the same holds true for narrative places: “it is here that exile enters as allegory or alibi, a necessary elsewhere. Narrative forges two kinds of scenes, the first a counter or allegorical space where the ‘I am’ of character projects a being that sustains an inscriptive sovereignty, and the second a mimetic space that limits the absolute otherness of the ‘I am’ by supposing a recognizable world to which it is answerable” (15). The way the two scenes are structured is what determines what he calls “exilic imagining,” which I argue is also representative of the tension between imagined worlds and the authors’ depictions of reality.

Border spaces represented in the novel are used as plot devices for interior monologue, for the slowed-down and zoomed-in transition of a character where “exilic imagining” occurs and this can be shown for the reader when a character enters into border space. Sarraute, in Enfance, writes a neatly packaged interlude in the middle of a page, an intermezzo that depicts her writing self as a child who finds respite in her room:

Derrière la porte fermée de ma chambre, je suis occupée à ce qu’il peut y avoir au monde de plus normal, de plus légitime, de plus louable, je fais mes devoirs, en ce moment il se trouve que c’est un devoir de français [. . .] il m’est permis de m’ébattre à l’intérieur de ses limites, sur un terrain bien préparé et aménagé, comme dans la cour de récréation ou bien aussi, puisque ces ébats s’accompagnent de grands efforts, comme dans la salle de gymnastique. (212)
Writing in her room and the normalcy of doing her homework creates conditions for transitory space in the writing process that sends her to the playful space of her imagination where possibilities are endless. This transitory scene is liminal because of its physical location as an interlude on the page. Sarraute returns to her past in this *intermezzo* for self-reflection on her experience as a child recognizing writing as a significant process.

The novel as border space is also freeing: the reader escapes within the book, they find respite in-between and a place within which to explore and imagine worlds where new things are possible because they exist outside of social norms. Indeed, border space can provide protection from reality. For example, with Némirovsky who had to hide her Jewish identity to publish, but it was in hiding that she used her assumed identities to explore themes of immigration, home, and belonging in France as a troubled nation. During the war, which is itself a liminal time where new rules and regulations were in place, Némirovsky was able to take on a different identity in order to survive for a time and to continue publishing. In Sarraute’s *Enfance*, books provide respite and freedom. Sarraute describes her childhood house where she was surrounded by books: “Je l’embarras du choix, il y a des livres partout, dans toutes les pièces, sur les meubles et même par terre, apportés par maman et Kolia ou bien arrivés par la poste . . . des petits, des moyens et des gros” (81). Joan in *Mon sang dans tes veines* finds respite reading outside the house under the veranda. For Ernaux, the novel is a transitory space within which the reader witnesses her finding of herself, like how she describes the sensations and subjective transformations in the car as a space where freedom is possible. What is more, Ernaux’s writing project is to capture within the novel the transitory space of life as a bordered area: “Ce qui compte pour elle, c’est au contraire de saisir cette durée qui constitue son passage sur la terre à une époque donnée, ce temps qui l’a traversée, ce monde qu’elle a enregistré rien qu’en avant”
(Les années 238). The border space of the novel can be freeing and as such, it echoes themes of desire for a place of respite, for a place to claim as home, found in works by these figures.

3. Thresholds

[É]t il n’est pas prêt, il lui aurait fallu encore quelques instants de recueillement pour se préparer, il aurait eu besoin de franchir d’abord une zone de silence. (Sarraute, Le planétarium 76)

Entre ou sors. Ne me laisse pas dans un courant d’air. (Némirovsky, Les chiens et les loups 292)

3.1 Passerelles and Stairwells

All of the public spaces I mention in the previous section are in fact regulated, semi-public spaces, similar to certain border lines between nation states: the automobile can be owned by a person keeping strangers out, the boat requires a ticket, balls and celebrations may require invitation, and only certain public can gain access to these spaces. Unlike those spaces, the passerelle and the staircase commonly exist in fully public places. And yet, they remain semi-public in the sense that they are smaller spaces outside of more openly public spaces like a larger street, a bridge with multiple car lanes, or a public building. For the border-crooser in the walkway and the stairwell, these spaces are transitory in that they are where the croser will make the physical transition from here to there. Sarraute depicts the walkway as also being unclear, where it is difficult to see the other side, for example in Portrait d’un inconnu:

Je me tenais arrêté sur la passerelle, au-dessus de la voie ferrée, penché sur la balustrade, regardant avec une extrême attention le quai d’un gris sale sur lequel
flottait une fumée âcre [. . .] je ne vois pas très bien—la passerelle se trouve très haut au-dessus du quai et je vois mal à cause de la fumée et des gens qui circulent sur la plate-forme et qui, à chaque instant, me cachent. (103-105)

The view from this location can be hazy, as we see in the previous quote where the smoke in this scene obscures the vision of the border crosser and it is high enough above the quay that he cannot see below; he is in-between and transitioning from here to there, unable to pinpoint any reference point but the smoke. The passerelle is the physical space that provides passage on a walkway from one place to another and the obscurity of the physical transition can reflect the emotional tension in a crossing.

Stairwells are also like walkways, operating between two physically-oriented positions of here and there, and what is more, there may also be a hierarchy associated with this space between up and down, lower and higher. These are liminal spaces that can mimic thresholds, the border through which one must traverse in order to arrive “over there.” Homi Bhabha, in reference to Renée Green’s work and liminal space in work on genealogy and the image of the museum building, writes about the stairwell as a liminal space where hierarchy may dissipate because of its position in-between fixed identity categories. That “process of symbolic interaction” is where we find the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. That interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (The Location of Culture 5)
Indeed, border-crossers share similar experiences: “Il faut que cela sorte qu’ils soient entre eux, entre gens du même bord qui se comprennent tout de suite, acceptent cela naturellement, il faut qu’ils se sentent libres et sûrs de leurs mouvements, deux femmes qui se croisent sur le seuil de la porte ou bien dans l’escalier, leur filet à la main, pressées de sortir, de rentrer, préoccupées” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 17). After entering into the liminal space of the stairwell the hierarchy may disappear as border-crossers recognize each other as akin to one another within this space that also has the ability to equalize.

3.2 Seuils

Physical seuils or thresholds can be in either public or private spaces and many are associated with entrance into home space. In this sense of crossing from the outside world into one’s home, I examine explicit references to thresholds in this section as representative of the broader immigrant experience of crossing over a border space and into a new place of residence. Threshold moments, to take the more abstract definition of the word, can also be crossroad moments: once you choose a certain path there is no turning back, for these are the points of no return. On the threshold or at the crossroads is a moment in this border space that can be liberating, or it can represent a moment that reflects the gravity of the decision to make the crossing into “over there.”

The decision to cross may come after a long journey and the border-crosser at the threshold who is ready to cross might do so without looking back: “Et c’est sans aucune arrière-pensée, du moins à ce qu’il me semblait, dans cet état d’heureuse exaltation, qu’après avoir longtemps erré dans mes rues préférées, ces ruelles paisibles, intimes, si douces, des villes du
nord, je me suis dirigé lentement vers le musée” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 84). And yet, even if they are ready to cross, the decision to do so may involve hesitation, or pause, which is represented by a reference to this hesitation at the threshold or a slowing down of the action before the crossing. There is a long scene in Némirovksy’s Le bal, which I further analyze in the next section, where Antoinette hesitates before crossing a physical bridge that depicts and coincides with her crossing over from childhood into adulthood and each detail of the passage and her pause for reflection in the middle of a bridge is articulated. In Les chiens et les loups, Ada hesitates on the doorway of her aunt’s house: “On ne franchissait pas le seuil de la porte; elle entendait de son lit les pas s’arrêter devant le seuil, hésiter, et une main furtive glissait un paquet sur le palier” (330). In Le maître des âmes, Wardes hesitates before deciding to enter into Dario’s house and in this moment there is room for emotions about the decision to arise: “Wardes considérait la maison de Dario avec un sentiment de colère, d’espoir et de peur. Il n’en franchissait pas encore le seuil” (152). Two pages later he is still hesitating; he pauses before ringing the doorbell: “Avant de sonner, il hésita” (154).

Sarraute uses writing about her life experiences in Enfance to access and revisit threshold moments. For example, she hesitates before writing her homework for school on the subject of her “premier chagrin,” over which she obsesses, and it becomes clear that this moment of writing is one that marked her. She acknowledges the instant where she hesitates before beginning the assignment: “Maintenant c’est le moment . . . je le retarde toujours . . . j’ai peur de ne pas partir du bon pied, de ne pas bien prendre mon élan . . . je commence par écrire le titre . . . ‘Mon premier chagrin’ . . . il pourra me donner l’impulsion” (210). The repetition of the ellipses here further depicts her hesitancy to write. After this section she continually repeats words and talks about them after repeating “les mots” as though writing is a way of explaining the choices she
made following the start of the assignment. Sarraute also hesitates before sharing her memories; her difficult childhood gives her pause:

> Ce vers quoi nous allons, ce qui m’attend là-bas, possède toutes les qualités qui font de “beaux souvenirs d’enfance” . . . de ceux que leurs possesseurs exhibent d’ordinaire avec une certaine nuance de fierté. Et comment ne pas s’enorgueillir d’avoir eu des parents qui ont pris soin de fabriquer pour vous, de vous préparer de ces souvenirs en tout point conformes aux modèles les plus appréciés, les mieux cotés? J’avoue que j’hésite un peu . . . (31)

Again, the ellipses at the end of this line extends the moment of hesitation and perhaps it further articulates the author’s uncertainty on the border before sharing her past.

Ernaux, too, uses her writing to work out threshold moments. For example, in *La place* she negotiates the loss of her father and examines his life at the same time that she grapples with his death. In *Mémoire de fille*, the whole novel can be read as an attempt to recreate the threshold moment of losing her virginity and of the “fille de 58” who no longer exists. The entire novel centers around the summer camp and she situates the story in 1958 before crossing into the space of the camp as well as after this experience: “Je n’ai pas encore franchi le porche de la colonie. Je n’avance pas dans cet effort pour saisir la fille de 58, comme si je voulais ‘créer son profil’ le plus minutieusement possible, qu’il n’y ait jamais assez de déterminations psychologiques et sociales, de traits au dessin” (30). She hesitates to expand upon the moment in a linear manner, instead moving back and forth between past and present and recreating and negotiating this moment in the writing of the “fille de 58.”

Anne Cheng describes photographs of Baker exactly as the representation of a hesitation on a threshold before entering into one or another identity:
If the portrait offers the promise of a person and the still life the promise of a thing, then the Baker photography [. . .] brings us not fulfillment but the (specifically photographic) pleasure of suspension: that pause or delay before a person becomes a person and a thing a thing. To lose oneself in those images is to surrender to a drama about the immanent possibilities of personhood and the frightening-yet-seductive affinity for objectness. (121)

Indeed, Baker plays with racial identities and with the negotiation of these identities as she is represented as an objective figure in all her films. In Zou Zou, after she moves to France, she answers an ad for a laundry that reads: “On demande jeune fille sans prétention sachant repasser.” After she gets a job there, there is a moment when the camera zooms out from its focus on a “Blanchissérie” sign with starkly white clothes displayed in the window. The slow zoom out and the hesitation before continuing is representative of Zouzou’s struggle between white and black identities. In the laundry she plays the role of entertainer, and her co-workers keep asking her to do her impression of Barbara (a well-known actress). The camera cuts to the real Barbara who is the contrasting image of Zouzou; while Zouzou is a black woman covered in a white dress, Barbara is a white woman dressed in black with one breast showing. She sings: “Pour moi il y a qu’un homme dans Paris,” which Zouzou later sings on stage at the end after she takes over Barbara’s role. The back-and-forth images of each of these women are almost like photographs as the camera remains fixed on them and each remains in the center of the frame. The portrayal of Barbara appears similarly in the juxtaposition between Clarence and Joan in Mon sang dans tes veines in the print images in the book: Clarence wears a see-through white gown with one breast and the print of Joan shows her in black with her hands clasped in prayer representing the Black Madonna. Incidentally, the white, female figures in Baker’s works are
similar to the famous painting “La liberté guidant le peuple” by Eugène Delacroix, which adds another layer of negotiation between these series of white and black figures where racial identities are negotiated.

3.3 Tension in the Transition

Thresholds can also represent the moment of leaving home, a departure as a crossroads moment. This transitional moment may be inscribed with tension or acknowledgement of the anxiety or fear in addition to hesitation in the moment. For example, Sarraute who traveled back and forth between France and Russia as a child writes about moments of departure and for the final departure, she recalls that this trip was different from the others: “Il est étrange que ce soit juste cette fois-là que tu aies ressenti pour la première fois une telle détresse au moment de ton départ . . . On pourrait croire à un pressentiment” (Enfance 108). Némirovsky inscribes a feeling of adventure and trepidation at the point of departure as a moment when the future is unknown and impossible to know: “Ce départ était un saut dans l’inconnu” (Les chiens et les loups 126).

One must tread carefully in the crossing as the beyond is uncertain and the journey may be difficult. Sarraute writes about the afternoon as a temporal space that can arduous and unpleasant to experience; crossing into that time is like entering the abyss: “On peut l’observer, marchant avec la miraculeuse adresse du lunatique sur l’extrême bord du vide qui se forme parfois au début des après-midi” (Portrait d’un inconnu 135). She repeats the shifting nature of the afternoon as an in-between space that may be dangerous for some, but not so for others:

Il y a au début des après-midi, je l’ai déjà dit, des moments dangereux. Pas pour tous, évidemment. La plupart des gens—et je ne parle pas seulement des gens très
occupés, toujours particulièrement bien protégés contre ces dangers-là—la plupart des gens traversent ses moments d’un pied léger comme les alpinistes bien exercés sautent les crevasses allègrement sans regarder sous leurs pieds. [...] Cette impression qu’ils ont de chute, de vertige, peut-être vient-elle de ce qu’ils sentent, dans ce silence, ce vide, le frôlement anonyme et froid du temps, la chute incessante des instants dont ils perçoivent tout à coup le glissement. *(Portrait d’un inconnu* 155-156)

Busy people who may be protected from the dangers of the shifting grounds of the afternoon are not those who have the ability to pause and reflect on the precarity of the transition across a border space. Indeed, in order to cross when one can recognize the crossing and the arrival into a new space, there may be a moment of hesitation and also of preparation for the passage. For example, Sarraute also references the void and the acknowledgement of being prepared to cross and prepared to arrive in *Enfance*. A long time passes before she goes to see her mother and before she leaves: “Aujourd’hui tu aurais pu imaginer que tu étais comme un parachutiste qu’on lâche au-dessus du vide en lui répétant une dernière fois: ‘Alors tu te rappelles bien, tu ne te tromperas pas? tu sais ce que tu dois faire pour y arriver?’ et tu dis ‘Oui, je sais . . .’ Et derrière toi la porte se referme” (*Enfance* 249).

There is tension in transition moments that can lead to a feeling of emptiness that occurs from the nature of border space as unstable grounds that indicates the uncertainty of what really lies beyond this space. The tension exemplifies the inner-growth or personal struggle that occurs before action. For example, Wardes in Némirovsky’s *Le maître des âmes*, who dies trapped because he never acts, decides to go see Dario to ask him for help, but if he makes any wrong move, the scandal he is concealing will come to light. His inner struggle comes out in his dreams
and represents the tension before action: “Je sens ma colère s’éveiller en moi, vous savez, cette rage, cette frénésie de destruction qui s’empare du cœur. Je pousse la femme vers la fenêtre ouverte, mais, toujours, avant de la voir tomber, précipitée par moi dans le vide, je me réveille” (239). Wardes is always fixed in inaction in this novel until his death: he finds himself literally enclosed in an insane asylum and then later bounded in his own madness. His mental enclosure leads him to be trapped physically as well—he is terrified of cars and trains and cannot leave any place, except when he goes to drown himself.

Movement from one place to another may happen gradually. Tension in the transition can represent the long process of personal growth and development that is not always noticeable during the process. For example, when Ernaux revisits her adolescence she recognizes the tension latent in where her core beliefs began to shift and change: “Sans doute est-elle dans une zone indécise, intermédiaire entre la croyante et l’incroyance, délestée peu à peu de la légende mais attaché à la prière, aux rituels de la messe et des sacrements” (Mémoire de fille 27). She recognizes this state of pre-arrival as a transitional time central to the makings of herself as an adult. It is only after temporal distance to this period that Ernaux looks back and recognizes the liminality and uncertainty of the time. Furthermore, the link to navigating personal convictions and religion is also tied up for Ernaux in the navigation of her past as linked to place and family of origin, for whom the rituals of religion were important. Her shift away from this world and the difficulty that comes from finding herself on the other side echoes the struggle in the process itself.

Tension in transitional moments can occur in broader historical contexts. For example, there is tension throughout Baker’s Mon sang dans tes veines (a tension echoed in her films as well) that leads up to the transition into the crossroads scene at the end of the novel, which I
further unpack in the next section. This tension is depicted in the perpetual juxtapositions of opposites, such as: white and black, sun and shadows, day and night, forests and cities, confinement and freedom, solitude and community. Racial differences represent a central theme of the book since the entire story takes place within the tension between white and black in the Jim Crow era South. This story includes Baker’s comments on the racial tension and her imagined world that could be possible of a utopic community where everyone lives together: “Ah! si la nature ne connaît pas de préjugés, l’humanité, depuis sa naissance, est soumise à la mode,” she laments in the introduction written by Baker alone, as she tries to make sense of the history of race as a nonsensical and socially constructed category (Mon sang dans tes veines 19). Joan decides to move past the racial tensions in the book, which depicts Baker’s views of racial differences as ultimately irrelevant in the face of more important matters such as love, life, and death.

3.4 Negotiating In-Between Identities

Hesitation on the threshold also represents a negotiation of identity that happens before crossing into a new space. In her article, “Becoming the World Versus Identity Politics,” Mieke Bal writes about border space as a place of negotiation, where, in reference to two art installments in Belfast, the overlapping of the exhibits created a border space of negotiation (9). Northern Ireland’s divisions of Protestants and Catholics is read as us and them, here and there; there are stark contrasts made between groups to create divisions. The art installment she writes about operates both within this history of division and outside of it as a border space in which negotiation is possible. I argue that liminal, transitory border space is negotiable territory in
which, in order to pass through, one makes a transition not only externally (from here to there) but also internally (from one identity to another). What is more, the negotiation of identities in the process of transition is only possible within this space that is both outside and in-between.

Certain conditions are necessary in order to step into the realm of possibilities. Horváth et al. also write about the conditional in reference to Turner’s work and “the very notion of ‘normality’ or ‘reality’ with a fictive ‘unreal’ state, temptingly inviting people into […] ‘life in the conditional’” (3). Indeed, there are moments when negotiating multiple identities can be freeing. In border space, one gains the ability to walk, act, dress as they please: “On leur offrait cela ici, cela, et la liberté de faire ce qu’ils voulaient, de marcher comme ils voulaient, dans n’importe quel accoutrement, avec n’importe quel visage, dans les modestes petites rues” (Sarraute, Tropismes 21). The border-crosser finds possible respite in the intersection along with self-discovery, a feeling of arrival or of finally, this is who I am, although the rest of the world may not see it. Ernaux writes about trying on different identities as she traces her entrance into the bourgeoisie in La place. She negotiating her identities of the period she writes the novel with those of her origins, specifically her parents who are stuck in a liminal state of “Mi-commerçant, mi-ouvrier, les deux bords à la fois, voué donc à la solitude et à la méfiance” (42). In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux navigates her two selves of 1958 and present-day and uses the space of the novel to negotiate the differences between these two sets of identities.

Némirovsky, in the opening to Suite française in the first section “Tempête en juin,” writes about the in-between space of France before the Germans arrive in Paris. The threshold of this novel, framed by weather references, takes place at the first instant of the alarm announcing planes overhead:
Chaude, pensaient les Parisiens. L’air du printemps. C’était la nuit en guerre, l’alerte. Mais la nuit s’efface, la guerre est loin. Ceux qui ne dormaient pas, les malades au fond de leur lit, les mères dont les fils étaient au front, les femmes amoureuses aux yeux fanés par les larmes entendaient le premier souffle de la sirène. Ce n’était pas encore qu’une aspiration profonde semblable au soupir qui sort d’une poitrine oppressée. Quelques instants s’écouleraient avant que le ciel tout entier s’emplit de clameurs. Elles arrivaient de loin, du fond de l’horizon, sans hâte, aurait-on dit ! Les dormeurs rêvaient de la mer qui pousse devant elle ses vagues et ses galets, de la tempête qui secoue la forêt en mars, d’un troupeau de bœufs qui court lourdement en ébranlant le sol de ses sabots, jusqu’à ce qu’enfin le sommeil cédât et que l’homme murmurât, en ouvrant à peine les yeux. –C’est l’alerte? (33)

The crossroads moment depicted here is of the negotiation of Parisian and French identities in the face of entering into a period of occupation where this part of the nation will become a part of Germany. Each line undermines the next and the passage depicts the back and forth of people’s thoughts, between the feelings of calm in the spring air and anxiety about the future. This is also a moment that represents a horizon, a seemingly impossible border to reach, and yet, they are at the threshold between freedom and war, entering into the unthinkable event of occupation.

When Baker negotiates different in-between identities she first refers to how she is made up of three different colors of blood: “Je la rassurais: les hasards de la vie avaient mis dans mes veines, un sang de trois couleurs” (Mon sang dans tes veines 5). In the preface to this novel, she navigates these multiple racial identities by including a sort of history of race that undermines
racial distinctions as having any real importance in the sense that race is hierarchical:

“L’Antiquité, qui peu à peu nous dévoile ses secrets, considérait la couleur rouge comme la plus noble de la race humaine. Venait ensuite la couleur jaune, la blanche fut moins appréciée que la noire” (19). She explains that whiteness is just which color is currently in style and signals current hierarchies that exist between white and other skin colors because of historical events in the United States: “Aujourd’hui, la teinte blanche est à la mode, et l’Amérique, supprimant la rouge et jetant un défi à la jaune, la porta à des sommets vertigineux” (20).

In the preface to Portrait d’un inconnu, Jean-Paul Sartre writes about the space between subjectivity and objectivity in Sarraute’s work: “Rassurant pour autrui, rassurant pour moi-même puisque je me suis réfugié dans cette zone neutre et commune qui n’est ni tout à fait objectif, puisque enfin je m’y tiens par décret, ni tout à fait subjectif puisque tout le monde m’y peut atteindre et s’y retrouver, mais qu’on pourrait nommer à la fois la subjectivité de l’objectif et l’objectivité du subjectif” (9-10). Indeed, it is precisely within the “neutral” space of the in-between where broader, collective and border-crossing identities can come into being. Bhabha writes about how it is in the “emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). Crossroads or intersections are not always neutral territories. For example, while subjectivity is negotiated at the intersection of multiple identities, it is also constituted by intersections of power structures, as Avtar Brah writes: “power is performatively constituted in and through economic, political, and cultural practices. Subjectivities of both the dominant and the dominated are produced in the interstices of these multiple, intersecting loci of power” (125). And yet, there is a necessity for moving away from the edges and beyond immoveable categories and to “focus on those moments or
processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. Those ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 2). The immigrant who crosses into a new place, originally belongs on one side and then becomes a foreigner on the other. While multiple identities are possible in the space of the intersection, in reality, there are issues with understanding these identities on the other side: how one self-identifies may not correlate with how others categorize them. And yet, those who navigate the in-between space of multiple identities are crucial in representing this outsider perspective on the other side. Bernd Giesen contends that “spaces of ambivalence and hybridity are fundamental to sustaining social reality” and “between structuralist and post-structuralist thought lies a third possibility: the space between the opposites, the transition between inside and outside, the ‘neither . . . or’ or the ‘as well as . . .’” (Horváth et al. 4). This in-between space is precisely where the authors in this project reside and their writing and performances is where they negotiate liminal, multiple identities.

4. Cases of Crossings

In this section I examine instances of border crossings: each case is a key crossroads moment from the works in this project. I choose the following examples as a way to illustrate in a close-up manner the events of a border crossing. In the act of crossing there are the following elements: glimpsing là-bas, transit, hesitation, and negotiation, before finally an acknowledgement of arrival.
4.1 The Child’s Understanding

In Sarraute’s *Tropismes* there is a simple but powerful portrayal of a border crossing that is depicted in the crossing of a street. The crossing scene is in Sarraute’s eighth tropism from the series: “Un grand-père, qui promène son petit-enfant, exerce sur lui une protection étouffante, et lui parle de sa mort.” Like many of the tropisms in the book, the title summarizes the entire section. The story opens with: “Quand il était avec des êtres frais et jeunes, des êtres innocents, il éprouvait le besoin douloureux, irrésistible, de les manipuler de ses doigts inquiets, de les palper, de les rapprocher de soi le plus près possible, de se les approprier” (51). We begin with the grandfather’s perspective of how he engages with his grandchildren who he wishes to become even more a part of him, almost as if to possess them and for them to possess him. He is crossing the street with his grandson and they venture with precaution, being sure to look carefully both ways because of the child with him: “en regardant avec une infinie prudence, à gauche et puis à droite, pour s’assurer qu’ils avaient le temps de passer” (51). Time is slowed down in Sarrautien fashion with her tropisms, and this further articulates the grandfather’s hesitation in crossing the street and also the necessity to have enough time to make the crossing safely: “Et il lui apprenait, en traversant, à attendre longtemps, à faire bien attention, attention, attention, surtout très attention, en traversant les rues sur le passage clouté, car, ‘il faut si peu de chose, car une seconde d’inattention suffit pour qu’il arrive un accident’” (52). As the boy and his grandfather transition across the street, this moment becomes an intergenerational crossing where the grandfather talks to the boy about his own childhood and about the weight of his age and impending death: “il aimait aussi leur parler de son âge, de son grand âge et de sa mort. ‘[. . .] Lui aussi, ton grand-père, il avait une maman’” (52).
The arrival on the other side of the street occurs slowly and slightly, but it has a large impact on the child. In the unmoving air the little boy takes on his grandfather’s thoughts: “L’air était immobile et gris, sans odeur [. . .]. Et le petit sentait que quelque chose pesait sur lui, l’engourdirait” (52-53). Finally, the section ends symmetrically to the beginning, but this time from the child’s perspective, who repeats in his mind what the grandfather has just said to him. The last part of the tropism describes the child’s state of uncertainty and the weight of death, which has made him cross a certain boundary of safety and protection:

[S]ans qu’il pût résister—le pénétrait, pendant qu’il trottinait doucement et très sagement, en donnant docilement sa petite main, en opinant de la tête très raisonnablement, et qu’on lui expliquait comme il fallait toujours avancer avec précaution et bien regarder d’abord à droite, puis à gauche, et faire bien attention, très attention, de peur d’un accident, en traversant le passage clouté. (53)

We witness the child’s experience of crossing the street with his grandfather and how he reacts to his grandfather’s crossing, which was articulated slowly from the grandfather’s perspective. Both have arrived on the other side, each have experienced the moment differently, and yet, a crucial understanding passed through them and connected the two as they transitioned into arrival.

4.2 Antoinette’s Bridge

In Némirovsky’s coming-of-age story Le bal, the main character Antoinette is continually denied access to the ball her parents are planning at their house. She chooses to move (literally and figuratively) out of a liminal adolescent state, which is depicted in her hesitation on a seuil at her house and on a bridge over the Seine. Antoinette’s parents are new, wealthy immigrants to
Paris and they are obsessed with appearances and status and decide to throw a ball to show off their wealth in an attempt to fit in to their newfound society. As she has not yet turned fifteen, Antoinette is not allowed to attend the ball, an event during which she hoped to have her “entrée dans le monde.” She longs to cross over into adulthood but instead she is stuck in the in-between state of adolescence that reflects her inability to access the ball: “Sales égoïstes; c’est moi qui veux vivre, moi, moi, je suis jeune, moi . . . Ils me volent, ils volent ma part de bonheur sur la terre . . . Oh! pénétrer dans ce bal par miracle, et être la plus belle, la plus éblouissante, les hommes à ses pieds!” (56-57). The narration in this section of the book is filled with interior monologue, demonstrating at another level Antoinette’s frustration and struggle in feeling trapped in the crossing. These feelings are compounded when certain spaces in the house are taken over by Antoinette’s parents for the ball, including her room which is turned into a bar.

Antoinette finds an opportunity to ruin her parents’ ball by destroying the invitations to the party before they can be mailed. She catches her English teacher (who is tasked with sending the invitations) secretly meeting with her boyfriend when she leaves to mail the letters. Antoinette corners her and then Miss Betty points to a little tabac across the bridge and asks Antoinette to mail the invitations instead. When Antoinette destroys the invitations, she has to cross a river to do so and her emotions as she crosses into adulthood mimic the crossing of the river. We witness both the child and the adult in her: she hesitates halfway across the bridge as she works out her inner child and inner adult that is coming through.

"Elle a eu honte de cette peur: quoi? toujours trembler comme une petite fille? Elle n’était pas digne d’être une femme. Et ces deux-là qui s’embrassaient toujours? Ils n’avaient pas dénoué les lèvres . . . Une espèce de vertige s’empara d’elle, un besoin sauvage de bravade et de mal. Les dents serrées, elle saisit toutes"
les enveloppes, les froissa dans ses mains, les déchira et les lança toutes ensemble dans la Seine. Un long moment, le cœur dilaté, elle les regarda qui flottaient contre l’arche du pont. Et puis, le vent finit par les emporter dans l’eau. (78-79)

While committing the childish act of destroying her parents’ invitations to the other guests (one can also make the argument for her parents acting absurdly and stuck in a state of perpetual childhood), she crosses over the world into adulthood when she walks over the bridge and decides to toss the invitations in the river, thus ruining her parents’ party. Before making decisions to cross into a new state she wavers before ultimately moving onward, for she realizes that she has nowhere else to go.

Throwing the invitations in the Seine and continuing across the bridge marks one moment of arrival for Antoinette. The other is the unfolding of events after this irrevocable action. When the night of the ball arrives, Antoinette continues to hesitate as the clock strikes: “Elle marchait vers le salon, comme un assassin novice qu’attire le lieu de son crime. Elle traversa le corridor . . . Elle gagna la salle à manger. Elle était déserte, toute prête, parée avec la grande table au milieu” (106-107). She sees herself as though she has arrived outside of herself, as though her actions have become a part of a play:

Plus tard, Antoinette ne put jamais comprendre comment elle avait osé traverser ainsi, dans toute sa longueur, cette grande chambre rutilante de lumières. Au seuil du salon, elle hésita un instant et puis elle avisa dans le boudoir voisin le grand canapé de soie . . . il y avait juste une petite place où elle pourrait demeurer en serrant ses bras et ses genoux contre elle, et, en avançant la tête, elle voyait le salon comme une scène de théâtre. (107-108)
Antoinette seeing herself moving into the space of the banquet hall is another sort of arrival into the in-between state of adolescence with a move toward adulthood. Roles are reversed in the end of the story, at a singular moment at the crossroads: “Tu es une bonne fille, Antoinette . . . C’était la seconde, l’éclair insaisissable où ‘sur le chemin de la vie’ elles se croisaient, et l’une allait monter, et l’autre s’enfoncer dans l’ombre. Mais elles ne le savaient pas. Cependant Antoinette répéta doucement: —Ma pauvre maman” (137). At this moment, Antoinette and her mother have crossed paths, and each has arrived on the other side: Antoinette has become an adult, taking on role of parent consoling her mother, who will never return to the period of her life where she was a young, beautiful woman.

4.3 Ernaux’s *Capes épreuve*

On the first page of Ernaux’s *La place* there is a border crossing: Ernaux’s *Capes épreuve*, a word which signifies an exam and also a trial, a proof, or an ordeal. This *épreuve* marks her entrance into the world of academia and departure from her place of origin. This is a border moment, on the threshold of the novel in a sense, as it occurs on the first pages of the story. It is also a liminal moment where she is neither here nor there. She must wait before crossing: “J’ai attendu là qu’on vienne me chercher pour faire mon cours, objet de l’épreuve, devant l’inspecteur et deux assesseurs, des profs de lettres très confirmés” (11). Then, from the vantage point of the in-between she glimpses her future beyond the crossing: “Une femme corrigeait des copies avec hauteur, sans hésiter. Il suffisait de franchir correctement l’heure suivante pour être autorisée à faire comme elle toute ma vie” (11). In the transition of the crossing, the committee hesitates and she is forced to pause with them as they all examine her
work and she is still unsure whether nor not she has been successful: “Pendant un quart d’heure, il a mélangé critiques, éloges, conseils, et j’écoutais à peine, me demandant si tout cela signifiait que j’étais reçue” (12). The arrival happens swiftly and without ceremony:

D’un seul coup, d’un même élan, ils se sont levés tous trois, l’air grave. Je me suis levée aussi, précipitamment. L’inspecteur m’a tendu la main. Puis, en me regardant bien en face: “Madame, je vous félicite.” Les autres ont répété “je vous félicite” et m’ont serré la main, mais la femme avec un sourire. Je n’ai pas cessé de penser à cette cérémonie jusqu’à l’arrêt de bus, avec colère et une espèce de honte. (12)

The Capes scene displays the ease of this particular border crossing and the bizarre ritual of gaining a “title,” of being allowed access to the beyond. A word used as a label or title is like a stamp in a passport: it marks the successful passage into a new location or state of being. Ernaux is being “allowed through” to become a higher-level employee with a professorship and she both respects the rite of passage and also articulates the peculiarity of the ritual. In her subtle commentary on this “immigration check” she contravenes the border, demonstrating its absurdity and its importance; this moment marks her crossing into a new world that further distances her from the world of her childhood. The Capes scene also resonates with Ernaux’s multiple departures from her place of origin into her current state of residence in this, and other novels. Furthermore, the scene is emblematic of both this type of movement away from home and also Ernaux’s conflicted personal views feeling perpetually in-between and neither here, where she has arrived, nor there, in her place of departure.
4.4 Joan’s Blood

In Baker’s *Mon sang dans tes veines*, I argue that the most important crossing to the plot of the novel is when Joan donates her blood to save Fred’s life. The glimpses of the other side are apparent throughout the entire story leading up to the pivotal moment, as Joan is constantly wishing for and envisioning herself in a world where she is Fred’s equal and where equality between races exists for everyone. In a contrary series of events in a first crossroads scene in *Mon sang dans tes veines* that leads up to the final one, Clarence is forced with the choice of saving Joan’s life. Chapter Five of the novel is entirely from Clarence’s perspective, which is a departure from the first part of the novel, which was from Joan’s point of view. In the first accident scene, Clarence almost goes off of a cliff with her horse but Joan saves the day: “Reconnaissant sa voix comme celle d’une enchanteresse, l’animal se calma aussitôt” (93). Then, all of a sudden, Joan is caught up in the accident: “La jambe gauche s’accrochant au frein, résista. Joan poussa un cri de douleur et perdit connaissance . . . Clarence déjà, avait sauté à terre” (93). The next sentence depicts Clarence’s hesitation, the negotiation of her own desires and reticence in acting to save Joan: “Toute pâle, elle contemplait la jeune fille noire, qui par son sang-froid venait de lui sauver la vie, et qui maintenant évanouie, à demi penchée hors de la voiture, ressemblait à la tige brisée d’une fleur” (93). Clarence hesitates and then pays two black men to take care of Joan. The opening of Chapter Six shows Joan waking up in the hospital after finally regaining consciousness. Fred believes that Clarence brought Joan to the hospital and Joan refuses to tell her story, repeating that this Miss Clarence will explain everything. Clarence gets one more opportunity to tell the truth and she continues to vacillate because of what her parents would think, glad that “sa turbulente enfant allait enfin devenir une femme respectable et
une épouse américaine” (117). Finally, Clarence goes out for a horse ride and runs into Fred who is coming out of the clinic where Joan is being cared for and the truth is forced upon her.

Clarence’s decision not to tell the truth about Joan saving her life leads to a fight between Clarence and Fred and he subsequently gets into an accident, after which: “Dans la forêt silencieuse, on n’entendit plus que le bourdonnement des mouches qui se posaient sur le sang chaud, répandu lentement sur la terre jaune et glissante” (124). Fred needs a blood transfusion to save his life, Joan volunteers, and she is a perfect match. The events that ensue reflect the societal norms of the Jim Crow laws within which the characters operate in this novel. The doctor hesitates, asking himself: “Peut-il, lui docteur Anderson, mêler le sang d’un descendant de la race qui donna à sa patrie Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, le génie de Alva Edison, avec celui d’une fille noire, avec une de ces parias qui, en injure, portent la couleur sombre de leur peau, sous laquelle coule le sang?” (132). He then continues this process as he realizes that the blood is the same as any of the soldiers’ blood he saw in the war: “Il arrêta le cours de ses réflexions. Ce sang, il l’avait vu couler, lorsque les mitrailleuses et les shrapnels allemands, créant des hécatombes, fauchaient les soldats de l’Amérian Légion dans les tranchées de la terre de France” (132). And again: “Parmi eux, étaient beaucoup de noirs . . . Et cependant, le drapeau sacré n’était marqué que d’une tache: d’une tache de sang rouge . . . Oui, dans la mort, le sang peut se mêler, mais dans la vie?” (133). For the doctor, science wins out in the end: “Enfin, s’élevant au-dessus, la Fontaine de Sang jaillit pour couronner son œuvre, et ses missions dans le miracle de la transfusion . . . Dans la science, il n’y a plus de préjugés, plus de différences entre les races et les nationalités, car la science n’a pas sur les yeux le même bandeau hermétique que la justice humaine” (134-135). Knowing that the transfusion will save his life but doom Fred’s impending marriage to Clarence, Joan begs the doctor to keep her identity a secret. In the end,
the truth again comes out accidentally; Fred first assumes it was Clarence who saved his life then he comes across papers in the doctor’s office and realizes it was actually Joan who provided the blood. Acknowledgement of arrival after the crossing occurs at this moment of realization.

Joan’s portrayal as the martyr in this novel, reiterated with the repetition of the images of and references to the Black Madonna throughout, is what leads to the transitional moment of the blood transfusion. The implications of the moment are that things are forever changed after the crossing, nothing can remain as it was: Joan can no longer remain in service to the Barclay’s, and Fred can no longer marry Clarence. What is worse by the societal norms of this story, while Fred’s life was saved, he has become tainted, as Clarence tells him at the end of the novel:

Clarence Clifton, immobile, muette, le visage aux traits fixes, devient d’une pâleur mortelle. Puis, la voix pleine de pitié, mais de cette pitié de déesse pour le simple mortel, elle dit, tranchante: — Pauvre Mr Barclay, ainsi, ayant son sang dans vos veines, vous êtes devenu un nègre blanc. Dans leur irréductible opposition, ces deux mots réunis marquent la fin de cette aventure, où le souvenir d’une ombre noire se mêle pour toujours à un bonheur impossible. (178)

Clarence ultimately stays unchanged in this moment, forever remaining attached to her upbringing. Joan eventually dissipates into the beyond, she escapes out of that world because she can no longer exist in that world. And yet, in saving people’s lives and refusing acknowledgement for doing so she plays up the notion of herself as a martyr and the blood transfusion can be read as an attempt to make the possible world she dreams of come into fruition. Indeed, at the very least, the doctor has changed his perspective on the matter.
5. Conclusion: Malleable Intersectionality

5.1 The Intersection Revisited

The back and forth, going and coming that is inherent to walkways, stairwells, and doorways shows border space is not always unidirectional. It is precisely in the possibility for pause and non-linear movements in this space where identities can be negotiated and coalitions can be formed. Mieke Bal writes about the negotiation on the borderline: “As a line, a border, be it political, geographical, linguistic, or cultural, keeps ‘them’ outside and encloses ‘us’ inside. As a negotiable territory, however, ‘they’ enter into the purview of ‘us’ and become partners in the turn-taking ‘we’ and ‘you’” (“Becoming the World Versus Identity Politics” 13). Indeed, the creation of community and links between groups of peoples with relatedly outsider identities serves to further illuminate power structures enacting on those and other groups at various intersections. We can examine intersectionality and the space of the intersection similarly to a crossroads or border space wherein one can take on multiple identities simultaneously. For intersectionality, the juncture is where two or more identities cross; one can be in-between multiple identity categories and also firmly planted within them on the intersection. And yet, like categories and power structures themselves, the intersection of these can shift and it is never stagnant.

Tiffany Lethabo King, in “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” writes about intersectionality as something malleable and opens this space up for how it can be used as a site of activism. She questions how it might function as a way of conceptualizing effects of power: as “a mode of critique, how does it, in
fact, destabilize the individual and the subject?” (132). What King calls the “back-and-forth oscillation” or “instability” of intersectionality also refers to the instability of categories:

“intersectionality’s [. . .] double moves that both deploy and collapse identity categories can be used by those committed to poststructural deconstruction and ‘radical’ on-the-ground politics” (134, my emphasis). Intersectionality as malleable and its possibility for activism is also addressed in Suzanne Keen’s chapter “Intersectional Narratology in the Study of Empathy,” in Narrative Theory Unbound, where she writes about how her use of intersectionality has the potential for social activism: “Like intersectional analyses of discrimination (Crenshaw), for which the concept was first formulated, my version of intersectional narratology seeks to understand why certain positions and concepts are privileged while others suffer from inattention or disparagement” (Warhol and Lanser 34). By using a flexible intersectional analysis, with historical and spatial components, feminist narratologists are able to put into question the use and status of terms and categories and their implications. Susan S. Lanser emphasizes the real material effects of these structures on identity: “Intersectional thinking would reject an approach to narrative that assumes identities to be predictable or predicative, yet would understand that narrative genealogies, along with our ways of thinking about them, are doubtless shaped by intersectional configurations” (Warhol and Lanser 28).

Illuminating, questioning and actively working to break down power structures are all key elements of feminism, as Maggie Humm writes in reference to the negotiation within border space before arrival into a new state of being: “Feminist criticism locates the relation of women’s literary experience to her life experience in a place of struggle: on the border between literary constructions and the turn towards transformation” (vii). Self-reflection, negotiation, and mediation are especially true with approaches using intersectionality:
The future of intersectionality studies will [. . .] be dependent on the rigor with which scholars harness the most effective tools of their trade to illuminate how intersecting axes of power and inequality operate to our collective and individual disadvantage and how these very tools, these ways of knowing, may also constitute structures of knowledge production that can themselves be the object of intersectional critique. (Cho et al. 796)

I continue to use an intersectional analysis in Chapters Three and Four in my project to understand the way things worked for certain populations who may no longer be alive to tell their stories. Contemplating intersecting axis of power influenced the who they were at given moments of time, or at least may have influenced their motivations and navigation of their worlds and realities. Looking at these writers and the characters they created, who navigate their own intersections of power structures, reveals larger structures of oppression, for “this interrogation must take place not only on the individual level but also at the macro level, examining how economic political, institutional, and ideological structures construct, perpetuate, and reify group identities” (Dill and Kohlman 21).

5.2 Arrival

As we saw in the “Cases” section, passing “into a new habitat or place of residence” as per the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “to immigrate,” indicates a movement over or through the borderline between place of origin and a set entrance point. This chapter is firmly situated in the border space of the journey itself and in this section, I purposely do not analyze what it means to finally make it across, or to arrive into a new state. In Chapters Three and Four I
shift my focus from individual identity to broader questions of what it means to arrive in and take up residence in France as a specific location, and I investigate the assimilationist ideals of that nation. Furthermore, I explore the concept of nationhood and citizenship and what it means to be French, which is especially of interest to my project as I look at the way these authors were allowed or denied admission to certain spaces that were created on the basis of long-ingrained, androcentric power structures within France.
III. IN AND OUT: ON IMPOSSIBLE ARRIVAL, IMPOSSIBLE RETURN, AND BECOMING AN OUTSIDER

The line between past and present is penetrable, but sometimes only to a certain point. The immigrant who comes to settle in a new place to take up residence uses specific techniques to jump back and forth between place of origin and place of residence; the borderline between the two is permeable in both directions. Yet, after claiming arrival, and conversely, claiming departure, it becomes clear that one can never fully arrive inside nor fully return outside of a place. One is trapped in place, yet the in-between can be used for one’s benefit. We can look at the borderline as an attempt to create binaries of here versus there, present versus past, and even us versus them. No one exists outside of binaries, categories, or labels, and yet not one of these precisely encapsulates everyone it designates. Like borders that are penetrable to a certain point, categorical distinctions are also penetrable, for they both constitute and are constituted by society. Binaries, like labels and categories, can leave their mark and have real implications for people who are marked by them. In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Kimberlé Crenshaw writes that her project’s most pressing problem is the values that are attached to certain categories and the “way those values foster and create social hierarchies” (298). Self-meaning is derived from labels: Nivedita Menon writes about positionality and how meaning can only be derived within those categories. The body, for her, is “not a simple physical object but is constructed by and takes its meaning from its positioning within specific social, cultural and economic practices” (69). Judith Butler also writes about inside versus outside in reference to language and linguistic structures, how one is never outside these structures: “I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I
determined by the language that makes this ‘I’ possible. This is a bind of self-expression, as I understand it. What it means is that you never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you” (Gender Trouble xxvi). Thus, the self is only comprehensible through categories or boundaries, rules that are always already in place. Yet, the line between the binary of “us” and of “them” is blurred because these lines are penetrable, and categories and labels can be used strategically; they can be ruptured from within, subverted by the ones who are marked as “insiders,” turning them into “outsiders,” making the categories themselves strange and disrupting the power structures they create.

In this chapter I look at the penetrable border in two ways: first, the immigrant’s flexibility in their capacity to cross back and forth, and second, for those who attempt to reside fully in the present, how origins and the past leak through and affect present situations and how the past simultaneously—and ultimately—becomes inaccessible. The authors in my project all attempt to jump back and forth between past and present, using writing as a way to make sense of each location, and they demonstrate the flexibility that they possess due to their having left place of origin and come to a new place. This chapter represents a blurry boundary between pre-crossing and after—does one ever get to an “other” side? Many parts of this chapter are similar to others; each section can be read as a different perspective on the same problem, thus blurring the lines between chapters in my project. I begin with: “Arrival In,” showing how one can claim an arrival into a new place and how the authors in my project establish arrival. Next, I undermine this section in “Impossible Arrival,” where due to one’s past, one can never fully arrive in a new place. In the following section, “Impossible Return,” I write about how there is nowhere to return, for the past is always unreachable. Finally, I write about the process of becoming strange
in “Becoming an Outsider,” where one is marked as “other” and begins to recognize oneself as such, ultimately leading to a crisis of the self and a rupture with origins.

1. Arrival Into

On était transplantés dans un autre espace-temps, un autre monde, celui de l’avenir probablement. [. . .] Ici Paris n’avait pas de réalité. (Ernaux, Les années 128)

1.1 Acknowledging Arrival

The actual transition into a new state, an acknowledgement of arrival, is represented in different ways. One must first depart from a place in order to arrive into a new place. There is a difference between arriving at something (a solid border) and arriving to something (an event) and arriving into something; and in this section I focus on the arrival “into.” For many of the authors in my project, this means arrival into the city of Paris, or into whichever place dreamt of in the là-bas border space. When does arrival occur? When has one arrived? Arrival, like identity, can be understood as a continuous process of becoming arrived, or as a series of multiple arrivals. However, arrival can also be described as an isolated moment. Each figure in my project articulates claims of arrival in distinct ways; sometimes the story of the crossed threshold is repeated throughout the novel, sometimes it is a fleeting reference, while other times it is never acknowledged.

After Annie Ernaux’s father’s death she invokes her entrance into the bourgeois world by admitting what she had to leave behind in order to make this crossing: “J’ai fini de mettre au jour
l’héritage que j’ai dû déposer au seuil du monde bourgeois et cultivé quand j’y suis entrée” (La place 111). For Ernaux, becoming bourgeois, or having crossed into this socioeconomic world that is different from the world of her childhood, is an event that she returns to throughout La place and in her other novels. After having made the crossing, Ernaux is aware of her new surroundings and cognizant of the fact that she has entered into a new world because it is so different from the world left behind. For example, once Ernaux traverses socioeconomic boundaries, she recognizes that she has arrived in a different place: “Quand j’ai commencé à fréquenter la petite-bourgeoisie d’Y. . . , on me demandait d’abord mes goûts, le jazz ou la musique classique, Tati ou René Clair, cela suffisait à me faire comprendre que j’étais passé dans un autre monde” (La place 65-66). She also realizes that she has finally completed this crossing when, on her way home from her father’s funeral, she is literally in motion from one place to another, on a train, in a linear movement with no return: “Dans le train du retour, le dimanche [. . .]. D’un seul coup, avec stupeur, ‘maintenant, je suis vraiment une bourgeoise’ et ‘il est trop tard’” (23). In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux refers to her name change after marriage as another acknowledgment of a moment of arrival into the bourgeoisie. The fact that she has officially changed her name after she has entered into marriage is simultaneously representative of her losing a part of her past, and also an acknowledgment by others that her marital status has shifted. What is more, she leaves a gap on the page after the following quote: “Voici la fille qui va entrer à la colonie,” as a way to create a space for the “fille de 58” that she is attempting to reconstruct in this novel, perhaps an attempt to give her back the space that was taken away with the loss of her maiden name. After the space she acknowledges the reality of this girl as she writes about her embourgeoisement: “Elle est réelle hors de moi, son nom est inscrit sur les registres de l’aérium de S s’ils ont été conservés. Annie Duchesne. [. . .] Duchesne, ce nom perdu
six ans plus tard avec légèreté, peut-être soulagement, à la mairie de Rouen, avalisant du même coup mon transfert dans le monde bourgeois et l’efficacement de S” (33-34).

Sound is important in the ways arrival is acknowledged in Josephine Baker’s works. Music especially is key to announcing arrival in her films. For example, in La sirène des tropiques the music and the color on the film shift when the French envoy arrives in the “tropics”: the piano changes to guitar and the film color shifts from purple to yellow. Of course, in a silent film the subtle variations such as the music are important in helping the spectators follow the plot since there is an absence of spoken dialogue and limited text. The first appearance of Baker in this film is an image of her laughing in an over-animated manner. She is equated with the animals in the area: she saves a cat from a well, there is always a dog next to her, or she is on the floor playing with the animals. Indeed, the Baker as friend-of-the-animals trope appears in each of her other films as well and it plays up her appearance of infantine innocence while it can simultaneously be viewed as a way of portraying her as less-than human as she plays the roles of colonial “other.” At the end of La sirène des tropiques, Papitou has found her calling as a dancing-hall performer in Paris. When Baker as Papitou arrives on the stage in Paris, the intertitle announces her arrival: “Soudain, dominant le rythme fou du jazz, un cri . . . le dernier cri de la civilisation moderne, Voici Papitou.” The music on the stage changes when Papitou enters and instead of solo piano or guitar, there is a full jazz band with drums. Her costume changes (from short overalls to big feathers as a skirt) mirror the dance and music changes as Baker does the Charleston and then finally arrives at her own unique style of dancing.

Baker’s arrivals in her performances highlight her freedom on the stage. For Irène Némirovsky, arrival is also freeing, and signs of arrival signify the difficulty of the journey across, which makes the transition all the sweeter. In Le vin de solitude, for example, which is a
*Bildungsroman* that echoes the author’s journey from Russia to France, there is the story of a young girl, Hélène, who has complicated relations with her family. She is finally free of this burden at the very end of the book and her path forward is made clear as she enters into a state of new-found autonomy: “Elle se leva, et, à ce moment, les nuages s’écartèrent; entre les piliers de l’Arc de Triomphe le ciel bleu parut et éclaira son chemin” (337).

In the eleventh section of Nathalie Sarraute’s *Tropismes*, “Une femme est assoiffée d’‘intellectualité,’” the opening line indicates that one event has happened before the other: “Elle avait compris le secret. Elle avait flairé où se cachait ce qui devait être pour tous le trésor véritable. Elle connaissait ‘l’échelle des valeurs’” (69). The arrival into this section is articulated doubly in the pluperfect tense, acknowledging that “elle” had already arrived at a certain understanding. Another section depicts a different sort of arrival using the word “now” as an anchor: “Maintenant, elle le savait. Elle s’y tiendrait. On ne l’en délogerait plus. Elle écoutait, elle absorbait, gloutonne, jouisseuse et âpre. Rien ne devait lui échapper de ce qui leur appartenait: les galeries de tableaux, tous les livres qui paraissaient . . . Elle connaissait tout cela” (69-70). The woman attempts to go further and actually possess the intellectuality that she desires: “Dans les recoins les plus secrets, dans les trésors les mieux dissimulés, elle fouillait de ses doigts avides. Toute ‘intellectualité.’ Il la lui fallait. Pour elle. Pour elle, car elle savait maintenant le véritable prix des choses. Il lui fallait l’‘intellectualité’” (70). Finally, the woman arrives at an ownership of intellectuality: “‘C’est si beau,’ disait-elle, en ouvrant d’un air pur et inspiré ses yeux où elle allumait une ‘étincelle de divinité’” (71). The arrival into this possession is articulated with the subtle spark in her eyes and this elusive moment is exactly the Sarrautien type of arrival that would not necessarily be apparent in real life but that the reader is able to experience in the slow-moving form that is Sarraute’s tropism.
Another example of the measured arrival is in *Portrait d’un inconnu*, where an arrival is described over multiple pages. On pages 172-176 of this novel there are many paragraphs of description that blur the boundaries between interior movements, back and forths, past and present, him to her, her to him, and then finally, the woman enters the room and the plot moves forward. At the beginning of this section the protagonist is experiencing her potential arrival: “Lui, quand elle arrive, il sait qu’elle ne vient pas seule. [. . .] Quand elle apparaît dans l’encadrement de la porte” (172). Then, after pages of text, there is a gap on the page, and she enters: “Quand elle entre, il ne tourne même pas la tête de son côté” (176). A prolonged arrival narrated with stretch narrative tempo leaves the reader with no reference points and feelings of uncertainty and even improbability of the event.

Unlike the above examples where the crossing is elongated and a hesitation to cross is described in detail, in *Enfance* there is no depiction of the crossing and only the acknowledgment of arrival, first at the border: “Je me souviens parfaitement d’une petite gare entourée de neige scintillante où nous avons attendu dans une salle éclairée par de grandes baies, les uniformes des employés avaient changé, je savais que nous étions à la frontière” (109). After this description of the border there is a gap on the page and then: “Et puis Berlin” (109). In this section Sarraute writes about her arrival into Germany and then France from Russia, the home she left behind with her mother to move in with her father in Paris. And yet, while she left Russia, there are still parts of that country that appear to her in France, making France seem foreign. For example, as she enters into a room she is reminded of home through hearing the Russian accent: “Je frappe à la porte, j’entends ‘Entrez!’ et d’un seul coup, rien ne m’est plus familier que cette voix . . . grave, à peine un peu raque, et aussi cette prononciation où seulement le ‘r’ roulé et une certaine intonation révèlent l’accent russe” (250-251). The swift realization of this familiarity is possible
through hearing a voice from a time and place that she has left after choosing to move to France and the sudden familiarity as a remarkable moment heightens her acknowledgment of having arrived in a new country.

1.2 Foreign Lands

Upon arrival in a foreign land, one’s experience is heightened by the newness of everything. For example, in Némirovsky’s *Le bal* when Antoinette is allowed to stay up an hour later than normal in order to help her parents address invitations to the party, she experiences this amplified awareness: “Ce soir-là, Antoinette, que l’Anglaise emmenait se coucher d’ordinaire sur le coup de neuf heures, resta au salon avec ses parents. Elle y pénétrait si rarement qu’elle regarda avec attention les boiseries blanches et les meubles dorés, comme lorsqu’elle entrait dans une maison étrangère” (25). Arrival into an actual foreign country can show that things are not the same as they were at home. For example, in Némirovsky’s *Les chiens et les loups*, Ada recognizes that imposed boundaries between groups do not exist in the same way in France as they existed in Ukraine: “L’appartement de Mme Mimi sous-loué, elles trouvèrent un petit logement de trois pièces dans ce quartier des Ternes où la bourgeoisie et la galanterie se rencontrent et souvent se confondent, comme les deux affluents d’un même fleuve” (129).

The shift from childhood to adulthood in the transitional state of adolescence includes multiple departures and then arrivals into adulthood as a sort of foreign land. Many of the characters depicted as arriving in the works mentioned in this chapter are adolescents who are already making the transition between child and adult, and the journey to a foreign land mimics the journey into adulthood and also speeds up the process of becoming adult. Ernaux, in
Mémoire de fille, for example, writes about the unification of the experience at the summer camp where each child who has left home for the first time recognizes each other child as similar: “Je la vois arrivant à la colonie comme une pouluche échappée de l’enclos, seule et libre pour la première fois, un peu craintive. Avide de rencontrer ses semblables, ceux qu’elle imagine comme ses semblables. Qui la reconnaîtront comme leur semblable” (29). Indeed, leaving home is like leaving a safe haven: “Dire: C’est la première fois qu’elle quitte ses parents. Elle n’est jamais sortie de son trou” (25). After arriving, she remarks the novelty of her surroundings: “Tout est nouveau pour elle” (39). Ernaux captures her experience encountering the foreignness of the adult world later as being disconcerting: “Il dit des mots qu’elle n’a jamais entendus, qui la font passer du monde des adolescentes rieuses sous cape d’obscénités chuchotées à celui des hommes, qui lui signifient son entrée dans le sexuel pur: Je me suis masturbé cet après midi. Toutes des gouines dans la boîte où tu es, non?” (45). Ernaux’s word choice here, with the contrast between her usual language and that of the foreign land of adulthood shows that newness is not always easy nor pleasant. And yet, the summer camp is the place of freedom to become adult for the “fille de 58”: “Elle est éblouie par sa liberté, l’étendue de sa liberté. Elle gagne de l’argent pour la première fois, achète ce dont elle a envie, des gâteaux, du dentifrice Émail Diamant rouge. Elle ne veut rien d’autre que cette vie. Danser, rire, chahuter, chanter des chansons paillardes, flirter. Elle est dans la légèreté d’être déliée des yeux de sa mère” (59). With her distance and understanding as an adult looking back on that transitional period, Ernaux quickly undermines this freedom with a parenthesis directly after the quote from above: “(Une image moins glorieuse contredit pourtant la constance de ce bonheur. Celle d’une fille titubant légèrement un soir, seule, dans le couloir qui mène aux toilettes situées près du réfectoire à colonnes, se demandant, dans sa conscience comme rapetissée en une flaque au-dessus d’un
Indeed, the arrival from child to adult is multiple, with shifting back and forth between the two worlds before finally (if ever) fully arriving in adulthood.

Arrival into a new state may be marked with darkness and foreboding signs of dangers that lie ahead. In *Les feux de l’automne*, Némirovsky uses images of changing weather and the passing of time to mark the entrance of France itself to a new state during the Nazi Occupation: “La longue soirée s’écoulait. La neige tombait. A intervalles réguliers, une lumière éclairait l’espace et les fils barbelés brillaient alors de toutes leurs petites pointes aiguës, comme une forêt de cactus” (326). The edge of this state is marked with a thorny barrier, one that will leave its mark on those who make it across. In Némirovsky’s *Suite française*, the opening of the “Dolce” section describes the arrival of the Germans in France:


Némirovsky chooses weather references to describe the foreboding arrival of the Germans. In juxtaposition to Easter Sunday, a day of rebirth, resurrection, and celebration of spring, the Germans arrive like thunder in the cold rain. Indeed, the sound of the foreigners arriving is described as deafening: “Il étaient si nombreux qu’une espèce de tonnerre ininterrompu ne cessa de résonner sous les voûtes de l’église pendant tout le temps que dura le sermon du curé” (308).
Their arrival reverberates throughout the countryside, as Mme Angellier reacts: “Quand on entendait, près de la fenêtre, le pas ou la voix d’un soldat allemand, elle frémissait tout entière, depuis l’extrémité de son petit pied chaussé d’une bottine aiguë jusqu’au front couronné de nobles bandeaux. —Dépêchez-vous, dépêchez-vous, ils arrivent, disait-elle” (310). Another sign of the Germans’ arrival in France is the change to “l’heure des Allemands,” which Némirovsky writes about to highlight the changing times and the entrance into a new, uncharted state where even the clocks were changed to an hour later and everyone was forced to live on German time.

Sometimes, the decision to move forward and arrive into a new state can be freeing, and one does not look back after the crossing: “Et c’est sans aucune arrière-pensée, du moins à ce qu’il me semblait, dans cet était d’heureuse exaltation, qu’après avoir longtemps erré dans mes rues préférées, ces ruelles paisibles, intimes, si douces, des villes du nord, je me suis dirigé lentement vers le musée” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 84, my emphasis). In Portrait d’un inconnu, after the protagonist enters into the museum and stands in front of the portrait, he experiences a sense of freedom and openness, of endless possibilities on the horizon: “Je me sentais libre tout à coup. Délivré. [. . . ] J’étais libre. Les amarres étaient coupées. Je vogueais, poussé vers le large” (87). No longer bogged down with the constraints of the past, what lies ahead is freeing. Similarly, Baker’s characters in her films all experience freedom when they arrive in France for the first time, in awe of the newness of their surroundings. Soon, real circumstances affect the newness and the only true place for freedom becomes the stage, where performances of arrival are multiplied and distorted to artificial arrivals in the false world of the stage in a foreign land.

Ernaux’s arrival into a foreign land occurs with her entrance into university, which is made possible thanks to scholarships she receives. Ernaux depicts her father’s incapacity to
understand her new world through his references to the differences between his work and hers. For example, she does not work with her hands as he does, and he refuses to acknowledge her scholarships: “Mais n’osant pas non plus avouer que j’étais boursière, on aurait trouvé qu’ils avaient bien de la chance que l’État me paie à ne rien faire de mes dix droits” (*La place* 92). Ernaux describes her married life and her arrival into the bourgeoisie as being both physically and metaphorically further away from her family of origin: “J’ai glissé dans cette moitié du monde pour laquelle l’autre n’est qu’un décor” (*La place* 96). The image of slipping or sliding into a new reality is a fitting description of fluid arrivals that are multiple, continuous, and impossible to differentiate one from the other. One sure sign of arrival, however, is a new and different perception of reality experienced by the one who has arrived. For those who are able to successfully cross into a new state, the foreignness of everything can be overwhelming; one may feel no longer at home. Indeed, the border-crosser becomes aware of their new surroundings and cognizant of the fact that they have entered into a new world.

1.3 Paris

Each figure in my project has a connection to Paris as a specific place to which they as authors arrived and they also write their characters as those who have arrived in Paris. Because Paris is often portrayed as a mythical, romantic location, arrival into this city is a different sort of arrival than to a different foreign land or state. For Ernaux, her entrance into Paris changes her perception of reality and time becomes problematic: “En migrant de la province à la région parisienne, le temps s’était accéléré. Le sentiment de la durée n’était plus le même” (*Les années* 127). Paris is a city with no limits; arrival into Paris is arrival into a place with no bounds or with
frayed edges—it's influence reaches through the horizon into nameless other places. One can feel lost trying to find where Paris ends and the rest of the world begins:

Plus loin, il y avait des espaces herbeux, des immeubles de verre et des tours administratives, une dalle piétonne, d'autres lotissements reliés par des passerelles au-dessus des voies de circulation. Il était impossible de se figurer les limites de la ville. On se sentait flotter dans une espace trop vaste, l’existence se diluait. Se promener là n’avait pas de sens, à la rigueur courir en survêtement sans rien regarder autour de soi. (Ernaux, Les années 127)

Ernaux continues, designating Paris as a completely different world, foreign to those not from there: “On était transplantés dans un autre espace-temps, un autre monde, celui de l’avenir probablement. […] On se savait des milliers d’individus ici, des milliers jusqu’à la Défense, on ne pensait jamais aux autres. Ici Paris n’avait pas de réalité” (128). Paris, as Ernaux describes it, exists in its own orbit outside of the time, place, and reality of other cities.

Baker portrays multiple arrivals in Paris as a particular place where she can perform on the stage. Not unlike her own experience of arriving in France and on the stage in Paris, the characters she performs in her films also come into their own during these performances. In the scene in Zou Zou, when we see Zouzou in Paris for the first time she is dressed as a nun and parading around with lots of children. The Eiffel Tower and the Bastille are shown in the background in the opening Paris scenes as if to announce that she cannot possible be anywhere else but Paris. In these scenes, juxtaposed with the images of Parisian monuments and landscape, Zouzou teaches the children dances from her native country. She is approached by two Parisian men who see her dancing and they tell her they own a nightclub called “Le ventre de Paris” and ask: “voulez-vous faire du music-hall?” Zouzou does not know what this is, and they explain:
“C’est un paradis où l’on gagne des fortunes avec leurs jambes.” She only accepts to go perform after asking if André, her long-lost companion, frequents music halls and they tell her that everyone in the world goes. Juxtapositions of the worlds outside of Paris with symbols that are the epitome of Paris is how Baker’s arrivals are represented in her films: through stereotypes of each place.

In Sarraute’s *Portrait d’un inconnu*, Paris is depicted as a portrait of itself in references to postcard-like images of the city: “Un étranger qui marche dans une ville inconnue. Et, comme on fait souvent dans les villes inconnues, appliquer sur les choses et maintenir en avant des images puisées dans des réminiscences, littéraires ou autres, des souvenirs de tableaux ou même de cartes postales dans le genre de celles où l’on peut voir écrit au verso: Paris. Bords de la Seine. Un square” (28). Later on in the novel, there is a reference to Charles Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* and the desire for a city, which the protagonist claims as Paris for him: “Et c’est là déjà, cependant, que l’ambivalence a dû jouer. Sournoisement, comme toujours, à mon insu: dans le choix même de cette ville. Pourtant elle me semblait, cette ville, être tout repos, Elle offrait les plus solides garanties. Elle était, elle avait toujours été pour moi, la ville de l’*Invitation au Voyage*” (83). The reference to Paris and Baudelaire as a flâneur in the city is depicted in the above quote as representing freedom, a place of respite, and a place one desires to visit. In Sarraute’s other work, Paris is not represented in the same sort of light. For example, in *Enfance*, in reference to her childhood back-and-forths between France and Russia, her arrival in Paris is tainted by what she has left behind and the normally beautiful train station is instead foreboding and sinister: “Il me semble que je n’ai fait que pleurer jusqu’à notre arrivée à Paris à la gare du Nord dont la grisaille jaunâtre, l’immense voûte vitrée, ont pour la première fois un air sinistre” (111). In the same book, Sarraute represents how she is attached to Paris with space on the page
after the partial ellipsis at the end of the following quote: “et je sentais confusément qu’on me soulevait, m’emportait . . .” (19). After a gap of a few lines, she continues: “Exactement à gauche des marches qui montent vers la large allée conduisant à la place Médicis” (19-20). The juxtaposition in this quote between being lifted or transported with being anchored or pulled down to physical references to the city is doubled in her split self that is narrating the entire story. The undermining of the narration in this instance expresses the uncertainty in arrival into a new place where there is simultaneously an anchor to the concrete, and a feeling of being lost or carried away.

Némirovsky’s characters also arrive at home in Paris, where they discover a new world that is not as freeing as it may have seemed before arriving. Multiple issues with visas, navigation of the city, and the French language are all apparent in Némirovsky’s works. After arrival in Paris, for her characters there is almost always a pull toward the past, a cautious treading in the new place of residence. For example, when Ada discovers where Harry lives in the city: “Machinalement Ada se pencha à la fenêtre et regarda l’avenue qui montait vers la place de l’Étoile. Il était étrange de penser qu’à Paris il était plus proche d’elle que dans leur ville natale, où les séparaient la ville basse, l’interminable boulevard planté de peupliers et les collines” (Les chiens et les loups 134). The fact that in Paris they are closer to each other but remain worlds apart shows some of the realities that Némirovsky depicts of differences between social classes that are less apparent than in Ukraine but still in place in Paris. Ada remains cautious: “Mais il fallait prendre garde de ne pas rapporter de cette promenade stupide sous une porte qui lui demeurait à jamais fermée, il fallait prendre garde de ne pas rapporter de là un détail concret, la forme d’un visage, une voix, un regard qui brusquement recréeraient le songe, lui donneraient la densité, l’éclat, la saveur du réel. Ainsi, près de deux ans passèrent” (135). Indeed,
Némirovsky shows that arrival in Paris means different things depending on one’s socio-economic status from where they originated and also what challenges they may face in their new home in Paris.

1.4 Arrival in the Novel

In *Les chiens et les loups*, Ada’s grandfather’s books provide her with an escape from the difficulty of her life into new, foreign worlds: “Les livres du grand-père étaient des ouvrages russes et des traductions de classiques anglais, allemands, et français. Tout un univers inconnu s’ouvrait devant Ada, et les couleurs en étaient si éclatantes que le monde réel pâlissait, disparaissait” (Némirovsky 63). As Ada arrives into the world of fiction the outside world disappears and provides her with necessary respite. This arrival into an escape through the novel is also apparent in Sarraute’s *Enfance* where her bedroom is the location from where she can enter into a novel:

> Voici enfin le moment attendu où je peux étaler le volume sur mon lit, l’ouvrir à l’endroit où j’ai été forcée d’abandonner . . . je m’y jette, je tombe . . . impossible de me laisser arrêter, retenir par les mots, par leur sens, leur aspect, par le déroulement des phrases, un courant invisible m’entraîne avec ceux à qui de tout mon être imparfait mais avide de perfection je suis attachée, à eux qui sont la bonté, la beauté, la grâce, la noblesse, la pureté, le courage mêmes . . . (266)

The ellipses in this passage act as pauses in the narration that magnify the moment of pure emotions that she experiences when entering into the novel as the story carries her away, off to a distant land that is only accessible within the covers of the book. In these examples we clearly
see two authors, Némirovsky and Sarraute, themselves dedicated readers, who know how to capture the moment of enthrallment that one experiences when arriving inside a new book.

Another sort of admittance into the novel, the epigraph, is more concrete for those who read any of the works in my project. Speaking about the novel’s physical borders, Gérard Genette writes about the notion of the paratext, and the possibilities within the undecided area of the blank space, what he calls the “‘vestibule’ qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d’entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin. ‘Zone indécise’ entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse” (Seuils 7-8). Epigraphs provide a signpost moment within this zone where arrival at the beginning of the story is acknowledged. What is more, epigraphs can also provide strategic ways in which to understand what is to come. Ernaux uses epigraphs that are keys to unlocking each text, or they are also mini-summaries of the novel in its entirety. In La place, the epigraph by Jean Genet reads: “Je hasarde une explication: écrire c’est le dernier recours quand on a trahi” (9). This quotation confirms Ernaux’s attempts at the use of writing as a process to pay homage to her father’s life, since she betrayed his place by departing from it. In Mémoire de fille, one of the epigraphs is from the band Supertramp: “I know it sounds absurd but please tell me who I am,” which indeed sums up the entire plot of the novel of her search for a lost self of 1958 (9). The epigraph in Les années, a quote from José Ortega y Gasset, reads: “Nous n’avons que notre histoire et elle n’est pas à nous” (9). This also sums up the novel as a play on a collective autobiography that indeed it is. There is also the reference to “nous” and “elle,” even though the “elle” refers to the noun histoire it still can be read as a double of the “elle” of Les années: it is her story, it is her, it is any her, it is a collective.

A lack of epigraph does not disorient the reader, but it changes the way the reader enters into the story. For example, Gretchen S. Besser writes about how Sarraute requires a different
kind of readerly participation than other authors do: “To claim his attention and ensure his active involvement in the fictional process, Sarraute deliberately removes from the reader’s grasp all the familiar props of plot and character. She substitutes instead a strange, disturbing world in which appearances are deceptive and a conventional reality is revealed as a trompe-l’oeil artifice of a delusion and sleight-of-hand” (Besser 31). Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to Portrait d’un inconnu, also comments on the reader’s experience with Sarraute’s work:

Ces quelques remarques visent seulement à guider le lecteur dans ce livre difficile et excellent; elles ne cherchent pas à en épuiser le contenu. Le meilleur de Nathalie Sarraute, c’est son style trébuchant, tâtonnant, si honnête, si plein de repentir, qui approche de l’objet avec des précautions pieuses, s’en écarter soudain par une sorte de pudeur ou par timidité devant la complexité des choses et qui, en fin de compte, nous livre brusquement le monstre tout baveux, mais presque sans y toucher, par la vertu magique d’une image. (14)

Perhaps Sartre’s preface serves to shape the way the reader enters into Sarraute’s writing, and perhaps it is meant to help guide the reader across and into her prose. The fact that it was Sartre who wrote the preface already claimed the arrival of Portrait d’un inconnu to a certain elevated status and importance.

Prefaces can orient the reader to a specific way of arriving into a text. In addition to a nineteen-page preface in the Denoël edition of Némirovsky’s Suite française, there are multiple other paratextual elements before the preface that also guide the reader. The first page after the title page includes a short paragraph that describes Némirovsky’s life as an author in exile and her tragic death:
Irène Némirovsky fut contrainte à un premier exil lorsque, après la Révolution russe, les Soviets mirent à prix la tête de son père. Après quelques années d’errance en Finlande et en Suède, elle s’installe à Paris. Maîtrisant sept langues, riche de ses expériences et passionnée de littérature, elle a déjà beaucoup publié lorsqu’en 1929 elle envoie à Bernard Grasset le manuscrit de *David Golder*. Et Irène Némirovsky devient cette égérie littéraire—injustement oubliée pendant des années—fêtée par Morand, Drieu La Rochelle, Cocteau. Il ne faudra pas dix ans pour que ce rêve tourne au cauchemar: victime de l’“aryanisation” de l’édition, Irène Némirovsky n’a plus le droit de publier sous son nom tandis que Michel, son mari, est interdit d’exercer sa profession. Puis la guerre lui arrive à nouveau son foyer, puis la vie. Emportée sur les routes de l’exode, elle trouve refuge dans un village du Morvan, avant d’être déportée à Auschwitz où elle est assassinée en 1942. (7)

On the very next page is an image of her manuscript journal from 1942 of the novel in progress. Opposite this page is Denise Epstein’s (Némirovsky’s daughter) dedication of the novel: “Sur les traces de ma mère de de mon père, pour ma sœur Élisabeth Gille, pour mes enfants et petits-enfants, cette Mémoire à transmettre, et pour tous ceux qui ont connu et connaissent encore aujourd’hui le drame de l’intolérance” (9). The reader is steered in a specific direction as they enter into this novel, and due to the elements that are unmistakably placed at the beginning of the text, and even if one decides to skip the preface, it seems impossible to miss one of these other elements that inject the novel with information about Némirovsky’s life and death.

The preface to Baker’s *Mon sang dans tes veines* was written by Baker alone. She includes her own interrogation of the origins of skin color and writes that she knows that Joan
like any other of the “petites filles de Saint-Louis qui étaient toutes noires. Était-ce parce que nous habitions dans un quartier plein d’usines qui fûment [sic]?” (3). The soot washes off in the river and she wonders what actually marks them as different: “Mais ils redevenaient blancs en sortant de l’eau du fleuve” (4). Joan realizes then that it must be blood that makes people different, but this, too, is impossible. At the beginning of the novel itself, there is a story of a black swan who enters into a white world that mirrors Joan’s experience in the Barclay’s house: “arriva du dehors, de la vie réelle, dans l’Empire blanc . . . Symbole d’une tristesse muette. Les cygnes s’effarouchèrent d’abord, lorsque le cygne noir s’approcha d’eux, puis ils l’accueillirent comme un ami, celui qui de l’autre monde, s’égara dans l’Empire Blanc” (20). She wonders how the swan feels living in its new world: “Le cygne noir a-t-il peur de vivre dans l’Empire des blancs?” (21). At the beginning of each chapter there are print images in black and white that depict some of the animals and events of the story. For example, the start of Chapter Ten shows the black and the white swans sitting together. Baker’s portrait is also printed after her preface and her face is on the title page of the novel as though to highlight both her omnipresence in the narrative and in the physical book.
2. Impossible Arrival

Je me suis pliée au désir du monde où je vis, qui s’efforce de vous faire oublier les souvenirs du monde d’en bas comme si c’était quelque chose de mauvais goût. (Ernaux, *La place* 73)

2.1 Societal Impossibilities

Even if one has physically entered into a new space, crossed a country’s border for example, one still may never be capable of fully arriving. In this section I focus on the idea of impossible arrival meaning that even if one can pass into a new place one nevertheless remains “outside” of an unchanging definition of a particular identity. Julia Kristeva writes in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* about the streaks of bad luck the foreigner will encounter that make him or her

lisse et dur comme un caillou, toujours prêt à poursuivre sa course infinie, plus loin, ailleurs. Le but (professionnel, intellectuel, affectif) que certains se donnent dans cette fugue débridée est déjà une trahison de l’étrangeté, car en se choisissant un programme, l’étranger se propose une trêve ou un domicile. Au contraire, selon la logique extrême de l’exil, tous les buts devraient se consumer et se détruire dans la folle lancée de l’errant vers un ailleurs toujours repoussé, inassouvi, inaccessible. (15)

Arrival is always impossible and the task of the foreigner to find themselves at home is difficult, never-ending, and even dangerous. Each of the figures in my project portray the path of endeavoring to arrive as being as Kristeva describes it: always inaccessible. Even though the task is impossible, each author writes characters who will not give up on the attempt at arriving.
Instead of being a singular moment, arrival becomes a performative act; the more arrival is practiced, the more an identity of one who has arrived takes shape, although it remains an unreachable goal.

In Némirovsky’s *Le bal*, there are themes of attempts to fit into society and trying to keep up appearances in order to do so. Antoinette’s parents become obsessed with fitting into their newfound wealthy socioeconomic place and from Antoinette’s perspective, they end up looking ridiculous. It is clear that despite their best attempts, they will never arrive in a place of belonging within this circle. Antoinette does not understand where the money came from: “Et puis, ils étaient devenus riches un beau jour, tout d’un coup, elle n’avait jamais bien pu comprendre comment” (19-20). The parents attempt to show off their new money by throwing a ball, an event that Antoinette never remembers them organizing in the past. One of the ways in which her parents display their newfound and newly-created societal expectations is that they begin to use the formal vous with each other, but only front of their servants: “‘Est-ce que vous venez, mon cher ami?’ dit-elle à voix haute en se tournant vers son mari, car le domestique desservait dans la pièce voisine, et devant, lui, depuis plusieurs mois, les Kampf se disaient ‘vous’” (26). Highlighting the boundary that the parents have attempted to create only serves to illuminate the absurdity of the ceremony of attempting to create a formal distance between themselves and their servants that did not exist before. On the night of the ball no one else arrives except for Isabelle, Antoinette’s piano teacher, because Antoinette destroyed the other invitations. The parents react to Isabelle’s presence at the ball:

—Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mais qu’est-ce qu’ils font? chuchota Mme Kampf avec agitation: que le diable emporte cette vieille folle, ajout-a-t-elle presque à voix haute, et, tout aussitôt, elle applaudit et cria en riant:
—Ah! Charmant, charmant; je ne savais pas que vous dansiez comme cela, Isabelle.

—Mais elle danse comme Joséphine Baker répondit Kampf à l’autre bout du salon. (119-120)

Awkwardness ensues and the reader is privy to all parts of the conversation thanks to the heterodiegetic narration that is describing Antoinette’s perspective from where she is hiding under the table and eavesdropping on the conversation. At the end, the parents continue to act like children as the grand plans for the ball fall apart and they never quite arrive where they desire to be in society.

Antoinette’s parents may have arrived at some aspects of high society, possessing enough money to play the part, but they were never able to fully arrive in that desired place. The same is true in many cases of impossible arrivals—partial arrivals may occur, but never full arrivals. Ernaux, for example, writes about physical arrival of waves of people from the provinces to the city in French society:

Des mouvements de déplacement parcouraient la société en tous sens, les paysans descendaient des montagnes vers les vallées, les étudiants déportés du centre des villes montaient dans des campus sur les collines, partageaient à Nanterre la même boue que les immigrés des bidonvilles. [. . .] Mais ce n’était pas d’être ensemble que les gens avaient envie, seulement du chauffage central, de murs clairs et d’une salle de bains. (Les années 91-92)

While the body may arrive in a certain place, acceptance and integration (i.e. arrival) into society may never occur. In her novels, Ernaux continuously references her own experience of that same movement from rural to urban, from working class to bourgeois, as though announcing it is a
performative act that further distances herself from the past. Indeed, this repetitive act is required in order to continue the attempt at arrival. And yet, as Ernaux points out in *Les années*, the harder one tries, the more impossible it becomes to succeed at arrival: “Plus on était immergés dans ce qu’on disait être la réalité, le travail, la famille, plus on éprouvait un sentiment d’irréalité” (95).

In Baker’s *Mon sans dans tes veines*, under Jim Crow laws in the United States there is an impossibility to arrive at equality between different races. The entire novel is a tension between Baker’s idealism of equality and integration that is impossible to achieve because of how deeply engrained those laws are in society. Joan looks at herself in the mirror and realizes the hopelessness of her ever becoming equal to Fred: “Elle aperçut soudain son profil entier dans une des grandes glaces. —Qu’aurais-je, pauvre moi, à vouloir ressembler à un garçon? même si je pouvais devenir un Fred Barclay, devrais-je songer à rivaliser? J’ai été créée pour être une petite Jô, toute simple, il faut jusqu’à la mort, rester la même chose” (53-54). The end of the novel portrays the doctor who hesitates to perform the blood transfusion that will save Fred’s life. Baker writes about the possibility of arriving at a point of full equality in science and medicine, but that this is not yet possible in social justice: “Dans la science, il n’y a plus de préjugés, plus de différences entre les races et les nationalités, car la science n’a pas sur les yeux le même bandeau hermétique que la justice humaine” (135). After Fred wakes up from the transfusion, he and Clarence attempt to comprehend who could have possibly given Fred the blood to save his life, because they know it was not Clarence. Joan as savior was impossible for them to recognize because of the repercussions that would ensue from this truth. Their conversation ends and the last lines of the chapter, before the ellipsis that fragments the page, reads: “Tous deux devant l’énigme impénétrable, restent interdits et muets. Le problème
angoissant se pose dans le dédale de leurs appréhensions, appréhensions que précisent une jalousie naissante, et l’ombre d’une déception” (157). The great tragedy in this novel is not Joan’s place in the house as a servant but the bigger picture of the oppressiveness of the laws themselves and Clarence and Fred’s incapability of accepting the mixing of blood even though the transfusion saved Fred’s life.

Baker often performs arrival into certain identities that are of a different social order than her origins, and yet she is never capable of actually arriving into those identities. For example, the film Zou Zou opens with Zouzou, a little black girl who stares at herself and smiles in the mirror and white children come to the window and say she looks strange, thus undermining her view of herself as pleasing. After this, Zouzou puts on white powder in a woman’s dressing room before she is chased out of it, attempting to shift her appearance to fit into society. Zouzou never arrives at full acceptance: at the end of the film, when she has become a stage performer, we see her on the stage still dressing up to fit in by wearing a fancy dress with fur and sequins. In this scene, she sings the song “C’est lui,” which is about unrequited love: yet another impossible thing to attain. Zouzou remains stuck in her place in society and never arrives at the love she desires; the film ends celebrating her one hundredth performance and she swings in a cage and sings dressed as a bird in a cage longing for Haiti. Baker’s ability to play multiple “others” displays her flexibility as an actress and that reveals the shifting grounds and possibilities for change that are actually latent in societal norms: “The only authentic thing we can locate in that performance is the virtuosity of movement—a virtuosity that does not allow Baker to transcend racial, gender, or national differences, but that, counterintuitively, precisely reveals those distinctions to be built on transferable disembodiment and disarticulation” (Cheng 163). Although Baker never saw the equality she longed for, and through her performances she never
arrived outside of the constraints society put on her, the performative acts she expressed on the
stage and in life, for example with her rainbow tribe of adopted children, reveal the possibilities
for change even in a process of continual non-arrivals.

2.2 Peripheral Space

Avtar Brah writes about attempts at arrival in a place to call home in *Cartographies of Diaspora* and how “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while
taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a ‘homeland.’ That distinction is
important, not least because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’” (16). In this section
I focus on the notion of “homing desire” specifically because it precludes a full arrive and a full
return. One of the key homing techniques is the use of peripheral space to create a place of
belonging for oneself after a border crossing. The part of settling or arriving into a place that is
not one’s own, as per the definition I am using of the verb to immigrate, occurs frequently in
peripheral space. This type of space is both inside and outside, at the edge, but still within, and it
is also a unique space to which one can be banished or within which one may seek refuge.
Eccentricity can be understood as outside of certain societal parameters such as race, gender, or
class, for example. The periphery can be border space where grounds are shifting and there is
possibility for change. And yet, peripheral space also represents what can never entirely be
accessed in the center; while the periphery is outside, it is still attached to the center’s societal
rules and regulations and the center can penetrate the periphery.

In *Mon sang dans tes veines*, Joan finds freedom outside the oppressive center of the
house space: “Au lieu de la véranda, elle choisit un grand chêne du parc pour y rêver” (Baker
What is not permitted in the house may be permitted on the periphery, for example, Joan must leave the house if she wants to read; she goes to see le curé Carter to borrow books since they are prohibited to her from the house. If there is a periphery, there must be a center or multiple centers. In the film *Zou Zou*, the nightclub where Zouzou performs is an example of a peripheral space in that it is like the jazz club: it is a nighttime space where, like at festivals and parties, normal rules are bent or nonexistent. What is noteworthy in the film is that the name of the nightclub, “Le ventre de Paris,” which is also a reference to Émile Zola’s novel of the same name. The nightclub’s name claims it as the center of the city and Zouzou penetrates the center and attempts to make it her own, but can never quite escape this space, just as she never quite arrives at belonging in the city.

In Baker’s films, peripheral space is where performances of her true self can take place. There are many references to performances that can only happen within peripheral space, that is, space outside of normative parameters, such as in the boat or within the jazz club. The stage provides a place that, through music and theatrical performances, Bakers’ characters perform multiple identities. In the film *Princesse Tam Tam*, for example, the main character Alwina has been brought from Tunisia and crowned the “Princess of Palindor.” Her critics, who are Max’s wife’s friends, arrive at a jazz club where they see Alwina who is dancing and singing in a very unique, Bakerienne, manner. She dances freely, and in the eyes of the French women, this dance makes her look, as they say, exotic and savage. The women set out to destroy Alwina’s new identity as princess and undermine her reputation by plotting to make her dance like that again at a party at the Maharajah’s house later on in the film, thus revealing her true character. They hope to publically embarrass Max and destroy the public’s admiration for the false princess. At the end, when Alwina dances again at the Maharajah’s party it seems as though the performance is
no longer a part of the film’s storyline but is happening outside of it, on the outskirts of reality. Indeed, the ending scenes on stage in each of Baker’s films, *Princesse Tam Tam*, *Zou Zou*, and *La sirène des tropiques*, all include stage performances that exist outside of, or at the periphery of each of these films.

Peripheral means both “at the edge” and “outside of.” For those operating at the edge there are different levels of acceptance and/or precarity that become possible. Some periphery-dwellers, like many of the characters in Némirovsky’s novels, may never leave the edge, even after having arrived at a center such as Paris. For example, Clara Asfar, the wife of the doctor Dario in *Le maître des âmes*, forever remains on the outskirts of Dario’s story. She is only mentioned a few times in the text and is almost always linked to her non-French origins. Even her son does not understand her: “Elle parlait en russe. Daniel ne comprenait pas cette langue” (273). Clara’s banishment to the peripheral space of the story mirrors her inability to penetrate the center, which her husband ultimately is able to accomplish, but only when he leaves his morals and family behind, which she refuses to do. Others, such as Ada in *Les chiens et les loups*, who is deported back to Ukraine, are relegated so far outside that they are forced to return to their country of origin.

The periphery is a place where one can arrive at common ground. Sartre, in his preface to *Portrait d’un inconnu*, writes about Sarraute’s project of finding common ground in the abject, or in the peripheral: “Sarraute a une vision protoplasmique de notre univers intérieur: ôtez la pierre du lieu commun, vous trouverez des coulées, des baves, des mucus, des mouvements hésitants, amiboïdes. Son vocabulaire est d’une richesse incomparable pour suggérer les lentes reptations centrifuges de ces élixirs visqueux et vivants” (11). Her rich, complicated vocabulary both pushes the reader to the periphery and calls them to enter in and work with her to create
meaning in the text. The “lieu commun” of the museum in Portrait d'un inconnu is also a peripheral space where exchange is possible amongst the unknowns: “Un portrait. Portrait de l’inconnu, de l’innommé, de l’innommable. Et portraits à contours. Le musée est chez Nathalie Sarraute et chez Sartre le lieu de la confrontation entre les portraits à contours (l’arrêt en caractères, situations, noms) et l’espace de l’échange” (Raillard 38). Sarraute also writes about peripheral space as a common experience in her seventeenth tropism section: “Un jeune couple est en promenade avec son enfant.” This tropism is only two pages and it is about a young couple in the suburbs. It is anchored to the outside world, a peripheral perspective of the center that is the family. What surrounds them is heavy: “l’atmosphère épaisse dans laquelle ils vivaient toujours les entourait ici aussi, s’élevait d’eux comme une lourde et âcre vapeur” (104). The child remains at the periphery of that world, refusing to leave his parents’ sides: “L’air dense, comme gluant de poussière mouillée et de sèves, se collait à lui, adhérait à sa peau, à ses yeux. Il refusait d’aller loin d’eux jouer avec d’autres enfants dans la prairie. Il restait là, agglutiné, et, plein d’une avidité morne, il absorbait ce qu’ils disaient” (104). The family is in a protective bubble, and the child leaves his parents momentarily but still remains within that circle. Indeed, reflecting the notion of the “lieu commun” in her tropism form, the short length of this tropism serves to articulate the simplicity of the moment as well as its universality.

2.3 Impossible Escapes

Arrival may be impossible because of the past that leaks through to affect the present. Moving between the past and the present can be a choice, like in Ernaux’s La place, where after the Capes épreuve, she writes about her father’s death and then continues in retrospective,
piecing together fragments of the past in an attempt to recreate an image of her father.

Undeniably, his presence haunts the story, like the shadow in a photo she finds of herself at age sixteen: “J’ai seize ans. Dans le bas, l’ombre portée du buste de mon père qui a pris la photo” (78). Ernaux further demonstrates his haunting in her formal choice to put everything in his words in italics: “Il disait toujours ton école” (73). He follows her around, not unlike misfortune does in Les années: “Quand elle remonte après les cours le boulevard de la Marne bordé par les baraques de la fête foraine, le hurlement de la musique la suit comme le malheur” (76). For Sarraute, the protagonist of Portrait d’un inconnu is constantly haunted by the portrait in the museum and this haunting is woven throughout the entire text of the novel, including a prominent place at the title. In Enfance, the split self is haunted by the past and Sarraute attempts to write events that have shaped her future self and her repetition of certain words like “déchirer” demonstrate that there are moments from the past that leak through even to the prose of the story to affect word choice that in turn articulates the feelings of uneasiness in the rupture created from the past event.

One’s destiny may be haunting, such as the fate of immigrants in Némirovsky’s novels. In Le maître des âmes, for example, Dario is continuously trying to fully arrive in France: “Pouvais-je croire, un jour, que moi, Dario Asfar, je serais reçu comme un égal?” (103). Indeed, the whole point of him coming to France was to escape his past and create a desired future; Dario’s dream was to “être avocat ou médecin . . . d’avoir un métier noble, d’échapper à cette boue . . . Je voulais échapper à ce village barbare, ne plus jamais revoir les miens, surtout” (109). And yet this may never be achievable: “On n’échappe pas à sa destinée” (110). Dario’s future becomes impossible to attain and he must continue to work at arriving at his goals: “Dario vit en un éclair sa réputation compromise, son avenir perdu. Il n’eut pas un cri de révolte. Sa vie ne
l’avait pas préparé à la révolte, mais à l’obstination, à la patience, à l’effort sans cesse déçu, sans cesse renouvelé, à la résignation apparente qui augmente et concentre les forces de l’âme” (63).
The ceaseless renewal that is required of him is echoed in other immigrant experiences where the past dictates the future and opportunities in the new place of residence are no longer attainable. Dario is aware of the impossibility: “il rêvait de trains rapides et de villes étrangères, sachant bien qu’il n’y trouverait que malheur et misère, mais une autre misère, sans doute. C’était déjà cela de gagné” (125). Even as he becomes successful in his career, he can only do so by leaving everything behind, including his family. When he finds success, his life is still a mess and he can never exactly land in a place of happiness.

Julia Kristeva writes about the possibility for a foreigner to find happiness as a continual journey: “L’étranger suscite une idée neuve du bonheur. Entre fugue et origine: une limite fragile, une homéostase provisoire. Posé, présent, parfois certain, ce bonheur se sait pourtant en transit, comme le feu qui ne brille que parce qu’il consume. Le bonheur étranger de l’étranger est de maintenir cette éternité en fuite ou ce transitoire perpétuel” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 13).
Kristeva articulates that happiness is found in the journey itself to arrival. Like Dario who is in constant movement and escape from his past in order to settle in the future, he is attempting but ultimately unable to make his escape from his past. Indeed, his journey is also just like a fugue as a musical form, which includes a shifting motif that is continually reiterated and imitated in the different voices in the composition. Like the immigrant who is trying on various identities, a musical fugue simultaneously represents a constant escape and an impossible arrival. Joan, in Baker’s Mon sang dans tes veines, is a perfect example of this fugue: because of the seriousness of the laws in place and her inability to adhere to them, once the events of the novel unfold, she can no longer exist with her world views within the diegesis of the novel and she disappears.
The line drawn between here and there, us and them, and the binaries the line creates also represent an impossibility to arrive at home on either side. This is especially true in *Princesse Tam Tam* by virtue of the artificiality that emerges in the idealized world of Paris in which Alwina arrives. The separation between Tunisia and France becomes apparent precisely with the scenic contrasts between the representation of the two places: “Alwina’s native Tunisia and Parisian society are co-temporal but spatially and visually contrasted: exteriors, expansive space, sunlight, and sea, on the one hand, versus interiors, enclosure, telephone and radio, glass flowers, birds, fish, and palm trees, on the other. Not surprisingly, Paris/civilization is shown to be artificial, shallow, self-absorbed, and uninformed” (Julien 52). Effectively, in Paris, Alwina is almost always indoors, never outside. While there are real animals in Tunisia, such as the goat she carries at the beginning of the film, in Paris there are only sculptures of animals, so everything “natural” is rendered artificial and false, just as Alwina is ultimately just an imitation of a princess, and she never fully arrives in this royal identity. Much of Alwina’s transformation throughout the film parallels the reality of Baker. It was during that time that Baker tried to change her image from the “savage” dancer, with her banana skirt to a sophisticated actress who wore beautiful haute couture European dresses. In fact, one sees this transformation on the posters that appeared for the marketing of *Princesse Tam Tam*. An earlier one shows her silhouette with the banana skirt while a later image shows Baker wearing an elegant gown. The more Baker gained success, the more she desired to transform herself in order to remain in the public eye; Baker learned to sing and she cultivated her talents to continue her success. In a sense, her assimilation is similar to that of Alwina, who learns French ways so she may be
accepted by and be prosperous in high Parisian society. However, unlike Baker, necessarily, Alwina is predestined to a certain end in the story. Even if there are strong differences between what the film portrays as the white world and the non-white world, the metropole and the colony, civilization and savagery, the Occident and the Orient, it is clear that while Alwina must go back to where she belongs, Baker’s place of belonging is in the space outside of all of these distinctions.

Ernaux articulates feelings of not belonging, or of belonging nowhere and of having no place to go, as Élise Hugueny-Léger writes:

Au quotidien, ce qui caractérise les relations entre elle et le monde, c’est un détachement constant vis-à-vis des choses et des gens. Les premières manifestations explicites de cette distance ont lieu à l’adolescence, quand son horizon de connaissance s’élargit et qu’elle découvre de nouveaux milieux, de nouvelles façons de vivre et de penser. À cheval entre deux milieux, elle “ne se sent nulle part” [Les années 87], ne perçoit de l’activité du dehors qu’un bourdonnement indéfini et infini. (364)

What is more, the detachment and distance from having a place to call home is doubly apparent in Les années in its form as a collective autobiography with no singular story told and no singular place for individuals, but infinite space for the collective. In Némirovsky’s Les chiens et les loups, it is also apparent to which world one does not belong, even after physically arriving into a new place. One may recognize their place in the new world, for example with Ada’s experience in France: “Elle regardait de loin les églises catholiques et les faisceaux brûlants des cierges, visibles par les portes que l’on laissait ouvertes en ces journées si chaudes. Mais elle s’arrêtait comme devant la maison de Laurence: tout cela faisait partie d’un ordre différent où
elle ne pouvait pénétrer” (309). Yet later on, it becomes unclear where or if one will ever arrive in a single place: “Pauvre Harry . . . Malheureux avec elle, malheureux avec moi, entre deux feux, entre deux races, que deviendra-t-il?” (314-315). The continual questions show the precarity of the situation for one who has nowhere to go: “Quel pays la recevrait? Comment vivre?” (319). These endless difficulties demonstrate Brah’s notion of homing desire, and they also represent the lack of place to where one can arrive or settle and the uncertainty of the future to where one will end up. The desire to conform takes over and changes to shame that one will always remain “othered”: “Honte d’être irrémédiablement ce qu’il était, désir désespéré de se transformer, de changer d’apparence, de condition et d’âme” (Némirovsky, Le maître des âmes 101). Indeed, the motif of “presque” recurs throughout Némirovsky’s novels, of people almost arriving, but not quite: “Mais vous habitez la France depuis si longtemps! . . . Mais vous êtes presque des nôtres! . . . Ce mot ‘presque’ contenait pour lui un monde des sentiments inexplicables, d’amères expériences. Il n’avait pas d’amis, pas d’alliés, pas de parents. Rien ne pouvait faire qu’il se sentit le droit d’être ici” (Le maître des âmes 135). Undeniably, this word, “almost,” sums up the notion of impossible arrival and the insecurity that can result from almost—but not quite—belonging.

Sarraute takes a different approach to insecurity and what is more, almost all of her writing resides in this uncertainty of arrival. Nothing is familiar as she “dismantles the whole structure of feelings and reconstructs them as they pass from phase to phase” (Minor 97). Her impossibly slow prose leads one to never be able to pinpoint where or if arrival will occur. For example, in Le planétarium, the plot moves so slowly that it never quite arrives at anything. Sarraute’s breakdown of emotions into their most minute states and shifts makes a plot difficult to follow. And yet, through her writing, Sarraute is able to demonstrate pauses at specific
moments, micro-arrivals before the plot continues to shift. Anne Minor articulates that these small pauses ultimately serve to leave us in the *presque* world of never quite arriving and of continual movement: “To anguish she restores its disproportion; to the joys of creation, their momentary enchantment; to the impact of an image against the obstacles of reality, the terrible surprise which puts the validity of both in doubt and leads to a never ending search for a false equilibrium” (97). Sarraute’s tropism itself marks an impossible arrival because it is impossible to pinpoint when one state ends and when another begins. And yet, Sarraute creates a place of belonging for herself in the unknown with her unique form of writing. With the tropism, she demonstrates the possibilities within this process of impossible arrival.

2.5 Other Non-arrivals

Impossible arrivals can occur in the experience of the reader at the edges of a book. For example, in Sarraute’s *Portrait d’un inconnu*, the opening line of the novel undermines the arrival at the beginning of the novel: “J’ai renoncé. Je me suis livré pieds et poings liés. Les masques m’ont perdu. Une fois de plus, tout s’est échappé au moment où je pensais le tenir” (73). With a line that summarizes the experience of reading this novel, the plot is clear from the start, and everything concrete will escape the moment it is seized. The middle section of *Portrait d’un inconnu* muddies the protagonist’s experiences with characters in *War and Peace* and his own life and displays the impossibility of uncovering masks that represent uncertainties between text and life:

Ainsi il y a un personnage de roman auquel des masques me font toujours penser.

C’est un personnage si “réussi,” si “vivant,” un héros de *Guerre et Paix*, le vieux
Finally, at the end of *Portrait d’un inconnu* there is no arrival at an ending, just another step to take: “Tout s’apaisera peu à peu. […] Tout s’arrangera . . . Ce ne sera rien . . . Juste encore un pas de plus à franchir” (238). The ellipses in this final passage echo the opening of the end of the novel and the impossibility of arriving at a conclusion.

Sarraute’s *Enfance* begins and ends with a dialogue, as though one has stumbled upon a conversation and started in the middle instead of the beginning. She ends with another sort of impossible arrival, at a moment of crisis that is the mark of the end of her childhood. In doubling the end of *Enfance* with the end of her enfance, the two together augment the meaning of this time period that is contained within the book, and yet, it is also undermined by the final ellipsis at the end:

C’est peut-être qu’il me semble que l’à s’arrête pour moi l’enfance . . . Quand je regarde ce qui s’offre à moi maintenant, je vois comme un énorme espace très encombré, bien éclairée . . . Je ne pourrais plus m’efforcer de faire surgir quelques moments, quelques mouvements qui me semblent encore intacts, assez forts pour se dégager de cette couche protectrice qui les conserve, de ces épaisseurs blanchâtres, molles, ouatées qui se défont, qui disparaissent avec l’enfance . . . (277)
Sarraute continues the repetition game with the word “childhood,” as her own childhood has disappeared, which is mirrored by the diffusion of “enfance” at the edge of the novel that is solely about her childhood.

Of course, for Némirovsky, her novel Suite française has no ending because Némirovsky died in Auschwitz before she could finish it. And yet, because of the book’s dramatic origins (her children escaped with the manuscript in a suitcase) and the facts and tales that have been added to it in publication, such as the image of the manuscript and the journals printed at the end of the Denoël edition, the search for an arrival into the end of this novel is unceasing. Unclear endings are non-arrivals that we also see in Ernaux’s novel Les années. It is impossible to arrive at the end because it disintegrates into thirteen blank pages in the Gallimard edition. Indeed, the last part of the text announces the limitless ending: “Je dévale en courant, en me roulant dans l’herbe rase et drue parsemée de petites fleurs des montagnes [. . .] je regarde le ciel comme je ne l’ai jamais regardée . . . je me fonds en lui, je n’ai pas de limites, pas de fin” (275). Baker’s film Princesse Tam Tam is melted at the edges and it is impossible to discern which story begins where in the film because of the layers upon layers of realities that construct the film’s narrative: there is a ghostwriter who is writing a book for an author in the film and he dreams up the entire story of Alwina as Princess of Palindor.
3. Impossible Return

Tout change. Au gré de son caprice. Le monde, docile, s’élargit à l’infini ou au contraire se contracte ; devient étroit et sombre, ou immense et transparent. A son gré, les couleurs changent. Rien n’est fixe. Rien ne s’impose à lui. Sous son impulsion, comme la toile légère où se balance l’araignée, le monde oscille et tremble. (Sarraute, *Portrait d’un inconnu* 118)

3.1 Nostalgia for Là-bas

Once a departure occurs, once a border is crossed, the return across the border is never completely achievable. Chinua Achebe writes about returning home for the first time and facing the wrong way in the car: “I could not see where we were going, only were we were coming from” (*Home and Exile* 2). While traces of the past remain, once one crosses into a new place there is also a certain rupture with it, in the sense that it is impossible to return: “‘the past’ becomes associated with a home that it is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present” (Ahmed 343). Home as place of origin is no longer tenable once one has left it and for the immigrant who has come to settle in a new place there is no real return to home. Even if one has the privilege of free movement, home no longer exists as it did in the past and it is impossible to fully bring the past into present view. Attempts to return to this impossible home are disorienting, like Achebe’s experience in the car. Dreams of là-bas that take place behind a border or in border space, continue after arrival on the other side, but this time they represent a nostalgia for a past là-bas. Dreams of là-bas also appear as an important trope in French culture, for example, in Charles Baudelaire’s “L’invitation au voyage” and in Stéphane Mallarmé’s “Brise marine.” The gaze toward the past is like the horizon: the closer one gets to it, the further
away it seems. Once things are difficult in the new place of residence, dreams of the past become more and more like the horizon, and it is impossible to return, as Julia Kristeva writes: the past is an “[a]mour mélancolique d’un espace perdu, il ne se console pas, en fait, d’avoir abandonné un temps. Le paradis perdu est un mirage du passé qu’il ne saura jamais retrouver” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 20).

In Princesse Tam Tam, dreams of là-bas are inverted—from the original boat scene where Alwina sings “Rêves” and dreams of the possibilities in the land across the sea—to the boat’s opposite in a jazz club in Paris. After arriving in Paris, Alwina goes to the club because she feels inhibited by her Parisian transformation. Only by entering the peripheral space of the jazz club is she able to escape her performance of the princess and she finds respite and joy, finally finding a place where “les gens bougent pour eux-mêmes.” During this transformative scene she sings her second song “Sous le ciel d’Afrique,” which is a song that shows her desire for là-bas but now, the meaning of this term is inverted: “Une voix en moi s’élève / Et sans trêve, elle dit: / Tu ne dois chercher ton rêve / Loin du ciel de ton pays” and then the refrain: “Sous le ciel d' Afrique, / Chaque instant semble meilleur qu’ailleurs, / Et pour nous tout est désir, plaisir, au pays bleu du bonheur!” In this new place, instead of longing for France, Alwina misses and longs for Africa. She sings of happiness found in her homeland, a happiness that she dreamt of finding in France before she left home.

Many times the way the là-bas of the past is remembered is skewed as only being positive and protective. For Sarrasute in Enfance, for example, she recalls school as being a place of respite, even though in other parts of the book she refers to issues with one of her teachers: “Même là-bas, dehors, l’école me protège. On passe derrière ma porte sans s’arrêter, on me laisse travailler” (169). This là-bas of the school as a protective space extends from the building
to her spaces in the house, where her family would leave her alone in her room, free to write and do her homework. Sarraute contemplates the là-bas of the past when she grapples with figuring out which place is real: her other life before she came to France, or the new one in France:

“‘Plus’ ne convient pas. ‘Autre’ serait mieux. Une autre vie. Aucune comparaison entre ma vie restée là-bas, dehors, et cette vie toute neuve . . . Mais comment, par où la saisir pour la faire tant soit peu revenir, cette nouvelle vie, ma vraie vie” (166). At the beginning of Enfance, in the opening dialogue with her split self, she says she will return to the past to go back through her memories and her other self responds with a warning of what it actually was like in the past:

“Est-ce vrai? Tu n’as vraiment pas oublié comment c’était là-bas? comme là-bas tout fluctue, se transforme, s’échappe . . .” (8). The reminder of the past in this section trails off with the ellipsis at the end and in doing so, it fragments itself as it does throughout the book, but especially at the beginning where entering into the space of the past is fraught with uncertainty, that is, the doubt of return.

In Némirovsky’s Les chiens et les loups, Harry tells Laurence about his protected childhood and how he never even saw a dead animal; he was protected in his own type of cage in the past. His nostalgia for that time pulls him toward the past and he attempts to translate to Laurence why he feels the need for là-bas. Ada is Harry’s connection to the past: “—Vous ne pouvez pas savoir ce que vous avez été pour moi. —Mais, c’était . . . là-bas . . . il y a longtemps . . . —Oui, mais là-bas . . . ce qui s’est passé là-bas, c’est peut-être plus important que vous ne le croyez, plus important que tout le reste, que votre vie ici, que votre mariage. Nous sommes nés là-bas, nos racines sont là-bas . . .” (204). Ada recognizes at the beginning of the novel that she must focus on the present in order to make her way in the world: “Et, enfin, le passé est le passé. On perd, en y songeant, les forces dont on a besoin pour vivre” (22). Ada possesses the ability to
return to the exact moment of when her life changed, when she met Harry for the first time at the Alliance Française in Ukraine: “Comme on tourne un film à rebours, de même elle était revenue au point exacte où s’était interrompu autrefois sa vie réelle, la seule réelle malgré les apparences: cet instant où elle était entrée, tenant la main de Mme Mimi, dans la salle décorée de fleurs et de petits drapeaux français, à la rencontre de Harry. Voici qu’elle avait aboli les années” (220). Even with her focus on life in France, Ada is deported back to Ukraine and it is here where she allows herself to look back to her time in France: “Où avait-elle entendu cela? C’était Paris, dans un autre univers, des siècles auparavant. Tout se confondait, s’éloignait, disparaissait. Avait-elle seulement connu Harry? ou était-ce un rêve? Elle trembla un instant à l’idée de se réveiller dans la chambre d’enfant, en Ukraine, et de découvrir qu’elle avait imaginé toutes ces années de bonheur et de souffrance” (332). Her confusion about the events of her time in France is due to her ability to be present in the situation at hand. The more she makes her way forward in the present, the more the là-bas of the past in France becomes a dream, as though anything that happened there took place in an alternate, intangible reality.

3.2 No Return

In some cases, one does not desire to attempt a return to the past because of its unpleasantness: “La plupart du temps je ne pouvais vraiment trouver en moi aucun désir de revenir à mes tourments passés. [...] J’étais exorcisé” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 81). In other cases, the impossibility of return is due to dangerous circumstances in the place of origin, or a remembrance of pain as being the reason why one left in the first place. For example, the hunger pangs of Dario’s past haunt him in Le maître des âmes and he remembers that this is not
the first time he has been hungry: “Mais les souvenirs ajoutaient au présent un écho et des prolongements de détresse presque insupportables” (Némirovsky 50). Death is always a possibility in the present but reminders of fear are tied to the past: “La peur de la mort était une porte ouverte à ce qu’il redoutait le plus au monde” (Némirovsky, *Le maître des âmes* 80). These examples highlight Némirovsky’s project of drawing distinctions between the haves and the have-nots and how fear of the past marks those who have made the crossing and may push them to make the present situation work. Due to their comprehension of the other side of the border and what could happen there, they are forever haunted by the possibilities of what happened on the other side. Indeed, although the past is inaccessible, it continues to impact the present situations of the border-crosser.

For Ernaux, the impossibility of return is more of an incapacity to return to the past due to a cognitive block that highlights the trauma of the event of the border crossing. In *Mémoire de fille*, for example, she describes the scene of her first sexual encounter and she cannot arrive back at that moment for it is inaccessible to her in her memory: “Je suis incapable de trouver dans ma mémoire un sentiment quelconque, encore moins une pensée. La fille sur le lit assiste à ce qui lui arrive et qu’elle n’aurait jamais imaginé vivre une heure avant, c’est tout” (44). After the event, she also has no recollection of other world events at the same time and in the present, whenever she sees anything referring to that year, she gleans whatever she can and claims that as her own reality since hers from 1958 is impossible to access: “C’est peut-être à cause de cette cécité à tout ce qui n’était pas la colonie que je suis brusquement arrêtée dans ma lecture d’un livre ou d’un journal lorsque figure cette date de 1958. Je redeviens la contemporaine d’événements vécus par d’autres, des inconnus, je suis reliée de nouveau à un monde commun et c’est comme si la réalité des autres attestait la réalité de la fille de 58” (70). Ernaux laments the fact that she
cannot find a way to retrieve the memory of the “fille de 58”: “Comment faire pour retrouver l’imaginaire de l’acte sexuel tel qu’il flotte dans ce moi au seuil de la colonie?” (30). She discovers herself stuck in a perplexing past that she cannot stop exploring: “Impossible de m’arrêter ici. Je ne le peux pas tant que je n’aurai pas atteint un certain point du passé qui, en ce moment, est l’avenir de mon récit. Tant que je n’aurai pas dépassé les deux années qui suivent la colonie. Ici, devant ma feuille, elles ne sont pas du passé pour moi, mais, profondément, sinon réellement, mon avenir” (79). Ernaux’s attempts in *La place* to retrieve the image of her father who has recently died take on a similar theme of impossibility as she realizes she can never return to the past that she has chosen to leave behind: “J’ai fini de mettre au jour l’héritage que j’ai dû déposer au seuil du monde bourgeois et cultivé quand j’y suis entrée” (111). In this novel, like in *Mémoire de fille*, Ernaux writes about what she has left behind and she uses the writing process and the space of the novel to attempt to revive a past life that she has left behind in the crossing into a new state.

In *Mon sang dans tes veines*, the impossibility of return to the past is also due to situations that are no longer in the control of those involved. The blood transfusion is an example of a decision made that is irreversible: what has been done cannot be undone. Like Ernaux who tries to remember the events that caused her to have no recollection of the “fille de 58,” participants in irrevocable acts may have a moment of crisis in the realization that there is no possibility for return. The dramatic irony in *Mon sang dans tes veines*—the reader knows all along that it was Joan who saved Fred’s life with the blood transfusion—is played out in slow steps of Fred’s realization that he can never go back to how things were before the crossing. At first, when Fred slowly wakes up, all is calm: “Il sait seulement qu’il est là, calme, apaisé dans la douceur de cette chambre close” (142). To delay the realization and add drama to the scene, he is
left in the dark about who the person was who gave him blood, literally stuck in a dark, closed room. When he finds out it was not Clarence, the real possibility is incomprehensible, as the two try to figure it out: “Tous deux devant l’énigme impénétrable, restent interdits et muets. Le problème angoissant se pose dans le dédale de leurs appréhensions, appréhensions que précisent une jalousie naissante, et l’ombre d’une déception” (157). Fred becomes desperate to know and begs the doctor to tell him. When he finally hears the truth, he still remains incredulous: “—Jim, Jim, répète le jeune Barclay sans comprendre, Jim, alors . . . moi . . . moi . . . j’ai maintenant du sang noir dans mes veines?” (166-167). Fred realizes the impossibility of returning to before the transfusion and is in such shock that he loses his ability to articulate what has happened, as though if he were to speak the truth, the event might be true. The blood transfusion scene is one of the four cases of arrival I explore in Chapter Two; and indeed, each of the arrival cases include irreversible actions: once one departs and makes the crossing there is no possibility of returning.

In Portrait d’un inconnu, Sarraute writes about the attempt to seek refuge in the past. Here the protagonist attempts to anchor himself to family:

Je me sentais de plus en plus affaibli, vidé, et puis j’avais peur de m’arracher à eux brusquement, je me collais même à eux de plus en plus, je me retenais à eux, car je commençais déjà à sentir en moi quelque chose qui se soulevait, quelque chose qui battait doucement dans le vide, se soulevait, retombait, comme cogne dans le silence de la nuit un volet mal fermé—je me retenais à eux, car je savais que si je restais seul tout à coup, sans eux, dans la rue chaude et vide, le battement résonnerait en moi atrocement fort. (79)
The refuge of the family is constantly undermined as it becomes clear that this past is impossible to attach oneself to. Sarraute’s language choices and the destabilization of actions, as we see in the above quote, can also be strategies to attempt a return to the past. In Enfance, for example, she weaves together the fragmented memories of her childhood in a non-linear fashion that can be jarring to the reader as Sarraute moves erratically through time, events, and space on the page. Sarraute articulates the impossibility of returning to the language of her childhood: “j’agite au-dessus de la terre ma baguette magique en prononçant des incantations faites de syllabes barbares et drôles que j’ai longtemps retenues et que je n’arrive plus à retrouver . . .” (34). Ellipses such as this one are peppered throughout the narrative and further disorient the reader as they portray the difficulty in the attempt to return.

The verb tenses chosen for writing about the past can also depict the struggle of attempting to return. Sarraute comments on the power of verb tenses when she writes about her father’s word choice as being in the passé composé and not in the present: “Chaque matin à heure fixe, avant de refermer derrière lui la porte d’entrée, mon père disait à la cantonade: ‘Je suis parti,’ Pas ‘Je pars,’ mais ‘Je suis parti’ . . . comme s’il craignait d’être retenu, comme s’il voulait être déjà loin d’ici, là-bas, dans son autre vie . . . Et moi, je m’élançais au-dehors avec la même impatience” (Enfance 165). He “has left,” which expands the distance between the event of him leaving and his place of departure as he becomes impatient to leave the past behind. In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux plays with multiple verb tenses in attempts to reconstruct the past and she never quite arrives on any one: “Que choisir donc de dire d’elle qui la saisisse, telle qu’elle a existé là, cet après-midi d’août sous le ciel changeant de l’Orne, dans l’ignorance de ce qui sera pour toujours derrière elle dans trois jours, juste dans ce moment sans épaisseur, évanoui depuis plus de cinquante ans?” (25). In this moment she is attempting to return to before the crossing
with the perspective of the aftermath, but, of course, returning is impossible. The effect of this sentence is that the almost-return is still impossible and there is no language that can be used to articulate the return—language to describe the past becomes unwieldy.

As time moves forward, the immigrant may wish to recall the past and preserve it for the future. For Ernaux in *Les années*, there is a sense of urgency to preserve her roots: “a frenetic compulsion to save, archive and store her life even as she confirms its ‘pastness’” (Jordan 145). She captures snapshots of her generation in writing, of events that defined her as an individual but influenced the collective in a sort of cultural archive. The sense of urgency in this type of writing is even more apparent in Némirovsky’s commentary on her novel *Suite française*, which she wrote during World War Two while she was in hiding. In a journal entry from June 2, 1942, published in the appendix, she writes about the book as though she knows her death is immanent: “Commencer à me préoccuper de la forme qu’aura ce roman terminé! Considérer que je n’ai pas encore fini la 2e partie, que je vois la 3e ? Mais que la 4e et la 5e sont dans les limbes et quelles limbes! C’est vraiment sur les genoux des dieux puisque ça dépend de ce qui se passera” (531). For Némirovsky, this book is not about preserving her personal history, but that of the country with which she most identifies. She acts as a witness to a France in a time of upheaval and uncertainty and longs to leave her mark in the place from which she was ultimately rejected.

3.3 Distance

Time and space become strange when one attempts to return to the past. For Baker, at the end of each film, almost all of the characters she plays return to an elsewhere that is not a part of reality. In *La sirène des tropiques*, for example, Papitou finally finds André in Paris and when
she saves his life in a duel, she realizes she has no place in that world and goes far away, to America. In *Zou Zou*, she remains trapped in the bird cage on stage, forever singing about Haiti. With the exception of Alwina in *Princesse Tam Tam* (who we find out at the end of the film never actually left Tunisia and whose journey was a figment of the imagination of the author who came to Tunisia for inspiration), none of Baker’s other characters ever return to a past place.

Joan, in *Mon sang dans tes veines*, departs for an irreal là-bas that she is banished to, for she can no longer remain a part of the house after the blood transfusion. Her friendship with Fred would always be impossible and instead of attempting to return to normal, she disappears:

> Elle s’en allait loin, cette petite Jô aux couleurs de nuit, et aux yeux d’aurore, loin vers le jour, vers la vie nouvelle, vers le soleil . . . Vers ce soleil, qui, de ses rayons, grisait les papillons blancs, tachés de noir, dont les tourbillons couronnaient d’une auréole vivante son Destin lointain . . . Elle s’en allait, et se perdait dans l’Empire de la Nature, qui l’attirait sur ses seins, parfumés de fleurs odorantes . . . (172)

This section is followed by multiple ellipses that demonstrate her retreat into the unknown, and then she finally leaves for good: “Adieu, ma petite Jô!” (172). In all of the Baker examples, the present itself becomes strange and returning to the reality of those shifted worlds becomes impossible; she cannot stay, so she escapes into the là-bas of the horizon.

In *La place*, Ernaux cannot remain in the past in her writing and she continually comes back to the present, as though coming up for air: “Plusieurs mois se sont passés depuis le moment où j’ai commencé ce récit, en novembre. J’ai mis beaucoup de temps parce qu’il ne m’était pas aussi facile de ramener au jour de faits oubliés que d’inventer. La mémoire résiste” (100). This sort of metacommentary in *La place* displays her distance from the past, which also
occurs at a linguistic level: “each sentence, each word that she inscribes upon the page separates her from her past more definitely still” (Motte 62). Distance between past and present accelerates the more one tries to revisit the past because time continues forward: “L’arrivée de plus en plus rapide des choses faisait reculer le passé” (Ernaux, Les années 89). At the end of Mémoire de fille, Ernaux comments on her increased distance to the past: “Le début de mon texte me paraît très loin. Il y a une homologie entre la vie et l’écriture: je me sens aussi loin du récit de la première nuit avec H que je devais me sentir, à Finchley, loin de la réalité de celle-ci. [. . .] L’une et l’autre de ces durées sont également vécues et imaginaires” (135). Ernaux also notes the continued distance between the past and the present in Les années and claims accessibility of the past only through photographs: “La distance qui sépare le passé du présent se mesure peut-être à la lumière répandue sur le sol entre les ombres, glissant sur les visages, dessinant les plis d’une robe, à la clarté crépusculaire, quelle que soit l’heure de la pose, d’une photo en noir et blanc” (65). Photographs are physical traces of a lost past and Ernaux attempts to recreate this past in this novel through her writing that mimics the form of the photograph.

In Narratives for a New Belonging, Roger Bromley writes about the acceleration of the impossibility of returning to one’s origins: the greater the distance, the greater the impossibility of return. Each narrative in his project “is involved in the process of reclaiming, of travelling back to an endlessly receding origin or identity, a point ultimately of no return” (6). In Némirovsky’s Le bal, after the irrevocable action of tossing the invitations in the Seine, time moves slowly and the dramatic irony is marked by the presence of the ticking clock in the scene of the empty house is it becomes time for the ball: “Onze heures moins le quart. Onze heures moins dix. Dans le salon vide, une pendulette sonnait à petits coups pressés, au timbre argentin, vif et clair; celle de la salle à manger répondait, insistait, et, de l’autre côté de la rue une grande
horloge au fronton d’une église, battait lentement et gravement, de plus en plus fort à mesure que passaient les heures” (121-122). The further away from the event of destroying the invitations the more dramatic the moment of realization becomes. There is possibility in the time that lies ahead that displays Mme Kampf’s impossible return to a time of her youth. She slowly gets ready for the ball and laments the fact that she is getting older and she longs for young love. Then she puts on all her jewelry and says to herself: “La vie commençait enfin! . . . Ce soir même, qui sait?” (100). The mother’s impossible return to her youth is mirrored in Antoinette’s impossible return to her own childhood after the crossroads scene where the mother begins her decline and Antoinette begins her ascent.

Sarraute also writes about lost time and the impossibility of retrieving lost time, when asking about past friends: “Mon Dieu, comme le temps passe . . .” (Portrait d’un inconnu 79). Time slips away in this scene that seems mundane talking about the past, but it, like other of Sarraute’s tropisms, is a translation of a common occurrence. Time is doubly lost in Mémoire de fille when Ernaux of the present acknowledges that she could not have wanted to prove something by returning to the camp, for she had never actually finished all of Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu. Instead, she returned “pour manifester combien j’étais différente de la fille de 58 et affirmer ma nouvelle identité [. . .] pour mesurer l’écart entre les deux” (149). Élise Hugueny-Léger links Ernaux’s work in Les années to Sarraute’s form of the tropism and the impossibility of returning to a past moment through writing, and instead:

[L]e travail effectué dans Les Années ne s’apparente pas tant à une recherche du passé qu’à une recherche du présent perdu, du moins pas vécu pleinement. La mémoire devient donc vecteur vers tout ce qui relève du domaine du ressenti, de manière confuse à la manière des tropismes sarrautiens. L’écriture ne recrée pas
ce qui a été, mais ce qui n’a pas été, ce qui se situait “hors des mots” [Sarraute, Enfance]. (366)

With her tropism, Sarraute has created a way to translate the impossible, to put into words the difficult situations that the other authors in the project cannot quite articulate.

4. Becoming an Outsider

Et il apparaît maintenant que non seulement elle connaît l’existence de ma mère, mais qu’elle ne perd jamais ma mère de vue . . . elle la voit à travers moi . . . Elle voit toujours sur moi sa marque. Des signes que je porte sans le savoir . . . des signes mauvais . . . (Sarraute, Enfance 160)

*Je fais ce qu’on veut, mais ce n’est pas “moi”—“moi” est ailleurs, “moi” n’appartient à personne, “moi” n’appartient pas à “moi,” . . . “moi” existe-t-il?* (Kristeva, Étrangers à nous-mêmes 18-19)

4.1 Traces of Origins

Those who have crossed into a new state of being cannot fully be in the present place. Like the crossing itself, origins leave their marks. Additionally, even after having escaped from and moved beyond the boundary line, it is quickly apparent that this line is perhaps more porous than previously thought. The past can seep through the border, haunting and excluding one from being fully present. In *Le maître des âmes*, when Dario says he hates his past, Clara reminds him that it will always be a part of him, even if he can never return to a past home: “Parce qu’il est toi et tu es lui, pauvre Dario. Tu ne peux pas changer ta chair, tu ne peux pas changer ton sang, ni ton désir de richesse, ni ton désir de vengeance, l’lorsqu’on t’a offensé” (Némirovsky 123). Rosi Braidotti points out that identity is a “retrospective notion,” [o]ur desires are that which evades
us in the very act of propelling us forth, leaving as the only indicator of who we are, the traces of where we have already been (Nomadic Subjects 14). The past leaves it mark also as an indication of a border crossed, which Kristeva writes about as physical marks:

[C]e visage si autre porte la marque d’un seuil franchi qui s’imprime irrémédiablement dans un apaisement ou une inquiétude Qu’elle soit troublée ou joyeuse, l’expression de l’étranger signale qu’il est “en outre.” La présence d’une telle frontière interne à tout ce qui se montre réveille nos sens les plus archaïques par un goût de brûlure. [. . .] [L]’insistance d’une doublure—bonne ou mauvaise, plaisante ou mortifère—trouble l’image jamais uniforme de sa face et lui imprime la marque ambiguë d’une cicatrice—son bien-être à lui. (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 12-13)

Indeed, the face of the foreigner is continually shifting: anyone can project their own desires or fears onto that person. Often, fear is projected onto the face of another person, which goes back to some problematic understandings of anyone who is “other.” Kristeva questions whether or not anyone deemed as outsider can become invisible: “L’‘étranger,’ qui fut l’‘ennemi’ dans les sociétés primitives, peut-il disparaître dans les sociétés modernes?” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 9).

Origins work both ways: they can haunt the immigrant but they also preclude them from full access to their new place of residence. Those on the other side want to hold on to their own origins, as Kristeva points out, with a certain claiming of roots that excludes those who are not “Français de souche” from access to true French citizenship: “The cult of origins is a hate reaction. Hatred of those others who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally” (Nations Without Nationalism 3). In this section, which blurs the lines between itself and “Impossible Arrival” and “Impossible Return,” I focus on the effects of a
border crossed: the marks of the foreigner or traces left from the crossing, a recognition of the self as strange, and finally, a crisis of the self.

Origins leave marks that are inescapable, even if one tries to leave them behind: “Je me suis pliée au désir du monde où je vis, qui s’efforce de vous faire oublier les souvenirs du monde d’en bas comme si c’était quelque chose de mauvais goût” (Ernaux, *La place* 73). The bitter taste of the past lingers and can have very real implications on the present. The past can affect all other moments stemming from it, for example, Sarraute writes about the shift in her relationship with her father as a moment that leaves its trace on every other subsequent events:

A ce moment-là, et pour toujours, envers et contre toutes les apparences, un lien invisible que rien n’a pu détruire nous a attachés l’un à l’autre. . . . Je ne sais pas exactement ce que mon père sentait, mais moi, à cet âge-là, je n’avais pas neuf ans, je suis sûre que tout ce qui petit à petit s’est révélé à moi, au cours des années qui ont suivi, je l’ai perçu d’un coup, en bloc . . . tous mes rapports avec mon père, avec ma mère, avec Véra, leurs rapports entre eux, n’ont été que le déroulement de ce qui s’était enroulé là. (*Enfance* 116)

Némirovsky writes about birth and social place as one of the traces of origins that forever sticks with a person. While money may come and go, one’s origins will always remain a significant part of present situations: “L’argent est l’argent, mais la naissance est la naissance” (*Les chiens et les loups* 32). For Baker, her characters are always already marked by their past due to the way she performs their French, the clothing and costumes she wears, and, surely, the color of her skin as marking her as “other” in the eyes of the French public.
4.2 Marking as Strange

The process of arriving into a new state leaves behind remnants or reminders of the border crossed, like a scar. In this and subsequent sections I examine ways in which those traces are apparent: they are visible, physical traits that others recognize as different from their own; they are invisible traits that others can recognize as different from their own, such as accents; and they can also be invisible traces that are recognizable to oneself. The shift to strangeness is unavoidable, and in many cases, the recognition as strange is implemented by one group onto another. Many origins leave a mark that is out of the control of the subject affected by those origins. For example, Ernaux writes about her sister’s death and how her lack of diphtheria vaccine was a marker of her birthplace and the lack of importance of or access to medical care: “Comme les autres enfants de la Vallée, elle n’était pas vaccinée. (La place 46). Ernaux also situates her birth temporally to the German Occupation of France: “A l’école, quand on ne comprenait pas un problème, on nous appelait des enfants de guerre” (La place 48). The teachers at her school impose a certain identity on the students who must not be able to understand because they are from a certain era where they lacked sufficient resources to develop properly. Also in La place, Ernaux marks her father as other from herself: “L’éternel retour des saisons, les joies simples et le silence des champs. Mon père travaillait la terre des autres, il n’en a pas vu la beauté, la splendeur de la Terre-Mère et autres mythes lui ont échappé” (33). Her experience with the land is not his, and vice versa. Ernaux’s choice to focus on land as something that marks them as different from one another is, in a sense, her attempt to return to her father’s world by finding common ground and using his language to show their differences. Yet, at the same time,
she uses literary descriptions and projects her understanding of the land to highlight the distance between her and her father.

The mark of a border crossed may be subtle, but still identifiable. In Sarraute’s *Enfance*, the sign of difference is recognizable to others, but not to everyone:

Mais pourtant cette femme si ferme, si solide, le voit. Elle voit le malheur sur moi, comme elle voit “mes deux yeux sur ma figure.” Personne d’autre ici ne le sait, ils ont tous autre chose à faire. Mais elle qui m’observe, elle l’a reconnu, c’est bien lui: le malheur qui s’abat sur les enfants dans les livres dans *Sans Famille*, dans *David Copperfield*. Ce même malheur a fondu sur moi, il m’enserre, il me tient. (121-122)

Sarraute describes the moments when she witnesses the process of Véra, her stepmother, becoming strange in front of her: “Et pour la première fois, j’ai vu quelqu’un d’aussi familier, bien visible, connu que l’était pour moi Véra, devenir sous mes yeux quelqu’un de tout autre . . . des images, des bribes de récits qui étaient passés comme à distance d’elle, très loin, comme quelque part au large, revenaient, se plaquaient sur elle, la recouvraient” (*Enfance* 203-204).

Those who recognize others as different may often refer to them as strange. For example, in Sarraute’s sixth section of *Tropismes*: “Une femme impérieuse écrase autrui sous le poids des choses,” a woman is moving around getting breakfast ready and laments those who run late and make everyone wait for breakfast: “Ceux-là, les étrangers, elle n’osait rien leur dire, et pour ce seul mot, pour cette petite phrase polie par laquelle ils la repoussaient doucement, négligemment, du revers de la main, sans même la considérer, sans s’arrêter un seul instant à elle, pour cela seulement elle se mettait à les haïr” (40). Indeed, when one marks someone as “other” it can reveal a hatred of anyone who is not like them. For Ernaux, appearing to others as strange is
worse than actually being different: “Faire paysan signifie qu’on n’est pas évolué, toujours en retard sur ce qui se fait, en vêtements, langage, allure. [. . .] Le pire, c’était d’avoir les gestes et l’allure d’un paysan sans l’être” (La place 70). Instead of focusing on appearances as being worse than reality, Baker uses appearances of difference to demonstrate and subvert binaries put into place by societal forces. Throughout Baker’s films and her novel there are multiple references to racial and social differences and the drawing of binaries that reveal the irrationality in the marking as “other.” Indeed, the same is true for Némirovsky’s references to Jewishness and how she plays with stereotypes related to this identity and subverts them by making every social issue inevitably due to the differences between the repus and affamés.

4.3 “Certain Uncertainty”

How can one be certain about strangeness? Homi Bhabha writes about identity and the ambiguousness yet sureness of being “other” and how this both confirms an identity and is what destroys or undermines it as real:

Identification . . . is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes. For Fanon, like Lacan, the primary moments of such a repetition of the self lie in the desire of the look and the limits of language. The “atmosphere of certain uncertainty” that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment. (64)

When origins are perceived to be unclear, what becomes clear is that there is a difference. Sarraute writes about the strangeness of the unknown person in the portrait as being—almost—recognizable, but never unique: “un type, un personnage, mais d’où, déjà, de quel roman? Ils ne
savent pas très bien, mais d’un coup d’œil ils le reconnaissent: un bon modèle de série coupé sur un vieux patron” (Portrait d’un inconnu 179-180).

Dario, in *Le maître des âmes*, is recognized by others as strange, with his unclear heritage. For example, in two dance scenes from the novel: the women observing Dario see him as having uncertain origins: “C’est un charlatan. Il a la vogue, il plaît, on ne sait pas d’où il vient” (Némirovsky 160). In a second dance scene fifteen chapters later, it is apparent that Dario has become outdated, but his origins remain the same: “Cet Asfar, ce ‘maître des âmes,’ on ne sait même pas d’où il vient” (244). What is more, the women now have an opinion about outsiders in a second moment of recognition: “Oui, ces étrangers abusent de notre crédulité” (245). What others think and how they react and treat people as different both have very real implications. In Baker’s film *La sirène des tropiques*, for example, Papitou’s origins are also unclear: her father is a white colonist and there is no mother present. What is clear is that Papitou is not like other people and she gets along better with animals and children rather than adults. Moreover, each aspect of the film that infantilizes Papitou serves to distance her from white colonists as “civilized” and further marks her as unquestionably different.

4.4 On Masks and Race

Sometimes race is referred to as a mark of foreignness and authors make explicit mentions of skin color or features that are signs of the times during which these works were written. Némirovsky, for example, claims uncertain foreignness as “oriental,” which she uses to describe Dario’s appearance in *Le maître des âmes*: “Car ce masque d’Oriental avait, en vieillissant, par le contraste des cheveux gris et de la peau sombre, par l’éclat perçant des yeux,
pris une beauté qui plaisait aux femmes. Enfin, il était célèbre en passant pour riche” (165). Here, his description as appearing foreign is a positive, attractive quality. Dario is also labelled as having acquired a different sort of mask with age, as he is marked both “oriental” and old, both of which he can use to his advantage: “Peu à peu, et avec l’âge, cette mobile figure levantine avait acquis la sérénité, l’impassibilité d’un masque” (192). When Sylvie goes to see Dario, he is again described in the following manner: “Il leva vers elle ses beaux yeux aux longs cils de femme, étranges dans ce sec et sardonique visage de vieil Oriental” (228). Némirovsky’s choice to mark Dario continually as “othered” serves to illuminate the impossibility of him completely fitting into the ideals of the French society within which he finds himself attempting to assimilate. It is important to remember in Némirovsky’s work that although a cursory reading will see all “foreigners” as the same for her, “this simplistic reading masks the complexity of Némirovsky’s interrogation of ‘race’: her point is that ‘race’ is defined differently according to whether you are an affamé or a repus” (Kershaw 126).

In Les chiens et les loups, Ben sees Ada as having emerged from another world. After they see each other in France, something about her appearance marks her as being from elsewhere: “Tu semblais revenir d’un autre monde” (Némirovsky 147). Some characters recognize their own physical traits that make them appear “other.” For example, Daniel, Clara and Dario’s son, despises the sight of his father’s fingers among other things that make him appear foreign: “Il détestait ces longs doigts d’Oriental et, quoique jamais Dario ne se parfumât, il semblait toujours au garçon” (Némirovsky, Le maître des âmes 170). Daniel’s parents refer to his appearance and wonder who he resembles, because he does not look like them: “D’où vient-il, celui-là? À qui ressemble-t-il? Il n’est pas des nôtres! il est comme un fils de prince” (168). In Les chiens et les loups, when Harry wants to invite Ada over with his friends, his wife Laurence
refuses and lines are drawn between the two cultures. Harry says they can have: “Une aumône, mais donnée sur le pas de la porte, sur le seuil de la salle bien cirée, comme chez tes paysans” (214). Harry and Laurence get into a disagreement and they discuss getting separated. Finally, Laurence wonders how her child, who is also marked as “other” only because of Harry’s Jewishness, will ever understand her: “mais comment cette étrangère, cette fille d’une race heureuse me comprendrait-elle?” (266).

In Mon sang dans tes veines, Baker clearly distinguishes between black and white but concurrently blurs the boundaries between different skin colors in order to play to her ultimate goal of racial equality. References to race often arise in this novel, many times for no other reason than to mark or claim the difference between the two, but these are often undermined by Joan. For example, when Clarence calls Joan to quickly get her some milk for her “eggnog cocktail”: “—Oui, petite, du lait, et du bon! Aussi blanc que tu es noire! Joan bondit, mais reprend vite son sourire, et, taquine, elle riposte: —Dommage, Miss Clifton, un mélange de couleur aurait pu faire du café au lait!” (71). A few pages later, Fred’s mother remarks her regret that Joan was often in pictures with Fred from when he was a child, and she laments her continuous presence in the household: “Que je regrette beaucoup que Fred ait eu la compagnie d’une noire, qu’il l’ait encore par ici quand il arrive le soir, toujours devant lui, à boire ses paroles” (78). Joan is not referred to by name, but by the color of her skin and she is thus deemed unimportant as an individual subject and is instead categorized by Mrs. Barclay as a part of an undesirable group that is marked by skin color. Clarence agrees and confirms the threat in the friendship between Fred and Joan, or ultimately, between Fred and a person of color: “D’ailleurs nous autres, dans New-Orléans, nous ne tolérons pas sur la même photo un jeune homme blanc, même un gamin, à côté des noirs, car eux doivent rester à leur place, toujours!” (79). A few
pages later, Joan continues to undermine categorization and this binary by serving as an example when she meets a thirsty man on the road and runs to get him water. When Clarence reprimands her for not being at work, Joan explains, and Clarence reacts: “La jeune fille éclata de rire.

—Chez nous, on n’a pas de pitié inutile pour un noir!” And Joan responds: “—Ici, ce n’est pas la même chose: ce pauvre homme est un des blessés de la Grande guerre, on n’a pas demandé s’il était noir ou blanc, pour lui enlever sa jambe, tout comme pour tuer mon père, tout comme pour vous rendre votre fiancé!” (83, my emphasis). Setting up the conflict between Joan and Clarence, Joan alludes to the problems to come by referencing Clarence’s views on race as a mark of her place of origin: “Joan le sait . . . Clarence Clifton est de New-Orléans, Là-bas on n’aime pas les gens de couleur . . . Là-bas on aime la haine! . . . Pauvre Joan . . . pauvre Clarence!” (69). Indeed, Joan takes pity on Clarence for her primitive views on race relations and chalks them up to her birthplace and upbringing. While Joan treats Clarence as a human, and equal, Clarence never reciprocates the gesture.

At the end of Mon sang dans tes veines, Fred tells Clarence that he can no longer marry her. Because of the transfusion he, too, is marked as racially “othered” and he has unintentionally but irrevocably crossed a line that would make their marriage illegal due to Jim Crow laws. Clarence makes this difference very clear while further distancing herself from her now ex-fiancé Fred by calling him “Mr. Barclay”: “Puis, la voix pleine de pitié, mais de cette pitié de la déesse pour le simple mortel, elle dit, tranchante:—Pauvre Mr Barclay, ainsi, ayant son sang dans vos veines, vous êtes devenu un nègre blanc. Dans leur irréductible opposition, ces deux mots réunis marquent la fin de cette aventure, où le souvenir d’une ombre noire se mêle pour toujours à un bonheur impossible” (Baker 178). In a sense, this novel is the reversal of the immigrant story of mark of the stranger: the one who “belongs” in that world, Fred, used to be
friends with Joan until he leaves home (and Joan must stay) and then Fred joins her as “othered” after the blood transfusion.

4.5 Stranger to Oneself

There are many ways that, after leaving home, immigrants recognize themselves as strangers: “Maigre, fin, frileux, serrant l’une contre l’autre ses belles mains, il se balançait doucement dans l’ombre comme l’avaient fait avant lui . . . tant d’émigrants sur le pont des bateaux; et, comme eux, il se sentait étranger, perdu et seul” (Némirovsky, *Les chiens et les loups* 305). Sara Ahmed writes about leaving home as “the failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit, a failure which is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body which feels out of place, which feels uncomfortable in this place” (“Home and Away” 343). Like Ernaux’s experience of coming home and noticing a separation from herself, Kristeva points out that we are all fragmented: “Inquiétante, l’étrangeté est en nous: nous sommes nos propres étrangers—nous sommes divisés” (*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* 268). Crossing boundaries creates a bizarre feeling for the immigrant; it is not only physical traits that have real implications on those who are deemed “other.” Language, for example, is an invisible marking that when interpreted through its sounds and meanings can leave one as being recognized as different. In *Les chiens et les loups*, accents are sometimes seen as innocuous indicators of foreignness: “On disait même ‘charme slave,’ mais sans aucune malice” (Némirovsky 153). In the same novel, when Ada speaks to Mimi, her accent marks her as foreign, coming from elsewhere: “—Vous savez comme moi, dit Ada de la même voix froide et lointaine qui sonnait à ses oreilles comme celle d’une étrangère, vous savez comme moi que seule sa femme, seule cette
famille française peut le sauver” (294-295). Baker’s characters in her films often are marked by their accents and their incapability of speaking “proper” French. For example, when we read Papitou’s speech in in the silent film *La sirène des tropiques* she says things such as: “Vous bon pour Papitou” or: “Papitou . . . beaucoup aimer grand ami.” Like the recognition of the Slavic accents as charming in *Les chiens et les loups*, the simplicity of Papitou’s French is a mark of her as explicitly not French, and foreign.

Recognizing one’s own accent through the ears of those without it is another way to distinguish oneself as strange, for example, in Némirovsky’s *Le maître des âmes*: “Il ne parvenait pas à se défaire de son accent étranger, de son air misérable et sauvage” (128). Ernaux, when searching for the lost “fille de 58,” wonders if she still had traces of her Norman accent at that time: “Je la vois, je ne l’entends pas. Il n’existe aucun enregistrement de ma voix de 1958 et la mémoire retranscrit sous une forme muette les paroles qu’on a prononcées soi-même. Impossible de dire si j’avais encore les intonations trainantes des Normands, cet accent dont je devais pourtant me croire débarrassée par comparaison avec tous mes ascendants” (*Mémoire de fille* 24). She wonders, in a sense, if she had left the accent behind or if she was still marked as “other” in the world of the summer camp. Sarraute also writes about the experience of speaking a foreign language:

> Les mots de chez moi, des mots solides que je connais bien, que j’ai disposés, ici et là, parmi ces étrangers, ont un air gauche, emprunté, un peu ridicule . . . on dirait des gens transportés dans un pays inconnu, dans une société dont ils n’ont pas appris les usages, ils ne savent pas comment se comporter, ils ne savent plus très bien qui ils sont . . . Et moi je suis comme eux, je me suis égarée, j’erre dans les lieux que je n’ai jamais habités. (*Enfance* 87)
The words feel strange to her and she, too, becomes strange as she speaks these words and thus recognizes herself as foreign as she takes on traits of the foreigner.

Names also indicate difference and can reveal origins and they affect the present situations of those who are named. For example, with names that haunt characters in Le maître des âmes: a woman is looking for a doctor and Dario wishes he had a different name when she insists on seeing Dr. Levaillant: “S’appeler Levaillant, Massard ou Durand, quel rêve! Qui aurait confiance en lui, Dario Asfar, avec sa figure et son accent de métèque?” (Némirovsky 49). Later in the novel, when talking about his wife Clara, he says: “Je ne vous dis pas son nom, son nom sauvage, impossible à retenir” (109). For Dario, Clara’s real name is what highlights her difficult past and simplifies—yet magnifies—the difference between her and Mme Wardes: “La différence entre elle et toi se ramène sans doute à ceci, simplement elle est d’une race qui, pendant des siècles, a été préservée de la faim, qui n’a pas eu à chercher sa nourriture, comme nos pères et nous-mêmes, et qui peut se permettre le luxe du désintéressement et de l’honneur— et nous ne le pouvons pas, dit-il avec amertume” (118). Ben, in Les chiens et les loups, also chooses not to use a name: when he does not understand someone who he deems “other” he uses pronouns instead and strips them of their individualism: “Eh bien! Ils étaient arrivés à leurs fins. (Ben pensait toujours au reste du monde en l’appelant ils, eux, pas des ennemis précisément, pas des amis non plus, mais des créatures incompréhensibles)” (Némirovsky 229).

Like the absence of a certain word or name, their presence can also leave a mark. In Portrait d’un inconnu, for example, Sarraute writes about words that cut deeply; even though they seem to not leave a trace on the surface, they leave an invisible, interior stain:

[J]e n’avais pas réagi du tout, comme cela arrive souvent, quand certains mots semblent glisser ainsi sur nous sans laisser de traces: nous les laissons passer,
nous rions, comme j’avais fait, pleins d’inconscience. Mais les mots pénètrent en
nous à notre insu, s’implantent en nous profondément, et puis, parfois longtemps
après, ils se dressent en nous brusquement et nous forcent à nous asseoir, inquiets,
sur notre lit. (92)

Indeed, words have the power to affect change and cause harm. The more one is spoken of as
strange, the easier it becomes to believe it and thus, the continuous references to foreignness or
“otherness” is also a performative act of “us” imposing an identity on “them” that creates a rift
between the two and also, like the formation of categories, can exclude or injure people. Even
seemingly harmless words can have a lingering effect that in turn reflects back upon the actor: “Il
y a sous tous ses actes, même insignifiants en apparence et anodins, comme un envers, une autre
face cachée, de nous seuls, et qui est tournée vers moi” (Sarraute, Portrait d’un inconnu 92).

Kristeva writes about the impossibility of perfecting the new language and how at first
one finds freedom in the practice but soon recognizes the strangeness of the sound and the
incapacity to conform:

Vous vous perfectionnez dans un autre instrument, comme on s’exprime avec
l’algèbre ou le violon. Vous pouvez devenir virtuose avec ce nouvel artifice qui
vous procure d’ailleurs un nouveau corps, tout aussi artificiel, sublimé—certains
disent sublime. Vous avez le sentiment que la nouvelle langue est votre
résurrection: nouvelle peau, nouveau sexe. Mais l’illusion se déchire lorsque vous
vous entendez, à l’occasion d’un enregistrement par exemple, et que la mélodie de
votre voix vous revient bizarre, de nulle part, plus proche du bredoillis d’antan
que du code d’aujourd’hui. (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 27)
The polyglot soon relinquishes itself to silence rather than speak in a manner that is incorrect and simple: “Ainsi, entre deux langues, votre élément est-il le silence. A force de se dire de diverses manières tout aussi banales, tout aussi approximatives, ça ne se dit plus” (Kristeva, Étrangers à nous-mêmes 28). Némirovsky learned French as a baby from her French-speaking governess so for her, linking language to peculiarity is not quite the same as with many of the characters she writes. Yet, she is still able to recognize the lure of certain linguistic spaces as parallel to that of physical boundaries. In Némirovsky’s Les chiens et les loups, Lilla’s knowledge of French is what allows her access out of the ghetto in which she lived: “Elle ne serait plus à ses yeux cette mendiant, cette vagabonde, cette outcast, cette petite Juive de la ville basse. Elle parlait le français maintenant; elle savait faire la révérence; elle était ‘comme les autres’” (103-104). Even though Lilla may have been able to cross those barriers and use her knowledge of French to gain access to a new space, using a non-maternal language can make one feel strange and out of place, indicating an impossibility of arrival: “Vous avez le sentiment que la nouvelle langue est votre résurrection: nouvelle peau, nouveau sexe. Mais l’illusion se déchire lorsque vous vous entendez, à l’occasion d’un enregistrement par exemple, et que la mélodie de votre voix vous revient bizarre, de nulle part, plus proche du bredouillis d’antan que du code d’aujourd’hui” (Kristeva, Étrangers à nous-mêmes 27). For Ernaux, code-switching is tedious and overwhelming: “Enfant, quand je m’efforçais de m’exprimer dans un langage châtié, j’avais l’impression de me jeter dans le vide” (La place 64). Perhaps the fact that all four authors chose to write in French, one of multiple codes they navigated, is “an attempt to inscribe on it other sensitivities, other experiences, and strangenesses apt to extend its pursuit of universality” (Kristeva, Nations Without Nationalism 44-45).
4.6 Crisis

The more one is marked as strange, the more susceptible one may be to becoming the stranger that one is marked as being: “Je suis si influençable, moi aussi, si suggestible. L’impression que les gens out de moi déteint sur moi tout de suite, je deviens tout de suite et malgré moi exactement comme ils me voient” (Sarraute, *Portrait d’un inconnu* 53). Encounters with the self as strange leave one feeling lost, unsure of oneself, and in a place of certain uncertainty:

Face à l’étranger que je refuse et auquel je m’identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites, je n’ai plus de contenant, les souvenirs des expériences où l’on m’avait laissée tomber me submergent, je perds contenance. Je me sens “perdue,” “vague,” “brumeuse.” Multiples sont les variantes de l’inquiétante étrangeté: toutes réitèrent ma difficulté à me placer par rapport à l’autre, et refont le trajet de l’identification-projection qui gît de mon accession à l’autonomie. (Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* 276)

The uncertainty of sense of place is in tension with Avtar Brah’s notion of “homing desire,” that is, the continual search for putting down roots and creating a home. If home or acceptance becomes impossible, then it can be possible to become trapped in a perpetual and impossible search for home, and the rupture with origins can leave a psychological stain: “La rupture avec la tradition, le déracinement, l’inaccessibilité des histoires, l’amnésie, l’indéchiffrabilité, etc., tout cela déchaîne la pulsion généalogique, le désir de l’idiome, le mouvement compulsif vers l’anamnèse, l’amour destructeur de l’interdit” (Derrida, *Le monolinguisrne de l’autre* 116). In order to move forward, there is the implosion of past self, what Kristeva writes as the result of
exile, where the present self is forever separate from the past: “Toujours l’exil implique une explosion de l’ancien corps” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 47). What is more, this split is often violent and it may leave a psychological mark on the person who has gone through the shift. To break free from the cycle, and become something new, a series of events must take place. I argue that the process of becoming begins with a departure from the past and a move to a new place. Secondly, others recognize and mark you as foreign. Thirdly, you recognize yourself as having nowhere to go as you realize there is no place to which you can return. Finally, the self is in crisis, a rupture with origins occurs, and there is a split from the past self.

Events that lead to rupture are slightly different for each of the authors in my project. In Baker’s Mon sang dans tes veines, for example, Joan goes through this process in clear steps. First, she is marked as strange in multiple ways, namely that she is always referred to by the color of her skin and by her social status in the house as servant. The house is first described as a castle: “Ainsi, les premières lueurs de l’aurore étaient apparues à l’horizon, tandis que chacun régnait sa chambre dans le splendide château, vaste par ses proportions, moderne par son installation étudiée et confortable” (50). The possibilities within the house seem endless, but it later becomes suffocating for Joan, and she only finds solace outside of that space, away from Clarence. It later becomes a prison for Joan and she cannot escape Fred and Clarence. When Fred’s friends visit the house for a weekend of partying, Joan comes to realize that she will never fit into Fred’s world; his original departure from the house forever changed the dynamic between the two of them. Throughout the party weekend Joan is marked by Clarence and Mrs. Barclay as being different. Joan looks in the mirror and begins to recognize herself through how these women view her: “Elle aperçut soudain son profil entier dans une des grandes glaces. [. . .] J’ai été créée pour être une petite Jô, toute simple, il faut jusqu’à la mort, rester la même chose” (53-
And on the next page, she imagines how Fred must see her: “Ne faisait-elle pas partie du décor? . . . Pour lui elle n’était peut-être qu’une forme sombre se détachant sur les tapisseries mauves et bleues des salons” (55). She moves about with nowhere to go and she observes the group of young people from the shadows, watching from the periphery: “Joan circulait sans rien dire” (60). Finally, the moment of crisis begins is when Joan witnesses Fred kissing Clarence and Joan realizes that she cannot be a part of Fred’s future and their past friendship is forever lost: “Joan sentait son cœur se serrer, une gêne s’empara d’elle, et le verre de fin cristal qu’elle tenait dans ses doigts se brisa sans bruit” (62). The breaking glass illustrates the shattering of their friendship and what has been lost to Joan. In the rest of the novel there is the story of the blood transfusion, which further serves to distance Joan from Fred as she cannot remain in his world. And yet, she has ensured with the transfusion that she will forever be a part of his world.

Ernaux’s books also describe the process of rupture with origins. In La place, for example, attempts to return to her father and his place of origin but shows her distance from that past. When Ernaux finds herself in her new bourgeois world, she sees herself as marked as strange, she does not fit in: “Quand j’ai commencé à fréquenter la petite-bourgeoisie d’Y. . . , on me demandait d’abord mes goûts, le jazz ou la musique classique, Tati ou René Clair, cela suffisait à me faire comprendre que j’étais passé dans un autre monde” (65-66). Things become stranger as she moves deeper into the new world: “C’était perdre la notion du temps, celui où les espèces doivent se mettre en terre, le souci de ce que penseraient les autres” (67). She realizes that she is no longer a part of the world of her parents, instead drawing the line between her world and theirs by claiming herself a part of the “us” of the new world: “Je dis souvent ‘nous’ maintenant, parce que j’ai longtemps pensé de cette façon et je ne sais pas quand j’ai cessé de le faire” (61). Returning to her parents’ home, Ernaux feels the detachment from the past to her
core, and this is the moment of self-splitting. She sees her parents for the first time after a departure and: “Je les retrouvais tels qu’ils avaient toujours été, sans cette ‘sobriété’ de maintien, ce langage correct, qui me paraissaient maintenant naturels. Je me sentais séparée de moi-même” (97-98, my emphasis).

In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux attempts to return to the moment of rupture and splitting of the selves. She recognizes that there is no going back to before the event, and refers to it as undoable: “De l’irréversibilité de l’événement” (73). While she can never explicitly return to the event, she can return to the feelings of the process surrounding the rupture. After the encounter, Ernaux recognizes herself as strange, losing her ability to read: “Je la vois l’après-midi lisant les premières pages de La condition humaine en livre de poche. À chaque phrase qu’elle lit, elle oublie la précédente. Après le meurtre de l’homme endormi sous la moustiquaire, elle ne comprend plus rien à l’histoire. Elle n’a jamais été dans cette incapacité de lire” (48). Her body begins to take on the feelings of strangeness, as the psychological rupture reverberates physically. She goes through a cycle of anorexia then bulimia: “Ce jour-là, la fille dans l’épicerie ne sait pas qu’elle est entrée dans la ronde infernale de l’abstinence draconienne suivie de la retombée dans la crise de gloutonnerie, au déclenchement obscur et irrépressible” (102). Finally, she loses her period during this time, and realizes that she has spiraled to a non-place, an elsewhere that is outside of the temporality of the world: “Exclue de la communauté des filles, celle du sang perdu régulièrement chaque mois [. . .] j’étais sortie du temps—sans âge” (90). Ernaux measures the distance between the irretrievable past and the present in her prose and in the blank space and fragmentary edges of the novels as she attempts to move between the past and present. For example, she marks the space between her past and present that was created after a rupture with origins by a gap on the page before: “Il n’y a plus rien d’Yvetot en elle, du
pensionnait et des religieuses, du café-épicerie” (59). Reflecting on her years as a student, in Les années, Ernaux writes about her movement away from home as a continual becoming “other” that leads to a rupture: “Ses années d’étudiante ne sont plus pour elle objet de désir nostalgique. Elle les voit comme le temps de son embourgeoisement intellectuel, de sa rupture avec son monde d’origine” (121). The blank spaces between each photograph-memory in this novel also demonstrate the impossibility of memory to return to a past in a manner that is linear; the past is always marked by subjective experience and it is fragmented, like the edges of Les années itself.

Many of the characters in Némirovsky’s texts go through a rupture with origins after they have arrived in France. In Les feux de l’automne, for example, Thérèse witnesses the separation between past and present self: “Thérèse elle-même éprouvait une sensation étrange et funèbre de dédoublement. Elle était elle-même, et elle était une autre, la Thérèse d’autrefois qui demeurait seule, mariée d’une nuit et bientôt veuve” (285-286). Many of Némirovsky’s characters are different in the sense that she weaves together experiences of those denied entry and refused cartes de visite or travail; while there is still a distance between origins, there is an even greater distance between them and their new place of residence. Themes of doubles and doubled-selves appear throughout her novels, but especially in Les chiens et les loups, with the character Ada, whose traversing of adolescence is articulated in glimpses of the past and future selves sometimes within the same moment:

“Elles sont méchantes,” pensa Ada. Mais ainsi que cela lui arrivait parfois, elle était habitée en même temps par deux pensées différentes: l’une naïve, enfantine, et l’autre plus mûre, indulgente et sage; elle sentait en elle deux Ada, et l’une des deux comprenait pourquoi on la chassait, pourquoi on lui parlait avec colère: ces enfants affamés surgissaient devant les riches Juifs comme un rappel éternel, un
souvenir atroce et honteux de ce qu’ils avaient été ou de ce qu’ils auraient pu être.

Personne n’osait penser: “ce qu’ils pourraient redevenir un jour.” Ada se cacha derrière le rideau et, aussitôt, elle s’endormit à moitié. (95)

The glimpse of the other self is exhausting and she cannot settle on it for very long. Harry recognizes Ada as doubled when he refuses to dance with her because he sees her as a child and this is a moment of crisis for Ada when she feels split in two: “En cet instant, dans le cœur d’Ada, l’extrême haine et l’extrême amour se confondaient et formaient un sentiment si violent, si contradictoire, si trouble qu’elle fut comme déchirée en deux, mais les pensées de Harry, elles aussi, n’étaient pas simples: il avait peur d’Ada et il était en même temps attiré par elle; il la regarda avec une curiosité douloureuse et passionnée” (119). At the end of the story, when Ada has been deported back to Ukraine, she is no longer split in two, but shattered into pieces:

Il lui semblait que son corps, déchiré par la douleur, n’avait pas repris son unité, son effrayante capacité de souffrir lorsque souffrait un coin quelconque de la chair ou de l’âme; il était sorti de son esclavage; il était dissocié, formé de mille petites Ada, qui, toutes, gardaient leur liberté, et chacune se réjouissait sans se soucier des autres, sans se soucier, surtout, de la véritable Ada et de son passé. Avait-elle eu un passé seulement? (334)

Legally, she has been excluded from France, the place where she attempted to arrive, and has been banished to her country of origin. Because she can never exactly return to that home as she once was, she experiences a double rupture: a rupture with France and a rupture of self. The question she poses herself is framed in uncertainty of a past that is impossible to return to after the rupture. With “Il lui semblait,” the thought is already undermined from the beginning from having anything firm to stand upon. The questioning of having had a past at the end of the quote
further destabilizes that past and she remains split apart in grief for her irretrievable life in France.

Sarraute writes about the process of rupture in different ways in *Tropismes* and *Enfance*, but in both, the process is an interior battle. In *Tropismes*, “Un homme souffre de la médiocrité de pensée de son entourage,” there is a description of an interior tear or a split self as the self is ripped apart. A man lies in bed and is burdened by the thoughts of recognizing his present situation as undesirable, he is infiltrated by his surroundings and they leave their marks: “‘Mais peut-être que pour eux c’était autre chose.’ C’était ce qu’il pensait, écoutant, étendu sur son lit, pendant que comme une sorte de bave poisseuse leur pensée s’infiltrait en lui, se collait à lui, le tapissait intérieurement” (17). It becomes impossible for him to escape this situation, for he has nowhere to go: “Il n’y avait rien à faire. Rien à faire. Se soustraire était impossible” (17). The self is in crisis as it tears apart: “Se plier, se plier, s’effacer: ‘Oui, oui, oui, oui, c’est vrai, bien sûr,’ voilà ce qu’il fallait leur dire, et les regarder avec sympathie, avec tendresse, sans quoi un déchirement, un arrachement, quelque chose d’inattendu, de violent allait se produire quelque chose qui jamais ne s’était produit et qui serait effrayant” (17-18). Finally, there is a rupture with the group at the end of the chapter: “Mais il savait aussi que c’était probablement une impression fausse. Avant qu’il ait le temps de se jeter sur eux—avec cet instinct sûr, cet instinct de défense, cette vitalité facile qui faisait leur force inquiétante, ils se retourneraient sur lui et, d’un coup, il ne savait comment, l’assommeraient” (18). The repetition of the conditional tense at the end of this quote shows that it is as though he had already imagined the possibility of this happening, and it also represents the echoes of the past self that are seeping through to the present.

In *Enfance*, the entire book is written as a dialogue with a split self, and like Ernaux’s *Mémoire de fille*, it is an attempt to return to the past of childhood, but this return is only possible
to attempt with a splitting of the self. Sarraute announces this split from the beginning, and her desire to rip apart, which she first arrives at in German, showing the nonlinear path back to the past: “‘Ich werde es zerreissen.’ ‘Je vais le déchirer’ . . . je vous en avertis, je vais franchir le pas, sauter hors de ce monde décent, habité, tiède et doux, je vais m’en arracher, tomber, choir dans l’inhabitée, dans le vide” (12). There are moments throughout the text when Sarraute recognizes herself as strange. For example, when she realizes she no longer belongs in the house after she walks into the room where her mother and Kalia are having sex. She has trouble remembering the moment and converses with herself to push herself to remember the feeling of being foreign in this moment: “—J’étais un corps étranger . . . qui gênait . . . —Oui: un corps étranger. Tu ne pouvais pas mieux dire. C’est cela que tu as senti alors et avec quelle force . . . Un corps étranger . . . Il faut que l’organisme où il s’est introduit tôt ou tard l’élimine” (75-76). She repeats this phrase marking and recognizing herself as strange. Later, she questions a possible return to how things were in the past, if it could be different: “Mais si tu étais revenue là-bas? Es-tu sûre de n’avoir pas redouté, même un seul instant, même très fugitivement que là-bas, auprès de ta mère, ça puisse te reprendre?” (136). Her response acknowledges an impossibility: “Il me semble qu’à ce moment-là, j’ai cru posséder pour toujours une force que rien ne pourrait réduire, une complète et définitive indépendance” (136-7). In claiming the moment of rupture with origins, she finds freedom; and, through the split self returning in dialogue in her writing, it becomes possible to articulate her autonomy.
5. Conclusion: Deterritorialization of the Self

5.1 Shifting Identities

After claiming arrival into a new place, a line is drawn between here and there and a new identity begins to form with the arrival. Much as in construction, foundations are dug, a building is welded together, and seemingly permanent connections are made. We almost always overlay things on top of each other in particular ways that allow us to unoverlay them, or delink them. Metaphors of self-construction, territorialization, and striated space, after arrival into a new place, link to the construction of social categories such as race and gender. Performative acts are tiny shifts that do not disrupt the entire system. Indeed, insignificant changes are not the same as a singular, disruptive “war machine” that uproots an entire system of power. But perhaps we can think of them as micro war machines: performative acts rupture a part of their surroundings, forever changing even a miniscule section of the rhizome in a small but significant way. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would say that they are against permanent identity and for change, flow, escape, movement. For them, things are only true in a temporal sense: truth exists in one moment, but in the next it has shifted. Performative acts as micro war machines occur when the authors in my project perform their identities strategically. They demonstrate their flexibility to navigate multiple, fluid identities and use this ability to examine different systems of power and identity in their works.

I argue that, while change is possible, rupture from the process of becoming “outsider” is more of a deterritorialization than a subtle shift. For each of the authors in my project, this process is wrought with multiple crises including linguistic breaks, physical symptoms, and real
societal implications that are depicted by each in different ways: Baker performs other selves that are not herself and demonstrates the absurdity in representations of the colonial “other”; Ernaux writes about rupture and the split with her self of origins and the stark contrasts between social classes and physical places and the implications of these differences; Némirovsky writes about doubles and multiple selves and the effects of the repus and the affamés; and Sarraute writes about the ripping apart of the singular self through her establishment of the form of the tropism that is unifying as a translation of universal emotions.

5.2 On France

I conclude my fourth section with a four-step process of “becoming an outsider”: 1) departure and arrival, 2) marked as “other,” 3) nowhere to go, and 4) self-crisis and rupture. This process of becoming an outsider is mirrored in the headings and content of the four sections of this chapter. I aim to distort the boundaries between macro sections and micro examples to demonstrate the ways in which the limits between self and “other,” “other” and self, have begun to blur. In Chapter Four, I shall interrogate the boundaries between self and other and focus on France as a particular location into which each of the authors in my project arrived. I will also investigate France as a place with power structures within which each author operated and negotiated identities as they created their works.
Boundaries framing categories that originally appeared to be clear and immoveable may begin to blur as encounters between people occur in border space. That is especially true for the determiners of “self” and “other” as a binary that becomes hazy for those on the move who recognize themselves as outsiders. For them, identification is a continual process of “becoming.” In her article, “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’ Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics,” Jasbir Puar writes about categories such as race, gender, and sexuality as events, actions, and encounters between bodies. Furthermore, referencing Kimberlé Crenshaw’s use of intersectionality, Puar writes that “identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multicausal, multidirectional, liminal; traces aren’t always self-evident” (59). This notion of identity as a process is certainly the permeable border, it is at once in-between, multi, and constantly in development. We can expand this viewpoint to imagine categories as permeable. Indeed, in reference to Judith Butler, Nivedita Menon writes about the instability of categories: “At no point in our lives can we be confident that our gender identity is secure; we can never let up on this performance” (71). The notion of continuous performativity is what Julia Kristeva writes about in Seule, une femme in regard to Simone de Beauvoir’s famous utterance: “‘On’ naît femme. Mais ‘on’ devient un ‘je’ féminin, un sujet-femme: longue et complexe construction [. . .] et qui dure toute une vie” (189). Menon observes that for this ongoing process in non-Western societies, the individual is produced at the intersection: “there remains a sense of self that is produced at the intersection of individuated bodies and collectivities of different sorts. Individuation then—that is, the process of recognizing
oneself as primarily an individual—is always an on-going process in the present continuous in our parts of the world” (54). This long, complex, and continuous iteration of identity still occurs within certain constructs, as Kristeva’s reflection on this reads, that one is born a woman—one is born into certain societal categories—, and we are sexed even before birth. Monique Wittig fights against that construct in her chapter “One Is Not Born a Woman,” where she attempts to “establish a link between women fighting for women as a class, against the idea of ‘woman’ as an essentialist concept” (xvi). As Judith Butler points out, for Wittig, language itself is repetitive and performative, and it produces effects of the creation of certain divisions or categories; it is a set of acts, repeated over time, that produce reality-effects that are eventually misperceived as “facts.” Collectively considered, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created the appearance of natural division. The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legisates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with the principles of sexual difference. (Gender Trouble 157)

Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser also write that gender and sexuality are categories that create ways that produce bodies. Identities are performed and in-flux, never solidifying into a singular, coherent identity. These authors of Narrative Theory Unbound also write about the real material implications and effects of identity categories: “While gender and sexuality are therefore not an essence but a performance, these and other identity categories, however constructed and fluid, nonetheless have real implications and effects” (7-8). This ties into Butler’s explanation of gender as performance and the idea of the self as fluid and the body as permeable, but it is also
clear that certain dangerous binaries or strictly structured border lines have impacts on human lives.

In this chapter, I blur the line between literary forms and historical context, between authors and the locations in time and place where they write, investigating the impact of social constructs in France upon their works. I argue that Josephine Baker, Annie Ernaux, Irène Némirovsky, and Nathalie Sarraute are boundary writers; they all operated and took up residence in the border space between multiple states and identities and created works from that particular place. Maggie Humm writes about how border women “are not decentered fragmented individuals but writers who have begun to cohere a core identity by entering the transitional space between self and other. The border is the trope of difference and potential conflict, between races, between cultures and between sexual preferences” (6). I shall examine borders as indistinct and unclear between outsiders and citizens while exploring what the concept of “home” looks like to each author in my project and the process of “becoming at home.” I reconsider many of the same borders from my first chapter, “Behind, Within,” this time through the context of each author as a border-dweller residing in France. The first section, “Blurring the Boundary Between Self and Other,” continues from Chapter Three after a rupture with origins that leads to recognition of the both the self and the “other” as an outsider. The second section, “Home,” explores the concept of home from different theoretical interpretations, especially through Sara Ahmed’s view of home a porous skin and Avtar Brah’s notion of “homing desire.” In the third section, “On Patrie,” I investigate what it means to become French, situating the authors to France as a particular location from which each was writing. In the fourth section, “Problems with Patrie,” I focus on the impossibility of assimilation and explore ways in which each figure navigates problems within systems of patriarchy, parentage, and the nation in their
works. Finally, I claim in my conclusion that the writers in my project are all at home in the in-between space of the border, and it is there where communities and coalitions can take shape.

1. Blurring Boundaries


1.1 Blurring of Selves

In the in-between space of the border, the self becomes unclear and indistinguishable from other selves. To demonstrate that ambiguity, authors choose to use inclusive, vague pronouns instead of differentiating proper nouns to describe characters. Rosi Braidotti writes about polyglots and their understanding of language as “not only and not even the instrument of communication but a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings, which we call civilization” (13). The authors in my project use language strategically in their works to demonstrate the fragile links between human beings. In Nathalie Sarraute’s *Tropismes*, the pronouns repeat from one section to the next and it becomes impossible to know if there is any singular person whom she is referencing. The second section of *Tropismes*, “Un homme souffre de la médiocrité de pensée de son entourage,” for example, opens with an unclear “ils” after a similarly indistinct “un homme” in the title: “Ils s’arrachaient à leurs armoires à glace où ils étaient en train de scruter leurs visages” (15). In *Portrait d’un inconnu*, Sarraute references “elles” but no one knows who they are: “Personne ne les reconnaît, quand elles sortent et vont, comme elle, longeant les murs, avides et
obstinées” (40). The repetition continues to underline the fact that it is a group of “others,” an unknown, indistinguishable, and dangerous “they”: “Elles sont derrière la porte. Elles attendent. Il sent comme elles se déplient, se glissent insidieusement vers lui. Elles palpent. Elles tendent vers le point sensible, un point vital en lui, dont elles savent exactement l’emplacement, leurs ventouses” (40). For Annie Ernaux, on the other hand, the blending of “on,” “nous,” and “elle” in *Les années* does not signify a threatening unknown; rather, that choice represents articulations of a comprehensive, universal experience of her generation. In *Mémoire de fille*, Ernaux also plays with pronouns, distinguishing between her past self, the “fille de 58” or “Annie D.,” who no longer exists, and others in the scene who impact the formation of that past self:

Dans l’espèce de tableau qui se re-présente chaque matin devant moi au moment d’écrire—un château parcouru de haut en bas, sur les pelouses, d’enfants indistincts, vêtus uniformément de bleu—il y a:

Eux, le groupe des moniteurs, chœur obscène dominé par les garçons, leurs voix, leurs rires et leurs chansons.

Lui, H, lointain, à la fois en ‘eux’ et flottant au-dessus d’eux, l’Ange du tableau.

Elle, Annie D, au centre de scènes avec eux.

Il n’y a pas de moi dans le tableau, il n’y a que des autres, imprimés sur elle, Annie D, comme sur une plaque sensible. Il n’y a pas non plus, au-delà de
The impact of this scene is further augmented by the space that Ernaux interjects between each new description. Annie D. is lost even more deeply in the past as her separation from the Ernaux of the present is amplified by a double distance of the summer camp as an isolated space that exists outside of normal social parameters. Ernaux establishes this isolation not only with the space on the page, but also with her choice to refer to others not by their names, but by pronouns and initials.

In *Les chiens et les loups*, Irène Némirovsky blurs the boundaries between the characters Ben and Harry through themes of switching places, making the two characters almost indistinguishable from one another: “Ah! vous êtes bien pareils tous les deux! . . . Vous êtes de ceux qui ne peuvent passer froidement devant une porte fermée sans essayer, par la ruse ou par la force, de pénétrer là où Dieu vous a interdit d’aller” (238). In a later scene, Ada remarks to Ben: “Tu disais tout à l’heure que vous vous ressembliez!” and Ben responds: “Comme le chien et le loup se ressemblent, dit-il en haussant les épaules” (288). Ben and Harry, like the title of the novel suggests as well, are two sides to the same coin, representing the line between the domesticated dog versus the wild wolf, with distinct individuality through their different names but undeniable similarities between them that remain apparent. The passage of time is fluid and irregular in the novel, for example, in the ninth chapter before a party, the narration shifts to different temporal points from one paragraph to another and then suddenly, almost joltingly, it is time for the party. I argue that the unpredictability in this narration expresses the fine line between domesticated dog and wild wolf that is also encapsulated through the Ben and Harry doubles in the novel; the transformation is unpredictable, unexpected, and feels almost unnatural.
Baker, too, shifts narration in *Mon sang dans tes veines*, through a switching of perspective from that of Joan in a third-person narration, then between Clarence, Dr. Anderson, and Fred, moving back and forth in subsequent chapters. The shifting of perspectives in the novel create an effect of an effort on the part of the author to have the reader weigh each side of the story from different points of view, which fits nicely into the novel’s motifs of diversity and tolerance.

Sarraute also plays with borders that separate. For example, in *Enfance*, she finishes one chapter and trailing off with ellipsis on a thought about her stepmother Véra and her father: “Qui n’aurait dit que Véra était ma grande sœur, que nous étions ses deux filles . . .” (150). On the next page, a new chapter begins with the two figures next to each other: “Nous sommes assises, Véra et moi, à côté l’une de l’autre, à la table de la salle à manger couverte d’un épais tapis de peluche dorée” (151). In making this separation of chapters, but with the ellipsis and thus not a clear separation, she blurs the boundaries not only between chapters, but also between mother and daughter, age, and family relations.

1.2 Animal or Human?

Where does the border between the self and the “other” begin, and where does it end?

Where does the border between human and nature exist? To return to Némirovsky’s wolf and dog theme in *Les chiens et les loups*, this novel also puts into question human nature and represents the capacity for a Dr. Jekyll to turn into a Mr. Hyde, as if as humans, the line is always blurred between when we are considered human beings and when we are animals. The line between the dog and the wolf is blurry, and Némirovsky brings to light the fact that there is a
tipping point between the two. She also works in the theme of fluidity between humans and animals in *Le maître des âmes*, which Olivier Philipponnat describes in the preface, as:

> [U]n conte qui recourt aux moyens du conte: Asfar est une “bête sauvage perdue loin de sa forêt,” puis “un sorcier.” Ce conte est celui du lycanthrope, cet hybride que la presse d’alors décrète “inassimilable,” première station d’une lente déshumanisation. C’est celui des racines que l’on n’arrache pas: levés dans l’espoir d’un occident, les héros d’Irène Némirovsky se couchent toujours à l’orient. (24)

Indeed, characters in this novel are cyclical, like the werewolf who is in a cycle of shifting between two states of being. Dario Afar longs to assimilate to and be successful in France but he is constantly reminded of where he came from, feeling: “Honte d’être irrémédiablement ce qu’il était, désir désespéré de se transformer, de changer d’apparence, de condition et d’âme” (101).

The animalization of Dario and the presentation of him as “other” links to contemporary discussions of post-humanism and historical representations of the “other” as equated with animal and human as a term reserved for those with a privileged status. Certainly, representations of Josephine Baker as colonial “other” in her films and performances also relate to the topic of post-humanism. In her films, Bakers’ characters are constantly associated with animals. In *Zou Zou*, for example, her little “chien chien” is always with her as a companion. In *La sirène des tropiques*, her dog Bamboula saves her from being raped by Alvarez while she is swimming. The film *Princesse Tam Tam* begins with Alwina carrying a goat and ends with her animals living inside the house. In *Mon sans dans tes veines*, Joan saves Clarence from riding off a cliff by calming the spooked horse: “Reconnaissant sa voix comme celle d’une enchanteresse, l’animal se calma aussitôt” (93). Baker’s ability to relate to the animals blurs the line between human and
animal and differentiates her from other humans, illustrating the differences between her own world and the society’s rules within which she operates.

1.3 On Fluidity

Boundaries between the self and “other” are sometimes represented in liquid terms that demonstrate the permeability of the border, including leaking, submersion, and the borderline that is in flux. For example, in Sarraute’s *Portrait d’un inconnu*, there are explicit references to liquids, surging, and flow: “Là, je m’accroche, j’appuie. Et je sens alors sourdre d’eux te s’écouler en un jet sans fin une matière étrange, anonyme, comme la lymphe, comme le sang, une matière fade et fluide qui coule entre mes mains, qui se répand” (72). The inside and outside references from this quote also link to the self and “other” leaking into one another: “Quelque chose venant de lui, une parcelle arrachée à lui au passage, son vague et frais parfum, me parvenaient, accompagnant l’angoisse habituelle, la haine. L’Inconnu prenait sa part de mon tourment. Je n’étais plus seul. Un sentiment réconfortant de confiance, de dignité, de fierté même me soutenait tandis que je prenais le chemin du retour” (100-101). In front of the portrait of the unknown, the boundary between the protagonist and the painting becomes fluid: “Nous ne bougeons pas, assis l’un en face de l’autre, le vieux et moi. Il a un air tout ratatiné, comme vidé. Son visage s’est un peu affaissé. Je devais lui ressembler, j’avais aussi cet air abandonné, quand j’étais affalé ainsi dans la salle d’exposition, sur la banquette” (233). And finally, the line becomes even vaguer: “Je vois qu’il me sourit. Il me montre la place vide auprès de lui: ‘Venez donc là, vous serez mieux’” (234). The man in the painting interacts with the man standing in
front of the painting, calling him to come closer as he seeps out of the painting and into the museum.

Ernaux writes about the line between self and “other” as a submersion of one within the other: the incipit to Mémoire de fille articulates this blurry line:

Il y a des êtres qui sont submergés par la réalité des autres, leur façon de parler, de croiser les jambes, d’allumer une cigarette. Englués dans la présence des autres.
Un jour, plutôt une nuit, ils sont emportés dans le désir et la volonté d’un seul Autre. Ce qu’ils pensaient être s’évanouit. Ils se dissolvent et regardent leur reflet agir, obéir, emporté dans le cours inconnu des choses. Ils sont toujours en retard sur la volonté de l’Autre. Elle a toujours un temps d’avance. Ils ne la rattrapent jamais. (11)

The “other” remains forever just out of reach, slipping from one’s grasp and impossible to fully capture. Ernaux makes a list of films she must see before beginning to write about the missing “fille de 58” and the line between her current and past selves dissolves for a moment: “À chaque fois, c’est comme si j’étais raptée par la fille sur l’écran, que je devenais elle, non la femme que je suis aujourd’hui, mais la fille d l’été 58. C’est elle qui me submerge, suspend mon souffle, me donne brièvement l’impression de ne plus exister hors de l’écran” (21-22). And yet, while Ernaux can never fully grasp the “fille de 58,” this figure remains a part of her: “cette fille n’est pas moi mais elle est réelle en moi. Une sorte de présence réelle” (22). Undeniably, memory functions exactly in this fluid manner; through memory we can move between the past and present, but it is impossible to retain the past in the present. And yet, the past seeps through into the present as it impacts the formation of the self and one’s worldview.
1.4 Recognition

The boundary between people is permeable and unsolid, just like all the borders and boundaries examined in this project. After a crisis of the self and a rupture with the past, the separation between self and “other” becomes increasingly less distinct. In Étrangers à nous-mêmes, Kristeva writes about this common ground as found through psychoanalysis, and the recognition of the self as “othered” and of the self in the “other”:

C’est de dénouer le transfert—dynamique majeure de l’altérité, de l’amour/haine pour l’autre, de l’étrangeté constitutive de notre psychisme—qu’à partir de l’autre je me réconcilie avec ma propre altérité-étrangeté, que j’en joue et que j’en vis. La psychanalyse s’éprouve alors comme un voyage dans l’étrangeté de l’autre et de soi-même, vers une éthique du respect pour l’inconciliable. Comment pourrait-on tolérer un étranger si l’on ne sait pas étranger à soi-même? (269)

The “other” leaks into the self and leaves an imprint, like the mark left after a border crossing. Recognizing this mark or trace generates a fragile attachment between self and “other” due to continuously shifting identities of each. Paddy McQueen writes about the fragility in recognition: “a plausible account of recognition must acknowledge the instabilities inherent within our identities, which in turn highlights the tenuousness of recognition in establishing us as social subjects” (4). McQueen continues in reference to the philosophers Fichte and Hegel, who “present an intersubjective or dialogic conception of the subject: we can only understand ourselves through our interactions with others. It is not just that others help me make sense of myself, but rather that others are in some way constitutive of the self. The other, as it were, is contained within and is an essential condition of, the subject” (10). Recognition can be a like a
practice of becoming, a continuous process of recognizing the “other.” Or, recognition can happen in a moment, like the moment of arrival, a claim of acknowledgment of the step that has been made, of the movement and border crossing between selves that has taken place. What is more: “recognition can help form, or even determine, our sense of who we are, the value accorded to us as individuals, and the way in which we understand freedom and justice” (McQueen 1).

In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux begins to recognize that self in others. For example, she sees a missing piece of the “fille de 58” that is reconstituted as Brigitte Bardot in En cas de malheur (1958): “Stupéfaction de voir combien j’avais la même façon que Bardot de me conduire avec les hommes en 58, les gaffes, que je faisais, ou le naturel que j’avais, disant à l’un que j’avais flirté avec l’autre. Sans aucune règle. C’est l’image de moi la plus refoulée” (60-61). Recognizing herself in others occurs in the novel through public examples such as the film, songs, or literary references. Ernaux thus recognizes her missing self in artificial, impersonal ways that are linked to public memory and French national identity with societal references anyone could look up on the Internet, as she herself also uses to look up old friends from summer camp. Artificial spaces such as the Internet, can promote recognition, for the rules and regulations of society are bent and no longer applicable in the same manner as they are in quotidian life. The line between the “fille de 58” and Ernaux writing the novel becomes blurred between multiple selves and the girl’s presence is unclear: “La fille de la photo n’est pas moi mais elle n’est pas une fiction” (20). She continues, stating facts that anyone could know, such as what is visible in the photo and then claims the “fille de 58” as “othered”: “La fille de la photo est une étrangère qui m’a légué sa mémoire” (21). With this passage Ernaux simultaneously distorts the link between her present and past selves by undermining the reality of the past due to
its irretrievability and also creates a connection between the two selves, acknowledging that they are forever linked within her.

For Némirovsky, party scenes act as artificial spaces where recognition can occur between similar peoples who are strangers but who have the same backgrounds as outsiders. Social circles become unfamiliar at parties and it is socially acceptable to both observe others’ interactions and to interact with others in ways that are not allowed outside of this space. Dario, for example, in *Le maître des âmes*, watches the party, half-hidden behind a curtain and from that place on the periphery he recognizes the other “outsiders” in the group:

> D’ailleurs, beaucoup de visages avaient, comme le sien, un air avide, impudent, inquiet, qu’il reconnaissait. Combien de semblables ici! . . . Combien de frères! [. . .] Oui, en effet, ce sont des frères, venus, eux aussi, de tous ces lieux étrangers que les Français n’imaginent même pas. Moi, Dario Asfar, je connais tout cela. Je me suis roulé dans la boue dont ils sont sortis. J’ai mangé le même pain amer. J’ai versé les mêmes larmes, tremblé des mêmes désirs. (144)

The link between all of the similar experiences of the immigrants he sees at the party unifies them: “ce qui les rend semblable, ce n’est pas le besoin d’argent, comme le croit Elinor, ou le plaisir, mais la nécessité de tenir sans cesse. Tenir plus longtemps que l’adversaire. Cacher ses faiblesses, cacher ses blessures. Car leur force nerveuse est l’unique capital dont ils tirent la vie” (146). Dario experiences a small crisis as he recognizes his situation in others and is reminded of his background that he continually tries to escape in his attempts at successfully assimilating into French society.

For Baker, if binaries are presented and recognized as immovable, it becomes impossible for her to exist within that space and she always remains outside of it. In *Zou Zou*, for example,
there is a scene where she works in a “blanchissérie,” dressed in white and she mimics the American actress Barbara who, in scenes that cut back and forth between the two women, is presented as a white, blond woman in a dark stage area dressed in black. This juxtaposition and also distortion of white and black creates an unclear, gray area where Zouzou attempts to enter but is never fully recognized as a part of that world. When Barbara can no longer perform because she skips town with her Brazilian lover, Zouzou takes her place on the stage and sings of her love “Pour moi il y a qu’un homme dans Paris / C’est lui,” which appears to be about her childhood companion Jean, whom she adores but she will never be recognized by him as anything more than a kid sister. While Jean lives his life freely, Zouzou is relegated to the artificial world of the stage. She attempts to rejoin him after her first performance and a stagehand who begs her to stay because of the important ambassadors and government ministers in the audience and she exclaims in response: “Je m’en fiche, je m’en fiche!,” thus demonstrating that her love for Jean is greater than any fame or attention. Zouzou remains unrecognized by Jean as important to him; she discovers Jean in a romantic relationship with her friend Claire and Zouzou finds herself stuck within the cage of unrequited love that is highlighted by the song she sings longing for Haiti stuck in a bird cage. The film ends with this song and an advertisement claiming the one hundredth performance of Zouzou in this role. A similar inability to exist in a gray area occurs in Baker’s novel Mon sang dans tes veines; once the blood transfusion between Joan and Fred occurs, blurring the boundaries between self and “other,” Joan immediately banishes herself from that world because the repercussions from the event would make it impossible for her to stay; she can no longer be recognized as a part of that world because she has upset the entire order and power structures at play that build the world.
Sarraute uses the space of the novel and her tropism form to create recognition between people, as Jean-Paul Sartre points out in his preface to *Portrait d’un inconnu* in reference to Sarraute’s common spaces where the lines between self and “other” dissolve:

> Elle ne veut prendre ses personnages ni par le dedans ni par le dehors parce que nous sommes, pour nous-mêmes et pour les autres, tout entiers dehors et dedans à la fois. Le dehors, c’est un terrain neutre, c’est ce *dedans* en nous-mêmes que nous voulons être pour les autres et que les autres nous encouragent à être pour nous-mêmes. C’est le règne du *lieu commun*. Car ce beau mot a plusieurs sens: il désigne sans doute les pensées les plus rebattues mais c’est que ces pensées sont devenues le lieu de rencontre de la communauté. Chacun s’y retrouve, y retrouve les autres. Le lieu commun est à tout le monde et il m’appartient; il appartient en moi à tout le monde, il est la présence de tout le monde en moi. C’est par essence, *la généralité*; pour me l’approprier, il faut un acte: un acte par quoi je dépouille ma particularité pour adhérer au général, pour devenir la généralité. Non point *semblable* à tout le monde mais, précisément, *l’incarnation* de tout le monde. Par cette adhésion éminemment sociale, je m’identifie à *tous* les autres dans l’indistinction de l’universel. (8-9)

Sarraute’s tropism form perfectly fits this notion of the individual as indistinct from the collective as she translates untranslatable and widespread psychological states and feelings into literary form. Recognition is a fundamental aspect of the tropism form, as the reader identifies with the interior movements laid out in the novel. Sarraute makes recognition more susceptible by removing identifiers such as names, as Anne Minor points out:
Rejecting the traditional procedure of identifying people by their names, she inaugurated the famous “he, she, they” which, while intentionally enveloping the characters in anonymity, restores them to a fuller measure of their inner life and leaves the reader the task of recognizing them from the inside. By emphasizing the secret and uncertain interior universe and minimizing the misleading signs of appearances, Nathalie Sarraute confronts the traditional forms of the novel with a structure closer to psychological reality; that is, closer to life itself. (96)

Minor’s idea of recognition coming from within is exactly the deep, interpersonal recognition that McQueen writes about where others are not only recognized by, but actually shape the self.

1.5 Universal Experiences

Blurring the line between individuals creates a certain universalism where everyone is tied to common human experiences. On political identity and citizenship, Maureen Whitebrook writes: “Political identity would [. . .] represent a movement from separate identity to collective identity, a movement from ‘I’ to ‘we’” (8). Némirovsky often references the movement from singular to collective as linked to a political identity through her own experience navigating the French administrative systems as a non-citizen. In his preface to Le maître des âmes, Olivier Philipponnat writes about Némirovsky’s writing project for this novel that highlights disparities between the repus and the affamés, and the universality of human nature: “Tôt ou tard, riche ou pauvre, français ou non, chacun se livre à la traque mutuelle qui est le propre de la race humaine” (13). Némirovsky is critical of mankind’s capabilities and claims aloofness as a universal principle of humanity (25). The all-encompassing claim of remaining aloof is what unifies in the
sense that it is universal, but while unifying, distance, or separation is also created. Outsiders are unified in Némirovsky’s works as not only being but also recognizing each other as compatriots. For example, Clara and Dario are united mostly because of their shared origins: “Ils étaient unis non seulement par la chair, par l’esprit, par l’amour, mais nés dans le même port de Crimée, parlant la même langue, ils se sentaient fraternels; ils avaient bu à la même source; ils avaient partagé un pain amer” (*Le maître des âmes* 45). Dario wishes to leave his origins behind and become French, while his origins continue to unite him to other outsiders. His image is mirrored in others:

> La rue était bordée de magasins aux portes encastrées de glaces, et chacune d’elles lui renvoyait son image, sa figure anxieuse et sombre, ses oreilles pointues, ses dents longues. Il se haïssait de ressembler à tous ces marchands . . . Cette vie d’aventures, d’expédients, certes, c’était le lot qui lui avait été destiné dès l’enfance, comme à eux, à cette racaille levantine, ses frères. [. . .] Comme il leur ressemblait par les traits du visage, par l’accent, par sa maigre échine, ses yeux brillants de loup. (65-66)

In *Suite française*, Némirovsky depicts common human experiences of attraction, even between political enemies: “Depuis si longtemps le bourg était vide d’hommes que même ceux-là, les envahisseurs, y paraissaient à leur place. Ils le sentaient, se carraient au soleil; les mères des prisonniers ou de soldats tués à la guerre, en les voyant, appelaient tout bas sur leurs têtes la malédiction divine, mais les jeunes filles les regardaient” (349). She further blurs the line between the German soldiers and French citizens in the love story between the French woman Lucile and Bruno, the German soldier billeted in Lucile’s mother-in-law’s house. Indeed, in this
story, political identity is irrelevant in the face of a more unifying and collective experience of love.

Groups that are represented as unified can be characterized as archetypes, figures that have been repeated and appeared so many times that they become common knowledge. Baker claims Joan in *Mon sang dans tes veines* as an archetype, a Joan like every other Joan: “Cette pauvre Joan, dont vous allez lire l’histoire, je l’ai connue . . . Ou plutôt non, ce n’est pas elle que j’ai connue, mais des dizaines de Joan, des petites filles de Saint-Louis qui étaient toutes noires” (3). In Joan’s example, Baker claims Joan’s experience of inequality as being the norm for the time period, shifting Joan’s life story onto countless others and thus creating a community of Joans for the reader to imagine. She is also commenting on the very real inequalities and repercussions of such a story under Jim Crow laws in the United States at that time. Sarraute, too, writes about commonalities between herself as a child and other children for different purposes: “Un enfant. Un. Un. Oui, un enfant parmi tous les autres, un enfant comme tous les autres enfants . . .” (*Enfance* 96-97). For Sarraute, being like other children is a claim that she is ordinary, and her childhood experience was like any other child’s experience, which could be read as a statement about the lack of uniqueness in her childhood as an immigrant to France. Ernaux’s *Les années* can be read as a commentary on French society with the common experiences of someone from her generation within the nation. Some events are witnessed universally, such as Y2K; others are more common and repeated experiences of childhood: vacations to the beach, dinners with family, going to school. By mixing these two types of collective experiences, Ernaux operates between cliché and nostalgia, between individual and collective memory.
The line between archetype and cliché becomes unclear in Sarraute’s representations of women in the thirteenth section of *Tropismes*, “Des femmes sont acharnées à traquer une pièce de tissu”: “elles souriaient tout de même, aimablement, bien élevées, bien dressées depuis de longues années, quand elles avaient couru encore avec leur mère, pour combiner, pour ‘se vêtir de rien,’ ‘car une jeune fille, déjà, a besoin de tant de choses, et il faut savoir s’arranger’” (83). In this section, there is a theme of self-images and perception of the self and how one should look, act, or dress a certain way. With the parts of the quote in quotations the clichéd depiction of women is perhaps a commentary on societal expectations and appearances and the experience of publicities telling women what they need in order to feel a certain way. In *Portrait d’un inconnu*, women are relegated to the periphery, placed together as a unified, group where individuals are erased and unrecognizable: “Elles se ressemblent toutes, d’ailleurs, paraît-il, quand on les étudie bien” (74). The unknown man himself is represented as an archetype, an indistinguishable and possibly dangerous outsider, the *inconnu* is: “un type, un personnage, mais d’où, déjà, de quel roman? Ils ne savent pas très bien, mais d’un coup d’œil ils le reconnaissent: un bon modèle de série coupé sur un vieux patron” (179-180). The protagonist comments on the use of clichés:

[C]es “clichés” dont vous m’avez parlé et dont, comme vous dites, ils s’affublent, pour s’affronter, légitimer leurs pulsions. C’est un trait répandu chez les névropathes, cette soumission au cliché que vous avez très bien dégagée, du reste, et qui n’a rien, à mon avis, d’inquiétant ni de mystérieux [. . .] bien des types de littéraires devenus immortels sont, de notre point de vue, aussi des névrosés. (75-76)

Georges Raillard, in his article about *Portrait d’un inconnu*, equates the clichés to Flaubert’s famous “Madame Bovary, c’est moi” remark that blurred the line between author and novel to
the portrait itself: “Ces tableaux côtoient dans le musée imaginé du roman celui de
*L’Hypersensible-nourrie-de clichés,* ‘un portrait exquis, ton œuvre.’ À Madame Bovary, c’est
moi, fait écho le portrait d’un inconnu, c’est moi, c’est vous” (40). With her use of
commonalities and the erasure of names in *Portrait d’un inconnu,* Sarraute effectively breaks the
boundaries between known and unknown and self and “other.”

2. Home

[S]i je n’arrive pas à les retrouver dans ma grammaire, si le moindre doute
subsiste, il vaut mieux ne pas y toucher, à ces mots, en chercher d’autres que je
pourrai placer dans une autre phrase où ils seront à une place appropriée, dans le
rôle qui leur convient. (Sarraute, *Enfance* 211)

2.1 What is Home?

Sara Ahmed asks: “What does it mean to be at home? How does it affect home and
being-at-home when one leaves home?” (330), and these are the central questions for this section
on “Home.” The word itself does not exist in French (the language authors in my project
navigate in their works) in the same way it does in English. Home is at once: a feeling, a state of
being, a physical place, and an imaginative place. Hamid Naficy distinguishes between “house”:
“the literal object, the material place in which one lives,” “home” as: “anyplace; it is temporary
and it is moveable; it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination,”
and “homeland”: “the most absolute, abstract, and fought for of the three notions” (6). In this
section, I focus on home as it is represented by authors as physical or imaginary places, as
houses, homes, and the desire for taking up residence in “homeland.” Avtar Brah writes about
the location of home as a “mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” and “a place of no return” that is also “a lived experience of the locality.” (192). She likens home to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of “detrimentalisation,” where it is possible for home to be both a place of safety and a place of terror (180). Home is thus always linked to affective understandings of feelings and emotions. Indeed, for Ahmed, home is always related to affect: “The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging—where do I originate from—but that it is sentimentalized as a space of belonging (‘home is where the heart is’). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel” (341). In this section, I examine representations and constructions of home and the feelings that one experiences in search of and within that place that is impossible to locate fully for it is always shifting and never static.

2.2 Home as Enclosed Space

In Narratology, Mieke Bal writes about the senses and the perception of space for characters in a story: “In the story, where space is connected to the characters who ‘live’ it, the primary aspect of space is the way characters bring their senses to bear on space. [. . .] Touch indicates proximity. If a character feels walls on all sides, then it is confined in a very small space. [. . .] A character can be situated in a space it experiences as secure, while earlier on, outside that space, it felt unsafe” (136). In many of the works in my project the authors play with the perception of space as a refuge, where characters are protected, versus as a space that is
suffocating or dangerous. In this section, I focus on the former: ways in which authors write about a desire to create home as a place of refuge, settlement, and security.

Irène Némirovsky’s *Suite française* is a novel that takes place at the start of the German Occupation of France during World War Two and the author juxtaposes the first section, “Tempête en juin,” which describes the mass exodus from Paris, with a section “Dolce,” which is anchored to the war’s effects on one small town, and one woman in particular. Whereas the first part is depicted as chaotic and unstable, like a tempest, the second is calmer and includes descriptions of the house where the Angellier family lives as homey: “La maison était la plus belle du pays; elle avait cent ans; elle était longue, basse, faite d’une pierre poreuse, jaune, qui au soleil prenait une couleur chaude de pain doré” (327). In *Le maître des âmes*, Clara creates a comfortable apartment with a candle in the window that signals to Dario as he passes in the street that everything and everyone is safe: “Elle avait allumé la lampe [. . .]. En Europe, entre les mille lumières de la rue, il apercevait sa fenêtre éclairée . . . et aussitôt il se sentait réchauffé, rassuré, il pensait: ‘Tout va bien’” (112-113). Némirovsky also links home to place, describing the naming of German soldiers as linked to the French homes in which they billeted: “Comme on avait donné autrefois aux fermiers les noms des domaines où ils vivaient, si bien que le facteur descendant des métayers établis jadis sur les terres des Montmort s’appelait à ce jour Auguste de Montmort, les Allemands héritaient en quelque sorte de l’état civil des leurs logeurs. On disait: ‘Fritz de Durand, Ewald de la Forge, Bruno des Angellier.’” (*Suite française* 345).

For Annie Ernaux, home as enclosures of refuge are represented in the recurring image of the automobile in *Les années*; the walls of the small space of the car create “un habitat transitoire” (165). Iain Chambers also writes about home as a mobile habitat as connected to one’s sense of self and belonging, home is “a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though
they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging” (4). Ernaux describes her generation’s formation into family units as enclosures: “Avec une rapidité qui nous stupéfiait, on formait tous de minuscules cellules étanches et sédentaires, se recevant entre jeunes couples et jeunes parents, considérant les célibataires comme une espèce immature qui ignorait les traites, les petits pots Blédina et le Dr Spock, dont la liberté d’aller et venir offensait vaguement” (Les années 94). In Mémoire de fille, Ernaux writes about the enclosed space of the summer camp:

Je lis dans la persistance de ces images la fascination de la fille de 58 pour un monde rigoureusement organisé, réglé au coup de sifflet à roulette, rythmé par les chansons de marche dans une atmosphère de gaieté et de liberté. Une société où tout le monde, du directeur aux infirmières, est d’humeur joyeuse, où les adultes, pour la première fois, lui paraissent supportables. Une sorte de monde clos idéal où tous les besoins sont couverts avec une abondance, une largesse en nourriture, jeux et activités, insoupçonnable depuis son pensionnat d’Yvetot. (41)

From the vantage point of the present, Ernaux recognizes the lure of the summer camp for the “fille de 58” as a place where she could live in the world between childhood and adulthood and find and cultivate a home for herself in this liminal state. In La place, home is linked to place and Ernaux articulates the tension between her new home and her father’s place that was her home of origin. She writes about her father as a proud homeowner, the first in his family to own his own house: “Il a emprunté pour devenir propriétaire des murs et du terrain. Personne dans la famille ne l’avait jamais été” (57). There is a sense of urgency in her father’s desire to own his place, which recurs throughout the novel in references to his obsession with staying in his place:
“Leitmotiv, il ne faut pas péter plus haut qu’on l’a,” and the fear of being displaced: “La peur d’être déplacé, d’avoir honte. Un jour, il est monté par erreur en première avec un billet de seconde. Le contrôleur lui a fait payer le supplément. Autre souvenir de honte: chez le notaire, il a dû écrire le premier ‘lu et approuvé,’ il ne savait pas comment orthographier, il a choisi ‘à prouver.’ Gêne, obsession de cette faute, sur la route du retour. L’ombre de l’indignité” (59).

In Josephine Baker’s *Mon sang dans tes veines*, the inside space of the house becomes uninhabitable and home in St. Louis is depicted as rapidly changing. At first, Joan is content at home; her world is comforting and familiar as she spends time with the animals, her dogs and favorite rooster: “Comme Joan se sentait heureuse au milieu de ce peuple familier et bruyant!” (35). She also finds comfort outside of the property in the church where she discovers the Black Madonna: “Aussi le visage doux de la Madone noire fut soudain dans la vie de Joan un rayon de la magie divine, et la chapelle, le principal but de ses promenades” (35). It becomes clear that Joan is not at home inside the house and its enclosures, but outside of those boundaries. Inside, she follows Fred’s friends around the house as a peripheral observer: “Joan la suivait, mais restait bientôt dans l’ombre des colonnes du hall, d’où elle suivait, curieuse, les présentations, se livrant à de discrets commentaires” (43). When Fred does not come to say hello to Joan and instead attends to his female guests, Joan no longer feels comforted inside the house: “Ce qu’elle attendait? Le mot dont elle entendait encore sonner comme un appel joyeux, ce mot, un des premiers que tout enfant, elle avait compris, que Fred savait dire avec une voix spéciale et séduisante: —*Helloo, João!*” (46). After Fred returns home with his friends, the house is described from a distance, as a castle, or an impenetrable fortress where Joan will never belong: “Ainsi, les premières lueurs de l’aurore étaient apparues à l’horizon, tandis que chacun régnait sa chambre dans le splendide château, vaste par ses proportions, moderne par son installation étudiée et
confortable” (50). When Fred and Clarence become engaged, happiness permeates the house: “C’est que le bonheur est partout dans la maison, dans les bois, dans les airs, depuis le jour des fiançailles” (76). However, for Joan, this space becomes one of tension and she attempts to make sense of this shifting home by questioning Clarence’s character: “Est-ce donc ainsi qu’êtaient élevées les jeunes filles modernes?” (77).

Nathalie Sarraute references the desire to be enclosed and safe within one’s place throughout Portrait d’un inconnu with constant indications of being at home or safe within a refuge: “Entre eux et un univers informe, étrange et menaçant, le monde des objets s’interpose comme un écran, les protège [ . . ] ils se sentent à l’abri” (157) or “sa cohorte protectrice” (178). Home as refuge is linked to family in this novel: “Un père. Rien ne peut remplacer cela. Un père, un refuge, un havre, un port dans les intempéries de la vie” (57). Home is also depicted not only as an enclosure made of physical walls, but of other boundaries that provide shelter: “Cette musique l’enveloppe, le protège; la double rangée de géraniums plantée tout autour de la terrasse le protège aussi. C’est son rempart, derrière lequel il s’abrite, d’où il me voit d’un œil narquois courir à la recherche de ‘sensations’ de ‘visions d’art,’ hein ? Les Offices ? comme il dit” (93-94). Finding the safety of home is depicted as a moment of relief: “Toute frétillante, toute arrondie, gonflée—comme un oiselet apprivoisé qui s’ébroue gentiment au bord de son petit bain de métal, et secoue ses plumes ébouriffées . . . A l’abri enfin. En sûreté” (228). In the same novel, Sarraute writes about the desire to construct a boundary for protection that, once created, provides the necessary self-confidence to take action:

Elles avaient réussi petit à petit [ . . ] elles avaient réussi à attraper, par-ci, par-là, dans tout ce qu’elles trouvaient autour d’elles, des bribes, des brindilles qu’elles avaient amalgamées pour se construire un petit nid douillet, à l’intérieur duquel
elles se tenaient, bien protégées, gardées de toutes parts, bien à l’abri [. . .] c’était extraordinaire de voir comme elles savaient saisir dans tout ce qui passait à leur portée exactement ce qu’il fallait pour se tisser ce cocon, cette enveloppe imperméable, se fabriquer cette armure dans laquelle ensuite, sous l’œil bienveillant des concierges, elles avançaient—soutenues par tous, invincibles, calmes et sûres. (42-43)

Indeed, references to “l’abri” are easily found throughout *Portait d’un inconnu*, and it is in that safe haven where one finds belonging and where everything in it belongs to that person: “Tout lui appartient. Il est chez lui. A l’abri” (119).

Julia Kristeva writes about the outsider who takes refuge in the self in an interior move that is described as comfortable:

Demeure pourtant l’assurance d’être: de pouvoir s’établir en soi avec une certitude douce et opaque—huître fermée sous la marée ou joie inexpressive des pierres chaudes. Entre les deux bords pathétiques du courage et de l’humiliation contre lesquelles le ballottent les heurts des autres, l’étranger persiste, ancré en lui-même, fort de cet établissement secret, de sa sagesse neutre, du plaisir engourdi par une solitude hors prise. (*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* 18)

Because the immigrant lacks a singular home and is in constant search for a feeling of comfort, it becomes possible to find this home and comfort within the self, becoming the only home that is necessary. Sarraute describes the coziness of home in *Tropismes* in “Dans la quiétude d’un cottage anglais, ‘une demoiselle aux cheveux blancs’ attend l’heure du thé,’” which is one of the shortest sections in the novel. It depicts a quiet moment of the day when a woman is at home outside of London during a rainy day waiting for afternoon tea: “C’est aux environs de Londres,
dans un cottage aux rideaux de percale, avec la petite pelouse par derrière, ensoleillée et toute mouillée de pluie” (107). She sits, safely and comfortably enclosed in her little universe of home with all that she needs in this particular moment: “Elle est assise là, toute raide, toute digne, toute sûre d’elle et des autres, solidement installée dans son petit univers” (107-108). In contrast to being content at home in the interior, in Sarraute’s Le planétarium, “chaque personnage s’agite à l’intérieur d’un univers factice qu’il s’est construit à sa mesure, où il se sent à l’abri, mais aussi souvent à l’étroit, et d’où par moments il voudrait s’échapper” (1). Indeed, home as a place of security or a place of fear is not only possible in physical representations of home, but also in interior journeys seeking refuge inside the self.

2.3 Home as Permeable

For the immigrant who has left home and who is seeking a new place of residence, the enclosure that is the nation may become dangerous and home is no longer a place of refuge. The borders of the space of protection are permeable; subject and space leak into and act upon one another. Ahmed describes this permeability as being like a skin:

The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other. To some extent we can think of the lived experience of being at home in terms of inhabiting a second skin, a skin which does not simply contain the homely subject, but which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world that is neither simply in the home or away from the home. The home as skin suggests the boundary between self and
home is permeable, but also that the boundary between home and away is permeable as well. Here, movement away is also movement within the constitution of home as such. That is, movement away is always affective: it affects how “homely” one might feel and fail to feel. (341)

The boundary is indistinct between subject and surrounding space; each has an impact upon the other and changes the other, whether in substantial or imperceptible ways.

The permeability of home is demonstrated in moments of tension in threshold scenes, where identities are negotiated, the past and future are untouchable, and all that remains is the present tension. In Némirovsky’s *Le maître des âmes*, for example, the “presque” motif of almost—but ultimately impossible—arrival recurs in references to literal thresholds that also represent threshold moments of negotiation and irresolution for Dario between shame and desire, imagination and reality. Némirovsky repeats the word “presque” throughout *Le maître des âmes* and I argue that this word is a threshold word because it represents an attempt to cross or take on an identity but without yet arriving. Sarraute repeats this word too: “ils étaient contents, ils se plaisaient ici, ils se sentaient presque chez eux” (*Tropismes* 22, my emphasis). For Baker, the crossroads are many, including the Maharajah scene of her choosing east or west, her scenes and Alwina in France who is—almost—French, inhabiting and negotiating the in-between as she physically arrives to that country. In *Mémoire de fille*, when Ernaux writes about the scene where she loses her virginity, she writes about the event as a threshold moment that she understands through literature: “Elle crève d’envie de faire l’amour mais par amour seulement. Elle connaît par cœur le passage des Misérables sur la première nuit de Cosette et Marius” (29-30). Ernaux represents the tension in her attempt and ultimately her inability to access the “fille de 58” in this scene through the literary references that remove the past self from the event.
“Home” is disconnected from “away”: “Home and away are divided as different spaces and as different modes of being in the world” (Ahmed 339). Sometimes these separate places are represented as static, but they are really constantly in flux: “the narrative requires a definition of home that is itself impossible: it stabilizes the home as a place with boundaries that are fixed, such that home become pure, safe and comfortable” (Ahmed 339). Ahmed is critical of Iain Chambers’s and Rosi Braidotti’s conceptions of home: for them, she writes that home is not given any positive definition: it is constructed only through reference to what it is not, that is, through reference to the homelessness of migration and exile. By being defined negatively in that way, home henceforth becomes associated with stasis, boundaries, identity and fixity. Home is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience, indeed, where the subject is so at ease that she or he does not think. (339)

Each of the figures in my project constantly question the fixed construction of boundaries and borders in their works and because they, too, were all people on the move who left their places of origin, they are certainly categorized as those in search of home and not as those who have arrived at such a place. Ahmed also writes about how one who is at home is stagnant and immobile: there is an “absence of desire, and the absence of an engagement with others through which desire engenders movement across boundaries” (339). Michael Seidel writes about exile in literature as both a wanderer and a homebody: “The typical exile in literature, although by nature a wanderer, is also by habit a homebody. Home is locus, custom, memory, familiarity, ease, security, sanctuary” (10). Reaching this home that is not singular and that is not possible to attain is attempted through acts of writing, an act that is performed, according to Natalie
Edwards and Christopher Hogarth, by women writers, and especially in autobiographical texts as linked to the construction of identity:

Rather than viewing “home” as an outdated source of reference, a construct that should be transcended by the worldly, cosmopolitan postcolonial subject, many female autobiographers represent “home” as a site of struggle—mental, physical, or both—within their self-narratives. Those voices represent “home” as a significant and troubling aspect of identity that the subject overlooks at her peril; the need for an understanding of this notion is thus, to her, more important than ever. (1-2)

All of the authors in my project create works that are linked to their own personal departures from place of origin and their struggles to come to terms with their new place of residence.

Struggle and tension inherent in representations of home are apparent in how each author works out and writes from the border space between the self and the novel, playing with the form of autobiography in various ways. Ernaux, for example, writes non-linear novels that include biographical information about her self and her family but with missing pieces. In Les années, she shifts the form of autobiography away from a singular self to a collective experience of her generation. Sarraute returns to her childhood in Enfance but also in a non-linear fashion and sporadic memories are accessible only through a conversation between her split selves. In her films, Baker reiterates her own journey moving to France and learning French in Alwina’s experience in Princesse Tam Tam, which also coincides with her move from the banana skirt dance to classical training for singing. In her novel, Baker distorts the line between her own experience as a child growing up in Missouri and Joan’s experience by claiming Joan as an archetype and moreover, by choosing to write and publish the novel in French, removing it from
an English-speaking audience. Némirovsky includes references in her novels to her childhood experience of moving to France, for example, in *Le vin de solitude*, where the family also spends time in Finland, as she did with her family after they fled the Russian Revolution. Furthermore, Némirovsky echoes her precarious experience living in France at the start of World War Two through Dario’s experience as an outsider in that country in which he will never be fully accepted.

2.4 Homing Desire

For many contemporary theorists in migrant and cultural studies, home for an immigrant is not a singular, unchangeable place in the past, but rather actions and a continuous journey toward a future. In relation to diaspora in her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, for example, Brah writes about the concept of “homing desire” in contrast to a desire for a “homeland,” (180). By making “homing desire” a verb in the present continuous tense she infuses the term with activity, continuous process, and agency. After a border is crossed and the immigrant enters into a new place, the next step in the definition of “immigrate” is to take up residence in the new place. Chambers, in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, also writes about the active process that is essential to “homing desire”: “To come from elsewhere, from ‘there’ and not ‘here,’ and hence to be simultaneously ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the situation at hand [. . .]. Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make herself at home in the interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present” (6). Kristeva, in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, writes about the happiness of the foreigner as fundamental to the process of becoming at home:
“Peut-on être étranger et heureux? L’étranger suscite une idée neuve du bonheur. Entre fugue et origine: une limite fragile, une homéostasie provisoire. Posé, présent, parfois certain, ce bonheur se sait pourtant en transit, comme le feu qui ne brille que parce qu’il consume. Le bonheur étranger de l’étranger est de maintenir cette éternité en fuite ou ce transitoire perpétuel” (13). Ahmed writes about home as a destination, also linking it to a continual journey and an impossible arrival at a stopping point; the journey itself is home:

the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance—I am here—but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home. In such a space, the subject has a destination, an itinerary, indeed a future, but in having such a destination, has not yet arrived: [at airports] home is indeed elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going: home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place. (331)

Homi Bhabha references the concept of home on the journey itself in a metaphor of a “halfway house,” which “sums up the condition of the literature of immigrants and their successors, who do not identify with single or simple national, sexual or racial units. Thus, characters of unhomely texts express a ‘performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel.’ As characters seek to ‘survive the fathomless waters’ of displacement, their unhomely position becomes a ‘bridge’ which enables an act of inventive ‘presencing’” (quoted in Edwards and Hogarth 3).

Examples of present continuous “presencing,” “becoming,” or a never-ending “homing desire” are found throughout the works of the authors in my project. For example, in Le maître
des âmes, Némirovsky writes about the notion of saving one’s reputation, of Dario’s attempts to belong in any way possible: “Surtout, il fallait sauver la face, garder l’apparence du bien-être, d’une situation aisée, au prix de n’importe quel sacrifice, de n’importe quel mensonge” (51). Dario’s homing desire for belonging at an elevated level of French society is linked further to travel and movement: “il rêvait de trains rapides et de villes étrangères, sachant bien qu’il n’y trouverait que malheur et misère, mais une autre misère, sans doute. C’était déjà cela de gagné” (125). He is constantly thinking of how others perceive him and of earning money based on this image, for example, he desires to rent an office in a nicer part of Paris in order to get more business. In Baker’s La sirène des tropiques, Papitou’s homing desire is in her attraction to nature and the freedom to access this space: “Papitou a deux grands amis, le soleil et la liberté.” In Baker’s other films the homing desire comes into play with the way she follows the male figures in the films, doing everything she can to win their affection, such as with Max in Princesse Tam Tam or Jean in Zou Zou. In Mon sang dans tes veines, however, Fred sees Joan and her two dogs “qui formaient avec la petite une trinité inséparable, comme sa propriété exclusive” (14) and, Joan’s journey in this novel is becoming pious, and sacred, which culminates in her portrayal of the martyr who gives her life (donates her blood) to save Fred. For Sarraute in Enfance, “presencing” is a journey of revisiting her childhood, a homing desire to revisit the past and explore the process of becoming of the self. She must work continuously to find that becoming, as is evident with the opening dialogue between her split selves: “Alors, tu vas vraiment faire ça? ‘Évoquer tes souvenirs d’enfance’. . . Comme ces mots te gênent, tu ne les aimes pas. Mais reconnaissais que ce sont les seuls mots qui conviennent. Tu veux ‘évoquer tes souvenirs’ . . . il n’y a pas à tortiller, c’est bien ça” (7). She reaffirms herself of the difficult journey ahead: “Rassure-toi pour ce qui est d’être donné . . . c’est encore tout vacillant, aucun
mot écrit, aucune parole ne l’ont encore touché, il me semble que ça palpite faiblement, hors des mots . . . comme toujours . . . des petits bouts de quelque chose d’encore vivant . . . je voudrais, avant qu’ils disparaissent . . . laisse-moi” (9). Ernaux, too, writes about the writing process itself in the search for her past self. Mémoire de fille is an entire novel that depicts her homing desire for finding a past self that will never be located. From the vantage point of the present, she explores performances of identity of the “fille de 58” who was practicing being at home in the summer camp. She tries to change herself before the next summer to better fit in: using “cette liste performative [. . .]. Cette conversion envisagée de tout l’être, physique, intellectuel, et social, avait le mérite—la finalité—d’oublier le vide qui me séparait de l’été où j’allais, j’en étais sûre, le revoir” (98). While locations of homing desire are different for each of the authors in my project, they are almost all centered on France as a particular location within which becoming and presencing take place.

3. On Patrie

Jamais plus d’“à la maison,” tant que j’ai vécu là, même quand il fut certain que hors de cette maison il ne pouvait y en avoir pour moi aucune autre. (Sarraute, Enfance 132)

3.1 At Home in France

Each figure in my project anchors her work to France with either explicit references to places within the nation, such as monuments in Paris, or more ambiguous references that hint at societal expectations of French national identity. In the films Josephine Baker stars in, for
example, there are stark representations of each: in Princesse Tam Tam, Alwina navigates high Paris society in nightclubs and parties, and in Zou Zou, when Zouzou first appears in France it is clear she is in Paris because the first scene takes place in front of the Eiffel Tower. Nathalie Sarraute, too, incorporates clear references to places in or near Paris in Enfance: “la place Médicis” (20), “le mur du boulevard Port Royal” (22), “les grilles du Grand Luxembourg” (23), and “l’église de Montrouge” (234). These passing references serve to anchor the plot in her new home of France, where she moves to as a child. In Le vin de solitude, Irène Némirovsky demonstrates the influence and timelessness of French symbols on Hélène: “Hélène traversa la chambre et vint s’accouder à la fenêtre ouverte; le trottoir était illuminé par le clair de lune; un arbre remuait ses branches flexibles et fragiles encore, où poussaient les premières feuilles. Elle regarda la Tour Eiffel où coulaient en lettres de feu: Citroën, Citroën” (262). Hélène tells her mother that she never wants to get old, which is also articulated through this scene of Paris in the spring as quintessentially Paris. Némirovsky also anchors her novels to broader representations of the treatment of outsiders in France; they are regarded as suspicious: “ils étaient . . . ils étaient des étrangers . . . Voilà, ce mot disait tout. Des êtres flottants, sans racines, des émigrés, des suspects” (Les chiens et les loups 182). Annie Ernaux localizes her novel Mémoire de fille to precise cultural and historical references to events in France from 1958: “C’était un été sans particularité météorologique, celui du retour du général de Gaulle, du franc lourd et d’une nouvelle République, de Pelé champion du monde de foot, de Charly Gaul vainqueur du Tour de France et de la chanson de Dalida Mon histoire c’est l’histoire d’un amour. [. . .] L’été 1958” (13). She also does that in Les années, capturing the collective memory of her generation experiencing certain events such as a childhood in post-war France, 1968, or Y2K, for example.
Being at home in France as a particular location from which the figures in my project were working means that the politics of French borders impact the authors and their works. Sara Ahmed writes about home as the nation that is a heterogeneous space:

If we were to expand our definition of home to think of the nation as a home, then we could recognize that there are always encounters with others already recognized as strangers within, rather than just between, nation spaces. To argue otherwise, would be to imagine the nation as a purified space, and to deny the differences within that space: it would be to assume that you would only encounter strangers at the border. (340)

Julia Kristeva writes about the paradox of how political regulations that are created to help outsiders also create the distinction as such: “Si la réglementation politique ou la législation en général définissent notre manière de poser, de modifier et éventuellement d’améliorer le statut des étrangers, elles forment aussi un cercle vicieux, car c’est précisément au regard d’elles qu’il existe des étrangers” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 141). Borders and boundaries are saturated with politics, as Judith Butler writes in *Frames of War* about the epistemological problem raised through framing, or how it is determined who is worthy of being considered human: “the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They are themselves operations of power” (1). To be politically saturated implies that those frames are so full they cannot truly act as containers, and that which makes up the frame itself leaks out into what is inside, while simultaneously, what is inside leaks out through the frame to the outside, like Ahmed’s notion of porous skin. In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal also writes about this permeability in reference to space in a story:
Spaces function in a story in different ways. On the one hand, they are only a frame, a place of action. In this capacity a more or less detailed presentation will lead to a more or less concrete picture of that space. The space can also remain entirely in the background. In many cases, however, space is thematized: it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space thus becomes an acting place rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that “this is happening here” is just as important as “the way it is here,” which allows these events to happen. (139)

Events that unfold within a space are therefore impacted upon by the normative practices of that place, “the way it is here.” French laws, regulations, and societal expectations are all a part of the works the authors in my project create and these works do not exist within a void. Encounters between groups occur within the nation state and “homes do not stay the same as the space which is simply the familiar. There is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitance” (Ahmed 340). The politics that generate the nation state and its borders seep across boundaries and affect those who operate within it as well as the narratives generated from within that place.

3.2 The Mission Civilisatrice

France’s infamous mission civilisatrice was the mission through which France intervened in its colonial empire, implementing French systems, rules, regulations, and—false—notions of a singular, unified national identity. Perhaps there is no better example than the “civilizing
mission” to articulate the attempts at and failings of the construction of a homogenous French identity. Baker did not fit in to a singular notion of French national identity, but she was welcomed and became famous in that country, a perfect example of what Kristeva writes about as “otherness” becoming a cultural exception:

Enfin, lorsque votre étrangeté devient une exception culturelle—si, par exemple, vous êtes reconnu comme un grand savant ou un grand artiste—, la nation tout entière annexera votre performance, l’assimilera à ses meilleures réalisations et vous reconnaîtra mieux qu’ailleurs, non sans un certain clin d’œil concernant votre bizarrerie si peu française, mais avec beaucoup de brio et de faste.

(Étrangers à nous-mêmes 60)

Baker is described as a cosmopolitan, as Terri Francis writes in Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: she is a modern figure [who] also played a role in French concepts of its national self. The persona of the modern American African performed by Baker likely appealed to Parisian audiences because it could give the impression of being distanced politically, morally, artistically, and sexually from American racism, as well as from the taint of colonial guilt, Old World musical traditions, and conservative social mores. . . this combination of French colonial guilt and fascination toward black (American) people was managed by white Parisian consumption of the spectacle of the free black, which both black American performer-products and white audience-consumers invented. (130)

In Baker’s films, there are many examples related to the mission civilisatrice and Baker’s acting in roles that play up French conceptions of the colonial “other.” What is more, she imitates and
even mocks the notion of becoming civilized, or becoming French. In *La sirène des tropiques*, for example, when the group returns to “la patrie,” and Papitou decides to escape to join them, she dresses in a long, fancy dress and walks around the island imitating a hen as she pecks with her head and makes her eyes overly expressive. Before leaving, she says goodbye to her friend the dog. Upon arrival in Paris, Papitou’s identity has shifted—she is dressed like a nun, walking around the city taking care of a group of children. Her transformation between the two images takes place in between the island and France. When Papitou is on the boat, there is a racially and sexually charged bathtub scene during which her identity becomes unclear: her skin is darkened by coal, whitened by flour, and she washes off the residue in a bathtub. This scene can be read as a cleansing of the Black body, which is also sexualized by the gaze of the white male passenger who discovers and cannot look away from Papitou playing in the bathtub.

In *Princesse Tam Tam*, the mission civilisatrice is echoed in Max’s mission to “civilize” Alwina so she becomes fit for Paris society. Indeed, education and social integration are themes found throughout this Pygmalion tale, especially in a montage that displays Alwina in regimented music, dance, math, and etiquette lessons, all organized by Max, the “Professeur de civilisation.” Bells ring to let her know when it is time to eat, at a precise time dictated by society and not when she is hungry: “un estomac civilisé—c’est beau la civilisation.” Max plays with Alwina’s education as the conception of what it means to be civilized shifts: “Apprend-lui à mentir . . . pour la civiliser,” he says. Baker’s own French education mimics that of Alwina in that Baker did not learn French until she arrived in France. It was here where she first learned to speak the language and create a name for herself as a cultural exception and cultural icon. Furthermore, *Princesse Tam Tam* also investigates writing as a place of performance and the space of the novel as a container that provides distance. At the end of the film we learn that
Alwina’s voyage to France is only an invention of Max’s imagination: Max meets Alwina in Tunisia but the trip to France and her transformation to the Princess of Palindor only take place in the storyline of the novel he is writing. To complicate this performance further, Max is not actually writing the novel himself; he has a ghostwriter who travels with him to Tunisia to write the novel for him. Eileen Julien explains the necessary separation for the French public at the time: “Because the stories of transformation and unrequited love that are at the heart of the film take place in Max’s fantasy, the novel, it is nicely contained for the film’s public, who can indulge in the primitive and exotic and then step out of this experimental world and back into the presumed order, stability, and safe familiarity of the real one” (53). As a consequence, there are multiple levels of separation between colonial reality and the image projected of this reality. Back in Tunisia, a copy of Max’s new book (entitled Civilisation) is destroyed; a donkey eats it in the closing scene of the film.

3.3 Education

I argue that it is upon entering into the French national education system when many French citizens or inhabitants begin a journey to “become French,” or that ideal of a singular, universal identity. The French education system is linked to the mission civilisatrice in the ways that it is far-reaching and operating under the assumption of assimilation to a cohesive national identity. It is also regulated by the nation state and operates on a national-level, which demonstrates its reach within the nation. We witness Annie Ernaux’s becoming French through her multiple references to entering into the education system, such as in Les années, where she indicates her the move of her generation in the provinces from agriculture dictating schedules to
the school calendar: “on ne manquait pas l’école pour semer du colza, locher des pommes et fagoter du bois mort. Le calendrier scolaire avait remplacé le cycle des saisons. Les années devant nous étaient des classes, chacune superposée au-dessus de l’autre, espace-temps ouverts en octobre et fermés en juillet” (33). Furthermore, in the beginning of La place, the Capes scene symbolizes Ernaux’s entrance into the French education system as she takes the necessary steps and qualifying exams in order to become a teacher.

Ernaux uses the language she learned through her education and literary references to talk about her experience at the summer camp in Mémoire de fille. Her first sexual encounter that takes place at the camp is understood through a literary lens. Looking back on letters from 1958, she recognizes that the content was solely centered on school life: “Le contenu de la correspondance tourne exclusivement autour de la vie scolaire et des lectures (Sagan, Camus, L’homme révolté qualifié d’’ardu’), de l’avenir et de l’existence en général” (32). Ernaux claims the new world in which she finds herself as patriarchal and larger than the individuals in the scene: “Ce n’est pas à lui qu’elle se soumet, c’est à une loi indiscutable, universelle, celle d’une sauvagerie masculine qu’un jour ou l’autre il lui aurait bien fallu subir. Que cette loi soit brutale et sale, c’est ainsi” (45). She does not speak the language of that world: “Il dit des mots qu’elle n’a jamais entendus, qui la font passer du monde des adolescents rieuses sous cape d’obscénités chuchotées à celui des homes, qui lui signifient son entrée dans le sexuel pur” (45). After the event, Ernaux experiences a break with her past and writes about her inability to read: “Je la vois l’après-midi lisant les premières pages de La condition humaine en livre de poche. À chaque phrase qu’elle lit, elle oublie la précédente. [. . .] Elle n’a jamais été dans cette incapacité de lire” (48). In a sense, she is witnessing her movement away from formal education to sexual education in that year and the impossibility of returning to the former. The “fille de 58,” who was
previously consumed by school and reading, finds herself instead in a state of famine that is out of her control; she no longer recognizes herself from before and that is the start of her struggle with bulimia. Ernaux from the present, the “je” in the story, becomes consumed with everything other than the event in 1958 trying to piece together the missing “fille de 58”; she becomes consumed by news in the media about the Algerian War, letters from friends from the time period, and films, songs, and books.

In *Enfance*, Nathalie Sarraute writes about how school and education were comforting constants that provided her with guidance and a place of refuge and protection when her family situation did not do so. She writes about teachers as maternal figures who supported her during her studies while her family life was unstable moving between Russia and France and with her relationship with her stepmother Véra. When Sarraute started school, her family provided her with space to herself in her room to do her homework: “Même là-bas, dehors, l’école me protège. On passe derrière ma porte sans s’arrêter, on me laisse travailler . . .” (169). In the dialogue with her split self in the novel, Sarraute remembers just how far-reaching school was for her, and the worlds it opened up:

—L’école dominait ton existence . . . elle lui donnait un sens, son vrai sens, son importance . . . Quand tu t’ès sentie si malade, tu avais la rougeole, tu as prié le Ciel . . .

—Oui, c’est comique, je l’implorais de me laisser vivre jusqu’à ce que ‘je sache tout’ . . .

—Et quelle perte d’équilibre, quel désarroi après, au lycée, quand tu t’es aperçue que ce monde bien clos, entièrement accessible, s’ouvrait de toutes parts, se défaisait, se perdait . . . (174)
Indeed, it was in school where Sarraute gained her ability to write in French. What is more, when she learns how to write, she describes it as also a process of becoming present within her own body in learning the physical act of writing: “C’est apaisant, c’est rassurant d’être là toute seule enfermée dans ma chambre . . . personne ne viendra me déranger, je fais ‘mes devoirs,’ j’accomplis un devoir que tout le monde respecte [...] je contrains ma main et elle m’obéit de mieux en mieux . . .” (134). Sarraute writes about a childhood during which she was surrounded by books that formed physical and metaphorical borders and provided her with a means to escape and with a place of respite: “Je l’embarras du choix, il y a des livres partout, dans toutes les pièces, sur les meubles et même par terre, apportés par maman et Kolia ou bien arrivés par la poste . . . des petits, des moyens et des gros” (81). Books create not only an escape, but an experience of elation for her: “C’est un moment de bonheur intense . . . toujours très bref . . . bientôt les transes, les affres me reprennent, évidemment les plus valeureux, les plus beaux, les plus purs ont jusqu’ici eu la vie sauve . . . jusqu’à présent . . . mais comment ne pas craindre que cette fois . . . il est arrivé à des êtres à peine moins parfaits” (267). She is transported to another world, no longer a part of the noise of her sister crying or Véra yelling. The literature has a lingering effect on her:

“Qu’est-ce qu’il arrive à Natacha?” j’entends une amie venue dîner poser tout bas cette question à mon père . . . mon air absent, hagard, peut-être dédaigneux a dû la frapper . . . et mon père lui chuchote à l’oreille . . . “Elle est plongée dans _Rocambole_!” L’amie hoche la tête d’un air qui signifie: “Ah, je comprends . . .” and Sarraute the narrator adds: “Mais qu’est-ce qu’ils peuvent comprendre . . .” (267)
The chapter ends there, with the child unable to comprehend how an adult could possibly understand the unique and lasting effects literature could have on her.

Irène Némirovsky also writes about French education in her novels, in both references to immigrants coming to France and learning how to be French and also to her own childhood experience learning French and visiting France on vacations before her family fled the Russian Revolution in 1917. Becoming French begins abroad, for example, in party scenes at the Alliance Française in *Les chiens et les loups*: “La salle des fêtes était ornée de guirlandes en papier, de plantes vertes et de petits drapeaux tricolores” (113). Hélène, in *Le vin de solitude* for example, is obsessed with France as a child growing up outside the nation and she plays with Napoleon figures and takes French lessons. She loves books, which provides her an escape from the world: “Elle regarda l’heure. Huit heures et demie. Les leçons et les devoirs s’étaient succédé depuis le matin, sans une seconde de répit. Mais elle aimait l’étude et les livres, comme d’autres aiment le vin, pour leur force d’oubli. Que connaissait-elle d’autre?” (117). Hélène is accompanied by her governess to visit friends and she becomes embarrassed and wrestles with her love of reading and her desire to fit in and be like everyone else, but assimilating to societal expectations is impossible for her:

Elle imagina avec tendresse le petit pupitre à sa taille, de bois peint, la lampe à l’huile, et son globe de porcelaine verte, cette lumière diffuse et laiteuse sur son livre. —Non, je ne lirai pas . . . Tous ces livres, cela me rend inquiète et mécontente . . . Il faut être contente, il faut être comme les autres [. . .] Quand on ne me verra pas, je cacherrai le *Mémorial* sous mon oreiller . . . Non, non. Ce soir, je découperai des images, je dessinerai . . . Je suis heureuse, je veux être une petite fille heureuse, songeait-elle et le bloc de glace et de ténèbres, immobile
sous un porche, les vitres sombres où se fondait la neige, qui coulait comme des larmes, se confondaient à ses yeux et formaient une mer mouvante et noire. (57-58)

In *Suite française*, reading is associated with French civility; Lucile remarks the German soldier’s actions in the house: “Et pourquoi ne se couche-t-il pas? Pourquoi ne met-il pas de pantoufles chez lui, le soir, comme un civil, comme un Français? [. . .] Maintenant, il tourne les pages d’un livre” (331). Némirovsky, who never attained French citizenship even though she self-identified as French, sees both the ridiculousness of attempts to fit into an ideal of French society, like the Kampfs do in *Le bal*, and she is critical of that society that is not accepting of foreigners. In *Le maître des âmes* for example, Clara remains outside of society even though she has learned French: “Elle était sauvage, peureuse [. . .]. Elle avait appris le français péniblement. Maintenant elle parlait, quoiqu’avec un mauvais accent, la langue du pays, mais elle avait pris le pli de vivre à l’écart” (37-38). In *Le bal*, when Antoinette’s parents are new to France and attempting to fit in by hosting a ball, they go through the list of people to invite, gossiping about certain friends who have bought their titles, and Mme Kampf becomes fearful that no one will come to the party. M Kampf explains to his wife that they will keep inviting people: “Au fond, pour avancer dans le monde, il ne faut que suivre à la lettre la morale de l’Évangile [. . .] Si on te donne un soufflet, tends l’autre joue . . . Le monde, c’est la meilleure école de l’humilité chrétienne,” and she replies: “Je me demande, dit Mme Kampf vaguement choquée, où tu vas chercher toutes ces sottises, mon ami” (31). Némirovsky illustrates the artificiality and hypocrisy of French society through Clara, who is fated to the outside and never standing a chance at acceptance because she is so foreign, and of the Kampfs who are the most assimilated to France
out of her immigrant characters, but who are still consigned to remaining outside the ideal to which they strive.

4. Problems with *Patrie*

Dans les idées refusées, il y avait celle d’être entrés dans la société d’immigration. (Ernaux, *Les années* 183)

4.1 Impossibility of Assimilation

In her section of *Nations Without Nationalism*, “Nowhere Is One More a Foreigner Than in France,” Julia Kristeva writes about French chauvinism in relation to national identity:

“Nowhere is one more a foreigner than in France. The coherence of the mosaic known as France, bonded by royal and republican administrations as well as by the lycées and the literary institution, rejects the notion of difference and sets aside for the foreigner a solitary curiosity, the weird charms of which soon prove to be a source of scorn” (30). Annie Ernaux notes the movement away from a romantic view of immigration in France, of idealistic depictions as a “mosaic,” “kaleidoscope,” or “patchwork”: “On avait oublié les ‘Touche pas à mon pote,’ ‘l’immigration, richesse de la France.’ Il fallait ‘lutter contre l’immigration sauvage,’ ‘préserver la cohésion nationale.’ La phrase de Michel Rocard sur la misère du monde circulait comme une évidence éblouissante, dont la plupart comprenaient le sous-entendu indicible, il y avait bien assez d’immigrés comme ça” (*Les années* 183). Assimilation is key to acceptance and a unified national French identity is deemed vital in preserving this identity: “an administrative sturdiness—comprising economics, culture, and language—turned this country into a base where
foreigners can put out roots only if they accept its identity” (Kristeva, Nations Without Nationalism 8). Kristeva refers to France as a “national-puzzle” of individual identities, and she puts into question the problem of assimilation to the national ideal moving forward:

[C]hacun est destiné à rester le même et l’autre: sans oublier sa culture de départ, mais en la relativisant au point de la faire non seulement voisiner, mais aussi alterner avec celle des autres. Une nouvelle homogénéité est peu probable, peut-être peu souhaitable. [...] S’achemine-t-on vers une national-puzzle faite de diverses particularités, dont la dominante numérique reste pour l’instant française—mais jusqu’à quand? (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 289)

There is a problem with the notion of assimilation itself because it always functions in one direction, assuming “the solvability of difference, its erasure in the becoming like, becoming the same. A stable, essential, unified national identity absorbs, refines, and neutralizes difference, but remains itself unchanged by those differences” (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 9). By writing from the space of the foreigner, authors in my project exhibit how France is changed by those who are not at home in this space. Indeed, home itself is a porous skin, as Sara Ahmed puts it, the “subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other” (341). France’s rich literary tradition goes hand-in-hand with forging a national identity and I argue that all of these writers establish a place for themselves in that tradition and thus give new meaning to what it means to be at home in France: “Si ce n’est une tradition nationale brillante, une culture littéraire qui mélange plus étroitement qu’ailleurs les passions du peuple et les efforts des intellectuels, et une volonté politique, latente ou future, qui cherche son souffle, pour donner un nouveau sens à la nation française et la porter ainsi vers les autres” (Kristeva, Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir 12-13). Because home is like Ahmed’s notion of porous skin, the nation always has an impact on its
inhabitants and the inhabitants always impact the nation, therefore making assimilation an impossible and unachievable ideal.

4.2 Not at Home in France

Kristeva writes about the impossibility of being viewed in a neutral manner as a foreigner in France: “Nulle part on n’est plus étranger qu’en France [. . .] les Français opposent à l’étranger un tissu social compact et d’un orgueil national imbattable. [. . .] Ses habitudes alimentaires ou vestimentaires sont considérées d’emblée comme un manquement impardonnable au goût universel, c’est-à-dire français” (Étrangers à nous-mêmes 58). Claiming anything French as being synonymous with universal taste serves to illustrate French as a social status that one desires to attain. Kristeva continues, highlighting the impossibility of blending in as a foreigner in France:

Et pourtant, nulle part on n’est mieux étranger qu’en France. Puisque vous restez irrémédiablement différent et inacceptable, vous êtes objet de fascination: on vous remarque, on parle de vous, on vous hait ou on vous admire, ou les deux à la fois. Mais vous n’êtes pas une présence banale et négligeable, un M. ou un Mme Tout-le-monde. Vous êtes un problème, un désir: positif ou négatif, jamais neutre. (59)

Because a foreigner is never neutral in France, for some, the idea of France as home becomes problematic. While the authors in my project all resided in France, many of their works represent feelings of being unwelcome, always outside, and not at home in that nation.

Symptoms of the problems with French patrie appear in works by each of the authors in my project as deterritorializations of home. These symptoms can be shown through
representations of home as a place that is no longer safe, or that has become peculiar and unfamiliar; one is no longer at home in their home. Josephine Baker, for example, made her home in France and created a place for herself in that nation, and yet, she was still never neutral, but seen as a cultural exception. Baker’s representations of home as strange are most poignant in *Mon sang dans tes veines*, and instead of France, she writes about how she was no longer at home in her original home of the United States. Although the novel was published in 1931, which was well before Baker’s work in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, she already articulates the problems in her home country to a French audience through her criticism of the United States. Once Fred returns from college with his friends and fiancée, Clarence, Joan no longer feels at home because she is constantly made to feel like an outsider in that space. For example, Mrs. Barclay reduces Joan to an object when she shows Clarence old photos of Fred as a child: “Fred est toujours accompagné de choses inutiles” (78). With Clarence in the house, Joan is deprived of and denied her usual activities. When she is no longer allowed respite under the veranda she leaves the house to find a safe space: “Au lieu de la véranda, elle choisit un grand chêne du parc pour y rêver” (80). The deterritorialization for Joan that begins with Clarence, culminates in the blood transfusion that permanently changes Joan’s home and fully interdicts her belonging in that world.

Nathalie Sarraute also presents home as a place that has become strange. On *Portrait d’un inconnu*, for example, Christine Cormier writes about how Sarraute makes the home that was once familiar, unfamiliar to the protagonist through a series of naming places: “Provocation, défi des deux côtés. En effet, dans le roman, un autre type d’évocation de noms de lieu, en série, apparaît: il s’agit d’une technique que le narrateur explique, sorte d’exercice de ‘détérritorialisation’ qui l’amène à regarder les rues familières ‘en étranger’” (116). In *Enfance*,
Sarraute writes about not being allowed to feel at home in her home, for example, when her stepmother Véra says: “‘Ce n’est pas ta maison’ . . . On a peine à le croire, et pourtant c’est ce qu’un jour Véra m’a dit. Quand je lui ai demandé si nous allions bientôt rentrer à la maison, elle m’a dit: ‘Ce n’est pas ta maison.’” (130). Annie Ernaux writes about an increasing feeling of strangeness in daily life in *Les années* as she writes about growing up and becoming adults: “Plus on était immergés dans ce qu’on disait être la réalité, le travail, la famille, plus on éprouvait un sentiment d’irréalité” (95). On the first night of summer camp in *Mémoire de fille*, she describes her feelings of being out of place in that new home for the summer: “La première nuit, elle reste éveillée, gênée par le souffle de sa coturne, endormie sur-le-champ. Elle n’a jamais dormi avec quelqu’un qu’elle ne connaissait pas. Il lui semble que l’espace de la chambre appartient plus à sa coturne qu’à elle” (39). What is more, Ernaux writes about how the “fille de 58,” becoming unrecognizable to herself, is representative of broader issues of women being judged by society: “Me la repassant encore, elle se dépersonnalise peu à peu. Ce n’est plus moi ni même Annie D au centre. Ce qui a eu lieu dans le couloir de la colonie se change en une situation qui plonge dans un temps immémorial et parcourt la terre. Chaque jour et partout dans le monde il y a des hommes en cercle autour d’une femme, prêts à lui jeter la pierre” (65).

Irène Némirovsky describes home as a foreign place in *Le bal*, when Antoinette is allowed to stay up late to help her parents address the party invitations: “Ce soir-là, Antoinette, que l’Anglaise emmenait se coucher d’ordinaire sur le coup de neuf heures, resta au salon avec ses parents. Elle y pénétrait si rarement qu’elle regarda avec attention les boiseries blanches et les meubles dorés, comme lorsqu’elle entrait dans une maison étrangère” (25). In *Suite française*, Némirovsky captures a nation no longer at home within their home during the German Occupation. For example, In the first section, “Tempête en juin,” the Nazis have invaded France
and this part is littered with references of peoples' lives being upended as they are displaced from their homes. In “Dolce,” people are not at home even though they are physically in their homes. For some, this was the case even before the Occupation; for example, Mme. Angellier went out of her way to make the family’s cook Marthe feel out of place: “Marthe était depuis vingt-sept ans chez elle. Depuis vingt-sept ans, Mme Angellier mettait précisément tous ses soins à ce que Marthe n’oubliât jamais qu’elle n’était pas dans sa propre maison, mais chez autrui” (388). When the German soldier billeted at the Angellier’s house asks Lucile about her home, she, too, acknowledges her displacement in the house, that her mother-in-law’s house is not her home: “Je ne sais pas, dit Lucile, mais ma maison natale, je pourrais vous dire quand elle a été bâtie et par qui. Ici, je ne suis pas née. Je vis seulement” (371). Indeed, home is not the same as the place where one lives and where one lives may never feel like home.

In *Le maître des âmes* and *Les chiens et les loups*, Némirovsky is perhaps the most critical of France as a particular location within which all her immigrant characters in these novels reside. She writes about citizenship issues with France that echoes her own citizenship issues in that country. Being a foreigner in France has a legal meaning and real implications according to Kristeva: “La notion d’étranger possède en effet aujourd’hui une signification juridique: elle désigne celui qui n’a pas la citoyenneté du pays qu’il habite” (*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* 61). Némirovsky writes about the precarious situation of the foreigner who loses their legal status: “Quel pays la recevrait? Comment vivre?” (*Les chiens et les loups* 319). The immigrant’s situation here is one of unsettledness and uncertainty:

Pour toutes ces femmes, l’annonce de l’expulsion de l’une d’elles avait une signification précise et sinistre . . . elles aussi, un beau jour, devraient abandonner le petit meublé sordide, la rue parisienne qui les consolait de tout par son
mouvement, son bruit, sa gaieté, le ciel léger, les passants courtois, et traîner à la porte des consulats, attendre un passeport promis qui n’arrivait pas, partir et chercher ailleurs de précaires moyens d’existence. (Les chiens et les loups 320)

In Le maître des âmes, Dario does everything he can to assimilate but he is rejected by France because of his foreign origins, always viewed as suspicious: “Oui tous, ici, l’épiaient, le dénonceraient. On n’était pas perdu ici, miséricordeusement seul, comme à Paris. Tous haïssaient, songeait-il, ce garçon mal vêtu, à l’accent étranger, ce malchanceux, ce pauvre” (51).

Némirovsky describes the apartments where foreigners live together in France in this novel as being on the periphery, the “sad walls” of the “pension de famille”: “À travers les planches minces parvenait jusqu’à eux le bruit de la pension de famille; là vivaient, se querellaient, pleuraient et riaient des émigrés qui mangeaient leur dernier argent, se haïssaient ou s’aimaient” (35). Foreigners are also isolated in Les chiens et les loups: “Maigre, fin, frileux, serrant l’une contre l’autre ses belles mains, il se balançait doucement dans l’ombre comme l’avaient fait avant lui tant de changeurs à leurs comptoirs, tant de rabbins courbés sur leurs livres, tant d’émigrants sur le pont des bateaux; et, comme eux, il se sentait étranger, perdu et seul” (305).

Although Némirovsky never obtained French citizenship, she wrote about internal borders in a France that rejected people based on a certain idea of national identity. Dario’s experience in France reflects Némirovsky’s souring view of the nation; in a journal entry she references this view, which is also echoed in her stories: “‘Mon Dieu! que me fait ce pays?’ she wrote in June of 1941, “écho à l’appel déchirant d’Asfar: ‘Oui, vous tous, qui me méprisez, riches Français, heureux Français ce que je voulais, c’était votre culture, votre morale, vos vertus, tout ce qui est plus haut que moi, différent de moi, différent de la boue où je suis né!’” (Philipponnat, Le maître des âmes 26-27). Furthermore, the French government’s ultimate refusal of Némirovsky’s
citizenship petition, which was delayed and then lost in administrative chaos at the start of World War Two, is even more poignant combined with the fact that during the war she was stopped by French police, sent to a concentration camp in France, before finally being deported to Auschwitz.

4.3 Parental Problems

There are examples of problems with patrie, as in parentage, that are prevalent in works by each figure in my project. If we expanded the idea of family to be linked to nation—motherland or fatherland—it becomes possible to see inhabitants of that nation as children who are at odds with the simplistic and generalist notions of the nation as a powerful and unified, homologous entity. Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith link “mother tongue” and nationalism and observe a family trope for nation: “Homology begets national identity,” they write (13). Brinker-Gabler and Smith also articulate France as a demotic-unitarian state, in which a national language is central for preserving universalistic values (3). Kristeva, too, writes about a family trope for nation of origin versus nation of residence and the trauma of both of being in-between mother(land) and father(land) and also of being separated from both:

Au plus lin que remonte sa mémoire, elle est délicieusement meurtrie: incompris d’une mère aimée et cependant distraite, discrète ou préoccupée, l’exilé est étranger à sa mère. Il ne l’appelle pas, ne lui demande rien. Orgueilleux, il s’attache fièremement à ce qui lui manque, à l’absence, à quelque symbole. L’étranger serait l’enfant d’un père dont l’existence ne fait aucun doute, mais dont
Indeed, each of the figures in my project was unable fully and solely to claim French identity, because this identity does not exist as a singular entity. In this section, I investigate parental problems authors in my project navigated in their works that echo other problems they experienced navigating multiple familial states in addition to linguistic and national states. I argue that their viewpoint as outsiders to France is what allowed them to be critical of that nation.

Ernaux demarcates her “mother tongue” from her current linguistic state through her use of italics in *La place*, highlighting the stark contrast between her father’s language, her “mother tongue” and her current language. That linguistic difference is another example of a problem with *patrie* she encountered as she learned to speak the language of her new world: “Enfant, quand je m’efforçais de m’exprimer dans un langage châtié, j’avais l’impression de me jeter dans le vide” (64). Her father differentiates his world from his daughter’s, a separation that Ernaux magnifies with italics: “Il disait toujours *ton* école” (73). Ernaux’s father’s world is strictly outside of her world of traditional French education, which represents another structure of *patrie*: “Il n’a jamais mis les pieds dans un musée” (65) and: “Le mot ‘prof’ lui déplaisait, ou ‘dirlo,’ même ‘bouquin.’ Et toujours la peur ou peut-être le désir que je n’y arrive pas” (80). Ernaux departs from her home of origin through education: “Plus encore qu’un moyen d’échapper à la pauvreté, les études lui paraissent l’instrument privilégié de lutte contre l’enlisement de ce féminin qui lui inspire de la pitié, cette tentation qu’elle a connue de se perdre dans un homme [. . .] dont elle a honte” (*Les années* 88). And yet, upon entering into the world of education she remains within a patriarchal society that she acknowledges is inescapable: “Ce n’est pas à lui
qu’elle se soumet, c’est à une loi indiscutable, universelle, celle d’une sauvagerie masculine qu’un jour ou l’autre il lui aurait bien fallu subir. Que cette loi soit brutale et sale, c’est ainsi” (Mémoire de fille 45). Ernaux finds both respite in her new world and an understanding of her place that will always be within the same patriarchal society she left behind in leaving home, as Mary Broe and Angela Ingram write: “the writer, who, exiling herself in the home country, is both exhilarated by the freedom it offers and critically aware that it is the locus of those patriarchal, heterosexist, middle-class norms that dominate life in the colony and at the colonizing center” (7).

The children depicted in Némirovsky’s novels tend to have much clearer and more mature worldviews than their parents. For example, Antoinette in Le bal is the character the most aware of her family’s situation and the absurdity of her parents’ attempts at assimilation. In other novels, parents are absent and stories are centered on the children. For example, in Les chiens et les loups, the novel focuses on Ada’s and Ben’s childhood games and then their lives in France. Problems with belonging to national parentage is especially evident in Le maître des âmes, where Némirovsky’s experience being rejected from France is echoed in that of Dario’s, as I write in the previous section, and what Philipponnat says in the preface to the novel about France “qui n’est plus la mère hospitalière des orphelins de la terre” (24). Indeed, orphans are represented in this metaphor as parentless like the foreigner is stateless. Baker, too, often portrays orphans in her works, for example, Joan is motherless with an absent father working at the Barclay’s home in Mon sang dans tes veines. Joan longs to be with Fred, the only other figure in the story she feels the most at home with, and when it becomes clear to her that the relationship would be impossible, Joan finds the Black Madonna and the other-worldly
possibilities and hope outside of her current situation in Christian teachings becomes her new obsession.

In Zou Zou, Baker’s character Zouzou has ambiguous family origins. She is in the “Cirque Romarin” with her white brother Jean, and the two are advertised as twins from a “Polynesian island.” There is no mention of a mother in the film and when other children ask her about who her father is, she distinguishes between “father” and her “Papa,” the man who runs their act and who is also a father-figure, but it is unclear if he is her biological father. Zouzou’s understanding of her ancestry is that her dark skin color as coming from a “clumsy stork” that dropped her in the chimney. Bennetta Jules-Rosette points out that Baker plays different versions of her life story in the films she’s in. In La sirène des tropiques, she also plays the foundling and like Zouzou (and even Baker) Papitou also has unclear origins: her father is a white colonist and there is no mother present. Unwanted male attention is a theme in the film, which epitomizes the effects of France as a colonizing force. The Marquis Sévéro, for example, is a greedy, white colonizer who does whatever is necessary to get what he desires. He wants a divorce from his wife so he can marry his goddaughter and in whose apparent is filled with “exotic” collections, such as a porcelain giraffe. Alvarez is the marquis’s connection abroad who takes care of his business and is also the man who attempts to rape Papitou as she bathes in the river, but she is saved by André. Clearly, Papitou does not exist in this film outside the white, male, colonizer’s gaze, which represents the inescapability of the systems of power within which the characters operate.

In Enfance, Sarracte writes about a problem stemming from an older adult figure who comes to visit her family whose identity she has trouble remembering and calls him “uncle,”
“puisque c’est ainsi qu’en Russie les enfants appellent les hommes adultes” (84). When the man says that it would really interest him to read her writing, she goes to get the notebook and:

“l’oncle” ouvre le cahier à la première page . . . les lettres à l’encre rouge sont très gauchement tracées, les ligne montent et descendent . . . Il les parcourt rapidement, feuille plus loin, s’arrête de temps en temps . . . il a l’air étonné . . . il a l’air mécontent . . . Il referme le cahier, il me le rend et il dit: “Avant de se mettre à écrire un roman, il faut apprendre l’orthographe . . .”

J’ai reporté le cahier dans ma chambre, je ne sais plus ce que j’en ai fait, en tout cas il a disparu, et je n’ai plus écrit une ligne . . . (84-85)

She continues, explaining that when people ask her why it took her so long to start writing, she can attribute her hesitation to this moment, calling it: “un de ces magnifiques ‘traumatismes de l’enfance’” (85). Another trauma of her childhood is the absence of her mother. Indeed, one of the most prevalent themes throughout Enfance is an obsession with words and phrases linked to Sarraute’s absent mother. Sarraute, whose parents were divorced, chose to live with her father in France and her mother stayed in Russia. She struggles with the use of “mom” to refer to Véra and cannot bring herself to give her this title while her biological mother is still alive:

Il faut manquer de cœur, être insensible, ingrat, oublier les liens les plus sacrés, ce qu’on doit avoir de plus cher au monde, sa mère, un nom qu’aucune autre femme ne peut porter, pas question de dire même . . . c’était l’alternative que je lui avais proposée . . . “maman-Véra.” Ce nom, maman, ne peut s’accorder à aucun autre. Je n’avais sur terre qu’une seule mère . . . et elle n’était pas encore morte . . . (219)

Sarraute writes about figuratively moving away from her mother after having physically moved away from her: “Elle ne sait pas qui je suis maintenant, elle a même oublié qui j’étais” (126). She
wrestles with the challenging feelings of loss and copes by not speaking about her mother: “Je parle le moins possible de maman . . .” (127). Looking for the right word to describe her feelings, she chooses: “De la rancune, de la réprobation . . . osons le dire . . . du mépris” (127).

Sarraute’s move from Russian to French was perhaps an easier transition than for others. In *Enfance*, she writes about her obsession with Napoléon Bonaparte as a child, for example:

—C’est un peu plus tard que t’est venu ce grand amour pour lui . . .
—Était-ce de l’amour? Je me transportais tellement en lui . . . Quand plus tard au lycée j’ai épinglé au mur de ma chambre une immense carte de la bataille d’Austerlitz que j’avais moi-même dessinée avec des crayons de toutes les couleurs, chaque régiment, chaque mamelon y était indiqué . . . c’était moi, incarnée dans ce Napoléon un peu gras et ventripotent, mais je ne le voyais pas, c’était moi à travers lui qui regardais dans la lorgnette, donnais des ordres . . . (243-244)

Sarraute also writes about issues of national identity, but from her understanding as a child, these were non-issues. For example, when she mentions her father’s religious identity and country of origin, there is silence surrounding them as taboo topics: “pour lui comme pour tous ses amis le fait même de mentionner que quelqu’un est juif ou ne l’est pas, ou qu’il est slave, était le signe de la plus noire réaction, une véritable indécence . . . Je n’ai jamais entendu dire qu’un ami qui venait à la maison qu’il était autre chose que russe ou bien français” (236). And she continues, writing about how at school even the notion of Russian as an identity seemed non-existent: “tous les enfants d’où qu’ils fussent venus étaient considérés comme de bons petits Français. Je ne me souviens pas qu’on m’ait posé aucune question, visiblement les idées de différence de race ou de religion n’entraient dans l’esprit de personne” (236). The erasure of religious and national
differences fits exactly into the notion of assimilation—that everyone becomes the same—and I feel that while this was perhaps Sarraute’s experience as a child, it demonstrates the privilege she and her family had as immigrants in France to whom those identities were non-issues at the time.

5. Conclusion: Home Revisited

5.1 Dwelling In-Between

All four figures of my project took up residence and made their home in the border space in-between multiple identities. In that space, identity is always that of “becoming” and “[t]he narratives are involved in a process of endless locating and undermining: belonging is always problematic, a never-ending dialogue of same with other” (Bromley 5). At home in the in-between can be an exhausting place to exist for there is no real respite from the tension of the border space. And yet, the vantage point from a border space is a place of power and possibility. Narratives within that space have the potential to enact radical change, using “both the dominantly constructed orders of discourse and the unsettling, undercutting and subversive orders of dream, the unconscious and the ‘mad.’ There is considerable reversing, doubling, repetition and displacing as ways of establishing ‘interstitial’ ground against the grain of hegemonic binary thinking” (Bromley 5). Homi Bhabha differentiates between “being” and “dwelling” in the beyond and what that difference means for cultural production:

Being in the “beyond,” then, is to inhabit an intervening space [. . .]. But to dwell “in the beyond” is also [. . .] to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human,
historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space “beyond,” becomes a space of intervention in the here and now.

(10)

Border women writers blur the edges; they “are not decentered fragmented individuals but writers who have begun to cohere a core identity by entering the transitional space between self and other” (Humm 6). Indeed, all four figures in my project have taken up residence at multiple interstices, and therefore beyond restraints of a single residence, in a state where one gains the ability to look back toward home and dare to gaze beyond it, for “[t]he line that limits is also the line that dares” (Seidel 3). Their work confirms that powerful position. Dwelling in-between is not easy, but, Mieke Bal argues that we need borders and boundaries in order to be able to look beyond them and make a home in the interior:

To be able to achieve anything, we need the limitations represented by borders, whether we straddle them, cross and recross them, or remain ensconced within them. But those borders beyond which we cannot see—the horizon, precisely because it never stops receding—those borders, I believe, help rather than hinder our work—producing an interior, the sort of home no one can do without.

(Embracing the Horizons 418)

Ultimately, it is in border space, the forever extending threshold, at once difficult and troublesome, freeing and dynamic, providing distance and therefore an ability to understand and see beyond, where these authors have established a productive residence.
5.2 Compatriots

In her article “Feminism, Postmodernism, and the ‘Real Me,’” Angela McRobbie poses the question: “How does feminism define itself in an intellectual world now characterized by shifting borders, boundaries and identities?” (1). Feminist theories and methodologies prioritize self-reflection, questioning of categories, and the creation of coalitions across boundaries. Communities of boundary-dwellers are formed firstly through recognition as mutual outsiders and secondly through reaching; they do not happen spontaneously, but through agency and choice to take action,

reaching across different spaces, through the very bodily gestures of reaching towards other bodies, who are already recognized only insofar as they seem out of place, as uncomfortable, or not quite comfortable, in this place. Migrant bodies hence cannot be understood as simply on one side of identity or the other, or on one side of the community or the other: rather, it is the uncommon estrangement of migration itself that allows migrant subjects to remake what it is they might yet have in common. (Ahmed 345-346)

Even though borderland is a shifting, contested space, the border space of diasporas are perfect locations for coalitions to form, as Avtar Brah writes: “Diasporas are places of long-term, if not permanent, community formations [. . .] also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure” (193).

For Brah, borders, or individuals, do not exist on their own, but connect across one another and remain both distinct and changed from the interaction: “Each border embodies a
unique narrative, even while it resonates with common themes with other borders” (198). In feminist postmodernism, individuals are important pieces that form connections within the whole and thus help shape the whole; the subject or self is not eliminated, “but finds it in operation as a series of bit parts in the concrete field of social relations. Politics must therefore imply subjectivities in process, interacting and debating” (McRobbie 9). Interactions within border space in the form of storytelling as finding and recognizing common ground is how communities take shape: “The stories of dislocation help to relocate: they give a shape, a contour, a skin to the past itself. [. . .] The telling of stories is bound up with—touched by—the forming of new communities. Memory is a collective act which produces its object (the ‘we’), rather than reflects on it” (Ahmed 343). Judith Butler calls for flexibility and permeability in a coalition that itself “requires a rethinking of the subject as a dynamic set of social relations. Mobilizing alliances do not necessarily form between established and recognizable subjects, and neither do they depend on the brokering of identitarian claims” (Frames of War 162). She appeals for both an active claiming of boundary and identity and a fluidity that is used to the advantage of those who can initiate change to help shift power structures. In order to keep coalitions flexible and dexterous, we need to “focus on those formations of power that exceed the strict definition of identity applied to those included in the alliance” (Frames of War 149). Certain elements of all human precariousness, such as hunger or homelessness, cross identity categories and impact global and local communities. Butler’s call for mobile alliances and coalitions, ones that are flexible and inclusive, is a way to begin to think about how we can act to resolve some of those humanitarian issues. In my view, the ways that each figure in my project operates with dexterity within border space in order to subvert normative forms and expectations illustrate the potential to enact change upon cultural narratives that shape and affect broader humanitarian issues.
CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING THE BORDER

1.1 On Cosmopolitanism

Do works by Josephine Baker, Annie Ernaux, Irène Némirovsky, and Nathalie Sarraute represent examples of immigrant literature? While one can argue that each of these authors are in fact immigrants, one can also say that they are not. Julia Kristeva declares herself a cosmopolitan, at once occupying multiple borders and borderless, “a transnational or international position situated at the crossing of boundaries” where “belonging to a set is a matter of choice” (*Nations Without Nationalism* 16). To be able to make that claim is a sign of possessing significant privilege and power. At the end of the twentieth century, Rosi Braidotti traces a trend of European women, including Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig, who make that claim of statelessness, of “planetary exile”:

As far back as 1938 Virginia Woolf was raising the issue: “As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world.” […] Is not the lofty metaphor of planetary exile very ethnocentric? In this end of century, when Europe and other parts of the world are confronted by the problem of refugees from the East and the South and movements of populations away from war-torn homelands, issues such as exile and the right to belong, the right to enter, the right to asylum, are too serious merely to be metaphorized into a new ideal. (21)

Many people on the move in the world, be they migrants, immigrants, refugees, do not have the choice to move freely across national borders, are forced to leave their homeland against their
will, or live in precarious, in-between, and sometimes actual and not metaphorical stateless situations. Kristeva does continue by saying that the freedom granted to an individual to make the choice of membership reveals “the democratic capability of a nation and social group” (*Nations Without Nationalism* 16). Indeed, while border space provides revelation, it is not without its own social hierarchies and their implications: “the questioning of boundaries, and the movement across borders, leads to an expansion of vision, *an ability to see more*. Such a narrative clearly demonstrates how some movement across spaces becomes a mechanism for the reproduction of social privileges, the granting to some subjects the ability to see and to move beyond the confined spaces of a given ‘home’” (Ahmed 337). My understanding of the figures in this project as border-dwellers at once demonstrates the privilege each of these figures were afforded, even though they each navigated multiple oppressive identities as women, race in Baker’s case, or Jewish in Sarratte and Némirovsky’s cases. However, I argue that we can talk about their experiences and their works without discounting the authors as being too privileged to care about if we also challenge their positions of power and privilege. Kristeva can claim herself a cosmopolitan, and we should not discount that claim but instead, create tension around it in order to challenge the statement and expose the implications of making that claim.

I move between multiple terms throughout this project: expatriate, immigrant, migrant, exile, nomad, foreigner, stranger, and I find that they each provide something useful in order to describe the authors. And yet, I argue that none of these terms are sufficient for any one of these figures. On exiles, Hamid Naficy writes about the word’s Latin root *salire*, which means “to leap,” which complicates the meaning of the term as meaning both: “enforced displacement and dislocation” and also “to leap,” which I argue demonstrates possibility (xii). Michael Seidel also writes about the Latin root of the word and the dual movement in the term: “Exile is a
compelling subject and a propelling action; it names a figure and establishes a narrative ground” (1). Seidel also writes about Henry James’s experience as an exile whose exilic experience provided him with special insight:

An exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another. Henry James, returning to America after a more than twenty-year exile in Europe, sensed that his physical absence from home had made him extracognizant not only of the new but of what he remembered of the old. The first time around he had absorbed experience unthinkingly; now he sees consciously. (ix)

Indeed, the notion of exile is “inexorably tied to homeland and to the possibility of return. However, the frustrating elusiveness of return makes it magically potent” (Naficy 3). Carine Mardorossian writes about the difference between exile and migrant and the shifting meanings of these terms and the “shift from exile to migrant [that] challenges this binary logic by emphasizing movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages. [. . .] Because of her displacement, the migrant’s identity undergoes radical shifts that alter her self-perception [. . .]. Her identity is no longer to do with being but with becoming” (16). Migrant literature stresses that the past is impossible to return to, “whereas discourse of exile tends to focus on what was left behind and the possibility of return (independently of how improbable that return is)” (17). Taking this a step further, Mardorossian writes about how the migrant’s favorite tense is the present perfect, where the past is a burden: “migrant literature is about a suspended, often impossible present; it is about missing, nostalgia, and blocked horizons. The past acts as a burden in migrant literature; it bears a fossilized definition of language that marks the lingering of the past into the present” (24). On nomadism, Braidotti writes about the links
between nomad and performances that open up a possibility for something different as related to the notion of “becoming”: “Nomadic shifts designate therefore a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge” (6). The nomad, for Braidotti, has access to her past, for it is already a part of her:

s/he knows how to trust traces and to resist settling into one, sovereign vision of identity. The nomad’s identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct in a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant cogito supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for movable diversity, the nomad’s identity is an inventory of traces. (14)

Sara Ahmed also writes about the nomad’s home as being everywhere, and how as such, identity becomes fetishized: “The very detachment from a particular home grants the nomadic subject the ability to see the world: an ability that becomes the basis for a new global identity and community. In such a narrative, identity becomes fetishized: it becomes detached from the particularity of places which allow for its formation as such” (338).

I argue that not one of these terms is fully applicable to any of the figures in my project: Baker was an expatriate, but she was also sort of in exile, and an immigrant; Ernaux is a French citizen and is not exactly any of these terms; Némirovsky, with her family’s privileged status, could be considered an expatriate, but since she never gained French citizenship, I argue that this term is not applicable to her; Sarraute was an immigrant expatriate, also from a privileged family, and she did gain French citizenship. My project attempts to intervene into conversations about the use of these terms and complicate their meanings in order to ensure reflection about
their meanings and implications, and there is more work to be done to further interrogate the use of the specific terms I choose in this project.

1.2 Form as Permeable

The line between literary form and historical context is permeable. Just as how categories are frames that affect those within them while simultaneously, those within affect the categories, art, too, does not exist in a vacuum outside of historical and contextual influences. Susan Friedman writes: “Narrative is a window into, mirror, constructor, and symptom of culture” (9), and I argue that it is also a powerful tool that makes resistance against social hierarchies and simplistic boundaries possible. Friedman uses “narrative poetics,” which is “the study of the form and function of story in their broadest dimensions [that] provides not only strategies for reading narratives but also a theoretical framework for interpreting the significance of narrative itself in all cultural formations” (9). Novels can be seen as containers that capture the cultural narratives surrounding them, from which they come into being, and they can also, in turn, impact cultural narratives: “Novels deal with persons not just as given agents, and not in isolation, but in complex interrelationships, situated in a world. Novels can be read as studies not only of political or other real-life situations, but of the narrative self, and the construction of narrative identity” (Whitebrook 15). Furthermore, I argue that literary form can be used for activist purposes, sometimes subtly shifting canonical norms, and other times aggressively uprooting and subverting these norms. The essays in Narrative Theory Unbound emphasize that “narratives are critical to constructing, maintaining, interpreting, exposing, and dismantling the social systems, cultural practices, and individual lives that shape and are shaped by performative acts” (Warhol
and Lanser 7-8). Narratives constitute and are constituted by societal forces. Susan S. Lanser speculates that “feminist and queer literary scholarship [. . .] might benefit in particular from narratology insofar as the mimeticist tendencies of those critical practices overlook the transgressions, subversions, and contingencies embedded in form” (25). Lanser calls for a transgression of the boundary between cultural and formal approaches: “the story won’t tell’ unless we study narrative form as narrative content” (24-25). Indeed, each figure in my project makes a shift in canonical, culturally embedded forms, enacting change upon them. In the next section, I examine some of the ways in which their projects destabilize, uproot, and subvert literary and cultural norms.

1.3 Baker’s Political Performances

Throughout the film *Princesse Tam Tam*, when Josephine Baker is acting the part of Alwina, she is still clearly her public persona of Josephine Baker the stage performer, and in performing roles such as that one and her banana dance, “she exposed the contradictions of modernism and pushed their limits” (Jules-Rosette 154). Anne Cheng, in her book *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface*, delves deeply into possible political meanings of Baker’s clothing: “In the climactic scene of performance in *Princesse Tam Tam*, Baker goes from gold to blackness. Yet she has not so much stripped or degenerated as she has crystallized and unveiled the very history of the black gold that fed the slave trade from the west coast of Africa across the Atlantic” (152). Cheng continues, expanding the effects of the gold clothing and what they symbolize in broader cultural and historical contexts:
The gold that sheathes Baker’s body in the film operates as cipher and citation: not only of the currency of European civilized refinement but also of the discourses of psychoanalysis on fetishism; the history of black gold in the transatlantic slave trade; the philosophic association of femininity with inert surfaces; and Modernism’s larger philosophic argument about ornamentation in fields from art to architecture. (153)

Because Baker was an icon and famous public figure, her clothing, like her performances, whether in film or in real life, impacted societal expectations, whether for the better or the worse:

“These iconic images exemplify colonial ambivalence (the idealization of primitive innocence and the denigration of primitive sexuality), and their reception today (as either evidence of her naive victimization by or her calculated parody of European racism and sexism) must be seen as continuing, rather than intervening in, this discourse of ambivalence” (Cheng 41-42). Baker was an American expatriate/immigrant who lived in France but played on notions of the colonial “other” in France; she confronted cultural norms of audiences in both nations.

Baker’s performances are impossible to separate from the self-construction of her public image: “Recognizing that in order to create appeal in the theatrical world, she had to be more than ordinary, she focused on becoming extraordinary, promoting herself as a comic dancer” (Regester 35). Her novel Mon sang dans tes veines, while critical of the United States, was indeed written in French for a French public, and its publication coincided with the 1931 Exposition Coloniale, at which Baker was crowned “la reine des colonies.” Her performances were consumed by her audiences and she certainly played on her public image for success; and yet, she also used her status to participate in social justice issues. Baker worked for the French Resistance during World War Two and strategically used her identity as transnational starlet to
pass along secret coded messages hidden in her music. Later in her life she returned to the United States and became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, participating in the March on Washington. She was even asked to head the movement after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., but she turned down the offer in order to participate more in her adopted children’s lives, her “Rainbow Tribe” as she called them. “Baker’s dream of universal harmony was constructed around her role as a nurturing mother and the Rainbow Tribe as a domestic and political image-ideal” (Jules-Rosette 185). And yet, that public persona was perhaps a part of the act: “Politics for Baker was a removable costume worn on a stage of appearances against the backdrop of her conception of fundamental human rights” (Jules-Rosette 227). Baker the stage performer participated in a perhaps more ambiguously political manner as she generated subtle shifts in societal views with her performances.

Baker actively blurred the boundary between her life stories and fiction. Regarding Baker’s film scripts, Bennetta Jules-Rosette writes about how the “repertoire became a tapestry into which she would weave elements of her life story through patter, using herself as the ultimate signifier and source of narrative coherence” (177). Indeed, “[t]hrough autobiography, the ‘self’ is transformed into the ‘other’” (Jules-Rosette 155). Baker was inseparable from her performances, for she inhabited them: “Baker’s art was where she lived” (Jules-Rosette 284). She remains ambiguous and obscure, with unclear origins that helped construct her public image as unique: “She remains her own by ‘remaining elsewhere.’ She has presented to her audience only what she chose for us to see” (Gottschild 165). What Baker’s arrival in France meant for the French and for the American public is that it:

challenged the hegemony of American cultural imperialism: initially rejected by her native country, Baker made French films and sang French songs, which were
accessible to Americans only by importation; moreover, here was an American, representative of the cultural imperialism that was coming to dominate France, cast in films that portrayed her as a subject of the French mission civilisatrice.

(Ezra 19)

In reference to what Elizabeth Ezra writes about the impossibility of placing Baker because of her racial ambiguity, Eileen Julien writes how France projects certain colonial ideals onto her and: “Not only was Baker not a French colonial subject or citizen but as a victim of American racism, she bolstered French claims to have created the premier republic of ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’” (50).

1.4 Ernaux’s Formal Subversions

Annie Ernaux is the only figure in my project who was born in France, ensuring her French citizenship and the privileged position that designation provides. Looking at a privileged figure such as Ernaux as an immigrant is problematic, especially if we ignore the very real struggles of actual immigrants. Ernaux’s formal choices, however, speak to broader cultural and societal issues in the French nation, and I argue that it is precisely in her capacity to leave a space for the reader that one is able to make the affective link between Ernaux’s experience as an outsider within her home country that in turn allows the reader to reflect on their own experience as outsider, thus opening up a space within which to recognize others as compatriot outsiders. In Les années, for example, Ernaux uses the space of the novel to talk about immigration issues, and by using the form of a series of photographs to do so, she is thus linking the cultural to the formal. Ernaux comments on the immigrant situation in France and campaigns in posters and in
the media: “On avait oublié les ‘Touche pas à mon pote,’ ‘l’immigration, richesse de la France.’ Il fallait ‘lutter contre l’immigration sauvage,’ ‘préserver la cohésion nationale’” (183). Indeed, as Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith write: “The very metanarrative of national identity depends upon the representation of the foreign” (7). Ernaux uses rhetoric specific to French immigration issues but that echoes that of other nations: “La distinction entre les ‘Français de souche’—c’était tout dire, l’arbre, la terre—and ceux ‘issus de l’immigration’ ne bougeait pas” (213). Ernaux calls the distinction made between French and “other” an entrance into an “immigration society”: “Dans les idées refusées, il y avait celle d’être entrés dans la société d’immigration” (183). She describes the goings on of what she deems “internal immigration” with third generation immigrants moving into French society and the tag of “immigrant” that remains with them even if they are born in France:

Une population dangereuse dont l’existence était toujours ignorée et constamment tenue à l’œil [. . .] dénommée officiellement “les jeunes issus de l’immigration,” et au quotidien les Arabes et les Noirs, dans une version plus vertueuse les Beurs et les Blacks. Informaticiens, secrétaires ou vigiles, qu’ils se disent français paraissait secrètement saugrenu, comme un titre de gloire usurpé auquel ils n’avaient pas encore droit. (183-184)

Ernaux describes the reactions of the French to outsiders in a flat, matter-of-fact, cutting style that is coyly critical of the society within which she finds herself. The way in which Ernaux writes about immigrants in France simultaneously states the facts of what French people are saying about outsiders to society while she critiques these statements and biases for what they are: provincial, racist, and exclusive, revealing the true meanings of these terms.
Toward the end of *Les années*, Ernaux describes her place in the world in terms of language and time, and distinguishes herself, or the writing itself, as made strange: “Ce sera un récit glissant, dans un imparfait continu, absolu, dévorant le présent au fur et à mesure jusqu’à la dernière image d’une vie. Une coulée suspendue [. . .]. À cette ‘sans cesse autre’ des photos correspondra, en miroir, le ‘elle’ de l’écriture” (240). Limiting herself to “elle,” “nous,” or “on” in *Les années*, she creates a novel that is removed from herself and could be about almost anyone or about everyone. Her choice to omit the self, or to write herself out of the text, as Shirley Jordan writes, is strategic: “this autobiographical tour de force is a remarkable ontological exercise not so much in consolidating the self at the end of a successful life of writing, but in evacuating the self and consigning it to memory” (147). While Ernaux creates a narrative of her generation and herself as a part of it, she omits the first-person subject pronoun “je” and “in a simultaneous counter-movement writes herself out of it” (Jordan 146). Shalyn Claggett, in her chapter in *Narrative Theory Unbound*, highlights agency latent in autobiography that is derived from biography: “by the very fact of its existence, particularly when in defiance of heteronormative or patriarchal values, autobiography forcefully announces individual agency. Biography, however, by virtue of the fact that it ‘speaks’ for another, potentially threatens to rob the subject of agency (Warhol and Lanser 358). In *Les années*, with the absence of “je,” Ernaux operates in-between and outside of those parameters, undermines the novel as autobiography, opens it up to a more shared ontological space, and instead writes a collective (auto)biography of her generation. The epigraph from José Ortega y Gasset, “Nous n’avons que notre histoire et elle n’est pas à nous” (9), is similar to Jacques Derrida’s famous quote from *Le monolinguisme de l’autre*: “je n’ai qu’une langue, or ce n’est pas la mienne” (15). With that epigraph, Ernaux
undermines the place or possession of the novel from the beginning and makes it ambiguous to whom the story of the “fille” belongs.

Ernaux also subverts the form of the Bildungsroman in *La place* and *Mémoire de fille* especially, by finding herself through the writing of the self. In reference to autobiographical novels of exile, Carine Mardorossian writes that “the protagonist’s process of achieving a coherent sense of self in her own voice,” or in finding oneself through one’s own voice, there can be a subversion of the Bildungsroman form, within which: “the protagonist’s (re)constitution of a coherent sense of self takes center stage” (24-25). Indeed, it is through leaving the “home” of the present and going through her past memories she reconstitutes the “fille de 58” in *Mémoire de fille* or her family and place of origin in *La place*. Furthermore, each of these novels serves as a representation of a self, whether it may be her father in *La place*, or her self from 1958 in *Mémoire de fille*. In these novels, Ernaux comments on the writing process as a method to create the self, a “literary being,” as she puts it in the latter: “J’ai commencé à faire de moi-même un être littéraire, quelqu’un qui vit les choses comme si elles devaient être écrites un jour” (*Mémoire de fille* 143). She comments on the possibilities in writing and of finding meaning in a moment or a person when revisiting a moment through writing: “C’est l’absence de sens de ce que l’on vit au moment où on le vit qui multiple les possibilités d’écriture” (*Mémoire de fille* 151). With that sort of metawriting, Ernaux achieves two things: she gains perspective on a moment or event through the writing process, and her novels come into being as both pieces of literature and also as literary representations of human beings.
1.5 Némirovsky’s Magnum Opus

Irène Némirovsky moved to France after her family fled the Russian Revolution in 1917. She became a fairly well-known author in the 1930s and published about a dozen novels or short stories at that time that focused on her personal experience as a newcomer to France and her problematic relations with her mother. In 1939 her family tried to use her status as a successful writer to gain French citizenship but they were denied and, although she had converted to Roman Catholicism, she was forced to go into hiding during the Nazi Occupation because of her family’s Jewish heritage. Ultimately, in 1942, Némirovsky was stopped by French police, sent to the French camp Pithiviers, and then deported to Auschwitz where she was killed. As she was forced to go into hiding, her books took on darker themes and she removed herself and her life story from her works, now centering them on broader socioeconomic and racial issues in France at that time. In her magnum opus, Suite française, which she was never able to finish, she paints a picture of the Nazi Occupation of France, concentrating the novel on individual experiences woven together to create a striking image of France in upheaval. Paris, which had once been a bustling city, was now a desert as the Nazis advanced into the country. It is important to note that Némirovsky navigated her Jewish identity in complicated ways that provided for her family. For example, during the war when she was unable to publish under her real name, she published in the journal Gringoire, one of the most anti-Semitic journals at the time, under pseudonyms, in order to make money to feed her family.

For Némirovsky, Suite française is not about preserving her personal history, but that of the country with which she most identifies. She acts as a witness to a France in a time of upheaval and uncertainty and longs to leave her mark in that place from which she was
ultimately rejected. Indeed, Némirovsky’s writing changed as World War Two loomed in Europe, and she removed herself from her work, opening it up to a broader, collective understanding. In the 1930s she wrote a few stories that centered on her own life experiences and challenging familial situations as a newcomer to France. There are darker themes in her short stories published at the beginning of the war, with very little use of first-person narration. In Suite française, she used individual stories of people from all walks of life to paint a picture of France during that turbulent time. I argue that this strategy is an attempt to gain some distance between herself and the upheaval of her surroundings in order to capture a larger image of the state of war. Harkening back to her work in Les chiens et les loups, there is a story of socioeconomic boundaries woven throughout both parts of Suite française that depicts the haves and have-nots. For example, during the exodus from Paris, the novelist Gabriel Corte ends up at a swanky hotel eating chips and olives while people are trying desperately and unsuccessfully to reserve a room and others are starving outside. He is obsessed only with saving his manuscript and uses his name and social status to gain access to certain spaces that are denied to others in the book. The text ends abruptly because Némirovsky never finished it. Like the photographs in Ernaux’s Les années that offer but a glimpse, there is a lot left unsaid beneath Némirovsky’s writing. For all her books, she began with an outline to the plot and then filled numerous notebooks with reflections and enormously detailed descriptions of each character, even those she wrote as tertiary characters. Although she never completed Suite française, we can read her plans for the book in some notebooks that were saved with the manuscript. Némirovsky set out to model this book after Beethoven’s fifth symphony, as Myriam Anissimov writes in the preface to the book: “Elle rêve d’un livre de mille pages, construit comme un symphonie, mais en cinq parties. En fonction des rythmes, des tonalités” (24). The novel’s incompleteness captures a
certain essence of the ravages of war, of lives upended and many, like the author’s, extinguished without closure.

What about literary borders? For Gilles Deleuze, “the highest aim of literature is to leave, escape, cross the horizon and enter another life” (Moslund 7). For Rebecca Walkowitz, the placement of literature is not limited to where books were written (their origins) but also “on the places where they were classified and given social purpose” (527). In that sense, Némirovsky’s Suite française is a perfect example of a book as immigrant literature. Her daughters fled with the unfinished manuscript and notebooks in a suitcase and it remained untouched until roughly sixty years later when they decided to publish it. Arguably Suite française set into motion, at least in the English-speaking world after its translation, a resurgence of interest in historical fiction centered on France during World War Two. The book crossed into film in 2015 when an English-language adaptation of the “Dolce” section was released. Like immigrants, books cross multiple boundaries through their publication, translation and production. If we read beyond borders, as Walkowitz points out, we need to consider many aspects of the book. Perhaps it is only on the transitional space of the in-between where these authors can produce fiction that moves beyond national and literary borders and can pass into a “new habitat to take up residence,” as stated in the Oxford English Dictionary definition of “to immigrate.”

1.6 Sarraute’s Anti-roman

Nathalie Sarraute’s tropism form first appeared in a set of examples of tropisms in her novel by the same name, originally published in 1939 but that found success with its second publication in 1957. With that form, Sarraute demonstrated the flexibility of the novel itself as a
form that could be disrupted or subverted from the inside out. In an article in *A New History of French Literature* on the *Nouveau Roman*, Gerald Prince writes about Sarraute’s *Portrait d’un inconnu*, which Jean-Paul Sartre called: “an anti-roman, an antinovel attempting to subvert from the inside accepted novelistic forms and formulas” (990). I argue that Sarraute demonstrates both her flexibility as an author and the flexibility of the novel as a form that *can* be disrupted from the inside. Categories can be shifted, relocated, and disrupted by first acknowledging their existence and power before enacting change. Certainly, that is exactly what Sarraute does with the novel; she uses the form of the novel to enact change upon the form by introducing the tropism as something new that shifts that form. Indeed, the *anti-roman* uses the space of the novel to resist that space. In his preface to *Portrait d’un inconnu*, Sartre writes about what the anti-novels maintain from the novel and the self-reflection of that form:

> Les anti-romans conservent l’apparence et les contours du roman; ce sont les ouvrages d’imagination qui nous présentent des personnages fictifs et nous racontent leur histoire. Mais c’est pour mieux décevoir: il s’agit de contester le roman par lui-même, de le détruire sous nos yeux dans le temps qu’on semble l’édifier, d’écrire le roman d’un roman qui ne se fait pas, qui ne peut pas se faire, de créer une fiction qui soit aux grandes œuvres composées [. . .]. Ces œuvres étranges et difficilement classables ne témoignent pas de la faiblesse du genre romanesque, elles marquent seulement que nous vivons à une époque de réflexion et que le roman est en train de réfléchir sur lui-même. (7-8)

Sarraute’s play on the form of the novel that demonstrates its possibilities participates in the *Nouveau Roman* movement in a way that relates to the movement’s social and political issues; the movement “dismissed the anthropocentrism of the existentialist works that had dominated
French literature in the postwar era, seemed utterly insensitive to immediate (sociopolitical) problems, showed unusual interest in its own procedures, promoted experimentation, and stressed the relative” (Prince 988). Sarraute herself writes about the possibility for flexibility in the novel with her tropism forms that make the reader suspicious of the existence of complex, various interior movements that are articulated by tropisms, and that method breaks with tradition: “elle a réussi à porter un dialogue traditionnel le plus rude coup qu’il ait subi jusqu’ici” (L’ère du soupçon 146).

Sarraute writes in the tropism form that represents a unifying force, moving across borders and categories to be inclusive of common human emotional and psychological experiences. Indeed, Sarraute herself claims her tropism form as such: in L’ère du soupçon, Sarraute defines tropisms as that which makes up our human existence: “Ils me paraissaient et me paraissent encore constituer la source secrète de notre existence” (8). In writing about commonalities within the space of the novel, which is a public space, Sarraute plays with the distinctions between inside and outside, subjective and objective experiences, as Sartre remarks in his preface to Portrait d’un inconnu: “Rassurant pour autrui, rassurant pour moi-même puisque je me suis réfugié dans cette zone neutre et commune qui n’est ni tout à fait objectif, puisque enfin je m’y tiens par décret, ni tout à fait subjectif puisque tout le monde m’y peut atteindre et s’y retrouver, mais qu’on pourrait nommer à la fois la subjectivité de l’objectif et l’objectivité du subjectif” (9-10). On Sarraute’s novel Le planétarium, Anne Minor writes about Sarraute’s search for truth as linked to the tropism as an inclusive form; Sarraute searches for “an inner and elusive truth. The passion and seriousness with which she strives to express whatever she wants to say in the most authentic, the most sincere manner; the way in which she seeks neither to embellish nor to lighten the realities of her thoughts and observations leave the reader
with the impression that he has met a true and exceptional writer” (100). The search for universal truth Sarraute’s search takes place within the space of the novel and encompasses aspects of the novel and more than that, as Sartre puts it: “Par cette adhésion éminemment sociale, je m’identifie à tous les autres dans l’indistinction de l’universel. Nathalie Sarraute paraît distinguer trois sphères concentriques de généralité: il y a celle du caractère, celle du lieu commun morale, celle de l’art et, justement, du roman” (Portrait d’un inconnu 9). I consider that Sarraute’s use of the novel as a social activist space is apparent in the form of the tropism that blurs the boundaries between self and other and removes certain social constraints in order to show humanity as a line that cuts through every sector of life. Sarraute’s tropism form is a powerful literary device that demonstrates the possibilities latent in literary forms to reveal commonalities through affective connections.

1.7 Flexibility and Dexterity

Writing from within a border space is not an easy task; it requires a certain acuity, talent, and ability to continually work from within that space. Kristeva opens Étrangers à nous-mêmes with a “Toccata et fugue pour l’étranger,” and both of the musical forms in this title signify continual movement and dexterity. The journey of the immigrant is like a fugue: partially a movement forward and modified along the way yet also haunted by what was left behind. In the case of a toccata, it is a frenetic movement that displays the immigrant’s dexterity. Both forms are inherently complicated; they require training and practice for both the player and the listener as these forms can be difficult to comprehend. Like the experience of an outsider, it is virtually impossible to pin them down. For Kristeva, these pieces “évoquent à mes oreilles le sens que je
voudrais moderne de l’étrangeté reconnue et poignante, parce que soulevée, soulagée, disséminée, inscrite dans un jeu neuf en formation, sans but, sans borne, sans fin. Étrangeté à peine effleurée et qui, déjà s’éloigne” (11). I claim the figures in my project as “immigrants” in order to demonstrate the trajectory that each has taken to leave a home and to take up residence at the border, or in border space that is in-between numerous categories. And yet, I acknowledge that this term is insufficient to describe these figures. In this project, I examine the flexibility of the figures as immigrant writers who enter into a new place to take up residence, and I argue that this residence is both literally within France, and figuratively in the border space between multiple identities, a space that allows them a vantage point for creating works that are socially engaged. Indeed, each of the authors in my project demonstrates dexterity and flexibility in order to create projects that participate in, comment on, and even subvert conventional forms and the social orders within which they operated.

There is much more work to be done on the topics in this project, such as an elaboration on literary borders that takes into account production, mobility, and readership of the physical book, such as in the work in Rebecca Walkowitz’s edited volume, Immigrant Fictions: Contemporary Literature in an Age of Globalization. Another way to expand my project further is to examine the notion of community and coalition formations as they relate to feminist theories and thought, and the flexibility of those theories that demonstrate the possibilities for using them in new, productive contexts. I see another crucial development of my project being to question the process of canon formation and what constitutes work as worthy of being canonized and thus further disseminated to future readers, using Diana Taylor’s work in The Archive and the Repertoire. Additionally, all of the authors in my project have written a collective biography or portrait of a nation, starting with Némirovsky’s depiction of a nation at war in Suite française
to Ernaux’s *Les années*, to Sarraute’s *Tropismes*, and Baker’s *Mon sang dans tes veines*, and this project could be developed to examine questions of nationhood and home and belonging as represented in portrayals of a nation, and how those depictions influence understandings of national identity. Finally, I feel that it is important to add more authors and primary texts to my project in order to promote and establish better the claim of the work of these authors as “immigrant.” This is especially crucial with my goal to complicate the term “immigrant” in order to inspire reflection on the use of this and other terms that have real impacts on people who operate within oppressive power structures and categories.
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