CHAPTER 19

Migration in Modern and Contemporary Playwriting
Uprooting and Rerouting

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Immigration is not a 'legitimate object of [French] national memory' even though from the late nineteenth century France hosted more immigrants than any other European country, and proportionately more than the United States (Noiriel, 1992: 160).[1] In 'French and Foreigners', historian Gérard Noiriel asked, back in the 1980s, why this was. Today, around 30 per cent of France's population comprises either migrants from its former colonies or their post-migrant descendants, demonstrating the key significance of migration to French society and culture. The plays discussed in this chapter – Bernard-Marie Koltès' *Le Retour au desert* (*Return to the Desert*, 1988), Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies* (*Scorched*, 2003) and Estelle Savasta's *Traversée* (*Going Through*, 2011) represent a significant and growing strain of playwriting in France that demonstrates the central role played by migration and by transnational, mobile identities in societies not just in France, but across the world. These plays tell stories about people – people on the move – and the shifting worlds they navigate.[2] They thereby demonstrate that whilst French playwriting might have the reputation for holding a mirror up to its own aesthetic properties, it also holds one, at times clear at times clouded, to the world of social situations.

One of the best-known periods of twentieth-century theatre is that of the so-called 'absurdist' playwrights including Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and the early Arthur Adamov. Humans are exiled, estranged, alienated: when, in Beckett's *Fin de partie* (*Endgame*, 1957), Hamm calls out and nobody replies, he says, 'No, alone' (Beckett, 1986: 93). In response to this communicational breakdown cultural critic Theodor Adorno writes, 'When conversing, people remain hopelessly distant from each other' (Adorno, 1988: 29). On the one hand Adorno was writing in the cataclysmic aftermath of Holocaust and exile caused by the Second World War; on the other, his emphasis on alienation, along with that

foregrounded in Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* of 1961 (2001), have come to define 'absurdist' theatre. But, warns cultural theorist Sara Ahmed, in the case of people who are *actually* 'hopelessly distant from each other', notably migrants, defining all humanity as universally diasporic runs the risk of denying the experience of literal distance (Ahmed, 2000: 93). This chapter thus examines a suite of French plays in which exile is physical, in addition to at times being existential.

Theatre theorist Jean-Pierre Ryngaert wrote at the start of the twenty-first century, 'New theatrical poetics […] abandon the exhausting task of representing the world whether faithfully or not' (Ryngaert, 2007: 24).[3] Fellow theorist Jean-Pierre Sarrazac suggests that when French theatre embraced symbolism and abstraction at the end of the nineteenth century, it forsook evident reference to recognizable social situations (Sarrazac, 1995: 98). Whilst attacks on the conventions of bourgeois theatre by Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator in Germany in the early twentieth century foregrounded class emancipation and condemned imperialist domination, corresponding assaults by playwrights in France, notably Alfred Jarry, tended to be more formal than political, their rebellion perhaps stressing how strict the French neo-classical traditions of coherence, clarity and rationalism, enforced in the seventeenth century, had been. Successive generations of playwrights including the absurdists, and later, Valère Novarina or Noëlle Renaude, blast conventions of linear narrative, spatial and temporal coherence, psychological characterization and comprehensible dialogue into discrete, at times apparently incomprehensible fragments.[4] This is not to say that French playwriting is entirely apolitical since, like Brecht, these authors often seek to break with the very forms of representation that support and maintain dominant economic and political ideologies. Nonetheless, Sarrazac argued at the end of the twentieth century that, with rare exceptions, French playwrights had invented parallel worlds instead of confronting the 'real world, however despairing it might appear' (Sarrazac, 1995: 13). And for the UK's leading specialist in French drama, David Bradby, theatre in France had become 'more inward-looking, more self-critical, but also more self-absorbed' (Bradby, 2002: 289).

A number of significant points arise. First, political theatre specialist Olivier Neveux (2007) argues that by accusing French theatre of taking place 'far from the barricades', much politically engaged performance has actually been written out of theatre history (see Chapter 16 in this volume). Whilst for many French playwrights theatre constitutes a laboratory for research into formal possibility, over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, a steady succession of theatre-makers including

André Benedetto, Armand Gatti, Jean Genet, Ariane Mnouchkine, Michel Vinaver, along with the *théâtre du quotidien* (everyday theatre) playwrights Jean-Paul Wenzel and Michel Deutsch, combine aesthetic innovation with social, political and historical observation, critique and debate. Second, the 'apolitical' label not only misrepresents a significant proportion of French theatre but also, as US theatre expert Philippa Wehle states, results in its dismissal in the United States and UK for being 'art theatre' (Wehle, 2007: 165). Third, in the first years of the twenty-first century, shortly after these scholars published their critiques, French theatre increasingly and noticeably turned its attention away from its own aesthetic anatomy towards France's body politic, proponents of this socially conscious form today including Caroline Guiela Nguyen, Lancelot Hamelin, Magali Mougel (interviewed in Chapter 21 in this volume) and Dieudonné Niangouna amongst others. Finally, as the three plays examined in this chapter illustrate, rather than constituting a radical turn, the social awareness of this new generation builds on an often neglected yet persistent politics in French theatre. I hope that this chapter might contribute towards the reconfiguration of French theatre's reputation for being aloof or irrelevant.

In *Poetics of Relation* (1990) Martinican philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant distinguishes between 'root identity', which is 'founded in the distant past […] sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation […] ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land' (Glissant, 1997: 144) and 'relation identity', linked to 'the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures; […] produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation; [it] does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates' (Glissant, 1997: 144).[5] Glissant's critique of the violence of plantedness and the entitlement to territorial possession is no coincidence given that, in order to make way for the industrialized colonial plantocracy from the seventeenth century onwards, indigenous Caribbean populations were the victims of genocide, African captives were trafficked and enslaved and land was deforested. However, Glissant advocates 'the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth', hopefully justifying my use of his concept of relation beyond the Caribbean (Glissant, 1997: 146).[6] So this chapter illustrates how three modern and contemporary plays staged in France feature exiles, immigrants and refugees to highlight 'the relational interdependence of all lands', and the 'circulation' amongst cultures. The characters drawn by each playwright show how axiomatic belonging, legitimacy and identity are uprooted via the often violent severance of migration and exile, but also how the trauma that characters suffer – which cannot

be underestimated – is counterbalanced by the relational, transnational, cosmopolitan citizens they are able to become. Glissant's notion of relation enables an appreciation of how these three plays promote an understanding of France, and of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century worlds of mass migration, as post-national, transnational and fluid. The accessibility offered to Anglophone readers by the fact that each of these plays is available in English translation, will hopefully promote further the 'contacts among cultures' that Glissant advocates.

Koltès, *Le Retour au désert*

Koltès (1948–89) is one of the most celebrated French playwrights of the second half of the twentieth century, and the subject of much scholarly interest (Benhamou, 1995, 2014; Desportes, 1993; *Europe*, 1997; Maïsetti, 2018; Petitjean, 2014; Salino, 2009; Ubersfeld, 1999). Before his untimely death at only forty-one he had written over a dozen plays, the best-known being *Combat de nègre et de chiens* (*Black Battles with Dogs*, 1979) and *Dans La Solitude des champs de coton* (*In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields*, 1985). Migration features in a number of forms in *Le Retour au désert* (abbreviated here to *Retour*), staged by the illustrious director Patrice Chéreau, who produced four of Koltès' plays.[7]

For millennia migration has defined human activity, illustrated by the fact that it constitutes the basis of many foundational texts: the Sanskrit *Ramayana*, the Old Testament, Homer's *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, or Icelandic sagas. Travel and mobility do not, however, automatically generate transnational praxis, cultural bricolage and fluid syncretism. After all, the voyages of 'discovery' resulted in colonial invasion and occupation. In 1830 France invaded Algeria which, from 1848, the colonial occupier renamed Algiers, Oran and Constantine, these areas from then on considered France's southern-most *départements*. Echoing the then minister of the Interior, François Mitterrand, who declared, 'L'Algérie c'est la France' [Algeria is France], Adrien, one of the main protagonists in *Retour*, situated during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62), insists '[L]'Algérie n'existe pas' (Koltès, 1988: 24) [there's no such place as Algeria] (Koltès, 1997: 89).

Retour begins as Adrien's sister Mathilde and her children return – explaining the play's title – from Algeria, from where they have been uprooted. Glissant does not romanticize uprooting: *The Poetics of Relation* opens with his description of captive Africans in the ship's hold, and he insists that by defining all migration as nomadic anti-conformism, one ignores the 'restrictive contingencies' to which migrants are often

'obliged to bow in obedience' (Glissant, 1997: 12). In *Global Diasporas*, social scientist Robin Cohen explains that the term 'victim diaspora' defines traumatized groups who, owing to a cataclysmic event, are either expelled – the Jews who in 586 BCE were dragged by the Mesopotamian ruler Nebuchhadnezzar to Babylon, marking the start of their exile from the Kingdom of Israel – or forcibly removed – Africans trafficked to the Americas (Cohen, 2008: xiv). Now, continues Cohen, 'diaspora' is more loosely used to denote people who migrate owing to multiple push factors including unsympathetic political environments or poverty (Cohen, 2008: 103). Although Koltès' play does not explicitly state it, Mathilde and her children are *pieds-noirs*: French settlers in colonized North Africa. Numerically weak but economically and politically powerful, the *pieds-noirs* were an ethnic minority but belonged to the dominant colonial class. By the end of the war 90 per cent – around one million – uprooted and repatriated to France owing either to the conflict or to the fact that they were no longer welcome in an Algeria seeking independence (Eldridge, 2016: 5, 19). Having, according to Claire Eldridge's study, always suffered from an 'inferiority complex' in relation to their 'motherland', the *pieds-noirs* were now displaced to a country where, in the case of Mathilde's children, they had never previously lived. The *pieds-noirs*' 'deeply traumatic experience' of exile from Algeria led to their 'sentiment of victimhood' at being 'marginalized and mistreated victims of decolonisation' (Eldridge, 2016: 30). The European colonial settlers had displaced entire Algerian communities, but now considered themselves to be diasporic victims, a situation I describe presently in relation to Mathilde's family.

Uprooting might have caused pain to the *pieds-noirs*, but migrants indigenous to the colonies suffered additional discrimination, notably racism. Specialist in French immigration Alec Hargreaves states that the endemic poverty and lack of social mobility amongst colonized migrants and subsequently amongst migrants, especially Muslims, from colonies that gained independence, was blamed by both right and left on their inability to adapt culturally. However in reality, continues Hargreaves, these migrants are discriminated against owing to racial hierarchies established during the colonial period, and socio-economically marginalized by a job market that excludes or exploits them (Hargreaves, 1995 xiii–xv). Adrien's Algerian employee Aziz is poorly paid and unappreciated. Adrien, his co-conspirators the chief of Police, Plantières, local politician Sablon and local lawyer Borny, engage in the right-wing terror activities that sought to prevent Algerian independence by intimidating pro-independence North Africans and their supporters: they blow up the café Saïfi in the North African quarter of their town.

Aziz, a patron, is killed; his death is neither mourned nor even mentioned. Aziz is representative of the unrecognized sacrifices made by migrant workers who boost workforces and propel prosperity in European metropolitan centres. Aziz, the Black Parachutist (encountered later in the play) and the café owner are all male, representing the separation of migrant men from their families. The Black Parachutist has no name, perhaps representing the hundreds of thousands of troops from the colonies who served, unacknowledged, in the European armed forces.

The wealth and health of the Global North depend on migrant workers. Whilst benefiting from this interdependency, Adrien's unnamed provincial town is isolationist and hostile. Whereas many of Koltès' plays include marginalized figures such as assassins or drug dealers, *Retour* is a bourgeois family drama, albeit a satirical and unexpectedly poetic one. Root identity, writes Glissant, 'root[s] the thought of self and of territory' (Glissant, 1997: 144). Whilst reliant on migrants like Aziz, the town claims self-sufficiency: 'Le monde entier envie notre province, son calme et ses clochers, sa douceur, son vin, sa prospérité.' (Koltès, 1988: 24) [The whole world envies us our countryside, its peace and quiet, […] its mellowness, its wines, its prosperity.] (Koltès, 1997: 90) Adrien says to his son Mathieu, 'Le monde est ici, mon fils […]. Regarde mes pieds […] voilà le centre du monde' (Koltès 1988: 22–3) [The world is here, my son […]. Look at my feet […] this is the centre of the world] (Koltès, 1997: 88). His pre-Copernican belief that the universe revolves around his tiny town;[8] and his self-assured, unitary rootedness to the spot, highlight his desire to conserve smalltown stasis. So ardent is his chauvinistic protectionism from the outside world – which he describes as a jungle – that he builds an immense wall around his property. Just five years after *Retour* was staged, in 1993 France's interior minister, Charles Pasqua, announced 'zero immigration' (Hargreaves, 1995: 17). Since then immigration has been deemed by politicians across the Global North to be a 'problem', even a 'crisis'. The wall in *Retour* constitutes what Glissant calls 'a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land', an emblem of anti-immigration xenophobia (Glissant, 1997: 144).

Rootedness, what Glissant calls the 'violence of filiation', occasions such stagnation in *Retour*, as to threaten the family's and town's viability. Mathilde's forename, her nephew Mathieu's, his mother Marie's, and stepmother Marthe's, all share the first syllable 'Ma', symbolically highlighting the family's inbreeding, illustrated, too, by the incestuous advances Mathieu makes to his cousin. Both the family and entire town lack diversity. Adrien's family name Serpenoise, his housekeeper's name Queuleu, and those of his collaborators, Plantières, Borny and Sablon, are all areas of the same provincial

town, Metz, suggesting a lack of outside influence.[9] Plantières, whose name highlights his 'planted', deep-rooted refusal to countenance variety, proudly announces, 'j'ai au moins sept frères qui tous me ressemblent; j'ai des centaines de cousins que l'on confondrait avec moi, car dans ma famille on se marie entre nous' (Koltès, 1988 : 30) [I have at least seven brothers and we all look alike; I have hundreds of cousins, who could all be mistaken for me; in my family we intermarry a lot] (Koltès 1997: 93). In what Glissant terms a 'genealogical sequence' that roots 'the species (race or people)' (Glissant, 1997: 47), these families perpetuate a monolithic myth of uniform, unadulterated origin. Not, of course, that purity or origin exist: as Franco–Tunisian anti-colonialist Albert Memmi notes, 'If you dig down deeper, you find that roots can be very tangled things.' (Memmi, 1991: 31) Origins are based on myth which, says Glissant, contains 'a hidden violence' that 'absolutely challenges the existence of the other as an element of relation'. (Glissant, 1997: 50) Adrien's hostile bricking off of the outside world emblematizes the town's – and France's – rejection of relation with any ethnic or religious Other.

Paradoxically, or inevitably, far from preserving family and folk, consanguineous homogeneity becomes suicidal. Inbreeding has caused congenital problems, Mathieu inheriting painful flat feet – another symbol of the family's obstinate plantedness – from his father Adrien. Suicide is a hereditary trait in the family, Adrien admitting, 'j'ai failli aller au cimetière pour me tirer une balle dans la tête, comme notre grand-père l'a fait quand son fils est parti à l'armée et comme notre arrière-grand-père l'a fait pour notre grand-père. C'est une tradition de famille' (Koltès, 1988: 61) [I almost went off to the graveyard to shoot myself in the head, like our grandfather did when his son went off into the army, and like our great-grandfather did for our grandfather. It's a family tradition] (Koltès, 1997: 121). Not only do the male family members kill themselves but also the women, and Adrien invites his sister to conform: 'Il faut respecter les traditions. […] Peut-être que tu te pendras à un arbre du jardin, comme l'a fait notre tante Armelle; ou peut-être que tu te jetteras dans le canal, […] comme l'a fait la douce, la discrète, la silencieuse Ennie.' (Koltès, 1988: 62) [Traditions must be respected. […] Perhaps you'll choose to hang yourself from a tree in the garden, like Aunt Armelle; or throw yourself in the canal, […] like the sweetly discreet and taciturn Ennie.] (Koltès, 1997: 122) The desert in the play's title is not the Sahara stretching across Algeria from where Mathilde has returned; it is the barren ground of Adrien's town, where growth is stunted. 'Cette ville me semble endormie, bourgeois. Est-ce qu'elle est désertée?', asks the Black Parachutist (Koltès, 1988: 55) [This town seems very sleepy to me, bourgeois. Is it deserted?] (Koltès, 1997: 116) (see Figure 19.1, on page 373).

Figure 19.1 Michel Piccoli as Adrien (left) and Isaac de Bankolé as the Black Parachutist (right) in Patrice Chéreau's production of Bernard-Marie Koltès, *Return to the Desert*, at the Théâtre du Rond Point, 1988. Photograph Daniel Cande © BnF-Gallica

Mathilde, and to a greater extent her children, tear up the town's ageing root structure. Adrien admonishes his sister: 'Tu as trop voyagé, ma vieille; les voyages troublent l'esprit, ils déforment le regard.' (Koltès, 1988: 62) [You have travelled too much, old girl; travels disturb the mind, they distort your outlook.] (Koltès, 1997: 122). She retorts, 'Qu'avez-vous à rester là, plantée comme une souche?' (Koltès, 1988: 85) [What are you doing there? Are you growing roots?] (Koltès, 1997: 142). *Souche* designates the base of a tree trunk, as well as origins. The nationalist and implicitly racist term 'Français de souche', used by the far right since the nineteenth century, distinguishes those considered to be of French origin, from migrants. In 1804 the Napoleonic Code introduced the *jus sanguinis* law whereby French nationality was determined by paternal filiation rather than the nation of birth. In a monologue addressed to the audience, Mathilde describes her rejection of filial lineage, which she herself enacts by having children with non-French fathers: 'Il faudrait changer le système de reproduction tout entier: les femmes devraient accoucher de cailloux. […] Les cailloux devraient accoucher des arbres, l'arbre accoucherait d'un oiseau, l'oiseau d'un étang; des étangs sortiraient les loups, et les louves accoucheraient et allaiteraient des bébés humains' (Koltès, 1988:

68) [The whole reproductive system should be changed: women should give birth to stones. The stones should give birth to trees, the trees to birds and the birds to ponds. From the ponds would come wolves and the wolves would give birth to human babies and suckle them] (Koltès, 1997: 127–8). In stark contrast to her brother's rootedness, Mathilde branches out. Like Brecht's Mother Courage, the quintessential exiled mother, Mathilde has children from different fathers, from different backgrounds. Mathilde exiled herself to Algeria after being shamed by her family and the French authorities for a liaison during the Second World War with a German soldier, which presumably produced her son Édouard, born around the time she left. She speaks to Aziz in Arabic, which she learnt when in Algeria. Adrien boasts, 'Un bon Français n'apprend pas les langues étrangères. Il se contente de la sienne, qui est largement suffisante, complète, équilibrée, jolie à écouter; le monde entier envie notre langue.' (Koltès, 1988: 25) [A true Frenchman doesn't learn foreign languages. He is content with his own, which is quite sufficient, complete, balanced and lovely to listen to; the whole world envies us our language.] (Koltès, 1997: 90) 'The root is monolingual', says Glissant (Glissant, 1997: 14). Mathilde, however, is proudly multi-lingual.

Mathilde's daughter Fatima is presumably of Algerian parentage, given her Arabic name. There is also an indication that she might be Muslim, since despite the mild weather she is fully covered, implying that she observes Muslim modesty (or perhaps she feels the cold, having migrated north). Adrien's insistence that Fatima conform, characterizes the French approach to assimilation. For Glissant a unitary root structure, which dominates the surrounding soil, is predatory (Glissant, 1997: 11). There is an expectation that immigrants submit to dominant cultural mores, presumed in France to be universally applicable to all inhabitants regardless of their background. There is little acknowledgement that, for example, the adoption of French names by Jewish people originates in anti-Semitism; or that *laïcité* – the removal of religion from the public sphere – has, according to some, mutated from the protection of all religions, into anti-Muslim sentiment (Fredette, 2018: 34), exacerbated by the Algerian War. Adrien is shamelessly racist and anti-Muslim, instructing Mathilde to change Fatima's name to 'Caroline' and enlisting his influential friends to have Fatima sectioned. Even Fatima's own mother – a complex, contradictory character rather than an archetype of an ideological position – says, 'crois-tu que tu vas pouvoir continuer à vivre comme une sauvage, ici?' (Koltès, 1988: 45, 20) [don't think you can go on living wild over here] (Koltès, 1997: 85–6). Algerian, Muslim, 'other', Fatima is prey to classic colonial tropes, labelled abnormal, irrational and uncivilized, and obliged to conform and assimilate.

In opposition to these ideologies of integration or acculturation, seeds of transnationalism germinate in Mathilde's family. Defending her daughter's name, Mathilde says, 'Si elle était née à Hong-Kong, je l'aurais appelé Tsouei Taï, je l'aurais appelé Shadémia si elle était née à Bamako, et si j'en avais accouché à Amecameca, son nom serait Iztaccihuatl.' (Koltès 1988: 16) [If she had been born in Hong Kong, I would have called her Tsouei Tai, I would have called her Shademia if she had been born at Bamako and if I had given birth to her at Amecameca, her name would be Iztaccihuatl.] (Koltès, 1997: 81) Although she was a member of the colonial elite in Algeria, Mathilde reached across cultures, giving her daughter an Arabic name. Now in France, she demonstrates her nascent transnationalism by refusing to submit to assimilationism.

Anthropologist Steven Vertovic distinguishes internationalism, which he defines as trade, diplomatic or other interactions between nation-states, from transnationalism, which denotes cross-border exchanges between non-state players (Vertovic, 2009: 3). Transnationalism, argue the co-editors of *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, replaces conventional, uni-directional understandings of home, community and nation as spatially fixed locations from which migrants depart and to which they relocate, with physical, affective and symbolic circuits where 'bodies, families, communities and nations are together reprocessed within transnational connections' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 3). Like Glissant's relation, transnational circuits are multi-directional, horizontal, rhizomatic. Upon Mathilde's return Adrien says, 'Tu es venue vers la maison où sont tes racines' (Koltès, 1988: 13) [you came back to find your roots here] (Koltès, 1997: 78). But for Mathilde, rootedness, homeland and home are fallacies:

> Quelle patrie ai-je, moi? Ma terre, à moi, où est-elle? Où est-elle la terre sur laquelle je pourrais me coucher? En Algérie, je suis une étrangère et je rêve de la France; en France, je suis encore plus étrangère et je rêve d'Alger. Est-ce que la patrie, c'est l'endroit où l'on n'est pas? J'en ai marre de ne pas être à ma place et de ne pas savoir où est ma place. Mais les patries n'existent pas, nulle part, non. (Koltès, 1988: 48)
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> [What country do I belong to? Where is my homeland, the ground on which I can rest in peace? In Algeria I am a foreigner and I dream of France; in France I am even more of a foreigner and I dream of Algiers. Perhaps your home is the place you're not at? I'm fed up with never being at home, never knowing where home is. But there are no homelands, nowhere, no.] (Koltès, 1997: 110)

Whilst expressing the disorientation of being uprooted, exiled, perpetually out of place, Mathilde opens the narrow notion of national identity to new forms of transnational cultural and social relation and belonging.

Even if at times she reverts to her family's bigotry – apples don't fall far from the tree – Mathilde sows the seeds of transnationalism that enable her children to grow into cosmpolitans. Privileged migrants can enjoy the life-affirming benefits associated with mobility. For migrants who suffer disadvantage or discrimination these benefits are less obvious or available, but no less filled with potential and promise. For Cohen, because diasporic migrants are often multi-lingual, versant in cultural diversity thanks to their everyday interactions, and wired into international family or community networks, they are 'able to use their cosmopolitanism to press the limits of the local' (Cohen, 2008: 150): 'Members of diasporas are almost by definition more mobile than people who are rooted solely in national spaces', he argues (Cohen, 2008: 146–8). Thanks to cosmopolitan competence, diasporas can provide a valuable resource, bridging divides between the kind of oppressive provincialism characteristic of Adrien's town, and more transnational, relational circuits (Cohen, 2008: 147).[10] This view is endorsed by Koltès himself, who attributes creativity and activity in France to its migrant populations (Koltès, 1999: 127).

Like her mother before her Fatima loiters outdoors, encountering the Black Parachutist. Towards the end of the play, which presumably spans nine months, Fatima gives birth to twins who, the housekeeper Maame Queuleu announces, are 'Grands, forts, gueulards, l'oeil brilliant.' (Koltès, 1988: 85) [big, strong, lusty, bright-eyed] (Koltès, 1997: 142). When she faints during childbirth, Fatima is described by Maame Queuleu as 'un arbre arraché par le typhon' (Koltès, 1988: 81) [a tree torn up by a typhoon] (Koltès, 1997: 138). Partly an allusion to the intensity of labour, Maame Queuleu's metaphor also indicates how uprooting becomes an integral part of regrounding as Fatima's progeniture rip up Adrien's rules of succession, the sacredness of legitimacy and the violent intolerance of 'la patrie', instead embodying France's multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith future. The twins are named Romulus and Remus. Even if the mythical Romulus kills his brother before founding Rome, at least this new civilization evades conservative family values: their names do not uniformly begin with 'Ma'; and Romulus and Remus were reared by a she-wolf, following Mathilde's insistence that genealogies break with hereditary lineage.

Instead of preserving ethnic, religious or mythical heritage, Fatima and the Black Parachutist mobilize transethnic solidarity. Adrien and Mathilde take 'white flight', leaving France, paradoxically – Koltès' plays never contain straightforward meaning – for one of its non-white overseas territories. Fatima and her new family settle in the Serpenoise home, gesturing towards nuanced definitions of belonging and citizenship no longer rooted

stubbornly in nationalism and other particularisms. They illustrate what philosopher Étienne Balibar calls 'a shift from the idea of the French citizen to the idea of the citizen of France' (Balibar, 1991: 81): to be a citizen of France, one need not be 'Français de souche'. With more than a hint of sarcasm the Black Parachutist tells Adrien, 'J'ai la nostalgie de l'époque coloniale […], chacun à sa place et tranquille dans sa place, et sa place était à lui.' (Koltès, 1988: 56) [I'm nostalgic for […] the colonial era […], each in his own place, calm and settled, and that place was his.] (Koltès, 1997: 118). In the Black Parachutist and Fatima's new world, rooted sedentarism and stagnant settlement are irrigated with the transversal flows of migration, as the former expresses:

> On me dit […] que les noms des villes, et des domaines et des maisons, et des gens dans les maisons changent dans le cours d'une vie, et alors tout est remis en un autre ordre et plus personne ne sait son nom, ni où est sa maison, ni son pays ni ses frontières. Il ne sait plus ce qu'il doit garder. Il ne sait plus qui est l'étranger. (Koltès, 1988: 57)
>
> [I'm told […] that the names of towns and estates and houses, and of the people in the houses, can change in the course of a lifetime, and then everything is reshuffled in a different order, and then no one knows his name, nor his house, nor his country, nor its borders. He no longer knows what it is that he's meant to guard. He no longer knows who is the enemy.] (Koltès, 1997: 119)

'[T]aking root, henceforth, will be of a different nature. It is in relation', writes Glissant (Glissant 1997: 61). Home becomes a fertile, ongoing, continuous, multi-directional process of uprooting, hybridizing root stock, renaming and rerouting, never fully complete. 'Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed', insist the co-editors of *Uprootings/Regroundings* (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 1).

Fatima's brother Édouard ends the play with an expressionist symbolization of deterritorialized mobility. Addressing the audience he says:

> sans doute les habitants de cette planète s'attachent-ils à leur planète avec leurs mains, les ongles de leurs pieds, leurs dents, pour ne pas la lâcher et qu'elle ne les lâche pas. Ils croient que leur alliance avec leur planète est irrémédiable […] quand je me retrouverai à quelques millions de kilomètres d'ici, en l'air, cela ira déjà mieux. (Koltès, 1988: 79–80)
>
> [perhaps the inhabitants of this planet hold onto it with their hands, their toenails, their teeth, so as not to let go, and so that it doesn't let them go. They think their link with the planet is indissoluble […] when I'm a few million kilometres from here, up in the air, things will be better.] (Koltès, 1997: 137)

As he describes humans who, tooth and claw, dig into and cling onto home, fatherland and territory, '*Il prend son élan, saute, et disparaît dans l'espace.*' (Koltès, 1988: 137.) [*He takes a run, jumps, and disappears into space.*] (Koltès, 1988: 137). V. Y. Mudimbe and Sabine Engel introduce *Diasporas and Migration* by writing, 'Members of diasporas define themselves in terms of at least a double identity, thus bracketing the unconditional fidelity associated with citizenship in a particular nation-state. […] Quite literally, they incarnate a transcending of separate cultural identities' (Mudimbe and Engel, 1999: 4–5). Rather than an attempt to extract himself from Earth's relational networks, the ecology to which the entire human and non-human planet belongs, I feel that Édouard's symbolic act might open relationality on a planetary scale. Earlier, the Black Parachutist enters Adrien's walled, gated property by descending from the sky. Whereas military parachutists conventionally embody the unrestrained mobility of invasion and domination, as well as the option to abdicate civil responsibility simply by being airlifted, Koltès' Black Parachutist, presumably drafted from sub-Saharan Africa into the colonial French Army, exhibits a subversive errantry, a mobility that disregards racial segregation and other exclusionary barriers. Édouard's exiting from the Earth's orbit is the mirror reverse of the Parachutist's landing, but both literally deterritorialize imbedded identities and static borders. If migrants possess a cultural mobility enabling them to be both participants of a culture and 'outsiders' (Cohen, 2008: 149); if Glissant's concept of 'errantry' allows 'each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open' (Glissant, 1997: 34), then these characters' air-born transcendence visualizes these qualities.

A post-colonial version of Anton Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* (1904), where Ranyevskaya also returns to the family home, the form and style of *Retour* resemble a naturalist family drama. However, the poetic expressionism of Édouard's intergalactic ascent provides an example of how apparent familiarity is rendered fantastical by Koltès. Language, too, seemingly rings with the clarity of everyday colloquiality, whilst resonating with a lyricism evocative of the ethereal tones of early twentieth-century poetic playwright Paul Claudel. Despite the historical context of the Algerian War, Koltès insists that his plays are not political tracts with definitive meanings, and the use of verbal and visual metaphor enable multiple readings (Koltès, 1999: 60). In terms of time, proceedings begin at dawn and end in the dead of night therefore appearing to conform with neo-classical unity, although time is also dilated to accommodate the twins' gestation. Koltès cites the episodic structure of both Shakespeare's

theatre – he had recently translated *A Winter's Tale* into French – and of cinema as influences on this play, which is far more episodic than his other theatrical works (Koltès, 1999: 32). The spatial and temporal fluidity were conveyed in Chéreau's production, designed by Richard Peduzzi, where a moving walkway, the kind found in airports, brought properties on stage and removed them (Chéreau, 1996: 48).[11] Eva Doumbia, a French director of Ivorian and Malian heritage, remarks that because, unlike films, novels and music, theatre cannot be transported into homes across the globe, transnationalism must be integrated into theatre: 'how can we conceive of theatre territorially, when borders are increasingly mobile?', (Doumbia, 2005: 188). Koltès adds a certain multi-lingualism to his visual and verbal disintegration of realism and his by turns surrealist stylization and satirical caricature of bourgeois family values: Mathilde, Aziz and the café owner Saïfi speak in Arabic; and each of the play's five acts bears an Arabic name.

The play's intercultural aesthetic, whilst apparent, is secondary to its strong narrative, mainly recognizable characters, vaudeville gags and mordant sarcasm.[12] This is no doubt owing to the fact that Koltès had written it with the star boulevard actor Jacqueline Maillan in mind, and it was seen by nearly 100,000 enthusiastic spectators at the part-public part-commercial Théâtre du Rond Point (1988).[13] Indeed, the relatively 'plotted', stable nature of the narrative and seemingly knowable characters arguably contradict the play's main message: that space, Self and Other are 'projects rather than congealed totalities' (Mudimbe and Engel, 1999: 6).

Wajdi Mouawad, *Incendies*

Since 2016 the Lebanese–Canadian performer, author and director Wajdi Mouawad has headed Paris' Théâtre National de la Colline, providing one of many examples of theatre practitioners who, since at least late antiquity, have taken performance across borders (Webb, 2009). *Le Sang des promesses* (*The Blood of Promises*, 1999–2009), of which *Incendies* (*Scorched*) is the second play, is a tetralogy of tragedies in all of which migration is provoked by war and violence. It was staged in France first at the Festival des Francophonies in Limoges (2003) (for further detail about this festival, see Chapter 18 in this volume), then in one of the nation's most prestigious venues, the Cour d'honneur at the Avignon Theatre Festival (2009).

Incendies begins as Nawal dies and her friend Hermile Lebel presents her will to her twenty-two-year-old twins, Jeanne and Simon. The will requests that they find their father, whom she had told them was dead; and a brother they never knew they had.

The play is set in Canada, to where Nawal fled from an unspecified Middle Eastern warzone. The fact that the 1980s are mentioned suggests that Mouawad references his native Lebanon, gripped by civil war between 1975 and 1990. Phoenician merchants from the eastern Mediterranean, where modern-day Lebanon is located, are mentioned in *The Odyssey* (Book 15); and until the twentieth century Lebanese migrants were associated with trade as well as with the banking sector and education institutions, that flourished thanks to Lebanon's status as a commercial axis (Cohen, 2008: 83–92). The high number of civilian casualties and wholesale infrastructural devastation provoked by the war turned Lebanese migrants from mobile, global merchants and professionals into a victim diaspora, and Lebanon arguably has never recovered from this downward spiral of mass emigration (Cohen, 2008: 96). References to the civil war rain down on *Incendies*: massacres, assassinations, abductions, torture, suicide bombings, the burning of property and people, as referenced in the play's title. These atrocities inevitably cause many thousands either to be internally displaced or to flee as refugees, as Nawal does.

Unlike other playwrights discussed in this chapter, Mouawad is himself a member of a victim diaspora who, as Glissant puts it, was violently uprooted. He recounts that in 1975 when he was seven, 'a bomb uprooted everything, setting alight our garden, my childhood and my dreams.' (Mouawad, 2011a: 64). The letter W that features in Nawal Marwan's first and surnames as well as in the names of her teenage lover Wahab, best friend Sawda and son Simon's original Arabic name Sarwane, echo the same consonant in Wajdi Mouawad's own names (Mouawad, 2009: 10). Rather than the genealogical lineage maintained via the continuity of the sound 'Ma' in the names of Adrien's family members in *Retour*, this repeated consonant, peppered like shrapnel across the tetralogy, references the real, biographical uprooting that Mouawad's family experienced. They fled first to Paris then to Quebec, where Mouawad grew up. Although he is Lebanese he explains that nowhere does he now feel more foreign than in Lebanon, highlighting the out of placeness intrinsic to migration (Mouawad, 2009: 17). In a book he wrote about his tetralogy entitled – appropriately for the premise of this chapter – *Le Sang des promesses: puzzle, racines, et rhizomes* (*The Blood of Promises: Puzzle, Roots and Rhizomes*) – he explains that making theatre enables him to recreate the playful happiness of his pre-exilic childhood before this violent uprooting (Mouawad, 2009: 6). To some extent the representation of migration in *Incendies* thus becomes self-representation.[14]

Jeanne and Simon's search becomes an odyssey – a journey of self-discovery – as they unearth their mother's past, staged in *Incendies* as

flashbacks. At fourteen Nawal became pregnant. So as not to bring shame on her village, her baby, Nihad, was removed. At eighteen Nawal and her friend Sawda set off in search of Nihad's orphanage, only to discover that the orphans had either been killed, or displaced by war. Nawal became caught up in the violence and assassinated a militia leader, for which she was imprisoned for ten years. During this time, her guard, Abou Tarek, raped her, and again, she became pregnant. Again, the baby was removed. Jeanne and Simon are confused: is Nihad their brother, or is the baby born in prison their brother? In an oedipal twist they learn first that Nawal's own son, who had changed his name from Nihad to Abou Tarek, raped her. Second, a guard informs them that Nawal actually gave birth in prison not to one baby but to twins and that, echoing Sophocles' *Oedipus*, instead of disposing of them in the river, the guard entrusted them to a shepherd.[15] The tragic truth – the Ancient Greek *anagnorisis* – reveals that the twins' brother, Nihad, is also their father.

Conforming with the conventions of classical tragedy, Oedipus cannot escape the fate predicted by the oracle consulted by his father Laius before his birth: he will kill his father and marry his mother. Whereas Nawal, like Oedipus' tragic mother–wife Jocasta, is undone by forces beyond her control, migration enables her to become an agent of choice and to spare her children a cursed future. Adrien in *Retour* insists on calling Mathilde 'ma petite soeur' [my little sister] and Mathieu 'mon fils' [my son], his use of possessive adjectives highlighting his jealous defence of lineage. Conversely, Simon in *Incendies* complains, 'Pourquoi dans son putain de testament elle ne dit pas une seule fois le mot *mes enfants* pour parler de nous?! Le mot *fils*, le mot *fille*! […] "La jumelle le jumeau, enfants sortis de mon ventre"' ('The twin sister, the twin brother, the offspring of my flesh') (Mouawad, 2003: 16–17) [When she talks about us in her goddamn will, why doesn't she use the world *my children*? The word *son*, the word *daughter*!] (Mouawad, 2009: 11). Nawal's relatives are 'engluées dans la colère' (Mouawad, 2003: 92) [trapped in anger] (Mouawad, 2011: 134). Her twins are the product of rape; her country is destroyed by war. In a rejection of filiation and nation she severs emotional ties with the twins, saving them from the violence and trauma of her own upbringing and the sectarian reprisals encircling her ravaged homeland. 'Il faut casser le fil', she writes in a letter to her children included in her will (Mouawad, 2003: 92) [We have to break the thread] (Mouawad, 2011: 134). Hargreaves states, 'Few adults seek to annihilate the culture that they learnt during their formative years. Most seek to transmit what they inherited to their own children.' (Hargreaves, 1995: xv) Mathilde's family is uprooted from Algeria and re-roots, or reroutes in France, according to errant, transnational, cosmopolitan, blended patterns of mobility. Contrastingly, in a necessarily

brutal act of 'cultural annihilation', Nawal ruptures contact with her homeland, replacing the twins' Arabic names Jannane and Sarwane with French names (which Mathilde refuses to do), and not teaching them Arabic.

Through uprooting, however brutal, Nawal reroutes her children's future. Even if exile is involuntary and provoked by violence, Glissant suggests that through errantry it can be transformed into relation: 'a network, […] the aggregation of things that are scattered.' (Glissant, 1997: 18, 55). Transcultural mobility becomes a means by which affirmation can be reclaimed from, or at the minimum exist in tension with, the violence of exile. Whereas Koltès' Mathilde is able to repatriate to France, Nawal and her twins have no choice but to become refugees. But Nawal shares with Mathilde, or at least with Mathilde's children, a view that, more than an origin, home can become a destination. Whilst sensing a debt of gratitude to her nurturing grandmother – who, on her deathbed advised Nawal, 'Apprends. C'est ta seule chance de ne pas nous ressembler.' (Mouawad, 2003: 30) [Learn. It's your only hope if you don't want to turn out like us.] (Mouawad, 2011: 32) – Nawal feels no idealized nostalgia for homeland (the Greek *nostos* literally means homecoming), from which she delivers her young family to a safe haven. Migrants depart from a place, losing a home, whilst departing for a place, gaining a home (Hollis-Touré, 2015: 15). Canada is stained by the obliteration of its indigenous populations, resulting from colonial occupation. But contra notions of homogenous purity, Canada features some of the world's most multi-cultural immigrant societies. In *Incendies* a shop owner helps the twins translate from Arabic into French; Hermile takes them to 'une pizzeria indienne' (Mouawad, 2003: 48); and Simon's string of profanities from both sides of the Quebec border celebrates what sociologist Paul Gilroy calls a 'cultural intermixture' (Gilroy, 1993: 4): 'Putain! Câlisse d'hostie de crises de fuck, de fuck, de fuck …' (Mouawad, 2003: 16) [Jesus Christ! Goddamn sonofabitching fucking shit, shit, shit …] (Mouawad, 2011: 14).

Mouawad explains how, when he first read the *Iliad* he was struck by the Mediterranean essence of the language, seascapes and sensations, which returned him to the Lebanese culture of his childhood (Mouawad, 2009: 15). Heavily influenced by the classics, Mouawad not only references Oedipus but loosely adopts the structure of classical tragedy, since the play features an exposition of the central dilemma – Who is the twins' father? Who is their brother? – which is resolved. But unlike classical tragedy, and distinct from the other two plays discussed in this chapter, *Incendies* features a non-linear plot which alternates between the twin's life in Canada after their mother's death; Nawal's youth in the Middle East; and the twins' journey to Nawal's former home. Not only time and space, but

also Mouawad's aesthetic style are pluralized insofar as he combines the realism of historical description, the high emotion of melodrama, and the chatty quotidian language that resulted from the nine-month rehearsal period during which his actors improvised speech, on which he based his script (Mouawad, 2003: 7, 2011: iii). Glissant describes how baroque art 'reroutes' the 'rationalist pretence of penetrating the mysteries of the known with one uniform and conclusive move' (Glissant, 1997: 77). Rather than 'some essence', baroque art presents 'bypasses, proliferation, spatial redundancy, anything that flouted the alleged unicity of the thing known and the knowing of it' (Glissant, 1997: 78). This hybridity represents not just an aesthetic style for Glissant but a 'being-in-the-world' where relation between constituent parts is more meaningful than the parts themselves (Glissant, 1997: 89). None of the plays discussed in this chapter constitute a 'baroque' 'rerouting' of 'unicity' in the way, for example, of François Tanguy and the Théâtre du Radeau's fluctuating crests and waves of ever-changing scenographies, voices, bodies and sounds; or Gisèle Vienne's nebulous, elusive atmospheres, both of which undo identifiable categories of time, space, character and theme (see Triau's Chapter 15 in this volume). Nonetheless, in *Incendies* present and past not only alternate, but interpenetrate. During their youth Nawal and Sawda escaped from a bus clearly marked 'Réfugiés Kfar Rayat', but which was nonetheless doused by militia in petrol and sprayed with bullets. As Hermile recounts this traumatic experience to the twins, a road digger outside fires up and grass sprinklers gush blood. Despite Nawal's efforts to disassociate her children from the carnage of her past and brutality of her homeland, the play's non-linear, epic narrative – evocative of the works of Canadian theatre-maker Robert Lepage, a profound influence on Mouawad – illustrates how migration, exile and the refugee experience collapse knowable categories such as past and present, there and here, exile and home.

Estelle Savasta, *Traversée* (2011)

Savasta, who incidentally assisted Mouawad on the Montreal staging of *Incendies* in 2003, is author of three plays. The title alone of her two-hander *Traversée* (*Going Through*, see Figure 19.2, on page 384) points both to migration and transnationalism.

Traversée begins as Youmna announces to young Nour, whom she looks after, that Nour is now old enough to join her mother abroad. *Traversée* is the only play discussed here that provides insights into the perils of the migratory journey itself. With economy Savasta's uncomplicated verse

Figure 19.2 Charmaine Wombwell as Nour (left) and Nadia Nadarajah as Youmna (right) in Omar Elerian's production of Estelle Savasta, *Going Through*, at the Bush Theatre, London, 2019. © Arenapal

covers many of the issues confronting migrants both whilst they travel, and on reaching their destination. Youmna disguises Nour as a boy by cutting her hair and changing her clothes, highlighting the added risk encountered by women and girl migrants, who are inevitably more vulnerable to sexual violence and trafficking. The exposure of child migrants is also illustrated, as Nour's first trafficker abandons her at a café in front of which she must sleep rough. Both the café and bus she then boards are populated exclusively by men, some armed. She walks for days, suffers dehydration, is smuggled across borders unaware of what country she is in, and has to dodge bullets. She finally arrives at the coast – perhaps the Mediterranean, although geographical locations are not specified – where she is instructed to cling onto a plank under a lorry and crosses the sea to her destination. The uncelebrated resilience, resourcefulness and resistance in the face of adversity displayed by Nour and fellow migrants – not that these are necessarily defining or prerequisite characteristics for all migrants – is acknowledged by her, as she describes them all as warriors (Savasta, 2011: 48, 2019: 33). Only once she arrives at her destination, where she in fact never finds her mother, can she process the trauma of her journey: 'La survie est réglée et tout me ratrappe. L'arrachement, et le voyage, ce que j'ai vu de si laid

que je ne raconterai jamais, les frontières qui traversent le corps' (Savasta, 2011: 57); [Now that I'm done with survival, everything catches up with me. Being snatched away, the journey, the ugly things I saw that I would never tell a soul about, the borders that go through our body] (Savasta, 2019: 40).

Francophone studies specialist Dominic Thomas writes of the 'criminalizing, debasing, and often dehumanizing logic' dominating migratory flows from the Global South, 'one that is fueled by the disquieting narcissistic nationalism associated with governments, politicians, and policymakers' (Thomas, 2019: 178). At one point Nour is piled atop watermelons in a lorry: 'Je suis comme un colis qu'on déplace d'un endroit à un autre. / On demande rarement à un colis son avis sur la situation.' (Savasta, 2011: 44) [I'm like a parcel that gets shipped from place to place. / You don't really ask a parcel their opinion about the situation.] (Savasta 2019: 29). Thomas suggests that the arts play a vital role in inviting empathy and understanding for migrants, who are otherwise objectified and anonymized. His article does not, however, mention theatre. Writing in *Theatre and Migration* director Peter Sellars, whose production of Euripides' *Children of Herakles* (2003) featured refugees playing themselves, argues that theatre literally fleshes out otherwise faceless migrants:

> What in the computer file that they consult as they pass your documents through their system at a checkpoint would begin to say anything about the courage, the love, the vision, the generosity, or the potential of the human being who stands in front of them? Theatre is a contribution to the necessity of deepening those ten seconds of vision and revealing the inadequacy of the documentation. (Sellars, 2014: viii)

Traversée enables audience members to gain intimate glimpses into Nour's arduous, lonely journey, and the singularity of her strengths, fears and hopes.

Nour is transported like cargo and treated with hostile contempt by border authorities. Glissant maintains that people are exiled from nations precisely because, since the eighteenth century, Europe has imposed and exported the default mode of the sovereign state which tends 'to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other' (Glissant, 1997: 13). This oppositional relationship involves, says Glissant, categorizing people either as 'citizen', or as 'visitor' at best, 'barbarian' at worst (Glissant, 1997: 17). Hargreaves makes a further distinction between those arriving in France from the Global North who are 'foreigners', and those from the South who are denoted by the more pejorative, pathologized term 'immigrant' (Hargreaves, 1995: 18). Instead of being welcomed upon

her arrival, Nour is humiliated and criminalized by what Sellars would term 'hyper-legal immigration and deportation superstructures' (Sellars, 2014: ix). When she is subjected to medical checks, Nour's biological sex is revealed; and X-rays of her wrists and hips allegedly verify that she is an unaccompanied minor, meaning she has the right to remain. But when she is eighteen she must unenroll from college and live clandestinely, to avoid deportation.

As with Mouawad's Nawal, we discover that Nour's mother commits an act of severance to offer her daughter freedom from violence, and the possibilities of transnational relation. Before Nour leaves Youmna hands her a tiny box, saying Nour can open it once she is an adult. Alone, never having found her mother, Nour trains as a midwife in her destination country. The day she delivers her first baby she opens the box, discovering a letter:

> Comprends bien, je suis Youmna et tu es née de mon ventre. […]
> Le voyage et toi êtes venus en même temps.
> Dès que j'ai senti que tu étais là, j'ai décidé.
> J'ai pensé Pour moi, c'est fait. C'est acceptable.
> Pas pour l'enfant.
> Mon enfant mangera à sa faim.
> […]
> Ici il n'y a rien pour nous. (Savasta, 2011: 60–1)

> [Understand that I am Youmna and you came from my tummy. […] The journey and you came about at the same time. As soon as I felt that you were there, I made a decision.
>
> I thought for me it's done. I can accept that. Not for the child. My child will not go hungry. […] Here there is nothing for us.] (Savasta, 2019: 42– 3)

Nawal severs her children from her culture and heritage; Youmna goes further still, geographically severing her daughter by sending her across continents. These women rewrite Euripides' Medea by committing emotionally violent acts to salvage their children's futures rather than kill them. Nour says as she leaves Youmna:

> Je ne me suis pas retournée.
> Je ne l'ai pas regardée devenir de plus en plus petite.
> Il y a des choses qu'on ne peut pas regarder disparaître sans prendre le risque de disparaître aussi. (Savasta, 2011: 35)

> [I didn't turn around.
> I didn't watch her become smaller and smaller.
> There are certain things you can't watch disappearing without the risk of disappearing yourself.] (Savasta, 2019: 22)

So their children do not develop a debilitating sense of belonging to an ancestral home; so they aspire to lives that are freer from hardship; so they enjoy greater prospects, both mothers uproot filiation.

Youmna says to Nour before departing, 'tout repousse, les herbes, les envies, les branches' (Savasta, 2011: 30) [everything grows back, grass, desires, branches] (Savasta, 2019: 16). Whilst Youmna has aspirations for her daughter, she herself, like Adrien in *Retour*, is rooted to her limited life. Nour describes her:

> Youmna n'a toujours pas bougé.
> Peut-être que pour vrai elle ne bougera plus jamais.
> Ses pieds s'enracineront. Ses bras deviendront aussi secs que de vieilles branches. (Savasta, 2011: 40)

> [Youmna has still not moved.
> Maybe she will never move again.
> Her feet will take root. Her arms will turn as dry as old branches.] (Savasta, 2019: 26)

Retour ends with the birth of Fatima's twins, and in *Traversée*, Nour delivers a baby to a migrant mother who, coincidentally, comes from her native country. Despite the pain and loss caused by migration, uprooting and severance can promote growth and hope, incarnated metaphorically and literally in this new generation of healthy babies. In the letter kept safe inside the box, Youmna describes Nour: 'comme les herbes folles d'un potager désordonné' (Savasta, 2011: 62) [like wild herbs in an unkept vegetable patch] (Savasta, 2019: 44). Nour is the Arabic for light: in the right conditions, migrants can take root, flourish, propagate.

In each work discussed here a single mother – Mathilde, Nawal, Youmna – exercises an act of personal volition to ensure the safety and welfare of her children. Glissant notes that another violence perpetrated by filiation in patriarchal societies is the classification of femininity as inferior (Glissant, 1997: 58–9). Migration is often perceived as male-dominated – in *Retour* the African migrants are all male – and since traditionally diasporic homemaking has tended to fall to women, it is often undervalued (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 5). Koltès, Mouawad and Savasta illustrate how, in their various ways, these three mothers uproot their children to enable them to take root, to make diasporic homes. Moreover, if the heteronormative patriarchal nuclear family is both a microcosm of, and reproductive tool for the exclusionary nation-state, these women's variegated family structures, like Mother Courage's international family, which Brecht created in 1939 during Hitler's rabid intensification of nationalism in Germany, open onto greater inclusivity, tolerance and possibility.

Glissant writes, 'Relation […] is spoken multilingually. […] Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent.' (Glissant, 1997: 19). If Arabic and Québecois in *Retour* and *Incendies* go some way towards uprooting monolingualism's hegemony, multi-lingualism in *Traversée* is a central structuring principle. The audience is told by Youmna at the start, 'Les oreilles de Youmna ne marchent pas / Mes oreilles ne marchent pas' (Savasta, 2011: 9) [Youmna's ears don't work / My ears don't work] (Savasta, 2019: 1). In both the French and UK productions the deaf actor playing Youmna signed her dialogue. In the printed playtext Youmna's lines are indicated by a smaller-print repetition of Nour's lines, as if Youmna were an echo of the more important, hearing character.[16] Omar Elerian's UK production presented a more equitable relationship between the two characters and performers than that suggested in the text, since they were jointly responsible for narrating the story. Elerian also employed video projections of graphics resembling chalk writing and drawings on a blackboard, to assist with comprehension by both hearing-impaired and hearing audiences. Both in the UK and France the casting of *Traversée*, which featured two actors of non-European heritage, one disabled and one able-bodied, illustrated Glissant's notion of a horizontal relation between multiple constituents.[17] *Traversée* thus takes part in the opening of French theatre to inclusivity, which is gradually replacing whiteness and 'Frenchness'.

In 'On Cosmopolitanism', written at the mid-point of the period spanned by these plays, Jacques Derrida asks what concrete measures could be taken to ensure that the ideal of unconditional hospitality expressed by the Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant, does not remain 'a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency' (Derrida, 2001: 23). In 1996 the 'refuge cities' that Derrida envisaged, where people could be 'allied to each other according to forms of solidarity', were 'yet to be invented' (Derrida, 2001: 3, 4, 5). In the twenty-first century these refuges appear even more of a distant mirage in the Global North, where controlling, curbing and monitoring by implacable juridical restrictions, as well as right-wing anti-immigration populism, are only increasing. The characters in these plays do not wait for the judiciary, human rights legislation or popular opinion to uproot racism, nationalism or other forms of exclusion. Instead, they seize opportunities to become transnational citizens of refuges that they themselves build through their deterritorializing acts of transformational rerouting, which unmake normative notions of ethnicity, culture, identity and citizenship, remaking them in creative, liberating and plural ways through mixity and overlapping.

The term diaspora derives etymologically from the Greek *speiro* meaning both 'scatter', and 'sow'. Both dispersed and rooted in their open, pluralized redefinitions of post-colonial, post-national cultures and identities, Fatima, the Black Parachutist, Jeanne, Simon and Nour, each of whom in their own way exposes the fault lines of nationalist and racist ideologies, are at once mobile, and settled. Hargreaves remarks, 'the absorption of people of foreign origin into the national community has left relatively few monuments in the collective memory of France' (Hargreaves, 1995: 26). In the decades since she wrote this, post-migrant French cinema and literature, and of course sport, have testified to the nation's multiplied and relational identities. As I stated at the start of this chapter, French theatre has tended to have a reputation, especially internationally, for symbolist, absurdist, expressionist or postdramatic abstraction. Whilst this oblique approach to representing the world has indeed prevailed for over a century, French theatre increasingly represents society in more explicit ways, the works discussed in this chapter thus becoming all the more relevant thanks to the precedent they set (Neveux, 2022). As they illustrate, French theatre, too, plays its part in creating mobile monuments to the migration on which the present and future of the modern French nation are founded.

Recommended Reading

David Bradby, *Modern French Drama 1940–1990* (1991) and David Bradby and Annabel Poincheval, *Le Théâtre en France de 1968 à 2000* (2011). These two volumes provide exhaustive coverage of modern and contemporary playwriting and directing, alongside chronological and historical contextualization.

Josette Féral and Donia Mousef, eds., *The transparency of the text: contemporary writing for the stage*, special issue of *Yale French Studies* 112 (2007). Detailed analysis of contemporary French playwriting.

Michel Corvin, *L'Homme en trop: l'abhumanisme dans le théâtre contemporain* (2014). An examination of post-narrative and post-figurative French theatre.

Clare Finburgh Delijani and Carl Lavery, *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage* (2015). Analyses of the key works of 'absurdist' theatre.

Notes

1. My grateful thanks to Anne-Françoise Benhamou for her invaluable comments on this chapter.
2. Other works for the stage also treat the theme of migration, the most renowned being Ariane Mnouchkine's *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (2003). For a detailed analysis, see Grehan (2009: 116–38).

3. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.
4. For discussions of postdramatic, post-narrative and post-character French theatre see Ryngaert and Sermon, 2006; Finburgh and Lavery, 2011; Corvin, 2014.
5. For further engagements with Glissant, see Brueton's Chapter 17 in this volume.
6. Whilst Glissant rejects 'root identity', his horizontal, rhizomatic paradigm can be seen to promote, rather than preclude oneness with the land – notably that around which some indigenous cultures grow – since hierarchies such as that between the human and non-human world, no longer exist.
7. For an account of Chéreau's production, see Regnault (1990).
8. In an interview Koltès states that all children should be taught that the earth revolves around the sun (Koltès, 1999: 118).
9. Metz was Koltès' hometown.
10. Migrants can also make conservative nationalist desires or claims to homelands (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 10).
11. For images, see Benhamou (1995: 74–9).
12. For an analysis of humour in Koltès, see 'Le Registre comique', in Petitjean (2014).
13. The roles have also been played by other great French actors, for instance, Myriam Boyer and François Chattot in Jacques Nichet's production at the Théâtre de la Ville (1995).
14. For an examination of theatre by refugees, see Jeffers (2012).
15. In the film adaptation of *Incendies* directed by Denis Villeneuve (2010), the opening scene zooms in on three black dots tattooed on the heel of a small boy in an orphanage, presumably Nihad. This mark references the wounds Sophocles' Oedipus bears, from being pinned with an iron bar through his ankles to a mountainside, so that he will perish to outwit the terrible prophecy.
16. The inclusion of a deaf actor perhaps outweighs Savasta's somewhat clichéd depiction of disabled people as either superhuman, abject, or both. Youmna, who can ward off the evil eye and talk to unborn children, says, 'Je crois qu'avec tous mes savoirs, je leur fais un peu peur.' (Savasta, 2011: 17) [I think that with all my knowledge, I scare them a bit.] (Savasta, 2019: 8). Like the blind prophet Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Youmna falls into the clichéd category of characters who are disabled, yet inspirational, gifted or magical.
17. From the start Chéreau included Black actors in his productions of Koltès' plays, notably Isaach de Bankolé (see Figure 19.1, on page 373).