UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

African Francophone *Bandes Dessinées*:

Graphic Autobiographies and Illustrated Testimonies

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in French and Francophone Studies

by

Michelle Lynn Bumatay

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Michelle Lynn Bumatay

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Dominic Thomas, Chair

Former French President Charles de Gaulle's famous claim that Belgian *bande dessinée* character Tintin was his only international rival speaks to the ubiquity of *bandes dessinées* in the francophone world while underlining their participation in imperial cultural hegemony. Similarly, in *Peau noire, Masques blancs,* Frantz Fanon also highlights the popularity of European *bandes dessinées* in the francophone world and observes the negative psychological impact of such texts on non-European readers who identify with Western explorer characters rather than with the racialized stereotypical images of non-European characters. One major factor for this is that the emergence and development of French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* took place during the height of European colonialism; *bandes dessinées* subsequently drew from and participated in a visual culture—such as travel postcards, brochures and keepsakes from colonial expositions, and in particular advertisements for exotic goods such as Banania—that

helped construct the European imaginary of Africa. Moreover, *bandes dessinées* published in France and Belgium were exported to the colonial territories with the *mission civilisatrice*. This dissertation analyzes how contemporary cartoonists seek to disrupt the continued prevalence of colonial iconography in mainstream European *bandes dessinées* through satire and through experimentation with the limits of this medium. The goal is to demonstrate how such texts combat Western stereotypes of Africa and how they reconfigure European imperialist discourses to generate new modes of thinking about and representing sub-Saharan Africa.

Though many sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* are didactic in nature and subject to censorship, there are two genres to which contemporary African cartoonists seem to gravitate: autobiographical *bandes dessinées* that focus on quotidian life and lived-experiences and journalistic *bandes dessinées* that foreground postcolonial violence. Chapters one and two center on the first genre in the work of Gabonese cartoonist Pahé and in the *Aya de Yopougon* series by Ivorian Marguerite Abouet and French Clément Oubrerie. Chapter three shifts focus to an investigation of the long-lasting sociopolitical effects of European colonialism in central Africa in the work of Belgian cartoonist Jean-Philippe Stassen with particular attention paid to his work on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and its continuing aftermath.

The dissertation of Michelle Lynn Bumatay is approved.

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2013

To my family and friends for their encouragement.

And to Marc for his boundless patience and compassion.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the UCLA Department of French and Francophone Studies, the UCLA Graduate Division, and Harry and Yvonne Lenart for their financial support. I am immensely grateful for the funding I received from them, which gave me the opportunity to travel to Rwanda and France to conduct research, meet with cartoonists, participate in intellectually stimulating colloquiums, and complete my dissertation. For the permission to use copyrighted images, I thank Éditions Chandeigne, Éditions Paquet, and Futuropolis.

I thank my committee members, Alain Mabanckou, Andrea Loselle, and Steven Nelson for their insightful comments, questions, and suggestions that have helped shape my thinking and strengthen my research. I am deeply grateful for Dominic Thomas, the chair of my dissertation committee, whose enthusiastic support and encouragement for my project on *bandes dessinées* since its inception has been invaluable. He has been instrumental in helping me discover the rich world of African *bandes dessinées* and in realizing the potential social and political impact of academic research.

During my time as a graduate student, I have had the pleasure of working with incredible faculty and colleagues at UCLA and at other institutions. I am thankful for Françoise Lionnet, Mark McKinney, Lia Brozgal, and Jean-Pierre Karegeye who have all had a profound influence on my research and on my development as an academic professional. In addition, I thank the graduate students, past and present, of the Department of French and Francophone Studies and of the Comparative Literature Department at UCLA for sharing their projects with me and for all of the stimulating discussions we have had. I look forward to continuing them in the future. In particular, I am grateful for my writing partners Katelyn Knox and Kirk Sides who agreed to

write with me early in the morning. I thank them for their comments on my work over the years, their words of encouragement, and their engaging conversations about a wide range of topics.

I am eternally indebted to my parents, Marilyn and Andrew Bumatay, and my sister, Monica Bumatay, whose dedication to teaching and to inspiring others to follow their passions has been foundational for me. I thank them for their unwavering encouragement throughout this long process. Lastly, this journey would not have been possible without the support, compassion, and unfathomable patience of my husband, Marc Hayhurst. Thank you for always listening and for asking questions.

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Bumatay, Michelle Lynn. "Humor as a Way to Re-Image and Re-Imagine Gabon and France in *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula*" *European Comic Art* 5.2 (2012): 45–66.

Bumatay, Michelle Lynn, and Hannah Warman. "Illustrating Genocidaires, Orphans, and Child Soldiers in Central Africa." *Peace Review* 24.3 (2012): 332–339. Web. 22 Aug. 2012.

Bumatay, Michelle Lynn. "La collaboration à distance: Entretien avec Alain Mabanckou." *Paroles gelées* Vol. 25.1 (2009) 27-34.

---. (November 2012). "Illustrating the Human Dimension of Immigration in *Bandes Dessinées*." Paper presented at the French-Language Comics Conference at the Miami University of Ohio, Oxford, Ohio.

---. (March 2012). "Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres: Jean-Philippe Stassen's 'Les visiteurs de Gibraltar.'" Paper presented at the 20th & 21st Century French & Francophone Studies Annual International Colloquium, Long Beach, California.

---. (October 2011). "Unpacking the Punch Line and Bridging the Postcolonial Gap: Humor as a Way to Re-Image and Re-Imagine Gabon and France in *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula*." Paper presented at the International Comic Arts Forum 15th Anniversary Academic Conference, White River Junction, Vermont.

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---. (January 2008). "Framing Genocide: *Déogratias* and *Rwanda 1994: Descente en enfer*." Paper presented at the Arts in the One World Conference and Workshops, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California.

Introduction

Sub-Saharan African *Bandes Dessinées* in Context: Challenging the Colonial Legacy of the Ninth Art and Reconfiguring the Visual Logic of Franco-Belgian (Post)Colonialism[1]

The importance of images and print culture to the Western construction of Africa during the height of European colonialism cannot be overstated; the ubiquity of travel postcards and posters, colonial expositions, children's and picture books, and advertisements for exotic goods such as Banania in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries in Europe indicates the widespread mobilization of visual culture in the métropole to both demonstrate the benefits of access to ostensibly untouched and unlimited natural resources in the colonies and to legitimate colonialism through the implementation of the civilizing mission.[2] In both France and Belgium, *bandes dessinées* originally printed in newspapers and then collected into hardback books known as albums, participated in and contributed to this visual culture by generating narratives fueled by the pairing of text and sequential images that relied on a visual economy often informed by stereotypes. In the French-speaking world, *bandes dessinées* constitute a veritable cultural force. The term *bande dessinée*—translated as drawn strip—is much more technical than comics and lacks the same kind of demeaning connotations associated with comics in America. Indeed, since the 1960s, *bandes dessinées* have been known as the Ninth Art, a term coined by Belgian cartoonists Maurice de Bévère and Pierre Vankeer to legitimize *bandes dessinées* by placing

[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] French historians Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel have conducted extensive research into French and European colonial visual cultures and their lasting legacies. Subsequently, they have written and edited a number of key texts that present and analyze a rich archive of visual artifacts. Moreover, they spearhead the ACHAC research group (*Association pour la Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique Contemporaine* (ACHAC) (Association for the Understanding of Contemporary Africa) established in 1989. See Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel, *De l'indigène à l'immigré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Laurent Gervereau, *Images et colonies: iconographie et propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française de 1880 à 1962* (Nanterre and Paris: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine / Association Connaissance de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine, 1993), Pascal Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, eds., and *Culture post-coloniale, 1961-2006: Traces et mémoires coloniales en France* (Paris: Autrement, 2006).

them alongside film and literature. Indeed, in France and Belgium, *bandes dessinées*—read by people of all ages—have been and remain integral to French and Belgian national identities.

Both France and Belgium exported *bandes dessinées* to their colonial territories in tandem with the colonial school system and canonical French literature integral to the civilizing mission. The prevalence of *bandes dessinées* throughout the francophone world is reflected in former French president Charles de Gaulle's famous declaration in 1966 that his only international rival was Tintin, the eponymous star character of Belgian cartoonist Hergé's hit *bande dessinée* series (Screech 48). Moreover, Frantz Fanon, in his groundbreaking anti-colonial text *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), touched upon the psychological impact of Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* on colonized and formerly-colonized subjects who identified with the white, European explorer and adventurer protagonists (119). While keeping in mind the fact that *bandes dessinées*, historically and culturally, are considered a form of mass media and popular entertainment, this dissertation considers how contemporary cartoonists[3] address the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural complexities of life in sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the African diaspora. It examines how sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* disrupt the continued colonial iconography and imperialist ideology enmeshed in this form of artistic expression thus exploring questions of representation and identity formation while also

[3] I use the term cartoonist to describe both cartoonists and writers who produce *bandes dessinées* and also *dessins de presse* (political cartoons), thus following the example of *bande dessinée* critics writing in English such as Mark McKinney and Bart Beaty. However, when necessary, I will also distinguish between cartoonists—responsible for the visual content—and scenarists—responsible in large part for the text and sometimes the layout of a given *bande dessinée*, though this division of labor in collaborative efforts is not always so distinct. Moreover, I have chosen the term cartoonist to describe authors of *bandes dessinées* as well as *dessins de presse* even though in French the term *bédéiste* designates an cartoonist or writer who produces book-length albums whereas *caricaturist* designates what would more generally, in an Anglophone context, be considered a political cartoonist. The main reasons for this are to avoid the understanding in English of caricaturist as an artist who produces caricatures of people and to draw attention to the fact that many cartoonists who produce book-length *bandes dessinées* often also produce comic strips and political cartoons as well, all of which would be considered under the umbrella term of the Ninth Art in the French-speaking context.

addressing processes of meaning-making informed by colonialist discourse associated with mainstream Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*.

Rather than give a brief history of *bandes dessinées* in sub-Saharan Africa, I propose to begin by questioning what francophone sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* are, for, as many cartoonists themselves have pointed out, there is no such thing as an African *bande dessinée*, but rather innumerable possibilities and examples. In order to label them "francophone," do they have to be explicitly in French or can multiple languages co-exist? By tacking on the geographical designation of "sub-Saharan Africa," must they be produced/written by someone born and living in Africa? How are we to read *bandes dessinées* produced in exile or through collaboration between a writer and a cartoonist of diverse backgrounds? Must the form be consistent and standardized or can we consider novels with images in the same category? While I do not want to imply that *bandes dessinées* by cartoonists from sub-Saharan Africa or set in sub-Saharan Africa need to be categorized together, my objective in asking these questions is to open up our understanding of what such a category might be in order to demonstrate how the production, dissemination, and consumption of such *bandes dessinées* reflect broader issues of francophone postcolonialism. Specifically, I am interested in how the *bandes dessinées* and cartoonists themselves actively work to reconfigure cultural stereotypes both in Europe and Africa and, ultimately, how an analysis of cartoonists' strategies contributes to a deeper understanding of not only French and Francophone studies, but also African studies and Diaspora studies.

A survey of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* published since 2000 reveals two major types of narratives. On the one hand, many cartoonists have turned to the Ninth Art as a form of autobiography, employing quotidian life and lived personal experience to combat

negative stereotypes of Africa portrayed by the Western media and to challenge official (both European and African) accounts of African independences, decolonization, and of the complex relationships between France and Belgium and their former colonial territories today. On the other hand, since the success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* in the early 1990s and of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* a decade later, more and more cartoonists are turning to the Ninth Art as a form of journalism and testimony. In the first two chapters, I look at the work of Gabonese cartoonist Pahé and his use of satire and caricature and Ivorian Marguerite Abouet's series *Aya de Yopougon* set in the Ivory Coast and in Paris. In particular, I examine how autobiography and autoethnography are mobilized through text and image not only to turn the gaze back on Europeans, thus complicating binaries and blurring distinctions between self and other and here and there, but also to explore the complex processes of identity formation in sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the diaspora. In the last chapter, I turn to Belgian cartoonist Jean-Philippe Stassen's use of *bandes dessinées* as a form of non-fiction reportage, consciousness-raising, and criticism of European colonialism and its lasting effects in Central Africa. Specifically I investigate how Stassen's attempt to represent the 1994 Rwandan Genocide in *bandes dessinées* led to innovative experimentation with the formal conventions of this form of artistic expression and also critical investigation of the colonial legacy in Central Africa and in the Ninth Art itself.

To analyze contemporary sub-Saharan Africa *bandes dessinées*, we must consider them in context, meaning we must not only understand their attendant publishing, dissemination, and consumption practices but also the historical background that informs such practices. While there is debate among comics studies scholars as to the origin of the Ninth Art—or sequential art as it

has come to be known in the Anglophone context[4]—the main epicenters of comics production and development in the West were in America, France, and Belgium. The emergence of manga in Japan, comics in America, and *bandes dessinées* in France and Belgium roughly took place at the same time and Japan, America, and France and Belgium constitute the three international loci of sequential art publishing. However, as Bart Beaty has demonstrated, this model of production has quickly been changing as a result of translation and the global circulation of cartoonists' work (Beaty). While American comics embraced the emergence of the superhero and the format of monthly issues, the Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* series are published in hardback books, longer in length than American comics with each volume taking substantially longer than a month to produce and often consisting of a self-contained narrative. In fact, Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* are more akin to what are known in the United States today as graphic novels. As a result of the more technical terminology attributed to *bandes dessinées* in the Franco-Belgian context and the physical likeness to books rather than disposable magazines or newspapers, *bandes dessinées* have held a more privileged position in mainstream French and Belgian cultures.

Nevertheless, the relationship between *bandes dessinées* and newspapers has always been a strong one; if not for the advent of newspapers and the emergence of a mass audience in the nineteenth century, *bandes dessinées*, comic strips, and graphic novels would never have evolved into what they are today. In fact, according to many *bande dessinée* historians, the founding fathers of this medium in the French-language context, Alain Saint-Ogan (creator of *Zig et Puce*) and Hergé (creator of *Tintin*), were deeply involved with newspapers. Moreover, that Hergé's

[4] American cartoonist Will Eisner coined the term sequential art and first used it in 1985 in *Comics and Sequential Art*. This term, much like the term Ninth Art, is meant to bestow upon this medium a more serious cultural status than comics. While the term graphic novel also exists, first used in the mid-1970s to describe long-form American comics, the term sequential art, like Ninth Art, refers to the medium regardless of the length of any given text.

star character, Tintin, is a reporter is not coincidental; starting in 1929, the Belgian journal *Le XXe Siècle* began publishing Hergé's Tintin series in the spin off *Le Petit Vingtième* as a supplement to attract young readers. As Mark McKinney convincingly argues in his book, *The French Colonial Heritage of Comic Books* (2011), the origin of *bande dessinée* in the francophone context is steeped in colonialist history and enmeshed with imperialist culture. McKinney argues that Saint-Ogan and Hergé not only mimicked the colonialist ideology of their historical moment, but also participated in generating, defining, and codifying a visual iconography of France and Belgium's respective colonial territories and their peoples, thereby encoding, in a sense, certain visual stereotypes into the very DNA of *bandes dessinées*. While I am not trying to suggest that Saint-Ogan and Hergé are solely responsible for creating a visual language of racism nor do I want to deny the rich history of caricature as a fundamental predecessor to *bandes dessinées*,[5] I agree with McKinney that the emergence of *bandes dessinées* is caught up with a modernist European epistemology and an imperialist culture that actively sought to legitimize the colonial endeavor and the civilizing mission. And while many *bandes dessinées* historians dismiss the paternalistic images of Hergé's *Tintin au Congo* as little more than representative of standard opinions of the historical moment, as Marie-Rose Maurin Abomo suggests, through simplification and amplification Hergé succeeded in fixing certain clichés and cultural stereotypes (Maurin Abomo 158).

[5] The use of stereotypical images to characterize people of African descent is not unique to French-language *bandes dessinées*. In *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History* (2003), Fredrick Strömberg provides examples of the changing representations of black people in comics from around the world beginning with the very first comics and *bandes dessinées* and continuing until the contemporary moment. According to Strömberg, the book is not meant to be a "tightly-reasoned and impeccably-documented doctor's thesis on the subject of 'the treatment of Black people in comics,' but rather a personal collection on what [he has] found in [his] comics collection (which is extensive… but in no way all-encompassing)" (25).

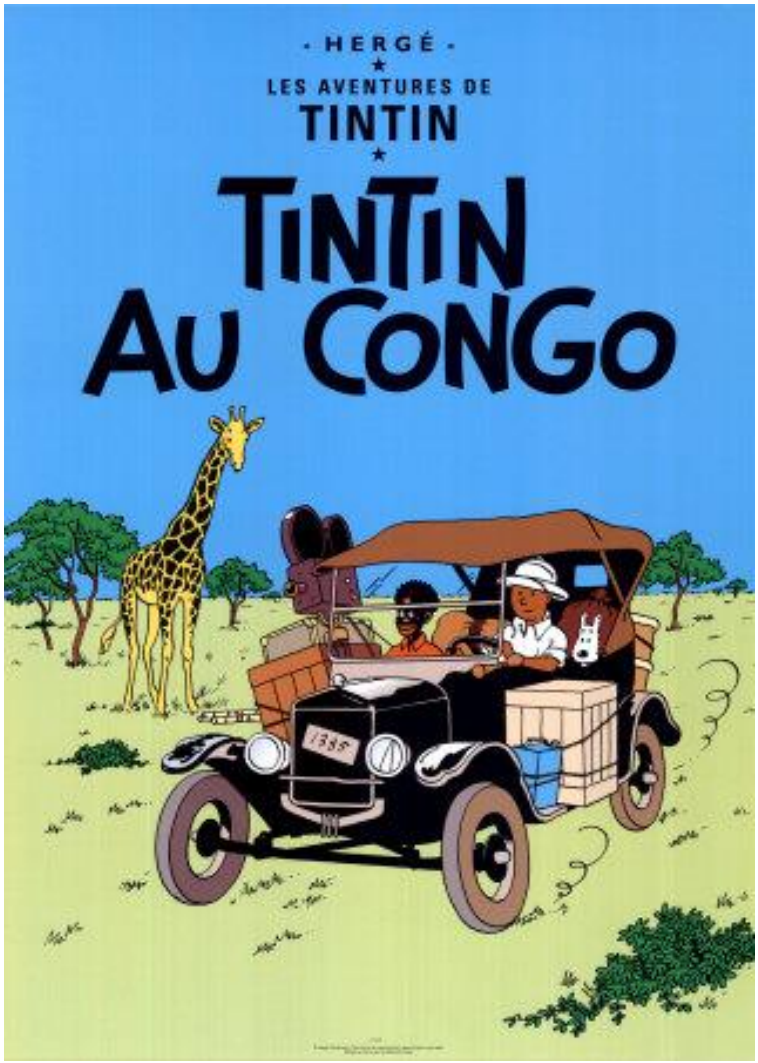

Figure 1. The front cover of Hergé's *Tintin au Congo* (1931).

In fact, *Tintin au Congo* has been and continues to be a lightning rod for discussions of European Africanist discourse. It is by no means a coincidence that *Tintin au Congo* was first published in book form in 1931, the same year as the famous French Colonial Exposition held in Paris. Additionally, Jean de Brunhoff's hit children's book *Histoire de Babar* was also first published in 1931. Just as exoticism fed into European print culture and influenced the subject matter of many early *bandes dessinées*, *Tintin au Congo* demonstrates how *bandes dessinées* in turn interacted with and participated in generating certain visual, linguistic, and narrative conventions particularly when representing the other and the elsewhere. On the cover of *Tintin*

au Congo (Figure 1) are two images that play into the exoticism that reigns over the entire album: the giraffe, a metonym for all wild animals in Africa and the young Congolese native who is accompanying Tintin as his guide, his big red lips, the sheer blackness of his skin, and his docile expression all familiar to European audiences of the time. Meant to encourage and support the civilizing mission, Belgian *bandes dessinées* like *Tintin au Congo* originally grounded their exotic representations of the Congo with real facts such as geographical names and visual cues. However, as Philippe Delisle argues in *Bande dessinée franco-belge et imaginaire colonial: des années 1930 aux années 1980* (*Franco-Belgian Bande Dessinée and Colonial Imaginary: From the 1930s to the 1980s*), over time, in order to tap into the larger French market, all traces, verbal and visual, of the specificity of the Belgian Congo were ironed out in favor of a more generic picture of Africa or even "une brousse indéterminée" (an indeterminate bush) (20), thus creating a visual shorthand for Africa and African subjects. The only remaining trace that identifies the location of the story in *Tintin au Congo*, for example, is in the title.

Recently, *Tintin au Congo* has once again come under fire for being racist and therefore in need of regulation. Congolese Bienvenu Mbutu Mondondo actively pursued legal measures for four years starting in 2007 to have *Tintin au Congo* censured in Belgium in conjunction with Patrick Lozès, founder of the Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France (CRAN) (Representative Council of Black Associations in France), who hoped to mandate that an insert be added to the album that contextualizes the colonialist ideology found within. In England, the album had already come under scrutiny, copies are no longer stocked in the children's literature section of bookstores and are now sold with an added warning that the album contains offensive material. Though nowhere near as violent as the controversy surrounding the September 2005 publication of editorial cartoons depicting the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in the Danish

newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, the renewed contemporary backlash against *Tintin au Congo*, like the Danish cartoons, speaks to the powerful and dynamic relationship between the Ninth Art and ideology. Though the use of images and text for ideological purposes is certainly not new, what these controversies bring into focus is the degree to which, as Jeff Adams contends in *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism*, "[m]aking sense of graphic novels is necessarily a culturally conditioned socially reflexive process" (Adams 2008, 22). Mobilized as a means of influencing the ways in which readers think and perceive reality across cultural lines brings to bear on the politics of representing and characterizing the other and the elsewhere.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse's *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (1992) investigates how Western images of Africa and Africans in the past have worked to inscribe a visual iconology of dominance. Pieterse's argument that imagery and ideologies developed during colonialism persist, transform, and are perpetuated through the period of decolonization and into postcolonialism speaks to the tension inherent in contemporary *bandes dessinées* and at the same time also informs my readings of the various visual tactics employed by contemporary artists to subvert previous stereotypes and the ideology associated with them. According to McKinney, there has been a return to the colonial period in recent *bande dessinée* production in France in the uncritical reprinting of original titles from the colonial era[6] and also in the nostalgic revisiting of this historical moment in entirely new titles.[7] The dangers of such texts, McKinney argues, is that, in their uncritical rehashing of the colonial

[6] "Republication usually occurs without the inclusion of a critical apparatus to help readers, both young and old, recognize the violence for with it is: colonialist and white supremacist representations that were produced within a cultural and historic context that is not completely past and done with, but instead lingers on, and is even actively maintained and fostered in new forms today. Recognizing how this occurs through comics constitutes one of the necessary steps towards stemming that violence" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 29).
[7] "Cartoonists who produce colonial nostalgia comics uncritically recycle the ideology, images and language of colonialist documents in order to celebrate colonial leaders, settlers and their achievements. They tend to portray the colonial past as a time of lost innocence and adventure, or of unjustly maligned accomplishments (or all of these)" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 92).

era, these texts run the risk of reinscribing the racist visual and narrative culture that accompanied it. However, there are cartoonists who, alongside writers and artists, challenge the perpetuation of hegemonic trends in favor of plurality and critical discourse.

Figure 2. Pahé reproduces the cover of *Tintin au Congo*. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2008), 11.

Figure 3. A local official in Kinshasa reacts to the stereotypical images of Africans in *Tintin au Congo*. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2008), 12.

Just as Hergé's representations of the Belgian Congo and the Congolese are clichéd and metonymic, *Tintin au Congo* itself has become a placeholder for racist colonial ideology and

various artists and writers have appropriated aspects of the original to reconfigure them and bring them to bear on contemporary politics.[8] For example, Figures 2 and 3, taken from a scene at the beginning of *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, show Pahé's hotel room raided by military officials in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, who come across Pahé's personal copy of *Tintin au Congo*. It is in the appropriation and re-presentation through caricature and deformation of Hergé's album that Pahé produces new meaning. The original, always already a stereotype, in the manipulative hands of Pahé, becomes a complete mockery that challenges the entire system of European colonial ideology and its modes of representation. Visually, Pahé distorts the giraffe, the young Congolese native, and Tintin himself. Similarly, South African artist and cartoonist Anton Kannemeyer appropriates *la ligne claire* aesthetic, the visual style perfected by Hergé for his Tintin series, and impregnates this already charged visual language with a critique of contemporary identity politics in South Africa, effectively electrifying the delivery of the sociopolitical content of the work, initially shocking viewers through jarring juxtapositions of form and content, thus forcing them to rethink their relationship to the content (Figures 4 and 5). As some *bande dessinée* critics have point out,[9] *la ligne claire* carries an obvious ideological weight in that the aesthetic clarity is meant to match the clarity of the content, thus making narratives transparent. However, Anton Kannemeyer's use of the *ligne claire* aesthetic to convey and deconstruct complex race relations in South Africa exposes the ostensibly "clear" visual style as an essentializing iconography steeped in Western ideology.

[8] One striking literary example of this can be found in the work of Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou who often alludes to mainstream Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* and adapts certain characteristics from the Ninth Art in his novels. In particular, in *Black Bazar*, Mabanckou uses references to Hergé's *Tintin au Congo* as a kind of shorthand for racist modes of representation of black people and of Africa.

[9] See Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

Figure 4. Anton Kannemeyer's *Fear of a Black Planet* exhibit 2008. "I love the white middle class ..."

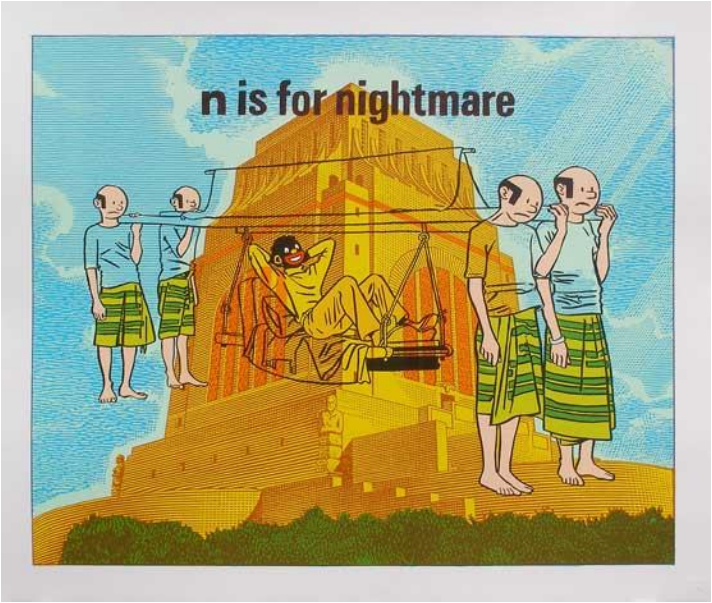

Figure 5. Anton Kannemeyer's *Fear of a Black Planet* exhibit 2008. "N is for Nightmare."

The juxtaposition of these texts not only demonstrates the richness and density inherent in using images and texts together to produce meaning, it also dramatizes the mobilization of *bandes dessinées*, a mode of expression formerly associated with the colonizer, to reconfigure colonial iconography and visual stereotypes of Africa and Africans. As mentioned above, *bandes*

dessinées were first introduced to sub-Saharan African colonial subjects alongside French and Belgian civilizing missions. Mainstream Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* from the 1930s and on thus served as models in terms of physical format, visual aesthetics and iconography, and technical conventions (such as the use of word balloons and a regularized use of panels of the same size to establish a narrative rhythm) for young African cartoonists looking to produce their own *bandes dessinées*. While *bandes dessinées* are published and disseminated in Western and Central Africa, the political, economic, financial and logistical hurdles faced by cartoonists are such that hardly any *bandes dessinées* are, as Hilaire Mbiye Lumbala has pointed out, entirely African, implying that it is rare for an African *bande dessinée* to be published without some kind of support from outside Africa, namely in the form of monetary funds from Europe (Lumbala, "Émergence" 39). In this regard, *bande dessinée* production in Africa resembles that of film production. Manthia Diawara, in *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, demonstrates France's role in the formation of filmmakers such as Ousman Sembene and also the French government's investment in francophone African cinema. In addition, as many cartoonists have underlined, the difficulties of maintaining a vibrant and healthy *bande dessinée* culture in sub-Saharan Africa not only include the process of producing and distributing *bandes dessinées*, but also the economic strain it puts on readers. In an interview for Radio France International, Pat Masioni explained that *bande dessinée* albums that follow the Franco-Belgian format consisting of a hard-back book containing high-quality glossy paper and rich colors and that subsequently cost around twenty American dollars are a commercial luxury well above and beyond the means of average citizens (De Solminihac).

The lack of a feasible market in sub-Saharan Africa also means the lack of well-established networks of dissemination and distribution. The majority of *bandes dessinées*

produced in sub-Saharan Africa consist, consequently, of *dessins de presse* (newspaper comic strips, political cartoons and editorial cartoons), weekly and monthly magazines containing collections of short vignettes by multiple cartoonists, or short didactic books usually financed by non-governmental organizations and distributed for free. Moreover, these publications tend to be circulated and read almost exclusively in major cities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the success of T. T. Fons's series *Goorgoorlou*, published in paperback albums in Senegal represents a unique case of success that attests to the public demand for *bandes dessinées* as well as a possible alternative format to the Franco-Belgian hardback album that dominates the industry. One of the main reasons for the success of *Goorgoorlou* is that appeals to readers in Dakar because it is set in Dakar and features Dakar-specific references such as the local vernacular and culture. Outside major cities in francophone sub-Saharan Africa, when *bandes dessinées* are available (often at French Cultural Centers), they are usually from Europe.

Critically-acclaimed Franco-Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou has remarked upon the discrepancy between the willingness to create and consume *bandes dessinées* in sub-Saharan African and the lack of logistical means to produce *bandes dessinées* of quality (Mabanckou, "Pédagogie"). *Bandes dessinées* serve as importance inspiration for Mabanckou and allusions to popular French and Belgian titles from his childhood continually pop up in his novels and pepper his prose. In an article about the state of pedagogical *bandes dessinées* in francophone Africa, Mabanckou provides a rather detailed list of various pedagogical *bandes dessinées* to have come out of Africa and cites the various international organizations who supplied the funding for such projects (Mabanckou, "Pédagogie"). Though he stresses the importance of the production of such texts, he simultaneously points to the unequal quality of such texts in comparison to French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* to which francophone African readers are accustomed having, such as

Mabanckou himself, grown up reading imported mainstream Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* (Mabanckou, "Pédagogie" 81). For example, he notes that even though there are African *bandes dessinées* that excel at conveying moral lessons and that there is a need for such texts, many suffer from grammatical errors that could have easily been avoided (Mabanckou, "Pédagogie"81). However, as Mabanckou sees it, "[l]a B.D. est une littérature et, à ce titre, elle doit être prise au sérieux aussi bien dans la clarté des iconographies que dans la richesse du récit, d'autant qu'elle jouit d'un engouement auprès de nos jeunes lecteurs" ("*Bande dessinée* is a literature and, as such, it should be taken seriously regarding both the clarity of the images and the richness of the story, especially as it benefits as a passion of our young readers") (Mabanckou,"Pédagogie" 81).

The main strategy and response by creators to these hardships is to immigrate to other countries, whether elsewhere in Africa or in Europe. The international collective of artists working for the highly popular and successful Ivorian satirical journal *Gbich!* and the support system for artists associated with the journal is a direct result of various artists emigrating to the Ivory Coast from such places as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon in order to secure artistic liberty and political asylum. However, due to the political nature of many cartoons and given that many of the *bandes dessinées* produced in sub-Saharan Africa are precisely *dessins de presse*, it is not uncommon for cartoonists working for *Gbich!* to find it virtually impossible to return home due to the threat of political repercussions. Many cartoonists face censorship and even risk jail time when they critique leading political figures, parties, and those in power.[10]

[10] In 2008, L'Harmattan TV put out a documentary by Nicoletta Fagiolo entitled *Résistants du 9ème Art* (*Rebels of the Ninth Art*) that centers on the difficulties and dangers (imprisonment, censorship, threats, violence) that political cartoonists in Africa face. Fagiolo focuses mainly on West Africa and South Africa and how cartoonists such as

Several artists seeking artistic liberty, political asylum, and recognition have emigrated to France and Belgium due to the expansive *bande dessinée* market in Europe and the stable, well-established networks of publication and distribution. Thus, while a center-periphery model fails to encompass the transnational character of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* production, the former métropoles—Paris and Brussels—remain magnetic strongholds that help facilitate the circulation of diverse cultural production in Europe as well as in Africa. As Christophe Cassiau-Haurie and Massimo Repetti have pointed out, while there was a proliferation of *bande dessinée* production in francophone regions of Africa in the 1990s, since then, the number of albums published in Africa has dropped dramatically as financial aid from international grants and non-governmental organizations has greatly diminished and as many artists who do not have the liberty to publish what they want, do not have the audience they need to survive off their work, or who want to reach a more varied readership have moved to Europe (Cassiau-Haurie 2010, Reppeti 2007a). In contrast, various contributing factors—in particular the small press movement of European *bandes dessinées* of the 1990s, the growing importance and influence of postcolonial studies, and the recent rise to fame of both Pahé and Abouet—have created a viable niche market in Europe for African voices.

Contemporary sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* challenge, subvert, and call into question Africanist modes of representation essentially complicating Western accounts of Africa while also providing social and political commentary on the current state of affairs in Africa and the diaspora. As Okwui Enwezor argues in "Rapport des forces: African Comics and Their Publics," comic books, *bandes dessinées* and political cartoons in Africa "serve the function of a type of speech. They intervene in the everyday, not merely as social commentaries operating in

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Willy Zekid (originally from the Republic of the Congo and who currently resides in the Ivory Coast) and Zapiro (South Africa) persevere and the strategies they employ for handling such problems.

the visual field, but also as fields of action and locuses of meaning-making" (18). Such *bandes dessinées* can be seen as participating in what W. J. T. Mitchell has termed the "pictorial turn." In *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Mitchell argues that "Images are active players in the game of establishing and changing values; they are capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones" (105). He goes on to suggest that if pictures and images are

> 'ways of worldmaking,' they are also ways of unmaking the various worlds in which they circulate. They are not simply manifestations of coherent world pictures or cosmologies whose myths and sacred geographies might be securely mapped and narrated, but *sites of struggle over stories and territories*. They are the situations in which we find ourselves asking: do we get the picture, or does it get us? (196)

Built upon series (mainly sequential though this is not always the case) of images, *bandes dessinées* constitute entire networks of worldmaking that constantly shift due to the addition of new images. Moreover, sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* simultaneously are "sites of struggle over stories and territories" and also generate narratives that dramatize such struggles. In the chapter "The Thing and Its Double" from *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe touches upon the subversive quality of Cameroonian cartoons and explains that the power of images derives from the fact that, in their representation of reality, they succeed in changing it: "[the image] is never an exact copy of reality. As a figure of speech, the image is always a conventional comment, the transcription of a reality, a word, a vision, or an idea into a visible code that becomes, in turn, a manner of speaking of the world and inhabiting it" (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 142). Indeed, "reading images" requires a different kind of literacy than reading texts devoid of images. According to Paul Messaris in *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind, and Reality*,

"What distinguishes images (including motion pictures) from language and form other modes of communication is the fact that images reproduce many of the informational cues that people make use of in their perception of physical and social reality" (165). Moreover, Messaris argues that while "learning about visual conventions may not be a prerequisite for their interpretation … such learning undoubtedly has significant consequences" including "a heightened conscious appreciation of artistry" and "the ability to see through the manipulative uses and ideological implications of visual images" (165). Not only do images render *bandes dessinées* somewhat accessible to illiterate individuals, they are also polyvalent and have the capacity to represent multiple ideas and to be read on multiple levels.

As a hybrid form, *bandes dessinées* exploit the potential of mixing language and images to produce meaning. In his two-volume essay *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999 and 2011) in which he attempts to generate a working definition of the Ninth Art, Thierry Groensteen contends that *bandes dessinées* are themselves complex systems of representation. Indeed, each *bande dessinée* creates its own internal logic that must be decoded and deciphered, thus engaging the reader on many levels. What particularly interests me is that the sustained juxtaposition of sequential images requires readers to interact with what is on the page, continually reevaluating what they know. Charles Hatfield, in *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, underlines this latent potential in comics and maintains that reading them is a "tension-filled experience" because they "offer a form of reading that resists coherence, a form at once seductively visual and radically fragmented" (xiii). He explains that comics "solicit the reader's participation in a unique way; through their very plurality of means, they advert to that incompleteness of indeterminacy, which … urges us to take up the constitutive act of interpretation" (Hatfield xiii). The act of reading a *bande dessinée* actually reflects, as some critics have argued, how we think

and replicates how we interact with the world: "reading today has become a hybrid textual-visual experience, as witnessed by the inescapable presence of the Internet, *Powerpoint*, cell phone screens, and the numerous full-color illustrations and photographs now found in newspapers" (Tabacknick 4). The role of the reader to make sense of the various fragments is precisely what generates new meaning and the work done by the reader is a kind of performance in which discrepancies and gaps are filled in by the reader's personal experience.

The structure of *bandes dessinées* is such that the interruption between sequential images is represented by the physical space of the page known as the gutter. Though some cartoonists work at minimizing the ruptures between panels to render transitions from one image to the next seamless, thus attempting to make visual and textual information as transparent as possible, others exploit this inherent propensity for fragmentation and instability to investigate questions of identity, history, memory, testimony, and trauma. According to Hatfield, "The fractured surface of the comics page, with its patchwork of different images, shapes, and symbols, presents the reader with a surfeit of interpretive options, creating an experience that is always decentered, unstable, and unfixable" (Hatfield xiii-xiv). The work done by the reader, one could argue, in fact mimics identity construction in the contemporary moment. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), Arjun Appadurai goes to great lengths to point out that while many aspects of today's world, namely deterritorialization and migration, are not new occurrences, what is new is the way in which these situations are represented and disseminated through the images and discourses of mass-media, thus providing fuel for the imagination and the grounds for the emergence of new forms of identity and agency. The power of imagination is crucial to understanding Appadurai's argument according to which the imagination provides not only escape, but more importantly, "a staging ground for action" (Appadurai 7). It is in the

imagination that new possibilities are formed, contestations take place, agency occurs, and new identities are explored that blend tradition, modernity, nostalgia, imported images, and different cultures. Sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* both enact and, through their very structure, engage readers in such possibilities.

Existing critical work on French-language *bandes dessinées* centers almost exclusively on French and Belgian cartoonists and texts; more recently, literary and *bande dessinée* critics have also turned their attention to *bande dessinée* production throughout the francophone world, focusing primarily on *bandes dessinées* from Québec and Algeria and by cartoonists who are either immigrants themselves or of immigrant background in France.[11] Similarly, the recent collection of articles edited by John A. Lent entitled *Cartooning in Africa* centers almost exclusively on English- and Arab-language comics in Africa with only a cursory mention of political cartoons in Cameroon that reiterates many of the ideas previously developed by Achille Mbembe in his book *On the Postcolony* (2001) or by Dominic Thomas in *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa* (2002). Furthermore, though the field of comics studies is growing in the United States and *bandes dessinées* studies has been developing in Europe since the mid-1960s, there are but a handful of literary critics working on African *bandes dessinées* and the scope of their work has been limited. Mainly, they address logistical realities facing African *bandes dessinées*: they 1) present the history and state of production of *bandes dessinées* in Africa, 2) catalogue cartoonists and *bande dessinée* titles with where they are produced, 3) explain the sometimes harsh financial and political conditions under which *bandes dessinées* are produced paying special attention to their complex transnational

[11] See Mira Farlardeau, *Histoire de la bande dessinée au Québec* (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 2008), Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, eds. *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (London: Routledge, 1997), Mark McKinney, ed. *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008), and Charles Forsdick, Laurence Grove, and Libbie McQuillan, eds. *The Francophone Bande Dessinée.* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005).

dimensions, 4) look at *bandes dessinées* as didactic tools and the social and cultural work they enact, and 5) touch upon subject matter, visual techniques, and writing strategies.[12]

These texts are crucial for analyzing the current state of African *bande dessinée* production and offer invaluable insight into the dynamic processes of creation. For my project however, to go beyond the scope of these texts, I require a working framework that allows me to address the postcolonial dimension of the production, dissemination, and consumption of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* and also the colonial heritage of the visual language unique to the Ninth Art. As my project is securely grounded in postcolonial studies, it takes its cue from other postcolonial scholars in its multidisciplinary approach. I draw from different disciplines and methodologies focusing primarily on current postcolonial theory, *bande dessinée* theory, American comics theory, cultural studies, critical theory, history, anthropology, ethnography, art history, trauma theory, and autobiography studies to enable a comprehensive approach that helps in deciphering the relationship between the formal conventions of the Ninth Art and cartoonists' innovative strategies to engage readers in participating in producing new meaning.

Bande dessinée theory in France tends to focus on outlining the defining features of the medium, which proves difficult in that, because the form is so elastic, there are always exceptions to the general rule. However, the ostensibly endless variations point to the rich possibilities offered by this form of expression. French *bande dessinée* theorists such as Thierry Groensteen, Benoît Peeters, Pascale Lefevre, Jan Baetans and Harry Morgan all approach *bandes dessinées* as a visual language. Indeed, in *Système de la bande dessinée*, Groensteen explains that the one underlying principal of all *bandes dessinées* is "iconic solidarity" and that this principal

[12] See *La bande dessinée*. *Notre Librairie. Revue des littératures du Sud* 145 (July-September 2001), *BD d'Afrique*. *Africultures* 32 (November 2000), and John A. Lent, *Cartooning in Africa*. (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2009), especially 1-39.

is what generates a visual language unique to each text. While I draw much of my terminology from Groensteen, American comics theorists have also made substantial contributions to our understanding of this sequential art form. Since the publication in 1994 of Scott McCloud's seminal text *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, there has been a proliferation of comics studies books published in the United States, though, there are important contributions that date back from before 1994 such as the theory on sequential art from American cartoonist Will Eisner. Building upon *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, American comics theorists have tackled sequential art from various angles. As Jeet Herr and Kent Worcester explain in *A Comics Studies Reader* (2008), current research on comics and *bandes dessinées* can be boiled down to three main approaches: the study of the history of the medium; the form's inner logic; and comics or *bandes dessinées* as social-historical mirrors of the time period in which they are produced.

In *The Power of Comics: History, Form & Culture*, Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith cite the unique reading experience of comic books, touched upon above, as one of their defining characteristcs: "Comics are reductive in creation and additive in reading. That is, creators reduce the story to moments on a page by encapsulation, and readers expand the isolated moments into a story by a process called closure" (Duncan and Smith 133). This process of closure calls on the reader to read images in conjunction with text and also to read between sequential panels. Indeed, Hatfield suggests "There may be much more going on than mere 'picture reading': comic art is characterized by plurality, instability and tension, so much so that no single formula for interpreting the page can reliably unlock *every* comic" (Hatfield 66, emphasis in the original). Thus, the formal qualities of the Ninth Art produce an inherent multiplicity. If one were to look at a single page of a typical *bande dessinée* or even a one-strip comic, for example, certain visual

elements would be repeated (mainly characters). While we might see nine panels with nine different drawings of the main character, we understand that in the diegetic world of the narrative, there are not nine different characters that look exactly alike. Rather, we read through the panels and assume the passage of time. However, the simple fact that the panels coexist on the page complicates a simple linear view of time. In a sense, the past, present and future coexist in the same physical space. As readers, we are not limited to reading in only one direction. We have the freedom to jump ahead, jump backwards, and skip to different moments on the page.

The advantages of this plurality have important implications for the *bandes dessinées* I have chosen because they mimic the repetition of events as a result of traumatic memory—an effective and conducive means of exploring the Rwandan genocide—and they complicate linearly- and chronologically-driven historical accounts. The fact that the past, present and future can cohabitate the same physical space becomes particularly interesting when discussing the damaging effects of the Rwandan genocide and when investigating the colonial past's relationship with the current state of affairs in Central Africa. This blurring of distinctions becomes a crucial element and guiding principal in Stassen's *Déogratias*. Stassen exploits this inherent tension to explode chronology in the story. In this *bande dessinée*, the past and present actually do inhabit the same moments for the main character, Déogratias, who is no longer able to differentiate between the two. The life he knew before the genocide haunts his present predicament and the actual events of the genocide slice into his understanding (and the reader's) of reality. Similarly, the predisposition towards plurality built in to the actual makeup of the Ninth Art allows for a space where autobiography challenges a linear understanding of history and where the focus on everyday experiences combats stereotypical representations of life in Africa.

There is an important correlation between the liminal status of *bandes dessinées* as an art form and postcolonial literature. As Christopher L. Miller notes in regards to sub-Saharan African literature, "Nationalism as a product of literacy could not simply have recourse to native languages, since colonial policy kept these languages 'innocent' of writing. A crooked path between 'high' and 'low'—both of which were blocked off—was therefore the only one available" (C. L. Miller, "Nationalism as Resistance" 68). Miller cites the practice of hybridity as both a powerful and empowering mode of expression. The attraction of *bandes dessinées* is that, while they also straddle the fuzzy division between high and low art, they likewise blur the division between literature and art by mixing images and text. Moreover, I would argue that the gutter, or the space between panels, can be viewed in terms of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" in postcolonial studies, "the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space—that carries the burden of meaning in culture," (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 56, emphasis in the original). While Groensteen warns against and critiques the fetishization of the gutter, I suggest that the gutter is a privileged site since, while there can be an internal change of time and space within a single panel, one of the defining features of *bandes dessinées* is the relationship established by the juxtaposition of multiple panels; it is precisely in the gutters between the panels that relationships are defined and where the reader must activate the narrative. Thus, the physical in-between space on each page retains the potential for triggering a sort of performance. This working through and deciphering process conducted by readers represents a powerful opportunity to dissect the existing colonial value systems embedded in the Ninth Art.

Over the last fifty years many talented African cartoonists—Mongo Sisé (*Mata Mata et Pili Pili*) , Barly Baruti (*Eva K*, *Mandrill*) ,[13] T. T. Fons (*Goorgoorlou*) and Willy Zekid (*Camphy Gapho*) being amongst the most successful—have managed to produce impressive oeuvres and continue to inspire younger generations of cartoonists despite the difficulties of publishing. Moreover, cartoonists of African and Caribbean descent living in Europe who began publishing mainly in the 1990s aided in establishing a niche in the European *bande dessinée* market for alternative narratives (Beaty).[14] However, to address the recent surge in the publication of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*, I have chosen to focus on the work of Gabonese cartoonist Pahé, Ivorian scenarist Marguerite Abouet, and Belgian cartoonist Jean-Philippe Stassen. In addition to being of roughly the same generation (all were born and grew up in the decades after many African nations became independent and when economic opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa and optimism reigned), these three have garnered much critical acclaim in Europe and abroad and, subsequently, have helped reshape the industry, one key reason being that they have been successful in challenging conventional limits, whether through the choice of subject-matter or through narrative experimentation. Examining the work of Pahé, Abouet, and Stassen together, I seek to offer a working definition of francophone sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* while exploring the range of practices employed in such *bandes dessinées* to challenge existing stereotypes of Africa and Africans already in circulation in the West and in Africa as

[13] In actuality, Baruti's influence and impact in the realm of African *bandes dessinées* cannot be overstated. In addition to being one of the first breakthrough cartoonists from Africa in Europe, he is also a co-founder of the *Atelier de Création et de l'Initiation à l'Art* (ACRIA) (*Creative Workshop for an Initiation to Art*) in Kinshasa that has helped and encouraged young cartoonists develop their skills.

[14] One of the most striking examples can be seen in the success of Yvan Alagbé and Olivier Marboeuf who established the French publishing house Amok in 1994, which eventually combined with the Belgian publishing house Fréon to create FRMK. FRMK, alongside the highly-influential independent *bande dessinée* publisher L'Association and the OuBaPo (Ouvroir de bande dessinée potentielle) (Workshop of Potential Comic Book Art)—modeled after the highly influential OuLiPo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle) (Workshop of Potential Literature) group of writers established in 1960—movement that seeks to test the limits of the Ninth Art through constrained experiments, has been a major driving force for challenging the existing historical and cultural definitions of what constitutes a *bande dessinée*.

well. While Stassen and Pahé can be considered *auteurs* in that both write the scenarios and draw the images for their *bandes dessinées*, both have also contributed to collaborative pieces. I explore these collaborations in detail, but it is worth noting that Pahé and Stassen's main oeuvres are the result of individual expression whereas *Aya de Yopougon*, which, though very much Marguerite Abouet's vision, is the product of collaborative work between Abouet and artist Clément Oubrerie.

Furthermore, in the case of Pahé and Abouet, their rise to fame coupled with the autobiographical component of their respective work sheds light on certain key postcolonial aspects of the publication, dissemination, and consumption of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*. First, the stages of Pahé's career are emblematic of the general trends among francophone African cartoonists. To succeed, that is, to have one's work published in the former métropole, be it Paris or Brussels, as previously stated, remains critical. Second, both Pahé and Abouet's intimate familiarity with European audiences through the acquisition of French and European cultures and customs provided each with direct access to the same cultural influences that inform mainstream European *bande dessinée* production.[15] Lastly, the trajectory of Pahé and Abouet's careers is representative of how historically the predicament of African cartoonists very much resembles that of African writers, artists, and filmmakers. Specifically, the relationships Pahé and Abouet have with their respective French publishers greatly resemble those of early francophone writers with their European publishers.

A clue into the dynamics of such relationships can be found in the promotion, presentation, and marketing of each cartoonist and their work, most clearly visible in the paratext to the first volumes of *La vie de Pahé* and *Aya de Yopougon*. In addition to being Pahé's

[15] Pahé spent substantial periods of his childhood and young adult life in France and Abouet has lived in France since the age of twelve when her parents sent her and her brother to live with relatives in France.

publisher, Pierre Paquet also plays the role of benefactor, promoter, and—most important—legitimizer. In a very real sense, Paquet's relationship with Pahé resembles that of André Breton and Aimé Césaire. Similarly, Paquet's endorsement of the first volume of *La vie de Pahé* echoes Breton's introduction to the 1947 edition of Aimé Césaire's seminal *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Watts). Whereas Paquet vouches for Pahé's talent, the paratext to volume one of *Aya de Yopougon* speaks to the verity of the stories within and works to authenticate Abouet's unique vision of Africa much in the way colonial officials' prefaces did for autobiographical texts by colonized subjects in the 1930s (Watts). While we cannot ignore that these series are marketed to make a profit, by bringing Abouet and Pahé's visions to larger audiences—visions that contest the gross overgeneralizations and stereotypes of Africa in the international mass media—the French publishers responsible for the publication of *Aya de Yopougon* and *La vie de Pahé* are actively helping to create a public space in which individual cartoonists can address contemporary sociopolitical and cultural issues.[16] Ultimately, Abouet and Pahé represent a new breed of cartoonists who have benefitted from earlier artists' and writers' struggles to be noticed and whose success has resulted in not only mainstream recognition, but also a lucrative market for other African and diasporic voices in *bandes dessinées*.

How does Stassen, a Belgian cartoonist, fit into a larger view of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*? While his national status would seem to exclude him from a survey of contemporary African francophone cartoonists, the quality and integrity of his work is the subject of scholarly articles in anthologies on African *bandes dessinées*.[17] In addition, Stassen is a regularly invited to participate in festivals showcasing African *bandes dessinées*. Thus, his

[16] In fact, Abouet has taken a further step by establishing an organization called "Des Livres pour tous" ("Books for All") whose mission is to create local neighborhood libraries for children in Africa. As a result of her fame and the success of *Aya de Yopougon*, this organization is sponsored in part by French publishing giants Gallimard Jeunesse and Pocket Jeunesse to name a few as well as by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[17] See Volume 145 of *Notre Librairie: Revues des littératures du Sud* (2001), a volume dedicated entirely to African *bandes dessinées*.

work is part of the corpus that makes up contemporary African *bandes dessinées* and he is representative of a growing group of European cartoonists—who often live elsewhere in the francophone world outside of Europe—committed to combatting negative stereotypes of Africa and Africans.[18] I would argue that including Stassen in this project is not only productive, but necessary for, as McKinney explains,

> Although there is still a great deal of uncritical regurgitation of colonial and imperialist ideology in contemporary French-language comics, we have seen that there are also cartoonists who are reworking the French colonial and imperialist inheritance in ways that are—in the best cases—at once artistically, historically and politically provocative.
>
> (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 160)

Cartoonists such as Stassen who actively work to disrupt colonial iconography perpetuated by mainstream *bande dessinée* tendencies play an important role in reconfiguring the industry and, more important, existing epistemologies of Africa.

Just as viewing Stassen's work alongside the work of cartoonists from Africa disrupts a simple understanding of the category of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*, Stassen's work itself seeks to disrupt simplistic thinking and facile representations that lack depth and rely heavily on clichés and stereotypes. Rather, as with many postcolonial texts and as a mode of resistance to mainstream trends, Stassen shifts the focus to the everyday and the personal. He employs the representation of the quotidian as a means of resisting the silencing effect of official discourse and impersonal statistics. By adding voices (literally through the use of speech balloons and figuratively through polyvocal narratives) Stassen provides a public space—the

[18] Examples include François Bourgeon whose series, *Les passagers du vent* (*Passengers of the Wind*) (1980-1994), explores the history of French slavery, Appollo from Reunion Island, Hippolyte born in France and also living on Reunion Island, Eric Warnaut who has co-created many *bandes dessinées* that investigate Europe's colonial legacy and questions of discrimination, and Floc'h Arnaud whose childhood spent in Cameroon influences his work.

bande dessinée being a mass produced, popular culture consumer product—in which the complexity of individual decisions brings to light discrepancies between official accounts of history and lived experience.

Using Humor to Critique

In chapter one, "Drawing (Upon) Cultural Capital: Satire, Identity, and Self-Representation in the Work of Pahé," I investigate how Pahé mobilizes humor, satire, and parody to address contemporary issues of cultural difference, discrimination, and identity formation. It focuses on the roles of humor, satire, and exaggeration as means of mocking Western hegemony and persistent stereotypes about Africa and Africans that have been carried over from European colonialism. In many ways, Pahé's visual humor is akin to that of African francophone writers Bernard Dadié (Ivory Coast), Alain Mabanckou (Republic of the Congo), and to an extent Henri Lopès (Republic of the Congo). Under the guise of mocking himself to make his readers favorable to his social and political commentaries, Pahé delivers satirical critiques of both mainstream stereotypes of Africa in circulation in the West and stereotypes of the West in circulation in sub-Saharan Africa. The cacophony and sheer chaos of everyday life are grounds for laughter, which becomes a weapon to destabilize clichéd representations of Africa as war-torn, impoverished, and disease-ridden. Pahé uses the reader's expectations to reveal contemporary stereotypes and the logic of preconceived notions from both Europe and Africa regarding the other's culture. In *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula*, the register of the naivety of childhood renders complex social commentaries jovial and instantaneously understandable. Yet Pahé's insight into cultural differences and misconceptions also functions on a deeper level informed by his formative experiences spent back and forth between his home country, Gabon, and France.

Pahé's journey to France, recounted in *La vie de Pahé*, provides Pahé intimate access to French culture and customs, resulting in a kind of acquisition of cultural capital. This trajectory north has a long history over the course of the twentieth century. In the chapter "Francocentrism and the Acquisition of Cultural Capital" in *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (2007), Dominic Thomas argues that a transcolonial approach to the role of travel in African francophone narratives demonstrates how underlying issues of discrimination and unbelonging from the colonial era, both in Europe and in Africa, continue to inform contemporary experiences. Consequently, I find it useful to consider Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris* (1959), published almost fifty years before *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* (2006), for analyzing travel and autoethnographic representations of life in Gabon and life in France are integral to *La vie de Pahé*. Indeed, Mary Louise Pratt's examination of the contact zone, transculturation, and autoethnographic expression in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2008) prove useful for an analysis of the various arrival scenes throughout both volumes of *La vie de Pahé* just as Aedín Ní Loingsigh's nuanced reading of travel to the (former) métropole in francophone novels in *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature* (2009) provides insight into Pahé's unique in-betweenness and into the complexity of his representations of life in Europe as more than simply a role reversal of the traveler's gaze. Furthermore, a nuanced reading of Pahé's *Dipoula* series created in collaboration with Paquet and French cartoonist Sti is required to avoid reducing it to simply an Africanized version of the phenomenally successful series *Titeuf* as some critics have suggested. Rather, *Dipoula* represents, I argue, an engaging, entertaining, and knowing exploration of cultural in-betweenness and racial discourse.

A Gendered Approach to the Everyday

In Chapter two, "*Aya de Yopougon*: Gender and Identity Formation in the Ivory Coast and in France," I take up the highly popular series *Aya de Yopougon* by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie. Always wanting to write about her childhood in the Ivory Coast, after encountering Marjane Satrapi's groundbreaking *Persepolis*, Abouet decided to use *bandes dessinées* to recount her memories (Zuarino). In addition to depicting the world of her childhood, Abouet cites a desire to show that everyday life in the Ivory Coast is just like everyday life anywhere else in the world and to combat negative portrayals of Africa in the media as a driving force for the creation *Aya de Yopougon* (Cherrau). Originally, Abouet meant for the main character to resemble herself as a little girl in the Ivory Coast. Yet, while the setting of the Ivory Coast of Abouet's childhood remained the same—the story is set in the late 1970s and early 1980s—Abouet's publisher at Gallimard, Joann Sfar, also a highly influential and award-winning cartoonist, suggested Abouet age the main character so that she was a young adult (X. D'Almeida 2005).[19] Centered on the eponymous fictional character Aya and her friends and family, this autobiographically-inspired series blends entertainment with social concerns and couches important issues in the familiar emotional highs and lows of quotidian teenage life to which all readers can relate.

Like *La vie de Pahé*, *Aya de Yopougon* shares many important characteristics with African francophone literature, specifically by female writers. Abouet's success is due in equal part to the earlier success of Marjane Satrapi—one of only a handful of successful women cartoonists—in the field of *bandes dessinées* and to the previous generations of female writers from Africa. In the two decades preceding the publication of the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon*, there had been an increase in the number of literary texts being published in France

[19] Eventually, due to the instant success of *Aya de Yopougon*, Abouet was able to return to her original plan with the spinoff series *Akissi* first published in 2010, which more closely resembles Abouet's childhood.

by African women that took on a more global perspective than texts produced by African women earlier (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 22). In a sense, the narrative arc over the course of the six volumes of *Aya de Yopougon* and the shift from daily trials and tribulations to larger questions of modernity, immigration, sexual orientation, corruption, and discrimination echoes the shift in novels by female writers from francophone Africa (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa*).

Abouet's expert blend of local and global cultures throughout the African diaspora is partially what gives *Aya de Yopougon* its charm and also the driving force for identity-formation at the heart of the series. In *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (2001), F. Abiola Irele examines the process of identity construction of blacks throughout the diaspora, underlining individual experience as one of the founding features of this process. Throughout the series, Abouet explores this tension through the main characters Aya, a young woman with hopes of being a doctor, and Innocent, a young homosexual hairdresser who immigrates to France in hopes of escaping prejudice and persecution in the Ivory Coast. This choice of main characters is crucial for understanding the subtleties of *Aya de Yopougon*. Nicki Hitchcott explains that "feminine identity in francophone African women's writing is initially expressed as a tension between the two apparently contradictory poles of 'modernity' and 'tradition,' poles which often become translated as an opposition between the individual and the community" (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 153). Although the tension between global and local melds with the tension between "modernity" and "tradition" in *Aya de Yopougon*, Abouet consistently blurs such boundaries in favor of the complicated nuances of daily choices. By transforming the dynamics of these tensions into familial quarrels or spats

amongst friends, every reader is able to relate to Aya's struggle to maintain her own individuality.

Reporting on Rwanda and on Colonialism

The focus shifts in chapter three, "Rwanda and Its Lasting Effects: Jean-Philippe Stassen the *BD journaliste,*" to Stassen's work on Central Africa and to an investigation of the emergence of *bandes dessinées de reportage.*[20] Almost ninety years after *Tintin au Congo* was first published in *Le Petit Vingtième* (1929), the first volume of *XXI vingt et un* (2008)—a high-quality periodical dedicated to new approaches to investigative journalism—was published and featured Stassen's "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar," what editors Patrick de Saint-Exupéry and Laurent Baccaria termed a *reportage en BD*. Rather than use a main character who is a reporter (Tintin) as the vehicle for the narrative, Stassen has become, himself, the actual reporter. While Hergé's influence on Stassen's work is undeniable, Stassen succeeds in avoiding what McKinney calls "[a] second-degree approach to colonialism in comics" that "generally produces a very ambivalent and ambiguous vision of the colonial past and of its relics" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 9). McKinney argues that the "ambivalence or ambiguity comes in part from the absence of a clearly articulated critique of the historical substance and context of an earlier work, a past master, or a now-outdated style" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 9). In fact, Stassen's work in *XXI* is the result of extensive research and presents readers with a surplus of historical information. The tendency to address the complexity of contemporary issues that Stassen applies to his work in *XXI* was developed much earlier in his career and actually helped provide for the emergence of such a journal.

[20] *Reportage en BD*, *BD de reportage*, or simply *BD reportage* are all terms designated by *bande dessinée* specialists and critics that describe non-fiction *bandes dessinées* with a journalistic bent.

Focusing on Stassen's work leading up to the emergence of *XXI*, I examine how he re-imagines colonial and postcolonial modes of representation through the actual insertion of new images into existing texts such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and in Luís Bernado Honwana's *We Killed Mangy Dog*. The intrinsically fragmented nature of *bandes dessinées*, for Stassen, serves as a unique vehicle for critique of Western discourses—in particular colonial ethnographic archives and the economy of colonial visual culture such as postcards, travel ads and *bandes dessinées* from the colonial era. In addition, because of Stassen's own background and personal relationship with Africa (having traveled to various countries in Africa along diasporic trajectories throughout his youth), I analyze the complexity of the status of the *bandes dessinées* themselves and how reader participation is manipulated, problematizing identity and racial and ethnic categorization that were once of hallmarks of Western colonial discourse. Indeed, it is through the exploitation of certain tensions inherent to the Ninth Art that Stassen breaks down the logic of official discourse, drawing attention to its discrepancies, ruptures, blind spots, and the violence of single, linear narratives. For example, to understand *Déogratias* (2000), one must give in to the chaos of the repetition associated with traumatic memory. However, just as the eponymous character in Déogratias is condemned to world where chronological time stopped with the genocide and where repetition of past events haunts the present, Stassen repeatedly returns to life in Central Africa and the dynamic relationship between the past and the present in subsequent *bandes dessinées*, each time trying new modes of seeing and representing to try and make the genocide and its aftermath, to use Mahmood Mamdani's term, thinkable.

The need for scholarly research in the growing field of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* and also francophone *bandes dessinées* more generally can be measured in the growing

number of artists and writers from diverse backgrounds turning to the Ninth Art to discuss and explore sociopolitical, economic, and cultural issues. Evidence of this growing trend manifested in 2010 in the form of two events featuring the promotion and exploration of African *bandes dessinées* that took place in Paris, organized by Cassiau-Haurie, a library curator and specialist of African *bandes dessinées*.[21] The main goal of these events was to contextualize and investigate the role African *bandes dessinées* play in the contemporary world. That these two events took place in Paris and were scheduled in 2010, when France celebrated *La Francophonie*—an international organization of regions and countries (almost all former colonies and colonial territories) where French is the primary language and where there are significant concentrations of francophone speakers—and fifty years of independence of fourteen of its former colonies through extravagant ceremonies[22] is no coincidence. Indeed, Jacques Toubon, the general secretary of the fiftieth anniversary of African independences, was present at the opening ceremonies for the First Salon of African *bandes dessinées* Cartoonists in December to help usher in the event and touch upon the importance for such occurrences in today's world, effectively giving the various cartoonists present France's blessing. That Paris in particular played host to numerous events commemorating fifty years of independence of fourteen of its

[21] The first, "A la rencontre de la bande dessinée africaine," ("Towards an African *bande dessinée*") a three-day event held at the controversial Quai Branly Museum in February, included lectures on the state of African francophone *bandes dessinées* both in Africa and in Europe, interviews with cartoonists, publishers, editors and other bandes dessinées curators, an exhibition of various cartoonists' work and a screening of Nicoletta Fagiolo's newest documentary, *Résistants du 9ème Art*. Similarly, the second event, the "Premier Salon des auteurs africains de bande dessinée" ("First Salon of African *bandes dessinées* Cartoonists"), held in December, took place in the heart of the Latin Quarter at the fifth Arrondissement town hall. This salon became the catalyst for Cassiau-Haurie to launch BD L'Harmattan, a subdivision of the Paris-based African publisher L'Harmattan devoted to giving voice to African cartoonists.

[22] The theme of the 2010 celebration of the 14 July (Bastille Day) was *la Francophonie* and included various events to celebrate all the African nations that were former French colonies and who obtained their independence in 1960. For example, representatives of armies from thirteen different African nations participated in the annual military parade held on the Champs-Elysées as French President Sarkozy, surrounded by the presidents of those countries and their wives watched on (Charles). In addition, many of the other annual events associated with the 14 July, the French national holiday, were given a francophone twist such as the fireworks display.

former colonies is indicative of the growing importance of diversity in the French-speaking world and, more precisely, the diversity in the métropole itself.

The growing recognition of African *bandes dessinées* not only reflects the cultural diversity found in Europe as a result of changes in migratory patterns over the last five decades, it also brings to bear on the reaction of the European *bande dessinée* market to such changes and demonstrates that the Ninth Art, alongside literature and film, constitutes a rich site for meaning-making. While sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* employ many of the same strategies as their literary counterparts—appropriation, abrogation, mimicry, allusion, distortion (caricature), plurality of meanings (literally on the page and figuratively through interpretation)—they mobilize them through text and image. Consequently, they offer a productive form of artistic expression that elevates and dramatizes the in-between to restructure not only the images of Africa in circulation, but also to reconfigure the political acts of looking and reading.

Chapter One

Drawing (Upon) Cultural Capital: Satire, Identity, and Self-Representation in the Work of Pahé

In the introduction to *Gabonaises… Gabonais…* (2006), the first collection of Patrick Essono's political cartoons, Olivier Konaté-Nkombé singles out Essono, more commonly known by the pseudonym Pahé, from other cartoonists for his expert ability to produce cartoons whose meaning is immediately understood. In addition to being a writer, poet, and journalist, Konaté-Nkoumbé is also the former chief editor of *Le Scriboullard* (*The Penpusher*), a satirical Gabonese newspaper for which Pahé supplied cartoons. According to Konaté-Nkoumbé, the goal of Pahé's work—and the work of good political cartoons in general—is not simply to systematically ridicule for that would not be productive. Rather, it is to make people laugh while also providing comprehension of the complexities at hand in the subject being ridiculed (4). Similarly, in the preface to another collection of Pahé's cartoons, *Les choses du pays* (*Country Things*) (2008), Gabonese law professor and publisher Guy Rossatanga-Rignault praises Pahé's talent for paradoxically rendering sympathetic the people he mocks, stressing the simultaneity of brutality and gentleness at work in his cartoons (5). It is no doubt this dynamic nature of Pahé's work that attracted Swiss publisher Pierre Paquet and led him to suggest that Pahé recount his own life story in *bande dessinée* form.

In addition to the economic hardships of publishing *bandes dessinées* in Africa mentioned in the introduction is the added dimension of political obstacles. As a political cartoonist working for satirical Gabonese newspapers, Pahé has been scrutinized by those in power in Gabon and has worked under threat of being censured. Pahé's political cartoons have even contributed to the dissolution of some newspapers (Kouamouo). In September 2009 Pahé was arrested by two police officers for drawings he did while at a restaurant in Gabon and spent

thirty-six hours in jail because his drawings that supposedly mocked the officers ("Le Dessinateur"). To get around such difficulties, Pahé, like other African cartoonists facing potential censorship, has contributed cartoons to anthologies of African *bandes dessinées*. For example, he participated in the Gabonese-based BD Boom project in which a group of cartoonists from Libreville, with the financial support of the French Cultural Center, worked together to host a *bande dessinée* festival that featured both local and international cartoonists and to publish a magazine of the same name starting in 1997 and continuing to 2005. However, such projects can be limited in terms of artistic freedom due to outside funding, conflicting interests, and self-imposed censorship.[23] Considering these socioeconomic, political, and cultural realities, it is no surprise that when Swiss publisher Pierre Paquet met Pahé in 2004 at a *bande dessinée* festival in the Cameroonian capital Yaoundé and offered to work with him, Pahé accepted the offer and its attendant potential financial stability of being published in Europe.

The result of Pahé's encounter with Paquet was the publication in 2006 of the first volume of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* with two more volumes on the way and a second series, *Dipoula*, in the works. *La vie de Pahé* is a satirical multi-volume autobiographical *bande dessinée* that recounts Pahé's childhood and rise as a successful cartoonist, focusing mainly on his journeys back and forth between Gabon and France. The first volume, aptly subtitled *Bitam*, the name of Pahé's hometown, starts with the an account of the idea for such a *bande dessinée* before moving on to tell the tale of Pahé's childhood spent partly in Gabon and partly in France. The second volume, subtitled *Paname*, the familiar nickname of Paris, centers on Pahé's time spent in France, first as an adolescent then later as an adult when Pahé went to attend art school,

[23] Many *bande dessinée* anthologies funded by outside sources are typically didactic in nature and subsequently focus on providing readers with information about social, environmental, and health issues. In 1999, BD Boom published an anthology entitled *BD Boom explose la capote! Histoires d'une chaussette tropicale* (*BD Boom Explodes the Condom! Stories of a Tropical Sock*) that highlighted the importance of using condoms.

then moves to Pahé's return to Gabon in search of work as a professional cartoonist. Interwoven throughout each of the volumes are short vignettes about the political and social state of Gabon as well as moments from the present in which Pahé depicts himself in conversations with Paquet or at various international *bande dessinée* festivals as an already successful cartoonist.[24]

In contrast, *Dipoula* is an ongoing *bande dessinée* series set at a Catholic orphanage in Gabon that centers on the eponymous main character, a Gabonese albino orphan. This series, though based on one of Pahé's original characters, is produced in collaboration; it was first written by French cartoonist Sti and then later by French cartoonist Louis-Bertrand Devaud with contributions from Paquet and illustrated by Pahé. *Dipoula* is very much influenced by *Titeuf*, a top-selling *bande dessinée* series by Swiss cartoonist Zep about the title character, an adolescent boy, and his friends and family that was first published in 1992 and continues to be published. Like *Titeuf*, *Dipoula* consists of one-page comedic vignettes that mainly function as a set of themes and variations with narrative arcs that serve as the dramatic driving force. Though many critics have also pointed to *Dipoula*'s close affinity with *Titeuf* and some have even gone so far as to suggest that the series is little more than an Africanized version of *Titeuf*, I would argue that *Dipoula* is much more complex than a simple imitation. What is surprising is how Pahé, Sti, and Paquet are able to create a lighthearted series rich in meaning that engages questions of racial discourse and cultural belonging in creative ways.

The effectiveness of *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula* derives from Pahé's own culturally in-between status derived from his time spent in France while growing up and his acquisition of French culture and customs. As Aedín Ní Loingsigh suggests, "international travel itself, for whatever purpose, has become so inextricably associated with the acquisition of cultural capital

[24] The third and final volume scheduled for publication in 2013 is subtitled *Loveman* and, according to Pahé's blog, focuses on his experiences with women.

that to remain at home has come to be seen by many as an intellectually and professionally limiting choice" (Ní Loingsigh, *Postcolonial Eyes* 52). This is not a recent phenomenon and Dominic Thomas underlines the transcolonial dimension of travel explaining that "Migration to the French metropole has been a constant feature of francophone sub-Saharan African literature from colonial times to the contemporary moment of postcoloniality" (Thomas, *Black France* 185). Having lived in Gabon and France, Pahé is able to capitalize on his intimate familiarity with both Gabonese and French cultures in order to convey insightful and at times even biting social commentary on the postcolonial relationship between the two.

In this chapter I examine Pahé's *La vie de Pahé* series to investigate what his process of identity formation and his formation as a cartoonist can tell us about cultural practices and belonging in the francophone context. Furthermore, I consider how he positions himself with regards to the mainstream Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* industry to analyze how he challenges certain colonialist overtones embedded in the medium. I situate Pahé with regards to African francophone writers to demonstrate how his work can be seen as participating in current literary movements by addressing many of the same social and cultural issues. Then, before moving to an analysis of the text of *La vie de Pahé*, I consider the paratext as a way to examine how Pahé and his work are packaged for European readers. The following section takes up the complex issue of autobiography in *bandes dessinées* and argues that *La vie de Pahé*, like many other autobiographical *bandes dessinées*, functions as a *Küntslerroman* in that it recounts Pahé's development as a successful cartoonist. I thus focus on the changing role of travel and education in *La vie de Pahé* to analyze his autoethnographic representations of France and Gabon and their impact on his process of identity formation as well as on his formation as a cartoonist. Lastly, I turn to *Dipoula* to examine how the protagonist mirrors Pahé himself and to show how Pahé

deftly works within the confines of mainstream *bande dessinée* conventions to involve Western readers in rethinking value systems based on skin color and on visual representation.

I have chosen to focus on Pahé's work for a number of reasons that bring to bear on an investigation of the larger field of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*. First, the stages and trajectory of Pahé's career are emblematic of the general publishing trend among writers and cartoonists from Africa. To become a successful writer or cartoonist, that is, one that lives by their work, the need to publish in the former European métropole remains crucial due to the logistical and financial obstacles facing the publishing industry in Africa, as discussed in the introduction. In this regard, the history and reality of publishing *bandes dessinées* very much resembles other avenues of print culture, specifically the publication of novels by francophone writers from the same region. Second, though there have been other successful cartoonists from sub-Saharan Africa before Pahé—in particular Barly Baruti from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the first breakthrough cartoonists from sub-Saharan Africa whose influence on the African *bande dessinée* scene is indisputable[25]—Pahé's recent and continued mainstream success in Europe and throughout the francophone world both marks and has helped enact a shift in the mainstream industry to include more non-European voices. The fact that *La vie de Pahé*, was picked up and adapted into an animated cartoon (*Le monde de Pahé*) for French and Belgian television stations in 2009 implies that Pahé has attained a certain mainstream following and that his particular brand of *bande dessinée* has local and mainstream appeal. Thus, while his career path reflects general trends amongst sub-Saharan African cartoonists, it is also a unique success story. Lastly, focusing on Pahé's work provides insight into such trends specifically because *La*

[25] Barly Baruti published local *bandes dessinées* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the early 1980s and then traveled to France and Belgium where he studied *bande dessinée* production in Angoulême and Brussels. In the early 1990s, he worked with French cartoonist Franck Giroud on two series: *Eva K.* and *Mandrill*. Both series have been popular successes in France and Belgium.

vie de Pahé is precisely the tale of his development as a successful cartoonist and demonstrates his navigation of the industry and his relationship to it.

Pahé and Migritude

In many ways Pahé's path towards success mimics those of other successful writers from sub-Saharan Africa just as his work addresses many of the same issues, themes, and tropes common to African francophone literature. Because publishing in Europe is virtually a necessity, the audience for such texts tends to be based in Europe. Considering *La vie de Pahé* in conjunction with a range of sub-Saharan African novels helps us understand the unique benefits, strategies, and differences exemplified in *bandes dessinées* in addressing readers and engaging them in an exploration of identity formation. Whereas *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* has important affinities with Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris* (1959), *La vie de Pahé: Paname* much more resembles Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu, blanc, rouge* (1998) and *Black Bazar* (2009) in its portrait of the diasporic community in France of the 1990s and also shares affinities with other contemporary novels. Dadié's use of satire in *Un Nègre à Paris* and his turning of the colonized gaze onto Parisian culture represent powerful moments in sub-Saharan African intellectual consciousness and in autoethnographic travel writing and therefore provides a useful counterpoint to Pahé's work. In contrast, *La vie de Pahé: Paname* presents a vision of France far removed from the historical moment of Dadié's novel. Decolonization and its social, political, and economic aftermath have had an immense impact on France and its relationship with its former colonies, particularly with regards to immigration. *La vie de Pahé: Paname* much more readily reflects recent novels by migritude writers, a term coined by Jacques Chevrier in his article "Afrique(s)-sur-Seine: autour de la notion de 'migritude'" (2004). Chevrier's neologism establishes a link with the influential Négritude movement of the 1930s while also introducing the more recent chapter of African-French relations by foregrounding the migratory component

that has become a feature of African francophone novels. Moreover, the title of Chevrier's article serves as an indicator as to the location from which texts are now produced, namely in the post-migratory context (France, Belgium, and so forth) in which the authors have established residency.

This term, according to Chevrier, frees writers from questions of belonging and highlights that neither the terms Black nor immigrant sufficiently describes their new hybrid and decentered identities that are, in fact, more characteristic of world literature. Integral to Chevrier's notion of migritude is the break with previous generations of black francophone writers and literary movements. Moreover, the term migritude, for Chevrier, signifies that the Africa presented by this new generation of writers has nothing to do with that of the previous generations (Chevrier 97). Djiboutian writer Abdourahman Waberi has described this new generation of writers as "the children of the postcolony" (Waberi, "Les enfants" 8), who were born after the majority of African nations obtained independence. However, Lydie Moudileno and Dominic Thomas have both argued against such homogenizing approaches to understanding cultural production.[26] Indeed, though Waberi's generational categorizations do not sufficiently encapsulate the complexity of contemporary cultural production, certain elements that he singles out as characteristic of contemporary texts by African francophone writers are, as we will see, also at work in Pahé's *bandes dessinées*.

Pahé's work includes many themes common to migritude literature, specifically travel northward and the acquisition of cultural capital associated with it. In the francophone context, the acquisition of cultural capital is very much linked to France and, more specifically Paris. In *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism,* Dominic Thomas explains that

[26] See Lydie Moudileno, "Littérature et postcolonie." *Africultures* 26 (2000): 9–13 and Dominic Thomas *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007, p. 20-21.

"Colonial education and the dissemination of the myth of French universalism and cultural superiority created a logical desire among colonial subjects to travel to the metropole, the result of an acquired francocentrism that in turn contained the promise of cultural capital" (Thomas, *Black France* 51). [27] Even though the myth of assimilation has been revealed, the pull of the metropole and the cultural capital it offers continues to affect France's former colonies. A fact corroborated by the growing numbers of immigrants from the former colonies trying to make their way to France and by the social and cultural importance throughout the postcolonial francophone world associated with traveling to Paris. Thus, while *La vie de Pahé* is not exactly a travelogue, travel figures prominently in both existing volumes. It is important to note that Pahé's trajectories—first to Libreville, the capital of Gabon, then north to France—not only follow along those of previous and current generations of African francophone writers, but also those of his own family members, namely his two older sisters Rose and Florence. According to Pahé, Rose moved to France to pursue a medical degree and Florence was married in Holland. It is because Pahé's older sisters had moved to Europe that he had the opportunity to travel there and live with them for extended periods of time. Thinking of identity formation in *La vie de Pahé* by foregrounding travel is crucial for understanding how Pahé reformulates cultural stereotypes and how his satire of preconceived notions in both Africa and Europe go beyond simple role reversals, an aspect also at work in francophone travel literature. As Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu, and Siobhán Shilton underline in *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History, Theory* (2006), "Non-metropolitan travelers do not seek to reproduce and invert the binary oppositions evident in colonial and neo-colonial travel

[27] Chapter two, "Francocentrism and the Acquisition of Cultural Capital" focuses exclusively on the transcolonial dimension of France's *mission civilisatrice* explaining its historical origins in order to analyze how the myth of assimilation continues to influence the sociopolitical and cultural dimensions of immigration in contemporary France.

literature. Rather, they strive to renegotiate the relationship between the cultures to which they belong simultaneously" (71).

Undoubtedly, as specialists of African francophone literature highlight, the relationship between travel and the acquisition of cultural capital is paramount to identity formation. Aedín Ní Loingshigh's text *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature* (2009) provides a useful framework for evaluating the impact of travel and how it is represented in *La vie de Pahé*. She focuses on how contemporary African writers' experiences and representations of travel differ from earlier texts. She is quick to point out (and rightly so) that "Careless readings [of such texts] mean roles will simply be reversed rather than travel models questioned, and instead of the colonial emphasis on the Black 'object' of the traveller's gaze, the Black traveller will simply be gazed upon as a new 'object' of ethnographic-style inquiry" (22). According to Ní Loingsigh, "as travelling black subjects in overwhelmingly white cultures, these authors are constantly faced with the objectification of their own identity which means they are more aware of, and arguably more critical of, the processes involved in such objectification" (174). As we will see, Pahé addresses such issues in *La vie de Pahé* through text and image and subsequently comments on metropolitan visual stereotypes perpetuated by French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*.

What we find in Pahé's work, because of the added visual dimension in *bandes dessinées*, are alternative reconfigurations of such themes as well as insight into what literary Mark McKinney calls the "colonial heritage" of French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*. In *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics*, McKinney demonstrates the intimate link between early *bandes dessinées* and colonial ideology and iconography, arguing that foundational *bande dessinée* series such as Alain Saint-Ogan's *Zig et Puce* and Hergé's *Tintin* "constitute a colonial

inheritance in themselves" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage* 7). How do French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*, entangled with European colonialism and containing images, iconography, and a visual culture of imperialism, impact Pahé's work? How does he engage with the colonial legacy of visual caricatures and stereotypes of Africa and Africans embedded in mainstream *bandes dessinées*? In *La vie de Pahé*, as we will see, through mimicry, appropriation, and reconfiguration of metropolitan literary and visual cultures and their attendant conventions, Pahé employs the textual and visual fields of *bandes dessinées* and brings them to bear on issues of cultural belonging and identity in an autoethnographic representation of his own experiences.

In her influential book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt defines two key terms for encounters between people of different cultures: transculturation and autoethnography. According to Pratt, transculturation has been used "to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (7). However, she explains that "While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what the dominant culture visits upon them, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean" (7). She describes when subjugated peoples take up the act of representation as autoethnography, explaining that it involves subjects who "represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms" (9, emphasis in the original). Pratt goes on to argue that "If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" and suggests that autoethnography "involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (9). Pahé's choice to express himself in

the form of *bandes dessinées* is directly related to France's previous colonial rule and its attendant imperialist culture in his home country of Gabon.

Figure 1.1. Pahé's representation of Astérix and Obélix. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2008), 27.

Pahé's appropriation of this medium and his ability to transform icons of mainstream French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* allow him to address the inherent colonialist ideology embedded in the medium and challenge its continued perpetuation. An example of how Pahé transforms mainstream icons takes place in *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, when an adolescent Pahé meets another student at school in Villeneuve d'Ascq, France who he considers as having a strange accent. Pahé learns that the reason for the student's accent is that he is from Marseille. Pahé includes a panel in which the instantly-recognizable characters Astérix and Obélix, redrawn

in Pahé's own style, casually walk to Marseille (Figure 1.1). Accompanying the reproduction of these two iconic *bande dessinée* characters that have come to be symbols of French national identity is the explanation that Pahé's only knowledge of Marseille at the time derived directly from an Astérix *bande dessinée*: "Marseille! J'en avais déjà entendu parler dans Astérix et Obélix. Les Marseillais avaient le sang chaud… comme les Bitamois!!" (Marseille! I had heard about it in Astérix and Obélix. The people of Marseille had hot blood… just like the people of Bitam!!) (27). This allusion to *Astérix,* a *bande dessinée*, as the measure of young Pahé's knowledge of France and French history is comedic for readers since the character of Astérix, like Tintin, is ubiquitous throughout the francophone world. However, it also alludes to the visual logic of stereotypical representations of the other and the elsewhere integral to this famous series and, through extension, all mainstream French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*. This visual joke is instantly recognizable and understandable for all French-speaking readers because of Pahé's knowing use of *Astérix,* a result of his talent and his first-hand familiarity with French culture and customs, including the idioms of French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*. It is important to point out that Pahé's *bandes dessinées*, as with the texts analyzed by Pratt, are "typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well. That is, they are usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own social group. They are bound to be received very differently by these different readerships" (22). A clue into how Pahé's work is received can be seen in how it is presented to the public.

Packaging Pahé for a Western Audience

The packaging of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Pahé's first full-length *bande dessinée*, informs how he and his work are received.[28] As his first major publication and as an autobiography, it

[28] Packaging also plays an important role in the aforementioned collections of Pahé's political cartoons published in Gabon. It is interesting to note that even in the Gabonese setting, packaging in the paratext alludes to French

constitutes a veritable first impression for European readers, few of which were probably already familiar with his work. Paying close attention to how *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* is presented and also how Pahé introduces this autobiographical text on the first page gives us insight into his relationship with Paquet that is emblematic of general trends in the context of francophone *bandes dessinées* and also representative of the complex history of metropolitan packaging of non-Hexagonal texts, that is texts by writers and cartoonists not of European descent. In *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World*, Richard Watts examines the relationship between the packaging of francophone texts and the texts themselves arguing that such a relationship is fraught with tension. He points to the paratextual space as a privileged site where "the struggle over who has the right to mediate and who maintains the authority to present and interpret this literature is fought" (4-5). Moreover, as he suggests, the paratext is often used not only to promote, but also to control a text since its main functions are "to capture readers and to influence the work's reception" (2). Though Watts criticizes a neocolonial framework for understanding the relationship between the paratext and the text, he insists that in the francophone world of publishing, "the center / periphery model of analysis is necessary for analyzing a phenomenon—the cultural bracketing of French-language works from the colonies and postcolonies—that is itself so heavily inscribed in that model" (10). Watts views the relationship between a text and that which surrounds it as "[mirroring] what is occurring in the realm of cultural politics, and politics *tout court*" (10, emphasis in the original). Though he turns his attention to francophone literature, his argument is useful for analyzing francophone *bandes dessinées* since they are part of print culture and the literary world.

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cartoons to validate Pahé's talent. For example, on the back cover of *Gabonaises… Gabonais…*, the editor labels Pahé as the Gabonese Marc Reiser, a famous French cartoonist, cofounder of the influential *bande dessinée* magazine *Hara Kiri* and regularly published in *Charlie Hebdo*.

On the back cover of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, is a testimonial from Pierre Paquet himself. Paquet's personal account of his appreciation of and support for Pahé's work, by contextualizing it, seeks to lend it legitimacy. According to Paquet:

> J'ai découvert son travail en Côte d'Ivoire, je l'ai rencontré au Cameroun et il vit au Gabon. Découvrez pour la première fois en France l'univers de Pahé grâce à son autobiographie qui retrace sa vie rocambolesque de Bitam à Tours. Un album sincère et original qui prouve que les artistes africains n'ont rien à envier aux européens. Partagez avec moi mon coup de cœur !
>
> (I discovered his work in the Ivory Coast, I met him in Cameroon and he lives in Gabon. Discover, for the first time in France, Pahé universe thanks to his autobiography that traces his extraordinary from Bitam to Tours. A sincere and original volume that proves that African artists have no reason to be jealous of European artists. Share with me this favorite of mine!)

Paquet's description of how he discovered Pahé stresses Pahé's transnationalism and lends credibility to his work by demonstrating its already established presence in sub-Saharan Africa. Paquet points out that he first saw Pahé's work in the Ivory Coast before meeting Pahé at a festival in Cameroon even though he is from and lives in Gabon. However, though this description suggests, for a Western reader, that Pahé is a well-traveled individual (which is definitely the case), it falls short of explaining the socioeconomic and political reasons that have generated transnational, mainly sub-Saharan African, networks and collectives of cartoonists that are vital for sustaining such cartoonists. It also underlines Paquet's own ability and privilege to travel extensively throughout Africa in search of such cartoonists with whom he can work towards a lucrative end. That is not to say that Paquet does not genuinely believe in Pahé's

talent. It does however point to the privileged position that Paquet maintains and how his relationship with Pahé represents an extension of the center-periphery power inequality associated with neocolonialism and its attendant cultural hegemony along colonial trajectories.

We cannot ignore the fact that this testimonial functions in much the same way André Breton's preface to the 1947 edition of Aimé Césaire's groundbreaking poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Both Paquet's testimonial and Breton's preface work to coax Western readers into reading the text at hand by describing the original encounter with Pahé and Césaire's work respectively. Another important parallel between Césaire's relationship with Breton and that of Pahé and Paquet is the fact that education (former and informal) was a major factor for Breton's and Paquet's respective gravitation towards the work of Césaire and Pahé. Both Césaire and Pahé were already very familiar with and well-versed in Western aesthetics and customs. Not only did Césaire and Pahé grow up in an environment informed by the French *mission civilisatrice*, they also both physically traveled to France to attend school and had therefore been exposed to metropolitan French culture firsthand. Indeed, we cannot ignore that while both Césaire and Pahé are framed as exotic voices, Césaire, being from Martinique, was a French citizen when he traveled to hexagonal France whereas Pahé traveled to France as a citizen of one of France's former colonies. The time Césaire and Pahé spent in France plays a crucial role in their success just as it informs the thrust of their social commentaries on French culture.

However, unlike Césaire, Pahé, born after 1960 when many African nations gained independence, knowingly accepts working with Paquet and even challenges the authority of the paratext, how he and his work are packaged, and Paquet's patronage on the first page, much in the same way that postcolonial francophone writers began challenging the authority of prefaces attached to their texts (Figure 1.2). Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, francophone writers began

to subvert and reconfigure the paratext to deconstruct it altogether, Congolese writer Henri Lopès's *Le Pleurer-rire* being one of the most extreme cases (Watts 6). For Watts, such writers "write with an apparent awareness of colonial and decolonial abuses of power in the paratext, and their experiments on the edges of the text attempt to defuse its authority and transform it from a site positioned above the text to one that is, in [Édouard] Glissant's terms, 'transversal' to it" (Watts 9). Even though the first page of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* is not part of the paratext, it is a kind of introduction in which Pahé addresses Paquet's patronage (3). In the first panel of the second strip that depicts Paquet's pitch to work together, Pahé asserts his control through narration by purposefully mislabeling Paquet's French nationality as Franco or Belgo and misuses the appropriate terms themselves, using Franco and Belgo instead of *Français* and *Belge* as are the correct adjectives in French, thus simultaneously dismissing the importance of accuracy with regards to identity and suggesting a hybrid identity. In effect, this serves as an ironic reversal of ignorance regarding the identity of the other. Moreover, the indicator of how Pahé views Paquet is his visible disdain for what he considers as intellectual comic book people.

Pahé complicates the issue by drawing out the racist overtones associated with white patronage of African artists and mocks Paquet's recourse to Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* when describing Pahé's work. By extension, Pahé also mocks the tendency of Western critics to compare texts from Africa with those from Europe, as though the only viable way of understanding cultural production from Africa. When Pahé finally addresses Paquet, he sardonically changes his language to mimic *petit nègre*, a form of pidgin French developed by colonists that supposedly simplified the language so that indigenous populations in the colonies could understand and use it. Pahé's ironic use of the term "Missié Bwana," equivalent to "Massa" in English, to address Paquet belies his lack of respect. Furthermore, Pahé satirizes the

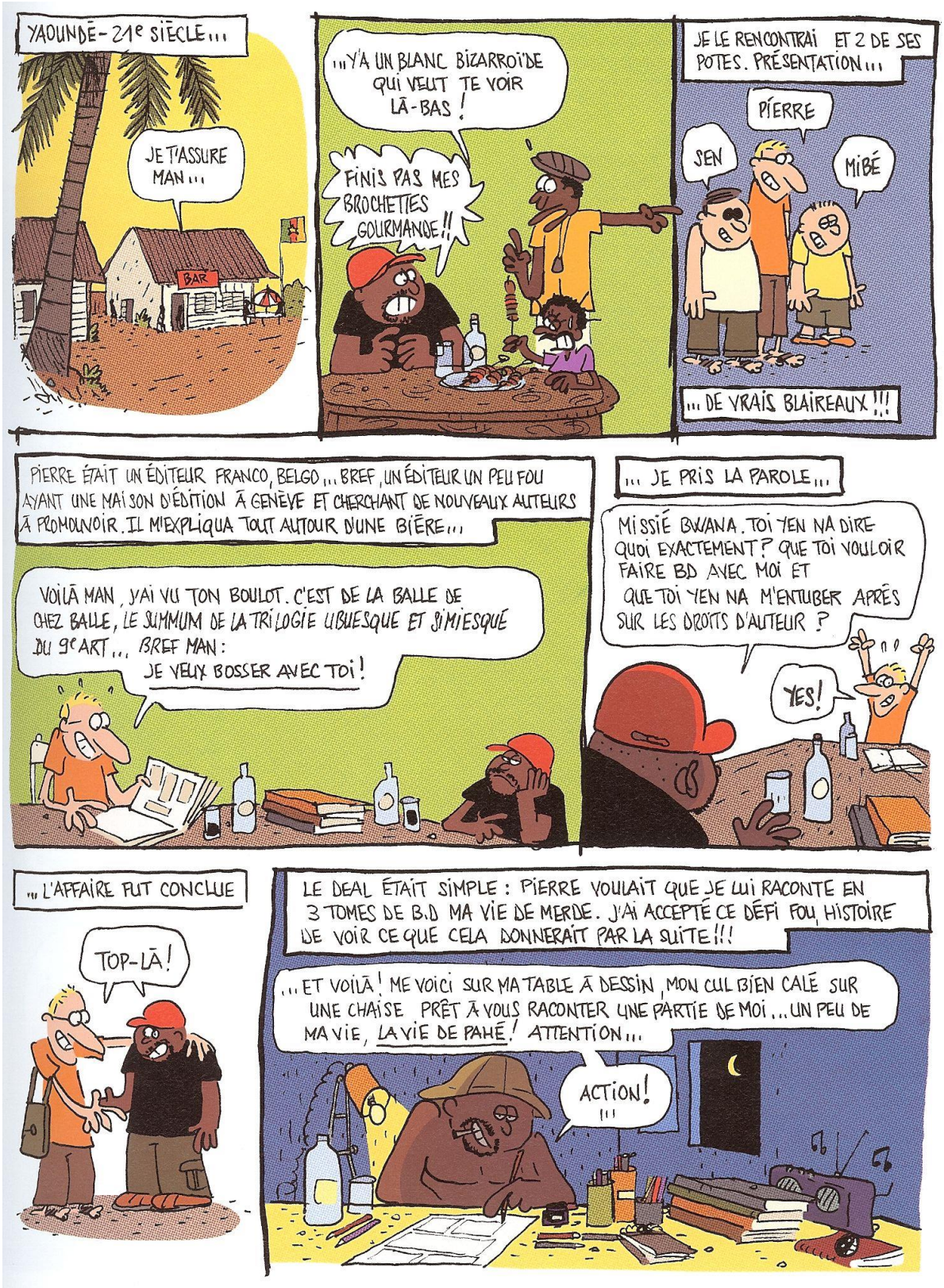

Figure 1.2. Pahé recounts meeting Pierre Paquet for the first time. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 3.

history of Western exploitation of Africa by using *petit nègre* when asking if Paquet wants to publish his work just so he can con him by robbing him of his artists' rights. The narration accompanying the scene provides a counterpoint to Pahé's use of *petit nègre* and proves that this is a knowing strategy on his part. Though Pahé is aware of the initially unequal dynamics of his relationship with Paquet, his depiction of his encounter with Paquet seems to put them on equal footing. When Pahé accepts Paquet's request, the two are depicted on equal footing. The page ends with Pahé at his drawing table ready to tell us his life story. Though he seems to downplay the importance of such an encounter, Pahé, ever the adaptive self-promoter, takes up the task knowing full well what he is doing. In fact, over the course of *La vie de Pahé*, readers learn that he is actually intimately familiar with the industry as well as with European culture due in large part to his acquisition of cultural capital in the form of travel.

A Graphic Autobiography: Visual and Textual Selves

La vie de Pahé: Bitam and *La vie de Pahé: Paname* recount Pahé's childhood and formation as a successful cartoonist in Gabon whose popularity throughout sub-Saharan Africa eventually led to a successful career in Europe via his meeting with Paquet. As Mouloud Boukala points out, *La vie de Pahé* corresponds to Philippe Lejeune's notion of the "autobiographical pact" in that the title character, narrator, and author constitute a single multifaceted entity (Boukala 223). In addition, if we look at certain paratextual features, we notice there is a claim to authenticity. Pahé's origins are stressed on the title page of the first volume with a reproduction of an actual map of Gabon that contextualizes the country's position on the continent of Africa that includes the provinces of Gabon, major roads, cities, and airports. This first image presents readers with a concrete representation of Gabon, not as some insignificant blip, but rather as a modern country like any other. In a similar fashion, the title page of the second volume features reproductions of Parisian metro tickets and the fine Pahé was

issued as a result of riding the metro without a pass, an event recounted later in the narrative. Furthermore, while each volume purports to recount Pahé's memories, that both are punctuated by the death of an important family member—the first volume is marked by the death of Pahé's mother and the second volume by the death of one of his older sisters, arguably a surrogate mother—attests to Pahé's willingness to share intimate details of his life, thus establishing a personal connection with the reader that reinforces the autobiographical pact.

However, the most convincing element that solidifies the autobiographical pact is a five-page photo album of Pahé, his family, friends, and handwritten descriptions at the end of the first volume. The title of this section is simply "La vie de Pahé" ("Pahé's Life") as though the photographs are the story of his life, therefore authenticating what transpires in the text. These photographs correspond to characters and places in the text, thus, through their indexticality, attesting to the truth of the narrative. They also familiarize readers with Pahé as a real person. The photographs of Pahé at different ages echo those of authors that graced the paratext of novels by African writers in the colonial era by highlighting his difference (non-Europeanness) from the target audience (read Europeans) (Watts 32-33). Yet, Pahé's Western clothes, like the Western suits worn by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor are, as Watts explains, "simply part of the hybrid signifying practices that define our world" (Watts 33). Likewise, the photographs of Pahé's friends and family simultaneously point to cultural similarities and differences between life in Europe and life in sub-Saharan Africa. Western readers recognize posing for group pictures and single portraits while getting a taste for the visual surroundings in Gabon through landscape and fashion. The photographs paint a vibrant picture of Gabon filled with extended family members and friends that speak to a sense of community that contrasts with the more solemn solo photographs of young Pahé taken in Europe. Though this might simply be the result

of the selection of photographs, it has the effect of creating a difference between Pahé and his family and friends in Gabon. I would argue that this is partially the goal: to set Pahé apart from his other family members and place him in a small group made up of his older sisters and himself, the difference originating in their time spent living in Europe. Pahé's more reserved and almost shy expressions in the photographs from when he was younger contrast with the outspoken and even brash cartoonish image of himself in the text. This contrast in mood, tone, and character recasts many of the ostensibly lighthearted situations that occur in the text in a more profound light; that is to say, this contrast speaks to the underlying complexity of Pahé's childhood memories. It also foregrounds his talent for rendering dynamic questions of cultural difference, belonging, and identity formation visually comedic and entertaining, thus making them tangible for all readers. Boukala also underlines this aspect of Pahé's work arguing that its originality derives from the refusal to dwell on hardships and the rejection of negative clichés of life in Africa (224).

Questions of identity and self-representation are, without doubt, central to all autobiographies and while many literary critics have exposed the unreliability of author-narrators, *bandes dessinées* and graphic narratives have the added component of a continuously present visual self-representation. Comics studies and *bande dessinée* critics appropriately foreground the particularly visual character of the narrating and narrated "I" as the most crucial element of such texts. In his in-depth look at autobiographical graphic novels entitled *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005), Charles Hatfield explains that "the cartoonist projects and objectifies his or her inward sense of self, achieving at once a sense of intimacy and a critical distance. It is the graphic exploitation of this duality that distinguishes autobiography in comics from most autobiography in prose" (115). Unlike the use of the subject pronoun "I," cartoonists

are faced with the challenge of constantly having to draw themselves. For Michael A. Chaney, what he sees as the author-illustrator—what *bande dessinée* theorist Jan Baetens terms the *graphiateur* in French—of autobiographical graphic narratives creates a "double self-portrait" that "invokes the classic topos of *mise en abyme*, a reflection of a reflection" (Chaney, "Terrors" 22). Chaney uses the term "I-cons" to describe the series of self-images author-illustrators produce. Though "they are the visual equivalent of the narrated 'I' of written autobiography, they are always on view, being viewed rather than merely revealing the view" (Chaney, "Terrors" 24). For Baetens, the constant need to generate such images of the self creates an ambiguous narrator, which he sees as uniquely slippery in autobiographical *bandes dessinées* (Baetens, "Autobiographies").

Embedded in this focus on the visual dimension of self-representation is also an exploration of the role of truth in autobiographical graphic narratives. Hatfield highlights how graphic narratives differ in this regard from purely textual autobiographies arguing:

> Despite the implied claim to truth that anchors the genre, the autobiographer's craft necessarily includes exaggeration, distortion, and omission. Such tendencies become doubly obvious in the cartoon world of comics, in which the intimacy of an articulated first-person narrative may mix with the alienating graphic excess of caricature. (114)

Baetens insightfully argues that these texts are actually closer to Serge Doubrovsky's notion of autofiction in their quest for a greater truth of the subject and their approach to innovation and style (Baetens, "Autobiographies").[29] While Baetens's terminology is resolutely grounded in the

[29] Jan Baetens, "Autobiographies et bandes dessinées." *Belphégor* 4.1 (2004): n. pag. Web. 22 Feb. 2013. "C'est au nom d'une vérité supérieure du sujet, que seule la fiction saurait garantir, que l'autofiction s'adonne aux jeux de l'invention, du style, en un mot de la littérature." [It is in the name of a greater truth of the subject that only fiction knows how to guarantee, that autofiction devotes itself to the games of invention, style, in a word to literature.]

French-language context, Hatfield also highlights the question of truth or "authentication through artifice" (Hatfield 125) and, instead of autofiction, proposes the term "ironic authentication" which he sees as "the implicit reinforcement of truth claims through their explicit rejection" (125) that "makes a show of honesty by denying the very possibility of being honest" (125-126). Both autofiction and ironic authentication are useful for thinking through the complex process of identity formation at work in *La vie de Pahé*. In fact, Hatfield points to the advantage of this medium for such an exploration explaining that, because graphic narratives are made up of sequential discrete images, "[t]he syntax of comics—specifically, its reliance on visual substitution to suggest continuity—puts the lie to the notion of an unchanging, undivided self, for in the breakdowns of comics we see the self (in action over a span of time) represented by *multiple* selves" (126, emphasis in the original).

While each cartoonist tackles the issue of self-representation differently with varying effects,[30] the idea of multiple selves is coupled with Pahé's cartoonish aesthetic throughout *La vie de Pahé* for comedic effect. For example, to emphasize the deliciousness of certain meals in unique circumstances such as the first time he experiences *le petit déj*, or breakfast, in France as a young boy and when he learns to buy groceries and cook pasta on a limited budget as a young adult in France, Pahé draws himself with an overly large and round belly, visually exaggerating how much he ate to convey his satisfaction with the food. Presenting caricatured and exaggerated visual representations of himself also sets the stage for Pahé's representations of French and

[30] Some artists choose to reduce their self-representation to a very iconic image, not quite a stick figure, but nonetheless easily identifiable and easily replicated. Examples include Guy Delisle's self-representation, little more than a stick figure, and Marjane Satrapi's stark restraint in representing herself. For both Delisle and Satrapi, their aesthetic choices bring to bear on how readers are meant to identify with the human experiences recounted and explored in the narratives. Other artists, such as Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco, manage to produce detailed images of themselves (even if in the case of *Maus*, Spiegelman draws himself as a mouse, it is still a very detailed) to foreground their part in conveying of others' stories. In *Maus*, Spiegelman tells his father's story as a Holocaust survivor whereas Sacco, whose work is a form of journalism, goes to great lengths to show himself not as an innocent bystander, but as an individual with preconceived notions that he attempts to address and reformulate in light of his research and the testimony he gathers, a process that he also invites the reader to do.

Gabonese cultures. Using a highly cartoonish version of himself, Pahé shows that, first and foremost, he is willing to poke fun at himself. The strategy of lighthearted self-deprecating humor makes readers more receptive to his mocking of other people, subjects and cultures. Debbie Lisle, in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, discusses the use of self-mockery and humor in relation to travelogues, citing these strategies as a means of getting readers on the author's side. Furthermore, the use of his younger self as a narrative device allows Pahé to comment retrospectively on many experiences he had while maintaining a certain kind of naïve charm, though the narrator purposefully oscillates between the point of view of a young child caught up in the excitement of new experiences and that of a successful adult cartoonist.

A closer look at how Pahé presents his earliest childhood illustrates how multiple levels of narration—textual and visual and a narrator that seamlessly shifts from a child's point of view to that of an adult—produce a simultaneously humorous and information-rich reading experience. The recounting of Pahé's earliest childhood begins, not surprisingly, with descriptions of Bitam and Pahé's family as seen in Figure 1.3. In the *récitatif* boxes,[31] Pahé's narration, that of the adult cartoonist at this point, is straight forward and actually somewhat dry in its delivery of autobiographical facts; he states that Bitam, in north Gabon in central Africa, is where he was born and he explains that he comes from a large family, his father being the chief of the village of Éboro and having more than ten wives. The relatively neutral tone of these textually delivered facts contrasts with the accompanying images. For example, to illustrate that his father was the chief and that he had many wives, Pahé draws his father on the right of the panel, sitting down and surrounded by his male relatives (mainly sons), while his many wives are shown on the left side of the panel, standing with fists raised and annoyed expressions all

[31] *Récitatif* is a comics studies and *bande dessinée* term used for text boxes that function as a kind of voiceover. Usually these boxes either contain setting information or constitute the voice of a narrator.

exclaiming as one “Un vrai polygame!!!” (“A real polygamist!!!”) (Figure 1.3). Directly following this panel are two more that provide an ironic counterpoint to the narration that explains that having more than ten wives was not an easy task for his father and that the cohabitation of the many wives proceeded swimmingly. However, in the first of these accompanying panels we see Pahé’s father having a difficult time drafting up his schedule for the week amongst his various wives and in the second panel one of the wives walks in on another brazenly using the cooking utensils of the wife that has come in. As we can see from these few examples, Pahé blends various levels of narration in a very conscientious and self-reflexive manner, an approach common to autobiographical graphic narratives.

One important byproduct of the inherent self-reflexivity of constantly having to draw oneself while also writing about oneself is a preoccupation with the act of drawing and of representing oneself with regards to the medium and this industry. Baetens argues that, in autobiographical texts, cartoonists seem possessed by the unification of the narrator and *graphiateur*. For Chaney, this obsession serves to validate the autobiographical pact: “[p]resumably, visual reference to the author’s labor of creating the very text we read lends credibility to her subjective truths by hypostatizing them in the material commodity object (the finished memoir)” (Chaney, “Terror” 22). Similarly, influential *bande dessinée* theorist Thierry Groensteen points out one of the most common features of specifically French-language autobiographical *bandes dessinées* is the emphasis on “the chronicle of the professional life, the *mise-en-scnène* of the author’s trade in comics” (qtd. in Beaty 149). In a sense, autobiographical graphic narratives are often forms of *Küntslerroman* that chart cartoonists’ development as artists. *La vie de Pahé* continues this trend in that the story of Pahé’s life recounted is precisely

Figure 1.3. Pahé's description of his family. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 4.

his journey towards becoming an internationally successful cartoonist. Intrinsic to such a tale is also a representation of Pahé's relationship with the industry itself.

Bart Beaty argues that the adoption of autobiography by small-press and independent cartoonists in Europe in the 1990s is best seen as a social process that worked "as a distinctive device that sets them apart from the normative elements of the comics market" (Beaty 142). Beaty suggests that the autobiographical small-press and independent *bandes dessinées* of the 1990s sought to elevate cartoonists to the level of auteur in the same vein as the French New Wave filmmakers explaining that "a number of cartoonists have made the narrativization of

comic book production a central signifier of authenticity in the contemporary European small-press scene" (141). In this regard, Pahé's publisher Paquet had the business wherewithal to propel Pahé to popularity by suggesting he create an autobiographical *bande dessinée* that attests to and demonstrates his talent. This use of autobiography as a means of authenticating and validating Pahé's prowess as a cartoonist has larger implications in the postcolonial context in that it not only works to situate Pahé with regards to the mainstream (read Franco-Belgian) *bande dessinée* market, it also serves as a form of self-promotion in which Pahé recounts his tale as a self-made cartoonist.

In *La vie de Pahé*, Pahé situates his work in the context of *bande dessinée* production both at the level of narrative by staging his development as a cartoonist throughout the series and his interactions with other cartoonists and at the level of form through his choice of aesthetics. Pahé's visual style—informed by his time spent in France as a child, later cultivated through formal training at the *Institut Supérieur d'Art et de Publicité* (ISAP), and then put to the test during his time as a political cartoonist for various Gabonese newspapers—purposefully recalls other highly-recognizable styles. In particular, his use of lively colors and visual humor through exaggeration and dynamic movement has a close affinity with the Belgian Charleroi style epitomized by André Franquin's *Spirou* and what is known as the school of Paris style exemplified by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's bestselling *Astérix* series. Pahé's aesthetic and narrative style have the strongest affinity with those of *Astérix* that French sociologist Jean-Bruno Renard describes as a "bande dessinée à double lecture" (dual-level *bande dessinée*), where younger readers enjoy the adventure of the narrative and older readers "s'amusent de la parodie de l'Antiquité, ainsi que des allusions constantes au monde moderne et à l'actualité politique ou sociale" ("enjoy the parody of Antiquity as well as the constant allusions to the

modern world and to current political and social affairs") (Renard 102). This dual-level reading experience is reformulated by Pahé and brought to bear on the social and political realities of the contemporary moment.

Thus, immediately through his visual style Pahé securely places himself alongside mainstream French and Belgian cartoonists familiar to readers throughout the francophone world. However, in mimicking these *bande dessinée* aesthetics known for their extensive use of caricature and exaggeration, Pahé succeeds in subverting their power to perpetuate clichés, in particular visual stereotypes of Africans. In his seminal essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi Bhabha foregrounds the inherent subversive potential of mimicry characterizing it as a "partial representation" and a form of metonymy that, through its difference, excess, and ambivalence is menacing. For Bhabha, mimicry "is the process of the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations" (129, emphasis in the original). In *La vie de Pahé*, not only does Pahé challenge the authority of imperialist Franco-Belgian iconography embedded in classic *bandes dessinées*, he also mocks their continued popularity by appropriating iconic, genre-defining characters Tintin, Astérix, and Obélix (as mentioned above and in the introduction) and distorting them through exaggeration.

In addition to situating himself with regards to the mainstream *bande dessinée* industry through his aesthetic choices, Pahé also explicitly informs readers of his rise as a successful cartoonist by recounting his early career (even reproducing and recycling some of his work from Gabonese newspapers) and by including scenes that show him engaging with other cartoonists. The last quarter of the second volume sketches Pahé's career as a cartoonist in Gabon from his initial search for work to his publication in multiple newspapers and participation in the

Libreville-based fanzine and association of cartoonists known as BD Boom initiated in 1998. In his depiction of BD Boom, Pahé instantly hones in on the unequal postcolonial overtones of the entire project. Firstly, BD Boom was created with the help of the French Cultural Center. Already, that the French Cultural Center—a strategic and long-lasting holdover from the colonial era—facilitated the emergence of BD Boom speaks to the continued and active French presence in Gabon. Secondly, bestowing upon the fanzine and association a kind of formal status, the French Cultural Center inaugurated an unequal relationship between French culture and Gabonese culture. That legitimacy for such a venture comes from a French institution necessarily reinforces a dependent relationship that seeks to maintain the primacy and hegemony of French culture. The relationship between the Gabonese cartoonists and their French counterparts parallels that between BD Boom and the French Cultural Center.

Pahé is critical of the kowtowing to French customs and culture by cartoonists during the festival and sets himself apart from the other Gabonese cartoonists. He is also highly critical of the lackluster capabilities of the association and disappointed that they mainly only booked (in his view) has-been French cartoonists for their festival, though there were also some cartoonists that he considers real talents. These exceptions, singled out with an entire panel each, represent artists that he considers legitimate, good, and worthy of attention. By thus qualifying certain artists, Pahé reveals them to be at his level or above and considers them and their work inspirational.[32] Surprisingly, only one page is allotted to the festival followed, on the facing page, by Pahé's break with BD Boom in the middle of festival in which he flippantly criticizes the quality of work of the other cartoonists and decides to strike out on his own. Most importantly,

[32] Though Pahé points to certain French cartoonists whose work he respects, no cartoonist comes close to Congolese Barly Baruti who figures prominently in *La vie de Pahé*. For Pahé, Baruti is a mentor and close friend. Indeed, Pahé owes as much to Barly Baruti as he does to Pierre Paquet for his success. Pahé also includes visual nods to other African cartoonists and artists. For example, on the first page of volume two, the name of cartoonist Mfumu'Éto (also from the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the name of famed Congolese musician Papa Wemba are shown as graffiti on a wall.

however, Pahé does not want to be pigeonholed as an African cartoonist and refuses to continue working with an association that relies on Western recognition and bolstering to provide for their success as a group. In this regard, Pahé resembles African writers from his generation, Waberi's children of the postcolony (Waberi, "Les enfants" 8). Like them, Pahé considers himself a cartoonist (in their case a writer) first and foremost and is determined to prove himself just as capable as any cartoonist, regardless of his ethnic or national background. As with the photo album at the end of volume one of *La vie de Pahé*, the BD Boom scene actively works to differentiate Pahé from other people in Gabon. Ultimately, the story of Pahé's formation as a cartoonist is synonymous with the story of his upbringing, spent in both Gabon and France; his success reflects his intimate familiarity with African and European cultures.

As many comics and *bande dessinée* critics point out, because the artist's relationship to the industry often constitutes a major theme in autobiographical graphic narratives, it comes as no surprise that both volumes begin with Pahé as an adult cartoonist at African *bande dessinée* festivals outside of his home country of Gabon. Volume one begins in the Cameroonian capital of Yaoundé whereas volume two picks up where the first volume leaves off with Pahé attending a festival organized by Barly Baruti in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.[33] These references to Pahé's presence in Africa outside Gabon accomplish two major tasks. First, Pahé uses the privileged site of the first page as a kind of self-promotion, immediately establishing himself as a successful cartoonist recognized throughout sub-Saharan Africa thus highlighting

[33] Barly Bartui has been instrumental in fostering *bande dessinée* production throughout sub-Saharan Africa through festivals and events at cultural centers throughout central Africa and also through the establishment of an art atelier in Kinshasa, *Atelier de Création, Recherche et de l'Initiation à l'Art* (known more commonly by its acronym ACRIA). Under Baruti's direction, ACRIA is a place for artists to learn and produce and it also hosts festivals and salons dedicated to African cartoonists and artists. The end of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* recounts Pahé's trek from Libreville to Kinshasa to attend one such festival and in fact, the very last panel of the *bande dessinée* before the photo album shows a crowd of people awaiting travelers into Kinshasa with Barly Baruti holding a sign that says "ACRIA Mr. Pahé (Gabon)." In a sense, this last panel symbolically signifies that Pahé has "made it" as a successful cartoonist. The physical sign held by Baruti the signifier of Pahé's accomplishments.

his own transnationalism. For African audiences, this demonstrates Pahé's participation in a larger black African community; for a Western audience, it, in conjunction with Paquet's endorsement, speaks to and validates Pahé's talent. Secondly and equally importantly, it points to the network of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih have termed "minor transnationalisms" that operates independently of the binary center-periphery model between the former colonies and former métropoles. Pahé's success is due in part to the strong transnational network of sub-Saharan African cartoonists that has been integral in supporting local publications (specifically anthologies) and generating local audiences. However, though Pahé's travel and success throughout Africa[34] complicates a simple binary model of movement and influence, the pull of the former métropole remains vital for African cartoonists. The acquisition of cultural capital facilitated by travel and formal training, recounted in *La vie de Pahé,* provides Pahé the artistic, intellectual, and cultural skill set integral to his success and essential for capturing the attention of African and Western readerships.

Travel and Identity

Pahé's life story is a story of movement. Though, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, *La vie de Pahé* is not explicitly a travelogue, the two existing volumes can primarily be seen as a series of Pahé's journeys back and forth between (primarily) Gabon and France. Even the subtitle of each volume underlines this: volume one's subtitle, Bitam, refers to Pahé's hometown in northern Gabon, whereas volume two's subtitle, Paname, is a colloquial term for Paris in France, arguably the most common destination for immigrants from France's former colonies. With these two terms, Pahé establishes the importance of geographic locations in the shaping of his life and of his formation as a cartoonist with travel being the uniting factor. If

[34] In addition to the festivals in Yaoundé and Kinshasa portrayed in volumes one and two of *La vie de Pahé*, Pahé has also participated in a number of other book festivals, *bande dessinée* festivals, and caricature and political cartoon festivals throughout Europe and Africa.

"[l]ike many Western travel writers, African authors are, in their way, attuned to the growing mechanization of travel and its effects on the traveller's ways of seeing," as Ní Loingsigh argues (29), then it should come as no surprise that, over the course these two volumes, a total of seven different journeys are documented and a handful of other trips are implied (including Pahé's attendance at *bande dessinée* festivals as mentioned above). Early on in *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Pahé, as a young boy, takes his first plane trip from Bitam to the capital of Gabon, Libreville to stay with his two older sisters. Just a couple of pages later, he journeys from Libreville to Paris, France. These two journeys are close together in the narrative and parallel each other in many significant ways. Later in the first volume, young Pahé flies from Libreville back to Bitam to attend his mother's funeral. Interestingly and not insignificantly, each of the times Pahé returns to Gabon from France throughout his childhood the travel scenes are omitted and supplanted by school scenes, which I will touch upon below when discussing the crucial role schools—in both Gabon and France—play in Pahé's life and career. The short epilogue of the first volume is comprised of Pahé's trek from Libreville to Kinshasa to attend a festival to which he was invited by Barly Baruti. In volume two, *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, Pahé (not surprisingly because of the subtitle) travels to Paris twice—once as an adolescent (though he continues on to Lille by train) then as an adult with a student visa to attend ISAP located in Paris—and is, finally, shown returning to Libreville in search of a job after having completed his degree at ISAP.

Through the staging of certain tropes common to travel and migrant narratives, such as the scene of arrival and the shock of cultural differences, Pahé represents autoethnographic encounters that function on two levels: on the one hand, the lens through which French culture is transmitted is that of Pahé as a child, whose observations of cultural difference are very literal and informed by Gabonese culture; on the other hand, the perspective of Pahé the knowing and

skillful author undercuts these ostensibly naïve interpretations in order to deconstruct Western myths and stereotypes of life in sub-Saharan Africa as well as Gabonese myths and stereotypes about life in Europe. In the following section I first touch upon the important similarities and differences between young Pahé's first journey from Bitam to Libreville and his second journey from Gabon to France, focusing on his experiences of cultural difference as understood from the point of view of a child. Of particular interest are the ways in which the first journey that takes place within Gabon is just as important as the second and how, through telling details, Pahé undermines the binary model that posits a modern West in opposition with a traditional (read not modern or not-yet modern) Africa. Keeping in mind Pahé's acquisition and appropriation of cultural capital attained in these first voyages, I then move to an analysis of his two subsequent trips to France in volume two of *La vie de Pahé*, once as an adolescent and then as an adult. While the first of these two journeys passes almost unnoticed, the second represents a critical moment revealing, on the one hand, that Pahé has grown up and, on the other hand, that France's treatment of African individuals has changed due in large part to French government immigration policies—specifically the set of laws known as the Pasqua laws of 1986, 1993, 1997[35]—that tightened immigration restrictions and limitations. Whereas Pahé passed easily through customs as a child and then as an adolescent knowledgeable in the customs of international airports and French culture, as an African with a student visa in 1993, he became suspect in the eyes of airport security and customs agents. This change in treatment and Pahé's assessment and comedic representation of it, as we will see, expose the myth of assimilation and speak to larger questions of identity and belonging faced by the diasporic community in France.

[35] This set of three laws passed respectively in 1986, 1993, and 1997 are named for conservative politician Charles Pasqua who was the French Minister of the Interior at the time and who pushed for anti-immigration laws.

Pahé's very first plane ride takes place wholly in Gabon, from his hometown Bitam to the capital of Gabon, Libreville. This first major journey represents an import moment in young Pahé's life as it is his first time traveling by airplane; it introduces him to modernized travel and urban life upon his arrival in Libreville. The specialness of the occasion is not to be missed. To mark such the moment, his mom buys him a special outfit specifically for the trip: an all-white formal suit, complete with a black bowtie and dress shoes, as opposed to his normal shorts and button-up short-sleeved shirt or t-shirt and bare feet. While on the airplane, young Pahé's new experiences such as having to wear a seatbelt and interact with the flight attendant function as precursors to an entire host of new and different customs associated with modern traveling. The use of humor in this scene facilitated by the collapse of the narrator and the character of young Pahé into one and the same so that the voice of the narrator represents the logic of a young boy is characteristic of almost all of young Pahé's interactions with new cultures and customs. For example, when he has difficulty fastening his seatbelt and the flight attendant comes to help him, the narrator comically misinterprets the flight attendant's job title for her name and her mien for her function: "[e]lle s'appelait Madame l'hôtesse de l'air et passait son temps à sourire" ("Her name was Mrs. Flight Attendant and she spent her time smiling") (12).

Once in flight, young Pahé excitedly exclaims that he is flying to which someone else onboard says, "Tais-toi villageois!" ("Be quiet, villager!"). The use of the term villager is meant to single young Pahé out as unaccustomed to modern living, yet the representations of Bitam, if we look more closely, belie this stereotypical impression. Pahé's renditions of Bitam (and later of Libreville) debunk the outwardly imposed dichotomy between a traditional Africa and a modernized West. The fact that Bitam, a supposedly small village, has its own airfield is the most obvious indicator that Pahé's home town, though small, is not so far removed from modern

conveniences. Similarly, running through the various images of Bitam are neat houses and, more importantly, continuous power lines. However, there is a stark difference between Bitam and Libreville and young Pahé's arrival in the capital city represents a significant culture shock. Right away, Libreville's airport, complete with an air traffic control tower, contrasts with Bitam's airfield. It is no coincidence that Pahé would choose to represent these two halves of his first journey on adjacent pages that face each other. The brown of the dirt runway of Bitam's airfield on the left-hand page stands in direct opposition to the large amount of grey concrete on the right-hand page for Libreville's airport and skyscrapers.

Young Pahé's journey to Libreville highlights differences between small town living and city life and constitutes a first step in his acquisition of cultural capital. In addition to functioning as a small-scale introduction to French culture, Pahé's short stay in Libreville also demonstrates how cultural hybridity is already part of everyday life in Gabon. For example, there is a television at his uncle's house and Pahé and his friends enjoy French consumer goods that Rose, Pahé's older sister, brought back with her from France. As with the misrecognition of the flight attendant, young Pahé and his friends naively misinterpret certain aspects of French culture. Upon seeing an image of a French model in a dress with the price of the dress listed in a magazine, young Pahé mistakes the price for the actual model. In the following panel, the narrator, in this case, adult Pahé, informs the reader: "[j]e pensais que les mannequins étaient à vendre. Le con!" ("I thought the models were for sale. What an idiot!") (16). To complement this assumption that the magazines were advertising French women rather than the clothes they were modeling, Pahé adds two panels in which an older boy tries to teach young Pahé and his friends about Christmas, Santa Claus, and Jesus. The older boy erroneously explains that Santa Claus is Jesus' uncle and describes Jesus as a great sorcerer with powerful gri-gri that allow him to walk

on water, not to cry when hit, and to transform beer into lemonade. Young Pahé, upon hearing such stories, reacts in a way that exposes his own, culturally specific point of view; his conclusion that it must be some kind of white magic—like the older boy's oversimplified explanation of Christianity—is comedic for Western and African audiences alike due to the childish logic at work in their interpretations of French culture. Yet, this scene also points to the syncretic nature of Christianity in Gabon and to the intrinsically hybrid nature of culture.

As the scenes in Libreville illustrate, Pahé's exposure to French culture begins long before he actually sets foot in Paris, a fact that foregrounds the social and cultural impact of French colonialism in Gabon. That the children speak French is the most pervasive trace of French colonialism. Similarly, the children's access to contemporary French magazines and goods demonstrates the economic postcolonial relationship between France and Gabon as well as France's sustained cultural hegemony. This first voyage from the small town of Bitam to the urban center of Libreville prefaces the rest of Pahé's journeys and sets the tone for a bigger shift in cultural differences when, on his next trip, he ventures from Gabon to France. That young Pahé's second journey takes place only three pages after his trip from Bitam to Libreville underlines the similarities of the two journeys while also highlighting important differences. As before, Pahé contrasts two facing pages to emphasize the suddenness and abrupt change he felt as a young boy. On the left-hand page are young Pahé and his friends looking through the magazines and books whereas on the right-hand side, is a large airplane in the first panel that spans the entire width of the page with the bottom half of the page consisting of a flashback to when Pahé's mother helped him pack for France (16-17). Once again, Pahé marks this transition through the acquisition of new clothes; just as his new white suit and bowtie marked the momentous occasion of his first plane trip, the new thick coat, knit hat, and matching scarf

Figure 1.4. Pahé lands at the airport in Paris for the first time. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 19.

packed by his mother denotes a different change that young Pahé will face, namely climate change. Through the use of new clothes—the suit and the cold-weather clothes—young Pahé acquires and adopts new customs beyond the realm of his everyday life in Bitam. Moreover, in both cases, Pahé's special attire underlines how these two journeys are rites of passage.

However, though these two journeys mimic each other, the shift from Libreville to Paris is much more of a cultural shock than that from Bitam to Libreville. For example, while Libreville is portrayed as a large city, everyday life does not differ too much from life in Bitam apart from a higher density of larger buildings, people, and consumer goods. Furthermore, besides the concrete of the airport in Libreville and its environs, Pahé uses many of the same colors for the landscape and architecture in Bitam and Libreville, which comes as no surprise as the two places share the same climate and culture. In contrast, the two pages dedicated to young Pahé's first arrival in France are even more dominated by the color grey than the during his arrival in Libreville; even the sky is grey and it is raining when the airplane lands in Paris whereas in Libreville, the sky is a bright shade of blue. Pahé's visual representation of dreary Paris confirms the stereotype of France as seen from the point of view of people traveling from tropical locales. The grey sky, grey clouds, and actual rain at the Charles de Gaulle airport—tropes of migrant narratives in which characters travel to Paris—serve as instantly familiar visual clichés that reinforce young Pahé's sense of disorientation (Figure 1.4).

In addition, just as young Pahé's trip from Bitam to Libreville informs his journey from Gabon to France, this first venture to the métropole of the former colonizer becomes the basis for a series of voyages that change over time based on 1) young Pahé's evolving relationship with France and French culture, 2) his age, and 3) the economic and political developments in France regarding immigration that subsequently effect French society and culture. Pahé not surprisingly

spends a good deal of time describing and recounting his very first trip to France; the entire journey from Libreville to his sister's apartment in Tours spans six pages in which we see preparations in Libreville, many forms of transportation—the airplane ride is followed by a short trip on an airport bus, a taxi ride to a train station, a train journey, and another trip in a taxi to the over-sized *HLM*, or large apartment building,[36] where his sister lives—and young Pahé's innocent and naive first impressions of France (Figure 1.5). This initial adventure and its attendant collection of first impressions—particularly his interactions with the customs agent in Paris and the slew of French customs and cultural differences he experiencing within his first few days in France—are foundational for understanding Pahé's relationship with France.

Whereas the rainy and grey arrival at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris is a cliché, Pahé's first human interaction in France is marked by his surprise that the French customs agent is black. Rose, waiting at the airport to pick up her younger brother, explains that the agent is from the French Antilles. Young Pahé's reaction is humorous because of the narrator's false naivety, the exaggerated oversimplification of the security agent's identity, and the simplification of the long history of the French Antilles and the cultural differences of the French citizens of the Antilles: "Incroyable!! Le policier devant nous qui contrôlait nos papiers était un français mais… noir ! J'avais du mal à le croire. Ma sœur m'expliqua qu'il venait d'un coin de France appelé les Antilles. En tout cas, il avait un accent bizarre…" ("Incredible! The officer in front of us who verified our papers was French but … black! I had trouble believing it. My sister explained to me that he came from a corner of France called the Antilles. In any case, he had a weird accent.") (20). Here, the explanation that the agent comes from a corner of France called the Antilles, is comedic in that it suggests that the Antilles is just another region of hexagonal France rather than

[36] *HLM* is the French acronym for *Habitation à loyer modéré* (fixed-rent housing) and translates as a housing project. In France, the term *HLM* is synonymous with large, ugly, and usually crowded apartment buildings and tends to have the same connotation as "the projects" in English.

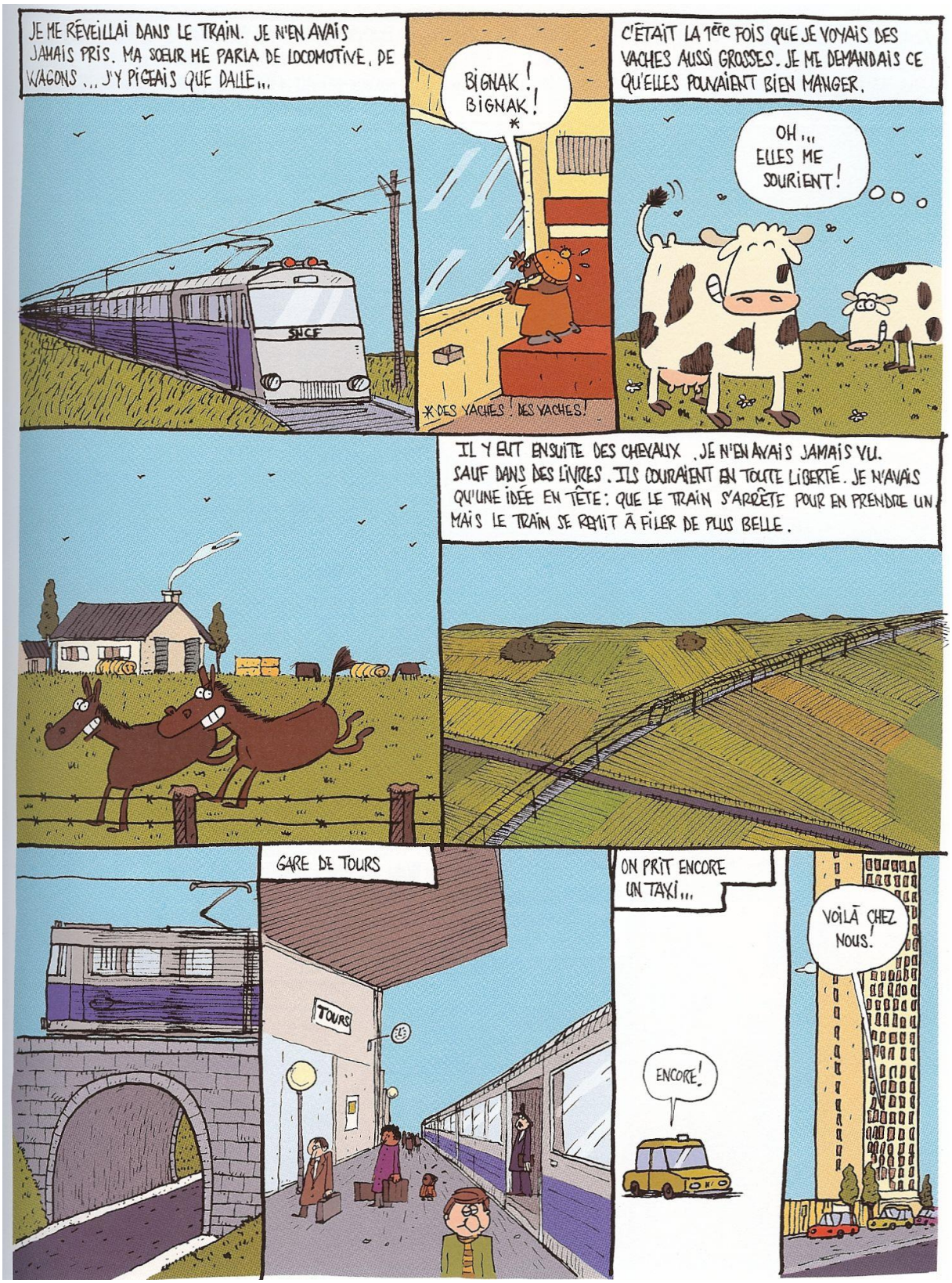

Figure 1.5. Pahé's first impressions of France. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 21.

part of France's *Départements d'outre mer* (overseas departments). While there is truth in the statement that the Antilles are part of France, the idea that they are just another region of continental France belies the historical background of the French overseas departments and territories and the history of social and cultural differences between life in hexagonal France and life outside of it. Young Pahé's innocent remark about the officer's strange accent points to the officer's otherness. Without a doubt, Pahé the author is more than aware of the history of the French Antilles, the slave trade, and French colonialism, yet young Pahé's childish wonderment and ostensible ignorance regarding such history, like his misrecognitions of other aspects of French culture, illustrate the dual-level reading experience of Pahé's work.

In representing his childhood memories of his first time in France, Pahé sketches out his own experience of transculturation ultimately generating an autoethnographic account of France from the point of view of a young boy. The entire middle section of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* is devoted to young Pahé's time spent adjusting to life in Tours with his sister. Many aspects are visually exaggerated to convey the sheer plentitude of differences such as geography and landscape, flora and fauna, and culture and people. For example, the scene in which young Pahé first travels to his sister's apartment in Tours via train and taxi features overly happy cows and horses, vast and lush farmland, completely indifferent people, and a high-rise building (the *HLM* where his sister lives) that extends so high as to exceed the actual border of the panel (Figure 1.5). That young Pahé believes the cows and horses are smiling is funny and their cartoonish depiction underlines his emotional excitement and wonderment that permeates his entire first journey to France. The things that stand out for him while in France consist mainly of television shows (in particular French cartoons), the conveniences of an apartment (specifically the bathroom) and its environs (the park), food (French breakfast and the supermarket), and French

primary school. The focus of these observations makes sense since they are from young Pahé's point of view whose awareness of French culture would logically center on things of interest to a child. Yet, the elements Pahé features in these scenes—such as the laughing cow (recognizable from advertisements for French cheese) and the grey sky and rain upon young Pahé's arrival in Paris—are, themselves, stereotypes about France and French culture.

Pahé's satirical approach to his wonderment at banal everyday activities and objects as a child echoes other satirical travel narratives and mimics the ironic representation of Paris in Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris*. Even though *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* was published almost a half century after *Un Nègre à Paris*, young Pahé's naïve wonderment echoes that of Dadié's character Bertin Tanhoe, both narrative devices that gently poke fun at French customs and cultural difference. In his book *Singular Performances: Reinscribing the Subject in Francophone African Writing* (2002), Michael Syrotinksi argues that "writing in Francophone Africa is often concerned—explicitly or implicitly, in diverse forms and in varying degrees of complexity—with questions of subjectivity and narrative agency" (1). With regards to Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris*, Syrotinski insightfully suggests that the use of an "ironic subject" allows Dadié to "mimic ironically the Western tradition of travel writing," thus "[putting] into question the transparency both of objective description and of self-expression" (7). Moreover, Ní Loingsigh points to the dual nature of Dadié's narrative style arguing,

> By using irony for the purpose of saying one thing and meaning another, Dadié reveals how his double vision (and 'double-voicedness') can be exploited more effectively to question fundamental features of European travel writing—assumed superiority of Western culture, direction of ethnographic gaze—and deftly to correct the images of African inferiority codified in the genre. (86)

In a similar fashion, Pahé also ironically mimics travel writing and, through the use of his younger self, capitalizes on a false naivety to mock Western culture and customs. Both Dadié and Pahé demonstrate their talent as intelligent satirists in their ostensibly lighthearted critiques.

In her monograph on travel writing entitled *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, Debbie Lisle demonstrates how most contemporary travelogues tend to reinscribe imperialist logic and suggests that, in contrast, satirical travelogues have the capacity to overturn the paradigm of Euro- and Western-centric, mainly masculine, travel narratives. She explains, that "satire does not negate the power relations at work in the discourse of liberal subjectivity, but it is one strategy that questions the automatic hierarchy of power between author and other" and argues that, in fact, postcolonial travel writers are at the cutting edge of reimagining this genre (271-274). According to Lisle, "satire is a complex political strategy that requires a shared understanding between the writer and the audience about *which* prevailing values are being lampooned" (173, emphasis in the original). Pahé lampoons existing cultural stereotypes in Africa about life in Europe and Europeans and also cultural stereotypes in Europe about life in Africa and Africans, thus including all his readers in his satire.

In contrast with young Pahé's first trip to France are two more journeys in the second volume of *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, one when Pahé is an adolescent and one when he is a young adult. Interestingly enough, the second trip to France, when Pahé is an adolescent returning to France to live with his other older sister, Florence, in Villeneuve d'Ascq, a suburb of Lille, is summed up in half a page with only two small panels representing the airport in Libreville and the airport in Paris. The adolescent version of Pahé appears self-assured while traveling from the airport to his sister's apartment via train; having already gone through this when he was younger, the adolescent Pahé confidently makes the journey by himself. Whereas his older sister Rose had

been waiting at the airport for him upon his arrival in Paris when he was younger, this time Pahé expertly navigates intercontinental travel from Gabon to France and intranational travel (by train) from Paris to Lille. The most important aspects of this extremely short travel scene are adolescent Pahé's familiarity with the customs of travel that effectively demonstrates his knowledge of travel culture and French culture and the lack of official government personnel responsible for monitoring and regulating border crossings. In fact, young Pahé (from volume one of *La vie de Pahé*) and adolescent Pahé, too young to cause trouble for the French state,[37] are non-threatening to France according to government officials, something that, once Pahé is a young adult, changes drastically. This change in treatment has everything to do with Pahé's age, the political climate in France in 1993 at the time of this third trip to France, and the nature of his trip as an international student.

As we can see from the various arrival scenes in France, Pahé's sense of self is very much caught up with his ability to move freely from one place to another. For example, as a young child the newness of journeying so far from home creates an experience ripe with new cultural encounters that are later tested when Pahé returns to France as an adolescent; his familiarity with French airports and the French public transportation system bolsters his confidence as an insider having adequately appropriated French customs to navigate the social and physical geography of France all by himself. Upon his third arrival in Paris, Pahé appears confident when leaving the airplane. However, once he crosses into the airport, he faces a much different situation than before and is stunned at being marked as different from other white passengers and lumped together instead—in the minds of the officers—with the other black

[37] Manthia Diawara remarks on this difference in treatment of black people in France based on age in *We Won't Budge: An African Exile in the World* (Cambridge: Basic *Civitas* Books, 2003), when discussing his fifteen-year-old son's treatment in France compared to his own. Since his son is not an adult and marked culturally as African-American, he is treated preferentially and does not face discrimination. On the other hand, Diawara himself, once it is known that his is originally from Mali, experiences harassment, embarrassment, racial profiling, and shame from all manner of French people (including taxi drivers and police officers), all of which sparks the impetus for the book.

Figure 1.6. Pahé is subjected to discrimination at the airport in Paris. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Paname*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2008), 35.

passengers. Interestingly enough, though there are some visual cues apart from skin color to mark the other black passengers as different (mainly in the form of various traditional African hats), the majority of the other black passengers, like Pahé himself, are depicted wearing Western-style clothes. Thus, Pahé is not the only non-white passenger to have acquired Western cultural capital and yet all the black passengers are scrutinized by the border patrol agents whereas white passengers not only pass through with ease, but are also treated as though long-time acquaintances. Whereas in the two earlier scenes Pahé's sense of self was grounded in the experience of being able to travel about freely, in this third voyage, his identity is externally ascribed in an unequal power relationship. This airport scene is common to many contemporary immigrant narratives specifically because airports, functioning as international spaces of national politics, represent a particularly unique brand of what Pratt calls the contact zone.

Pratt defines the contact zone as a place that "shifts the center of gravity and the point of view" where different subjects are present and where "their trajectories now intersect" (8). Airports are extreme contact zones as gateways of travel and physical spaces where political, cultural, and socioeconomic discourses collide and where difference is highly scrutinized and policed. For Pratt,

> The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (8)

According to Pratt's definition, the contact zone repositions the reader's point of view along the lines of the marginal and highlights the flexibility of interpretation. It also draws attention to the social, cultural, and political constructs and discourses at work in the contact zone that seek to ascribe an identity (usually an easily-identifiable identity based on stereotypes and clichés) to individuals. Pahé's travel scenes, particularly this last arrival scene, serve as a crucial topos that reveals the political, social, and cultural interworking of the contact zone.

In the case of airports, travelers' and travelees' places of origin become of particular interest as do their personal and political agendas. Social interactions between airport agents and travelers change with regards to shifts in internal and international politics. Pahé's differing experiences traveling to France and specifically his change in treatment upon his arrival in the fall of 1993 demonstrate the shift in treatment of immigrants in France as a result of anti-immigration laws and anti-immigration sentiment in French society. The complex history of immigration into France in the second half of the twentieth century was undoubtedly shaped by France's economic interests. Directly following the Second World War, France, in need of a cheap labor force to help rebuild and modernize the nation, welcomed workers from former (and at the time current) colonies (in particular Algeria) with open arms. However, during the worldwide economic crisis of the 1970s, the French government began implementing restrictions on immigration.[38] Despite legal measures to curb immigration, the trend to move to the métropole of the former colonizer in search of economic opportunity had already been well-established. By the 1980s and 1990s, France faced economic, cultural, social, and political crises that also lead to a crisis of identity. The drastic social and cultural changes that resulted from

[38] The work of French historians Pierre Nora and Gérard Noiriel has been instrumental in exposing and rethinking France's history of immigration. Their work on the history of immigration into France over the course of the twentieth century and the treatment of immigrants once in France has shed much light on and influenced discussions of official memory in France and of a national French identity.

immigration and the new generations of French citizens of non-European descent led to social and political backlash, the Pasqua Laws of the late 1980s and early 1990s being part of this reaction.[39] As a byproduct of civil unrest and animosity towards immigrants and non-white individuals, whether French citizens or not, racial discrimination in the workplace and in public places and racial profiling by French police and security agents have become part of the social landscape of quotidian life in France.

It is in the rise of this context that Pahé's third visit to France takes place. Of course, we must not forget that the historical moment of the author-illustrator producing the text is more recent than the scene depicted and therefore further influenced by more recent changes. In fact, this scene foregrounds Dominic Thomas's insightful suggestion that "if migration has emerged as a key geometric coordinate of globalization today, then so too has the concern with *controlling* the planetary circulation of human beings, particularly when it comes to the African continent" (Thomas, *Africa and France* 9, emphasis in the original). Not surprisingly, the complexity of this airport scene is reflected in the time spent on it—two facing pages are dedicated to the time it takes Pahé to leave the airplane and make it through customs—and in the change in tone of the narrator who becomes much more conscientious. The narrator tells us that the French airport has changed a great deal even if, like the previous times, the sky is grey and the weather is cold; unlike before, the airport is crawling with officers. In a series of four panels on the first page, Pahé depicts black passengers being stopped and scrutinized by the white French airport officers while white passengers pass through security freely, unfazed, and utterly indifferent to the aggressive behavior of the police towards non-white passengers. In one panel,

[39] See Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*. Trans. Geoffroy de Laforcade (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Noiriel argues that the rise of the National Front, a conservative and ethnocentric political party in France, is largely the result of their ability to capitalize on xenophobic sentiment that charged immigrants for France's social and economic problems.

Pahé raises his voice to question why the white passengers are not stopped or hassled; through the white passengers' nonchalance, Pahé seems to be suggesting that their lack of outrage at the unequal treatment of different people based on skin color is akin to compliance with and approval of the racist logic at work in the policing of France's national borders. The following page is divided into three different customs agent scenes, the first two setting the stage for Pahé's turn (Figure 1.6).

In each section, Pahé's narrative description of the discrimination at work is accompanied by a short sequence of panels that illustrate such unequal treatment. The first scene pertains to non-white non-European Union passengers (also categorized as third-country nationals), that is to say, African passengers traveling from Africa to France. The narrator exaggerates the disparity in treatment explaining, "[l]es policiers, tels des détectives, contrôlaient minutieusement *nos* passeports ce qui n'était pas le cas pour les passagers européens qui se la coulaient douce, c'est à peine si le policier jetait un coup d'œil sur *leurs* passeports. Le mec arrivait et hop il entrait en France comme dans du beurre" ("The officers, like detectives, meticulously scrutinized *our* passports which wasn't the case for the European passengers who slipped through easily. The officers barely glanced at their passports. The guy arrived and hop he was admitted into France just like butter") (35, my emphasis). In this case, the possessive adjectives *nos* and *leurs* that designate the passports of the different groups of passengers effectively underline Pahé's status as an outsider. The narrator goes on to point out that racial discrimination is not limited to non-European Union members and that French nationality does not preclude non-white passengers from discrimination:

> Avoir la nationalité française n'était pas un acquis pour tout le monde. J'assistais à une scène cocasse. Un homme noir, pourvu d'un passeport gaulois, voulu faire comme ses compatriotes: passer la guérite en présentant brièvement son passeport. Il fut stoppé net

> par les policiers qui se mirent à vérifier son passeport. Après un contrôle intensif les flics se rendirent compte de leur bévue. C'était bien un citoyen français!! (35)
>
> (Having French nationality wasn't a benefit for everyone. I witnessed a funny scene. A black man, equipped with a Gallic passport, wanted to do like his compatriots: to pass through the gatehouse by quickly presenting his passport. He was stopped short by the officers who went about verifying his passport. After intense scrutiny, the cops realized their mistake. He was really a French citizen!)

The substitution of the term *gaulois* as a synonym for French to describe the passport in question combined with the word *compatriotes* and the earlier term *nationalité française* are sardonic for sure, sarcastically equating contemporary French identity with an idealized image of Gauls. It also, however, gets to the heart of the disparity in the treatment of passengers based on skin color. Indeed, the paradox of a supposedly color-blind French Republic as enshrined in the 1791 constitution is singled out for being racist. While equal rights are guaranteed by citizenship, such occurrences of unequal treatment make up the fabric of everyday life in France. Highlighted in these first two sections are the gaps between contemporary French identities and the inability—and unwillingness—of the state to address such discrepancies using the excuse that the French Republican constitution does not allow for such differential treatment of French citizens.

These two scenes preface Pahé's own encounter with the security officers, eliciting the question as to what Pahé's fate will be. Will he be treated like the other African passengers or will he be treated like the black French citizen? Pahé's own status is ambiguous. Up until this point, as we have seen, young Pahé had been able to cross the French national border without hesitation or problems. However, at this point, the narrator has already aligned himself with the other African passengers through the use of the possessive adjective *nos* when discussing passports. When it is Pahé's turn to face the security agent, he puts on his confident smile, yet

the agent returns a silent regard tinged with anger and mild suspicion. Pahé gives us insight into his own thoughts at that moment that hint at his nervousness and uncertainty: "[j]e me suis dit qu'il [the officer] devait certainement me reconnaître. Etait-ce un ancient camarade d'école à Tours? Se souvenait-il de mon visage? Non !! L'interrogatoire commença" ("I thought to myself that he [the officer] should certainly recognize me. Was he a former schoolmate from Tours? Did he remember my face? No! The interrogation started") (35). The chances that one of Pahé's schoolmates from Tours would be the security agent in front of him upon his return to France in the fall of 1993 are slim and unrealistic. Yet, that Pahé would have such thoughts points to the betrayal he feels at being scrutinized at the border as an outsider.

Pahé's recourse to his time in school while in Tours when he was younger as a sort of evidence for his belonging in France gives a glimpse into the dynamic psychological and cultural underpinnings at work in the unique contact zone that is the airport. Having already spent much time in France without facing such scrutiny, Pahé feels wronged at being singled out. Though he has already claimed allegiance with other African passengers, he also paradoxically feels connected to the white French security agent, identifying with him and pointing to a potentially shared past. Indeed, the French school system, a key instrument in both the construction of a French republican identity and the French *mission civilizatrice*, facilitated young Pahé's access to French culture.[40] However, while Pahé gained intimate knowledge of French culture and customs via his time spent in France and in attendance at French schools while growing up, he remains visibly different from average French citizens and thus a threat to the stability of the French republic in the eyes of the security agents. Pahé's rendition of the end of his encounter

[40] The link between the French school system, French identity, and colonialism is undoubtedly part of French statesman Jules Ferry's legacy. As an advocate of French nationalism and a strong France, Ferry is responsible for passing two laws in 1881 and 1882 respectively that succeeding in making education secular, free, and mandatory for all French children. In 1885 he delivered his famous speech in support of French colonialism that stressed the moral duty of the French *mission civilisatrice*. Taken together, these two accomplishments had a major impact on the construction of a modern French identity that continues to today.

with the agent speaks to the hostility towards ostensible outsiders. After the agent reluctantly confirms that all of Pahé's documents are in order, by way of a greeting, he tells Pahé, "Bon séjour en France et j'espère que vous n'allez pas y rester longtemps" to which Pahé replies, rather flippantly, "Pour baiser vos femme?" ("Have a nice visit in France and I hope you don't stay long." "To screw your women?") (35). The agent stresses the temporality of Pahé's journey, drawing a distinctive line between French belonging and Pahé. Though Pahé is deemed an outsider, he does not remain silent in the transaction; the coupling of his expression of aggression that matches that of the agent with his cheeky retort speaks to Pahé's awareness of the cultural stereotyping that informs his mistreatment.

(Post)Colonial Education and Formation

Even though Pahé returns to Gabon multiple times over the course of volumes one and two of *La vie de Pahé*, actual depictions of him traveling back to Gabon are scarce. This almost complete absence of return scenes has the effect of establishing Paris, and by extension Europe, as a magnetic force that continues to produce an unequal dynamic between Europe and Africa. In this regard, *La vie de Pahé* resembles migritude novels wherein the trajectory of the characters is resolutely towards Europe. Furthermore, the attention paid to arrival scenes in France in *La vie de Pahé* corresponds, at least in part, to what the writer Waberi has underlined as one central theme in such novels: "le thème du retour au pays natal a pratiquement disparu du paysage romanesque africain: c'est le thème contraire (l'arrivée de l'Africain en France) qui fait fureur chez les jeunes écrivains" ("The theme of return to the native land has practically disappeared from the landscape of African novels: it is the opposite theme (the arrival of the African in Europe) that is all the rage with young writers") (Waberi, "Enfants" 12-13). However, whereas the characters in migritude novels usually enact a complete break with the country of their birth, as outlined by Chevrier in his explanation of migritude (Chevrier 99), Pahé does in fact return to

Gabon multiple times and there are two moments when return journeys are depicted: when, towards the end of the first volume, young Pahé returns to Bitam, not from Paris but from Libreville, to attend his mother's funeral; and when, towards the end of the second volume, he returns to Libreville from Paris after finishing his studies at art school to start his career as a professional cartoonist. In both cases, Pahé's journey home marks a turning point in his life: the end of his childhood in the first and the beginning of his professional career in the second. Moreover, the placement of these scenes towards the end of each volume securely anchors Pahé in Gabon, thus counterbalancing the ostensibly all-powerful attractive pull of France.

In contrast to these two examples, the other times Pahé returns to Gabon from France the airport arrival scenes are supplanted by school arrival scenes and not without cause. It is no surprise that there are many school scenes in *La vie de Pahé* for school plays a major role in most children's' lives. However, in the francophone postcolonial context in which *La vie de Pahé* takes place, schools in Gabon and in France foreground the difficulties of being caught between two cultures and track Pahé's dynamic process of identity formation. Indeed, the school as a major institution of the French *mission civilisatrice* remains, even after Gabon's independence, integral to identity formation for young people. Accordingly, schools play a recurring and important role in *La vie de Pahé.* Though Pahé does not spend much time describing his time at the *École maternelle protestante de Bitam* (preschool), the one thing he makes sure to foreground is his propensity for drawing even at such a young age. In fact, this first school scene is primarily comprised of images of young Pahé first drawing on the classroom wall, then on the playground cement, and then being punished for having drawn on the walls. In contrast to this first school experience in Bitam, the subsequent school scenes are mainly

characterized by Pahé's growing sense of unbelonging due to being different from the majority of his schoolmates.

Figure 1.7. Pahé's first day at a French school. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 32.

In particular, in the first volume of *La vie de Pahé*, his first time at school in France is purposefully presented in close proximity with his return to school in Gabon. Young Pahé's first day at primary school in Tours, France (Figure 1.7) is marked by the other children's reaction to his difference; Pahé draws all the students with shocked expressions on their faces, exclaiming in unison "Il est tout noir!" ("He is all black!") (32). Then, during recreation, the French students surround young Pahé and attempt to verify a number of outlandish stereotypes regarding African culture, obvious vestiges from colonial representations of Africa and Africans. Pahé purposefully echoes this school scene when, just a few pages late in the text, he depicts his return to public school in Gabon. Once again, young Pahé is singled out (Figure 1.8). However, in reaction to the teacher introducing him as "[l]e petit français" ("The little French Gabonese"), the Gabonese students shout, "Le Blanc" or "whitey" (36). As we can see from Figures 1.7 and 1.8, through analogous framing and composition, there is a visual echo between the two scenes that establishes a correlation between young Pahé's feelings of unbelonging in both situations. In

addition, the juxtaposition of the two similar scenes emphasizes the difference in quality between French public school and Gabonese public school, the first being cleaner and having more material resources for the students than the second. In fact, young Pahé encounters difficulties at the Gabonese public school as a result of the cultural capital acquired while in France; the other students harass him because of his accent and take advantage of his knowledge. In this regard, Pahé not surprisingly resembles other francophone African writers whose "in-between cultural position … can also impact negatively on their relationship to their 'African home.' For many, a sense of belonging to Africa is never self-evident and the adoption of Western narrative forms and modes of address can operate as a distancing process between both the author and his/her African reader" (Ní Loingsigh, *Postcolonial Eyes* 22). Though I would argue Pahé pokes fun at this tumultuous period of his life with cartoonish humor and vivacity, the discrimination and bullying he faced points to the underlying hardship of unbelonging.

Figure 1.8. Pahé's first day at school upon his return to Gabon. (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 36.

After repeated problems, young Pahé is enrolled in a mixed school originally intended for the children of Europeans living in Gabon and difficult for Gabonese children to get in to, and where all the teachers are French. The narrator points out that the mixed school so closely

replicated of the French school system in terms of organization, staffing, decorum, and curriculum that "[à] l'école mixte, on se croirait un peu en France" ("[a]t the mixed school, it was almost like being in France") (42). Because of his familiarity with schools in Gabon and France, Pahé is astonished at the outdated curriculum being taught at the mixed school that seems not to have changed since the colonial period. To mock the continued and, in Pahé's view, outmoded influence of the French *mission civilisatrice* he once again reproduces Astérix and Obélix in response to his teacher explaining, "Vos ancêtres, les noirs? …ce sont aussi les Gaulois!" ("Your ancestors, blacks? … are also the Gauls!") (Figure 1.9). That Astérix and Obélix metonymically stand in for the historical Gaulois and for the school teachings according to which colonial subjects learned that their "ancestor were Gauls," is telling for, as noted above, Astérix and Obélix have come to symbolize French national identity. Moreover, Pahé emphasizes the absurdity of such a notion through young Pahé's astonishment when one of his white school mates says, "T'es mon frère! Chic" ("You're my brother! Cool") (42). This metaphorical use of Astérix for the French *mission civilisatrice* is ironic because the premise of *Astérix* consists of a group of Gauls fighting off a colonizing force, the Roman Empire.

Figure 1.9. Pahé's use of Astérix and Obélix to represent the concept of "Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois" ("Our ancestors, the Gauls"). (Pahé, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2006), 42.

In *La vie de Pahé: Paname* there are three more school scenes that feature a more aware Pahé (in large part due to the fact that he is growing up) as well as different sociopolitical climates in the school settings. The first of these scenes takes place during Pahé's second visit to France to attend junior high. What stands out for him at this stage in his education differs from before, yet his own skin color in relation to the other students remains a primary concern; he now notices he is no longer the only black student (18). He even exclaims that one could even mistake being in the mixed school in Libreville because of all the different nationalities of the students, the exact opposite of what he had said about the mixed school in Libreville. There were other children just like him who were sent by the families to live in France with relatives. Here we start to see the social and cultural changes that France witnessed during the 1980s and Pahé's awareness of such changes. Consequently, a strong sense of cultural hybridity comes to the fore in the scenes of Pahé's adolescence spent in France. More aware of cultural differences, Pahé compares, contrasts, and mixes French and Gabonese cultural elements. For example, in one of his classes at his Catholic boarding school, he imagines teachings from the Bibles in his own way with black saints, a black Jesus, a black God.

The last two school scenes—one in Libreville where Pahé finishes junior high and high school and one at ISAP in Paris—feature a more self-assured Pahé who is driven by his commitment to drawing. Unlike the trouble he faced at public school in Libreville upon the return from his first visit to France, teenage Pahé appears well-adjusted and fits in at the public high school in Libreville. Rather than be exploited by the other students, he manages to benefit from his drawing skills by charging other students to do their homework for them. After high school, Pahé flunks out of the accounting school that his sister suggested he attend and instead he decides to pursue a career in *bande dessinée* and heads to Paris in 1993 to attend ISAP.

Surprisingly, even though Pahé spends three years attending ISAP, he devotes only one single page to his formal training as an artist before which are a total of twenty-one pages describing, in detail, his arrival in Paris (as mentioned above) and his experience as an adult living on his own there. One possible reason for this extreme attention to detail at this point in *La vie de Pahé* is simply the fact that, having made the decision to become a cartoonist, Pahé more than likely sketched every day and subsequently probably had lots of notes. Another reason is that though ISAP provided Pahé the opportunity to refine his technical skills as a cartoonist, his time spent living in Paris as part of the diasporic community in the 1990s also functioned as a kind of education, one much more influential for Pahé's development as a cartoonist *and* as an adult than his time at ISAP.

It is interesting to note that Pahé's satiric tone in the representation of his time in Paris in the 1990s as part of the diasporic community resembles that of internationally-acclaimed Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou. Whereas young Pahé's naïve wonderment in the first volume was reminiscent of Dadié's Bertin Tanhoe, art student Pahé living in Paris has an affinity with Mabanckou's character Massala-Massala from *Bleu, blanc, rouge* (1998) and with Fessologue in *Black Bazar* (2009). Pahé's run-in with a train conductor for having boarded without a ticket is analogous to Massala-Massala's turn to illegal activities to get by. In addition, Pahé's living situation surrounded by other African immigrants at the *Association Foyers Internationaux* resembles that of Mabanckous's characters. However, it is in his satiric and humorous approach to the representation of his time in Paris that Pahé most resolutely resembles Mabanckou. Both draw from personal experience and an intimate familiarity with French culture and customs to poke fun knowingly at the transculturation that takes place for immigrants living

in France while also critiquing the myth of assimilation that results in everyday injustices and discrimination that immigrants endure.

Dipoula, the Symbolic Pahé

As the travel and schools scenes in *La vie de Pahé* demonstrate, questions of belonging and cultural hybridity as they pertain to identity inform Pahé's *Küntslerroman*; they are also the basis for the *Dipoula* series, a fictional tale about an albino orphan set exclusively in Gabon. Like *La vie de Pahé*, *Dipoula* takes up the issue of identity and its relationships to skin color and to the acquisition of cultural capital. In fact, the character of Dipoula in a way represents Pahé. Pahé created Dipoula while in high school in Gabon upon returning from studying in France and he even published early cartoon strips about Dipoula in his high school journal *L'éclair*. Though originally Dipoula was simply a school trouble-maker and not an albino, he was symbolically an albino to the extent that Pahé displaced his own frustrations onto the character (Obiang 115). In his own words, Pahé explains:

> Dipoula est une partie de moi. Lors de mon arrivée en France dans les années 76, dans l'école de Tours où j'étais le seul petit Noir, tous mes petits copains blancs me montraient du doigt à cause de ma couleur de peau. Pire, à mon retour au Gabon, j'ai été confronté à la même situation mais avec mes petits copains gabonais qui m'appelaient 'le Blanc' à cause de mon accent francisé. J'étais donc une espèce de 'Dipoula.' (qtd. in Bangré)
>
> (Dipoula is a part of me. At the time of my arrival in France in 1976, at the school in Tours where I was the only young black kid, all my white schoolfriends would point their finger at me because of my skin color. Worse still, upon my return to Gabon, I was confronted with the same situation, but with my Gabonese school friends who called me 'Whitey' due to my Frenchified accent. Thus, I was a kind of 'Dipoula.')

As described above, in *La vie de Pahé*, the school scenes are mainly characterized by public opinion of young Pahé based on physical appearance—his black skin in the French school marking him as other and his French clothes earning him the nickname "le Blanc" from the other students at the public school Gabon—and convey his sense of unbelonging and in-betweenness. Though Pahé has welcomed the positive reception *Dipoula* has received from fans in Europe and Gabon, he has also stated that he prefers his original version (Bangré). Yet, in accordance with Paquet's suggestion that he make the series less specific to Gabon so as to address a much more international audience, he agreed to alter the premise and collaborate with French cartoonist Sti (and later with French cartoonist Louis-Bertrand Devaud) for the larger cause of raising awareness about the mistreatment of albino people in parts of Africa.

Ludovic Obiang has argued that the collaboration between Paquet, Sti, and Pahé on this series reproduces an unequal relationship in which France, a metonym for the West, maintains power over the project (Obiang 114). Moreover, in his article, "Le *Dipoula* de Sti et Pahé: un *Titeuf* mal noirci? Endroit et envers de la Francophonie à travers une bande dessinée franco-gabonaise" ("Sti and Pahé's *Dipoula*: a Poorly Blackened *Titeuf*? Place and Reversal of Francophonie through a Franco-Gabonese *Bande Dessinée*"), Obiang critizes *Dipoula* for being little more than a role reversal. He examines the first two volumes of *Dipoula*, focusing on the inconsistencies in the representation of everyday life in Gabon. Exposing the discrepancies between the image of Gabon presented in *Dipoula* and the sociocultural and political realities life Gabon, Obiang argues that while *Dipoula* might have the noble goals of promoting Pahé's talent and condemning the stigmatization of albinos in Africa, it also distorts the complexity of real, contemporary issues. Specifically, he foregrounds the sustained colonialist logic behind many of the stereotypes and clichés in *Dipoula* such as the outdated representation of white Catholic

nuns, an ostensibly all European school staff, and the inaccurate representation of adoption in Gabon since the Gabonese government restricts adoption of Gabonese children by foreigners. Ultimately, Obiang warns that through the Europeanization of *Dipoula*, or rather the Africanization of *Titeuf*, the series runs the risk of generating an insidious devaluation of Africans (114-115). However, I would argue that though he is correct in pointing out the lack of verisimilitude and the risks associated with unfaithful representations of life in Gabon—mainly that Western readers, without more detailed knowledge of sub-Saharan Africa will take the representations at face value—Obiang overlooks much of *Dipoula*'s potential to challenge Western cultural hegemony and, more importantly, to serve as a vehicle for exposing the continued pervasiveness of racist discourse in the contemporary moment and embedded in the visual language of *bandes dessinées* themselves.

Though *Dipoula* reproduces certain colonial-era stereotypes about life in sub-Saharan Africa, it purposefully engages Western readers with aspect of everyday life in Gabon precisely because of its affinity with *Titeuf*. That *Dipoula* imitates *Titeuf* is evident even if Pahé has expressed annoyance in interviews with such a comparison (Michel, "Dipoula").[41] The two share the same format (single-page scenes), correlating main characters (Dipoula and Titeuf are roughly the same age and physically resemble each other, Dipoula's hairstyle an echo of Titeuf's iconic vertical quaff), and a similar narrative focus (both center on the everyday preoccupations of adolescents). Nevertheless, imitation of best-selling series is nothing new and, in fact, constitutes common practice in the industry. As Beaty explains, "[t]he ability of series to construct a faithful audience—whose loyalties could often be expanded to include similar series

[41] "Impossible de ne pas penser au héros des cours de récrés françaises, Titeuf. Alors, Dipoula, un Titeuf africain ? Son papa se fâche: 'Il a le même âge, mais ça n'a rien à voir. C'est un orphelin albinos! Je pense plutôt que *Titeuf* c'est le *Dipoula* français!'" (Michel, "Dipoula," no page). ("Impossible to not think of the hero of French recess, Titeuf. Dipoula, an African Titeuf? His papa gets mad: 'He is the same age, but that has nothing to do with it. He is an albino orphan! I think perhaps it is rather *Titeuf* who is a French *Dipoula*!'")

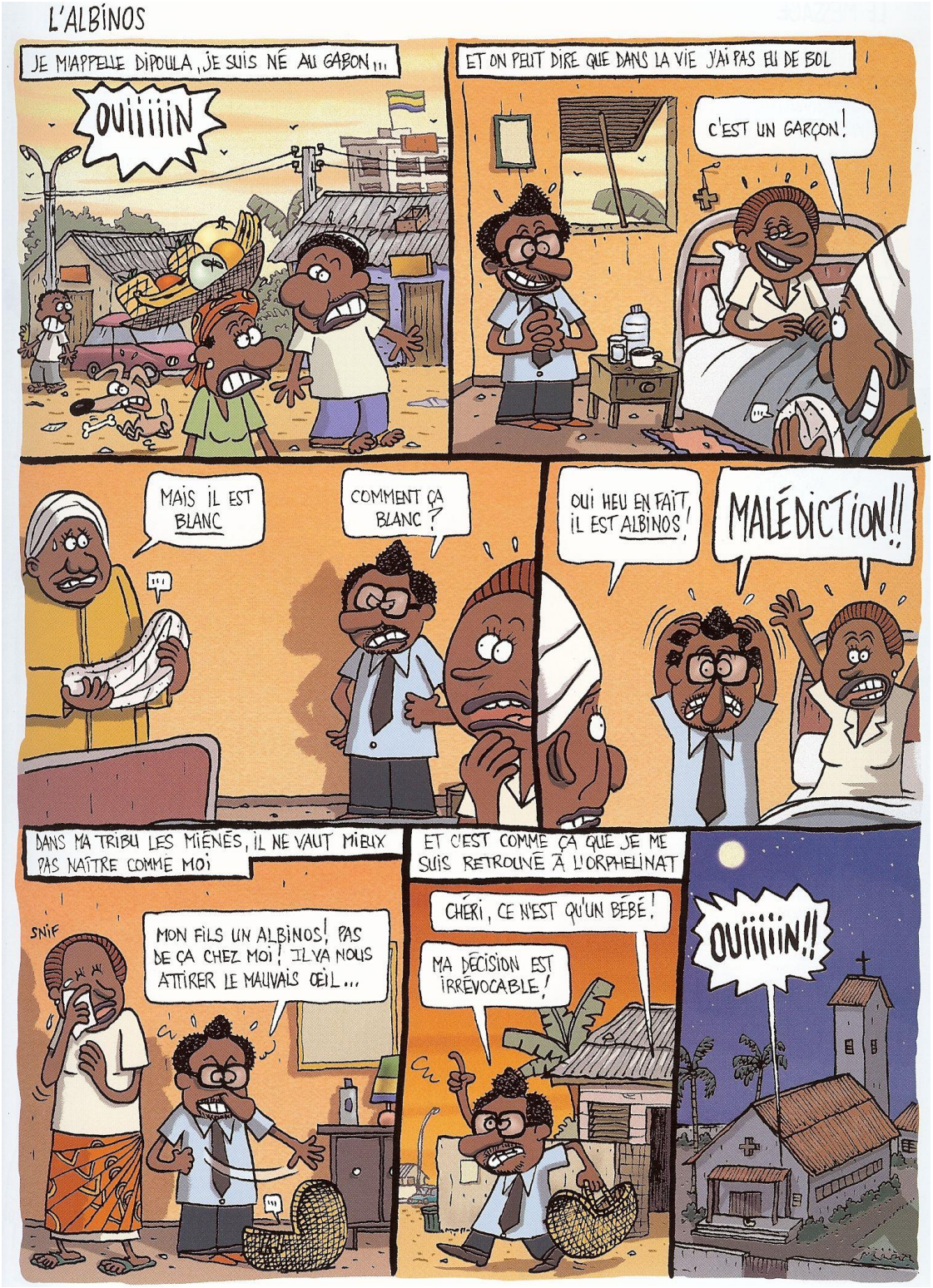

Figure 1.10. Opening vignette of *Dipoula*. (Pahé and Sti, *Dipoula: Mbolo*, Geneva: Editions Paquet, 2008), 3.

from the same or different publishers—created a publishing institution rooted in nostalgia, an inbred culture in which projects are promoted based on their similarities to previous work" (Beaty 172). Indeed, this logic describes the affinity with *Titeuf* as well as partially explains the decision to remove Gabonese specificity in favor of an outdated representation of Gabon. Furthermore, the choice to imitate *Titeuf* which, according to Beaty is indisputably "the most popular French comic book character since the creation of Astérix in the 1960s" (4), means that *Dipoula* will be lucrative because the audience is already receptive to the format. Ultimately, mimicking *Titeuf* functions analogously to Pahé's appropriation of *Tintin* and *Astérix* in *La vie de Pahé*: it permits him to appeal to an international audience while undoing the visual stereotypical logic associated with the original wherein Europe and European values are the focus.

Having an albino orphan as the main character of *Dipoula*, while raising awareness of the stigmatization of albinos in many African countries, carries social commentary on the unequal treatment of people based on their skin color. On the first page of the series, Figure 1.10, Pahé and Sti establish a role reversal regarding the sociocultural status of skin color. This first page tells of Dipoula's ostensibly unfortunate birth. His parents are thrilled at first when the midwife informs them that their child is a boy; yet when she nervously reveals that the child is *blanc* (white), Dipoula's parents' mood changes dramatically. Dipoula's white skin is underlined textually by the word *blanc* being underlined in the midwife's speech balloon and visually through the parents' surprised facial expressions. That Dipoula's father suspects that his wife has been unfaithful to with a white man serves as dramatic irony due to the title for this first vignette. Each page in the *Dipoula* has its own title and in this case the title, "L'albinos" ("The Albino"), cues the reader into the fact that Dipoula's father's suspicion is unfounded. However, when the truth is revealed, it appears worse that Dipoula is an albino for both parents yell "Malédiction"

and are visibly upset. The fact that both parents consider this a curse is meant to convey to Western readers the stigmatization of albinos throughout Africa.

To maintain the role reversal that white skin is aligned with suspicion, dishonesty, and malediction while black skin is preferred and celebrated *Dipoula* features a running gag in which Dipoula and his friends attempt to turn his skin black. These scenes usually include code switching through a play on words and expressions involving colors. For example, in the scene "Ébène" ("Ebony") when Dipoula turns green from being nauseous after eating a particular leaf, his change in color is ironically considered progress. The running joke of using various concoctions in the quest for a specific outcome is familiar to Western and African audiences in that it imitates other magic potions in Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* such as the magic potion prepared by Panoramix in the *Astérix* series that bestows superhuman strength to those who drink it. Though, since Dipoula is trying to turn his skin black rather than gain special powers, this variation has the added dimension of countering the trend in sub-Sahara Africa and throughout the diaspora of physically trying to lightening one's skin through cosmetic skin-whitening.

Dipoula: *L'albinos contre le petit Pahé* (*The Albino versus Young Pahé*) furthers this exploration of the implications of this role reversal through the relationship between belonging and cultural capital in the francophone context by opposing Dipoula and young Pahé. By the time this *bande dessinée* was published, *La vie de Pahé* had already been adapted into an animated cartoon series, *Le monde de Pahé*, that aired in France and Belgium in December of 2009. The animated cartoon series does not directly follow the *bande dessinée* and the cartoonish representation of young Pahé at this point is much more a character than an autobiographical representation of Pahé as a young boy. As mirror images of each other Dipoula and Pahé expose the complexity of racial discourse and how it is caught up with questions of culture, nationality,

and belonging since neither is completely black nor white and paradoxically both. While Dipoula is Gabonese, he is considered an outsider because of his white skin; in contrast, Pahé, though also Gabonese, is singled out as *le Blanc* due to his time in France and his acquisition of Western customs. This unbelonging based on culture and appearance is reflected in Dipoula's description of Pahé: "i]l [Pahé] vient de France… Mais en fait, au départ, il vient du Gabon … Bref, c'est compliqué! On sait pas trop s'il est gabonais ou français" ("[h]e comes from France… but in fact, originally, he comes from Gabon… In short, it's complicated! We don't really know whether he's Gabonese or French") (6). Dipoula mentions France first in his description of Pahé because he looks like he is from France due to his clothes and video game, which signify economic and cultural capital. Opposing Pahé and Dipoula in this *bande dessinée* highlights the economic inequalities between the West and Africa and explores the complex relationship between cultural capital, identity, and skin color.

Many of the vignettes in *Dipoula: L'albinos contre le petit Pahé* center on the differences between Dipoula and young Pahé. In the vignette "Supermuscleman" that takes place on the playground, Pahé pits his store-bought robot action-figure against Dipoula's homemade imitation constructed from found objects (19). Pahé's material advantage backfires when one of the projectiles from his store-bought robot ricochets off Dipoula's robot and hits young Pahé in the eye. Dipoula's satisfaction with his own homemade version seems to promote African ingenuity and counter the materiality of Western consumer culture. In the vignette "Tête ronde" ("Round Head"), soccer becomes the vehicle for investigating social constructions of race through code switching. Young Pahé tells Dipoula that it is normal that he missed a goal because he is white implying that being white is to be not as skilled at soccer as black players; in this case, white skin is synonymous with being European and black skin is synonymous with being African.

However, Pahé's remark is ironic since he wears the blue uniform for the French national soccer team, nicknamed *les Bleus*. Thus, even though young Pahé makes a verbal claim to being more authentically African than Dipoula, is uniform visibly symbolizes his identification with French culture and customs. Dipoula's insistence that he is both white and black seems to suggest, conversely, that Pahé is not. When Pahé then smashes the soccer ball on Dipoula's head, its two colors represent the in-between social and cultural statuses of both Dipoula and Pahé. For readers familiar with professional soccer in France, this scene alludes to the thinly-veiled racist discourse about the ethnic backgrounds of the players for the French national team by conservative politicians in France.[42]

The most recent volume of *Dipoula*, *Dipoula l'Albinos: La vie gabonaise* (2012), moves away from a discussion of identity in favor of a focus on the local culture of everyday life in Gabon. While certain colonial clichés continue (exotic big game animals in close proximity to the city and white nuns and teachers at the orphanage), there are substantially more references to local culture such as Dipoula's new hobby of playing *le djembe*, a drum, and the mention of celebrated warriors Wongo and Akoma Mba from Gabon's pre-colonial past. This change in *Dipoula* actually represents a general shift in Pahé's career. The financial success and growing popularity of *Dipoula* and *La vie de Pahé* have granted him more artistic freedom and permitted him to focus on Gabon-specific projects. In fact, in contrast to the first two volume of *Dipoula* in

[42] See Thierry Leclère, "'Des Bleus et des blessures', un documentaire sur Canal+." Controversy over comments made by right-wing politicians in France regarding the high number of non-white footballers on the French national team, *Les Bleus*, has been the subject of much debate in France over the course of the last couple of years. The political implications of mass migrations of people into Europe from non-Western countries and conservative political reactions to such migrations have created a situation far removed from the glory days of the team's triumph with Zinedine Zindane at the 1998 World Cup and then again at the 2000 European Championship. More recently, the multicultural makeup of the team serves as a vehicle for a racist political discourse touched upon by Pascal Blanchard and Morad Aït-Habbouche in their recent documentary *Des Noirs en couleur*.

which Gabonese cultural specificities were altered or erased altogether to appeal to an international audience, Pahé's most recent work does not seem subject to such alterations.[43]

In this chapter, I focused on Gabonese cartoonist Pahé as simultaneously exemplary of sub-Saharan African cartoonists and uniquely situated as a result of his international success. I demonstrated how his work, because of his in-between upbringing and his acquisition of cultural capital and formal training, engages with similar issues found in African francophone novels while also addressing the colonial legacy of Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*. *La vie de Pahé,* as an autofictional and autoethnographic *Küntslerroman*, provides insight into Pahé's formation as a cartoonist, illustrating his experiences of cultural difference, first in France and then in Gabon, that inform his visual and narrative aesthetic. Rather than dwell on the negative aspects of such experiences, Pahé's self-reflexive and satirical approach renders his critiques of discrimination and stereotyping in French society and in Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* easily accessible for all his readers. Indeed, his ability to appropriate mainstream conventions and reconfigure them is the basis for the success of *Dipoula*. Informed by his political cartoons, both *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula* invite readers to rethink cultural differences, how they are visually represented and codified, and the impact they have on social interactions and identity formation. The next chapter also addresses questions of identity formation in sub-Saharan Africa and adds gender to this discussion by focusing on the work of Ivorian Marguerite Abouet. As we will see, there are many interesting similarities between Abouet's *Aya de Yopougon* and *La vie de Pahé*, such as packaging and the role of autofiction, though there are also important differences.

[43] Recent publications from Pahé include *Ali'9, roi de la République gabonaise* (2010), a collection of political cartoons from his blog about the new Gabonese president, Ali Bongo, son of Omar Bongo (2010) and other collections of his political cartoons organized around a specific theme such as *Parlons le Gaboma illustré* (2012), which features local Gabonese expressions and idioms.

Chapter Two

Aya de Yopougon: Gender and Identity Formation in the Ivory Coast and in France

In 2005, French publishing giant Gallimard published, in its Jeunesse (Youth) series, the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon* written by a previously unknown writer, Ivoirian Marguerite Abouet, and illustrated by French cartoonist Clément Oubrerie. An instant success, *Aya de Yopougon* was the first *bande dessinée* to be published as part of a special collection at Gallimard Jeunesse entitled Bayou and edited by cartoonist Joann Sfar. In 2006, *Aya de Yopougon* received the award for best newcomer at the annual Angoulême International *Bande Dessinée* Festival thus establishing Abouet as the first person from Africa to win an award at this festival in addition to being one of a handful of women who have received such recognition. The importance of both facts cannot be overstated. After all, as Mark McKinney has argued, "[t]he gender skew in the pool of [comics] artists is at least as troubling as the ethnic imbalance" (McKinney, "The Representation of Ethnic Minority Women" 87). Even though McKinney wrote this in 2000, on the brink of Marjane Satrapi's emergence as a revolutionary voice in the field of *bandes dessinées*, Catriona Mcleod has more recently pointed out that "[d]ue in part to the traditionally gendered structure of society and in part to the overwhelming male domination of the industry, women remain massively under-represented in today's *bande dessinée* production—with the depiction of ethnic minority women making up a fraction of this already minimal proportion" (207). Although Abouet is in many ways a marginal figure in French-language *bandes dessinées* and in the realm of literature by female writers from francophone sub-Saharan Africa more generally, she remains for these two reasons a key figure whose commercial success has helped change the shape of the *bande dessinée* industry. Furthermore,

she has benefitted from and participates in the recent surge in publications by female writers from sub-Saharan Africa since the 1980s.[44]

Whereas Pahé's *La vie de Pahé* series thrives on complicating stereotypes and subverting them to expose the prevalence of prejudice and the inequality of the relationship between Europe and Africa, Abouet's *Aya de Yopougon* series draws strength from highlighting the similarities between quotidian life in the Ivory Coast and elsewhere in the world. These different approaches reflect also the professional formations of each; Abouet has stated in interviews that she had always wanted to write and publish accounts of her childhood in the Ivory Coast, thus giving voice to her memories and sharing them in a public space. In contrast, Pahé started his career as a political cartoonist working for various newspapers before being approached and asked to tell his own life story in *bande dessinée* form. Yet both Pahé and Abouet are representative of other African cartoonists in that they see the Ninth Art

> as an attempt to meet the need for supranational, collective communication between themselves and their readers—both African and European—with a strong local (African) tendency towards comics using the register of the everyday, autobiography and documentary. (Repetti, "African Wave" 28-29)

In choosing to revisit their childhood in their *bandes dessinées*, both Pahé and Abouet present images of an Africa slightly removed from today, yet still indicative of and in dialogue with the contemporary moment. While Pahé explicitly presents *La vie de Pahé* as an autobiography, Abouet is adamant that the main character of *Aya de Yopougon* does not represent her even though the series is based on her childhood in the Ivory Coast.

[44] See for example Irène D'Almeida, *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000); Odile Cazenave, *Rebellious Women: The New Generation of Female African Novelists* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

The success of Abouet and Pahé at about the same time speaks to the appeal of their work to international audiences and to their participation in a larger trend among African cartoonist.[45] Like Pahé, Abouet's success is also due in part to intimate familiarity with French culture, customs, and education as a result of her time spent living in France. In contrast to Pahé who traveled back and forth between Gabon and France during his childhood, Abouet was sent, at the age of twelve, to France with her brother by their parents to live with their great uncle. It would be fifteen years before Abouet returned to her home country of the Ivory Coast. In this regard, she is part of the diasporic community living in Europe; she is representative of the trend of francophone Africa writers, artists, and filmmakers who have immigrated to Europe in search of better economic opportunities and who have chosen to stay.

Set in Yopougon, a working-class suburb of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Aya de Yopougon* follows the lives of three young women—Aya and her two best friends, Adjoua and Bintou—and their respective families. The first volume sets the tone for the series by introducing a large cast of characters at the center of which are Aya, Adjoua, and Bintou. While Adjoua and Bintou are similar in that they both prefer to go out at night to dance and meet up with young men, Aya is more serious and informs her parents that she plans on continuing her studies after high school to become a doctor. The main intrigue in this first volume is that Adjoua becomes pregnant and thinks that the baby's father is wealthy Moussa Sissoko, Bintou's boyfriend and the only child of the Sissoko family who live in Abidjan. Though this causes tension between Bintou and Adjoua and between Moussa and his parents,

[45] Volume one of *Aya de Yopougon* came out in 2005 and *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, Pahé's first full-length *bande dessinée* and his first publication in Europe, came out just a year later in 2006. Both of these publications were commercial successes that arguably launched both Abouet and Pahé's careers with an international mainstream audience. Although Pahé had already made a name for himself in Gabon and throughout sub-Saharan African, *La vie de Pahé: Bitam* undoubtedly changed the course of his career. In addition, whereas the *La vie de Pahé* series, as mentioned in the previous chapter, has been adopted into a cartoon (*Le monde de Pahé*) that aired in both France and Belgium, *Aya de Yopougon* has, as of 2010, been translated into thirteen different languages and Abouet and Oubrerie have adapted the series into a full-length animated feature film to premier in the summer of 2013.

eventually Bintou forgives Adjoua and the Sissoko family begrudgingly agrees to a quick wedding between Moussa and Adjoua. The first volume ends on a cliffhanger when Aya and Bintou visit Adjoua and her baby in the hospital only to realize that the baby looks nothing like Moussa. Accordingly, the beginning of the second volume takes up the issue of the paternity of Adjoua's baby. Adjoua's father, Hyacinte, decides to photograph all of his family members to find some resemblance between them and his grandson. Eventually, while drinking at an outdoor bar with his friends Ignace, Aya's father, and Koffi, Bintou's father, Hyacinte spots a young man who looks strikingly like his grandson and who is, in fact, the baby's biological father. After Adjoua confirms that this other man, Mamadou, is the father of her son, her marriage to Moussa is annulled. In the meantime, Bintou has started seeing another man, Grégoire, who appears to be wealthy and who has just returned from a trip to France; Aya decides to help Bintou's cousin Hervé take a more active role in his future by teaching him to read and by encouraging him to advance in his job as a mechanic; and Moussa's father, Bonaventure Sissoko (who also happens to be Ignace's boss), gets a job for his son at his company Solibra (Société de limonaderies et brasseries d'Afrique) (Company of Limonaderies and Breweries of Africa). Once again, the volume ends with a cliffhanger. Since Aya's father had been working away from home, he had taken a mistress unbeknownst to his family in Yopougon; at the end of the second volume, his mistress and their two children confront him at his home in Yopougon in front of his family.

Starting in the third volume, the narrative and the artwork become more nuanced. As Aya's father attempts to make amends with his wife and his mistress, all of the young women in the neighborhood rush to have dresses made and their hair done in preparation for the Miss Yopougon contest that occupies the majority of the volume. Aya encourages Félicité to enter the contest and she wins. Félicité serves as Aya's family's maid, but in actuality is much closer to

Aya's adopted older sister. At the same time, Hervé has become a successful mechanic and has saved enough money to help Adjoua start her own outdoor restaurant where Bintou sets up a small business as a relationship counselor. In contrast, Moussa squanders the opportunity to work for his father and decides to steal his father's savings and leave Abidjan while his parents are away. Towards the middle of the third volume, Aya learns that Adjoua's brother Albert has secretly been seeing another man, Innocent, the local hairdresser. When Aya confronts Innocent about his relationship with Albert, Innocent confesses that he is planning to leave for France so he no longer has to live in secrecy and that he has invited Albert to come with him. However, Albert is not willing to leave the Ivory Coast and volume three ends with Innocent in tears on a plane headed for France. The fourth volume opens with the plane landing at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris where it (not surprisingly) happens to be raining. Innocent's struggle to find work and a place to live in Paris is interwoven throughout the entire fourth volume. After being invited to live with an immigrant worker from Mali, Innocent sets up an impromptu hair salon in the apartment complex for the wives of other immigrant workers, but is eventually expelled from the complex by the women's husbands for encouraging the women too embrace Western culture and values. In Yopougon, Aya begins her studies at the local university where one of her professors attempts to rape her and then gives her a failing grade in his class because of her unwillingness to cooperate. In addition, Bintou's counseling business and Adjoua's restaurant take off; Moussa's parents hire detectives to find their son; and Félicité's father, who lives in Ignace's home village, learns of her success after having won the Miss Yopougon contest and decides that he wants her back.

Interestingly, in the last two volumes, the narrative strays away from Yopougon to two different directions: to Paris and to villages outside of Abidjan. In the fifth volume, Innocent

flourishes once he discovers the neighborhood around Chateau Rouge in the north of Paris where there is a large diasporic community and once he saves and then befriends Sébastien, a Parisian who also happens to be gay. Over the course of the fifth and sixth volumes, Sébastien invites Innocent to live with him and the two help each other; Sébastien helps Innocent find a job and obtain his green card while Innocent supports Sébastien with his parents who are unaware of their son's homosexuality at first, but then learn of it after Sébastien's mother falls ill. In a divergent move, the narrative of the fifth volume also moves outside of Yopougon. On the one hand, Moussa's parents hire a big game tracker to help them find their son and journey through the jungle from village to village in search of him. On the other hand, Félicité's father ventures to Yopougon and brings Félicité back to her home village against her wishes. Aya, Bintou, and Adjoua enlist Hervé to help them rescue Félicité while at the same time Ignace is convinced by his wife to also rescue Félicité. In addition, Grégoire, Bintou's former boyfriend, in need of money, poses as an evangelical priest as part of a scam to rob churchgoers of their money. Towards the end of the fifth volume, Aya meets Didier, a young man in whom she is interested but who turns out to be the godson of the professor who tried to rape her and Moussa's parents find him in a village where everyone is celebrating him. In the sixth and final volume, justice is served and each of characters establishes a path of their own for the future. Grégoire and Moussa are arrested for their respective crimes and share a jail cell. When Moussa's father visits his son in prison, he learns that Grégoire's mother is a woman with whom he was in love when he was younger and that Grégoire is also his son. To make up for lost time, Moussa's father offers Grégoire a position at his work. Moussa is welcomed back home and, much to his parents' surprise, is bestowed a presidential award from President Félix Houphouët-Boigny for using funds to build maternity hospitals in remote villages. In the meantime, Aya's friends help her set

a trap for her professor to obtain enough evidence to prosecute him, which allows Aya and Didier to date without having to worry about Didier's godfather. The series ends with most plotlines neatly resolved and positive prospects on the horizon for the majority of the characters.

Through the drama of everyday life, Abouet presents a modern image of Africa far removed from the violence and devastation of political coups, famine, and disease. Abouet has explained that the main reasons for creating *Aya de Yopougon* were her own sense of nostalgia, to combat the negative portrayals of Africa in the media, and to prove that the stories presented in this series, though very much grounded in quotidian reality of the Ivory Coast could happen anywhere in the world:

> J'étais agacée par la manière dont les médias reflétaient systématiquement les mauvais côtés de l'Afrique. Je voulais donc simplement en décrire l'autre face: la vie quotidienne des gens, leurs joies, leurs chagrins. *Aya* est une histoire urbaine qui aurait pu se passer n'importe où dans le monde. (Cherruau)
>
> (I was annoyed by the way in which the media systematically reflects the bad sides of Africa. I simply wanted to describe the other side: the everyday life of people, their joys, their sorrows. *Aya* is an urban story that could have taken place anywhere in the world.)

Subsequently *Aya de Yopougon* strikes a balance between memory and invention and documentation and entertainment; it celebrates the dialogue between the local and the global and highlights the role of cultural *métissage* in the individual experience of identity formation. According to Françoise Lionnet, *métissage* is a useful concept that emphasizes the polyvalent nature of transculturation; as a reading practice, it "allows us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of 'clarity,' in all Western philosophy" (Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*

6, emphasis in the original). Like other postcolonial women writers, Abouet offers a polyvalent narrative that actively complicates the symmetries and dichotomies to which Lionnet refers.

In what follows, I first examine the context surrounding the publication and packaging of *Aya de Yopougon* and Marguerite Abouet to demonstrate how they are both marketed as simultaneously exotic and familiar. I then analyze the textual and visual strategies of Abouet and Oubrerie that challenge negative stereotypes of Africa in circulation in the Western media. Included is also an examination of how Abouet and Oubrerie counter stereotypical representations of gender and sexuality in sub-Saharan African texts that often pit the modern African woman against her community, a metaphor for the ostensible dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Ultimately, Abouet presents readers with a large cast of very different characters, each of whom are hybrid and defined by their individual choices informed by traditional African culture and also various Western cultural influences. In particular, through the characters of Aya, Moussa, and Innocent, Abouet offers alternatives to gender and social norms and foregrounds the complex and multifaceted process of identity formation.

Context and Framing

In his influential book *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*, Christopher L. Miller underlines the necessity of understanding the context of production of African francophone texts, regardless of the gender of the writer or artist, in order to counteract the tendency to exoticize the text and to attempt to examine it on its own terms. Furthermore, many critics emphasize the need to comprehend the correlation between text and context when examining works by francophone women writers from outside hexagonal France. Irène D'Almeida, in the introduction to *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*, argues that:

> If the writers themselves position their work at the intersection of text and context, at the intersection of art and sociopolitical issues, the critic cannot escape that reality and must show that imaginary representations here help women make sense of their social experiences, make present what is absent, give voice to what is voiceless.
>
> (I. D'Almeida 30)

Similarly, Nicki Hitchcott emphasizes the need for an analysis of context to grasp Calixthe Beyala's unprecedented success in France. Specifically, for her approach to the cultural phenomenon that is Beyala, Hitchcott explains that "[t]his emphasis on position and context underlies my analysis of Beyala as an exotic commodity in postcolonial France" (Hitchcott, *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration* 7). I too stress the importance of reading Abouet's work in context. Hitchcott's framing of Beyala's success in France as "an exotic commodity in postcolonial France" is useful for an analysis of Abouet and how she and her work are marketed in the West.

Abouet, who has lived in France since the age of twelve and is published by a French publisher, considers herself an Ivorian writer. In the postcolonial francophone context, these are important factors that have contributed to the success of *Aya de Yopougon*. However, just as Bart Beaty argues that to reduce Marjane Satrapi's success to being simply "the right woman in the right place at the right time, is thoroughly dismissive of her accomplishments" (248), we must at all costs avoid such a reductionist approach when it comes to assessing Abouet's own success. Instead, I would suggest that improving our understanding of the broader context of *Aya de Yopougon* serves to enrich an analysis of Abouet and Oubrerie's textual and visual practices. Indeed, such an approach would enable the investigation of mainstream French-language *bande dessinée* industry marketing practices and the manner in which they seek to simultaneously

domesticate and exoticize texts by ethnically marginal cartoonists. In fact, there are many interesting correlations between Marguerite Abouet and "franco-Cameroonian" novelist Calixthe Beyala, both unique examples of successful francophone African women writing. Nicki Hitchcott argues that "[t]he fact that [Beyala's] novels are produced by prominent French publishers … immediately distinguishes her from other francophone African women writers who are published either in African publishing houses…or with small specialist publishers in Paris" (Hitchcott, *Calixthe Beyala* 2). Similarly, Abouet's relationships with Gallimard and specifically with Joann Sfar are instrumental in garnering a large readership for *Aya de Yopougon*. Moreover, both Abouet and Beyala are often marketed as exotic figures who have a talent for introducing local West African flavors to Western audiences. In fact, Abouet recently published a kind of cookbook entitled, *Délices d'Afrique: 50 recettes pour petits moments de confidences à partager* (*African Delights: 50 Recipes for Small Intimate Moments to Share*) in which Abouet shares anecdotes around specific recipes meant to illustrate aspects of Ivorian culture. Included throughout are illustrations and short *bande dessinée* scenes drawn by Agnès Maupré. One cannot help but think of Beyala's novel *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* (*How to Cook Your Husband the African Way*) (2000) that revolves around the recipes included and prepared by the main character, Aïssatou, with the goal of seducing her neighbor M. Bolobolo.[46] However, the main difference between Abouet and Beyala is that Abouet's project focuses primarily on providing readers with an authentic representation of everyday life in the Ivory Coast that combats negative stereotypes circulating in the West whereas Beyala's work tends to center on the African migrant experience in metropolitan France.

[46] Abouet's *Délices d'Afrique* also resembles *Soulfood équatoriale* (2009) by Cameroonian writer Léonora Miano. Like Beyala and Abouet, Miano, though originally from Cameroon, moved to France indefinitely (in 1991) and published in France. In *Soulfood équatoriale*, Miano focuses on food culture in Cameroon and throughout the diaspora and provides anecdotes of how foundational cuisine is to culture, everyday life, and identity.

Abouet has a strong connection with a European publisher who has played an invaluable role in her success. Abouet's publisher, Joann Sfar, is arguably one of the most influential and prolific French cartoonists of the contemporary moment. Bart Beaty underlines Sfar's narrative and artistic talent in conjunction with the sheer volume of his work as the main contributing factors for his success at offering an alternative third way between mainstream industry norms and more obscure independent *bandes dessinées*. In fact, Gallimard's selection of Sfar to manage the Bayou collection represents, for Beaty, the inverse of "selling out," namely, co-optation. According to Beaty, "the co-optation of the independent cultural producer—either through incorporation, elimination, or conversion—reduces the status of the 'independent' to a brand within the field of consumption representing a set of practices or attitudes rather than an aesthetic and institutional position" (181). From this point of view, the Bayou collection can be seen as a specific brand. It is striking, then, that Sfar would single out *Aya de Yopougon* to be the first *bande dessinée* to be published as a part of the collection. Oubrerie has touched upon this in interviews explaining, "c'est vrai qu'ils [the team at Gallimard] ont été assez courageux parce qu'ils ont pris un peu de risques dans la mesure où Marguerite n'avait pas encore écrit de scénario connu et moi, malgré une quarantaine d'album jeunesse en illustration, je n'avais jamais fait de BD" ("it's true that they [the team at Gallimard] were rather courageous because they took some risks insofar as Marguerite hadn't written any known scenarios and I, despite around forty illustrated children's books, I had never made a *bande dessinée*") (X. D'Almeida, "Marguerite Abouet"). However, the choice to publish *Aya de Yopougon* is not without precedents—famed French cartoonist David B.'s support and encouragement of Marjane Satrapi a couple years before can be seen as a successful model—and it was a well-calculated and, as we will see, planned risk. Simply by publishing *Aya de Yopougon*, even without contributing any

explicit praise to be found on the front or back covers or in the front matter, Sfar endorses it, thereby legitimating it and attracting a wide readership.

In addition to benefitting from Sfar's indirect endorsement, *Aya de Yopougon* also capitalizes upon the high expectations associated with Sfar's work to provide readers with a text that privileges a high-quality narrative as well as high-quality art. One example of how *Aya de Yopougon* seizes upon Sfar's reputation can be seen is its format. *Aya de Yopougon* is not published according to the tradition format of French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* that is familiarly called the "48CC" referring to the page number, the use of color on glossy paper, and the fact that the *bande dessinée* is hardbound (in French, *cartonnée*) (Beaty 243). Yet this is not to say that it does not correspond to mainstream conventions. Rather, the physical makeup of *Aya de Yopougon* has been deliberately chosen to connote a more artistic approach to *bandes dessinées*. The format of *Aya de Yopougon*—which still consists of a hardback book, but that is smaller in size and longer in length than the industry norm and printed on thick matte paper with rich colors—can been seen as following in this trend. Interestingly, as the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon* was the first text to be published as part of Sfar's Bayou collection, its format and the high quality of the narrative and the art have become hallmarks of the collection. In fact, the format of *Aya de Yopougon* can be seen as a result of the small-press movement of the 1990s in European *bandes dessinées* in which independent publishers experimented with form to the extent that many experimental *bandes dessinées* were much closer to artists' books. As Beaty has convincingly shown, the small-press movements of the 1990s, with the success of such texts as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, have championed alternative formats that highlight the talent of the cartoonist and the creative force of the narrative. One of the results of this shift has been a valuation of formats other than the standard album by mainstream publishers such as Gallimard

who have adopted alternative formats in order to cultivate a more artistic and handcrafted aesthetic and, as Beaty argues, "to borrow legitimacy from the consecrated arts by creating special-edition books that are artificially scarce" (10-11). Thus, due to the physical format of *Aya de Yopougon*, it is easily accessible to audiences familiar with high-quality mainstream Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*.[47]

In conjunction with the material benefits from working with a European publisher is another dimension; Sfar's influence on the narrative of *Aya de Yopougon* has helped the series appeal to a large, international audience. For Abouet, Sfar's influence resulted in a somewhat drastic rethinking of the series. In interviews, both Abouet and Oubrerie are very open about following Sfar's advice to change the main character, Aya, from a young girl to a young adult; the ability to connect with a larger audience thus winning out over Abouet's original intentions of wanting to recount her childhood memories. In her own words, Abouet explains, "Au début, je voulais faire une BD sur mon enfance, mais Sfar, qui avait adoré cette histoire, voulait que je fasse un peu grandir Aya. J'ai donc pris l'histoire de ma sœur" ("At first, I wanted to make a *bande dessinée* about my childhood, but Sfar, who loved the story, wanted me to make Aya older. So I used my sister's story") (X. D'Almeida, "Marguerite Abouet"). The impact of this important alteration of the original project cannot be overstated. Sfar's suggestion to Abouet and Oubrerie effectively made *Aya de Yopougon* more approachable for a large audience by staunchly placing it alongside mainstream bestsellers in its focus on the lives of young adults. As

[47] Many other cartoonists in and from Africa, by virtue of the state of the industry on the African continent and the lack of mainstream publishers in Europe willing to take a risk on publishing their stories, must seek out alternative publishers that are typically smaller in scale and therefore tend to use lower-quality materials. However, the general move away from the standard format has given rise to L'Harmattan BD, a subdivision of the Paris-based publisher *L'Harmattan* devoted to publishing *bandes dessinées*. This subdivision, spearheaded by Christophe Cassiau-Haurie, has been able to launch the careers of many African cartoonists while sustaining others who have been struggling to publish over the last decade precisely for having adopted a less expensive format consisting of quality paper and colors, but bound in trade paperback covers rather than the hard-backed industry standard. In addition, Abouet has "convinced her French publisher, Edition Gallimard, to sell cheap, soft-cover copies of her comic in the Ivory Coast, and the series has developed a following there" (Berretta).

an innovative cartoonist who had already had a huge impact on the industry before presiding over the Bayou collection at Gallimard, Sfar is well aware of readers' appetites and interests and also of how accepting the market is of alternative narratives. Moreover, Sfar, by choosing to publish *Aya de Yopougon*, actively works to alter the industry by creating a space in the mainstream market for an ethnically marginalized voice.

Thus, Sfar's suggestion that the main character of Abouet and Oubrerie's *bande dessinée* be a young woman rather than a young girl effectively primed *Aya de Yopougon* as an easily sellable consumer product in the former metropole. In a very real sense, this shift in narrative focus rendered Abouet's vision more palatable—and therefore more marketable—as an example of a postcolonial exotic consumer product, to use Graham Huggan's term. In *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), Huggan considers the "global commodification of cultural difference" to examine "the varying degrees of complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained" (vii). Central to these discourses is the notion of exoticism which, Huggan's suggests, "may be understood conventionally as an aestheticizing process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar." (ix). Sfar's influence on the narrative and the packaging of *Aya de Yopougon* are, without doubt, examples of Huggan's "aestheticizing process." For Huggan,

> the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent *quality* to be found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. (13, emphasis in the original)

Huggan is most interested in how exoticism functions in the postcolonial context where he sees exoticism as "effectively repoliticised**,** redeployed both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power" (ix-x, emphasis in the original). He acknowledges that the term postcolonial is problematic and contentious, yet he points out that this "term also circulates as a token of cultural value; it functions as a sales-tag in the context of today's globalized commodity culture" (ix). Though the term postcolonial is not directly applied to *Aya de Yopougon*, other packaging elements in the paratext—specifically the preface to volume one, "Le Bonus Ivoirian" that Abouet offers at the end of each volume, and the short biographies of Abouet and Oubrerie accompanied with their photograph at the end of each volume—work to highlight the exotic quality of the text and of Abouet. It is interesting and necessary to point out that Sfar's active role in the construction of *Aya de Yopougon* is virtually absent from the text or the paratext. This absence also begs the following question: what, then, is included in the paratext and how does it frame Abouet and *Aya de Yopougon*?

Though Sfar does not actively endorse *Aya de Yopougon* in the paratext in the form of a testimonial,[48] the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon* is preceded by a short preface written by Anna Gavalda, a popular and award-winning French writer. Gavalda, roughly the same age as Abouet, has written many novels that have, in total, sold upwards of three million copies; she has also served on the jury for the International Angoulême Bande Dessinée Festival (Frey). Like the addition of Sfar's name to the *Aya de Yopougon* series, Gavalda's preface to the first volume works to legitimate Abouet's emergence as an important voice in the field of bandes dessinées.

[48] As mentioned above, Sfar's endorsement derives from his decision to publish *Aya de Yopougon* and in fact, on the very last page of volume one of *Aya de Yopougon*, there is a page that lists other *Bayou* titles at the bottom of which is the logo for *Bayou* and the description, "Collection dirigée par Joann Sfar" ("Collection directed by Joann Sfar"), thus symbolically providing his stamp of approval.

However, Gavalda's celebrity as a well-known French writer (read not bande dessinée artist or scenarist) goes beyond the realm of bandes dessinées and addresses an audience that might not be familiar with Sfar's work or that might not read bandes dessinées on a regular basis. With Gavalda's preface then, the hope is that *Aya de Yopougon* will tap into a broader literary market. Moreover, having a female writer preface *Aya de Yopougon* underscores the female focus of the text and Abouet's own unique status as a marginal voice both in the field of bande dessinée and in the field of francophone sub-Saharan African writing. In fact, Gavalda's reference to the popular American soap opera Dallas at the end of her preface—"[p]arce qu'à Yopougon, c'est un peu comme le ranch des Ewing" ("[b]ecause in Yopougon, it is a bit like the Ewing's ranch")—an allusion also made by Abouet in the text, reinforces the female-centered dimension of *Aya de Yopougon*.

However, in addition to highlighting the female writer's voice, Galvada's preface corresponds, at least in part, to Richard Watts's analysis of the paratexts of novels written by women francophone writers. Speaking about sub-Saharan African women writers, Watts argues, "[i]f the works themselves often blur the boundary between fiction and testimonial autobiography, their paratexts do not. They simply vouch for the reliability of the woman writer and of her appropriateness as witness to a particular event or, more often, sociological condition" (146). *Aya de Yopougon*, based on Abouet's childhood memories, is not an autobiography (an important point to which I will return shortly), yet, in the preface, Galvada is sure to underscore the authenticity of the vision of Africa presented in the text. For Watts, the result of paratexts that continually seek to vouch for the female writer's reliability "is that the women of the francophone world and their narratives are presented, at the moment of their emergence in the 1960s and far beyond, as transparent and immediately accessible vessels for transmitting, rather

than reflecting on, experience" (146). Though Watts describes literature, *Aya de Yopougon* is framed in a similar fashion. Galvada purposefully highlights the universal aspect of the characters and their concerns while underlining the local flavor captured in *Aya de Yopougon*, appropriating Abouet's vocabulary and grammar: "[à] Yopougon en Afrique, Côte d'Ivoire, comme partout ailleurs (plus qu'ailleurs), on s'engueule, on se reconcile, on rit, on pleure, on danse, on cherche une issue à tout ça et on offre du Nescafé aux sexy génitos" ("[i]n Yopougon in Africa, the Ivory Coast, as everywhere else (more than elsewhere), people yell at each other, they make up, they laugh, they cry, they dance, they look for solutions and they offer Nescafés to sexy young men with money to waste"). Galvada's list of actions and her use of the term *génitos*, defined in the lexicon at the back of the volume as "young men with money to waste," underline the liveliness of *Aya de Yopougon* and suggest how the local is delightfully global. However, we cannot ignore that the form of *Aya de Yopougon*, as a *bande dessinée* and not a novel, does somewhat account for it being "transparent and immediately accessible." Indeed, Galvada's preface differs from paratexts to novels by female writers from sub-Saharan Africa in its own lightheartedness. It lacks the anthropological information and colonial discourse that Watts argues is characteristic of novels from the 1960s and 1970s (146). Moreover, unlike such paratexts which "often refer explicitly to the history of women's writing in the francophone world…[and] also refer to the history of the presentation of women's writing, and in so doing transform the status of the woman writer," according to Watts (155), Galvada's preface lacks any attempt to historicize female cartoonists or cartoonists from Africa. The most likely reason for this is, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, if women writers from sub-Saharan Africa are few and far between, then minority women cartoonists are even fewer and further between.

It is interesting to note that while the original French version of *Aya de Yopougon* lacks direct endorsement by Sfar, on the back cover of the English translation, simply titled *Aya* (2007), published by Drawn and Quarterly is an endorsement by Sfar that seeks to legitimate the authenticity of Abouet's vision. It is not insignificant that the English translation is published by Drawn and Quarterly, a Montreal-based comics and graphic novel publisher known for the high quality of its publications. Drawn and Quarterly has been instrumental in bringing big names in Franco-Belgian independent *bandes dessinées* to an Anglophone audience. That Sfar's testimonial figures on the English translation of *Aya de Yopougon* demonstrates that whereas Gallimard as a brand is enough in France to attract readers, in the Anglophone world (mainly North America and the United Kingdom), Drawn and Quarterly purposefully appeals to their readers' more-than-likely interest in Sfar's work to attract them to *Aya de Yopougon*. Like Paquet, Sfar addresses readers ostensibly unfamiliar with Africa. He singles Abouet out as an important African voice and attests to Oubrerie's talent:

> Aya is an irresistible comedy, a couple of love stories and a tale for becoming African. This isn't a guided tour for backseat travelers: as you read, you're a Yopougon local. It's also a book about what goes on in the minds of teenage girls. It's essential reading. Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie bring back to life an Africa that's not asking for favors and that can stand on its own feet. Despite the lighthearted tone, *Aya* is a very political book. And I think it's an excellent time to invite readers to pull up a chair at an African table. (Joann Sfar, cartoonist of *The Rabbi's Cat*)

Sfar underlines the narrative of *Aya* and suggests that its authentic depiction of Yopougon not only transports readers to Africa, but also has the power to transform them into local inhabitants. He also emphasizes the feminine character of the narrative, almost equating the feminine

authenticity of the narrative with its African authenticity, for after pointing to these two elements of *Aya*, he then deems the text as "essential reading." Hidden from this endorsement is Sfar's involvement in determining the age of the main characters (as previously mentioned) and, as a consequence, also the focus of the series on young adult women and their love interests.

In addition to Sfar's testimonial on the back cover of the English translation of the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon* is a preface by Alisia Grace Chase, PhD.[49] As with the preface to the first volume of the original French series, Abouet's work is prefaced by a woman. However, in contrast to Galvada's preface in which Galvada's name stands on its own due to her celebrity, directly following Chase's name is the qualifying indicator of her status—PhD—that serves as symbolic "scholarly" caché that authorizes her to comment on *Aya* in a meaningful manner. Since Chase is singled out as an academic professional her preface effectively places *Aya* in the realm of study and critical attention rather than simply entertainment, as Galvada's preface seems to suggest. Yet, though Chase is an art historian, her preface does not focus on *Aya*'s aesthetic or narrative qualities. Rather, it historically situates the narrative for an Anglophone audience perhaps unfamiliar with the history of post-independence Ivory Coast. In fact, citing historian Catherine Boone's research, Chase goes into detail about the economic policies of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny to explain the sociopolitical and cultural atmosphere of Abouet's narrative. The effect of Chase's preface is that *Aya* comes across as an object of academic study while also, as Watts argues of novels by women writers from sub-Saharan Africa, functions to corroborate the capacity of the text to transmit a realistic representation of society in Abidjan during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

[49] Drawn and Quarterly has carried this preface over into the complete edition of the English translation of *Aya de Yopougon*.

Authenticity and Autofiction

Though Abouet is adamant that the main character of *Aya de Yopougon* does not represent herself, this is not to say that the series is not autobiographically inspired or that autobiographical information is absent. Abouet has stated that, in *Aya de Yopougon*, she is Akissi, the younger sister of the eponymous main character (Aka). In fact, Abouet's original project—to specifically recount her childhood memories—has been realized in the *Akissi* series, pitched as a spinoff to *Aya de Yopougon*, also published by Gallimard Jeunesse. In addition to the character of Akissi that represents Abouet herself, there are also other important autobiographical elements embedded in *Aya de Yopougon*. Indeed, Abouet chooses 1978 as the starting point partly because that is when she was living in the Ivory Coast and because it facilitates a positive representation of life in Africa for it was "when the 'Ivorian miracle' was at its apex: the thirty-year period, starting with its independence from France in 1960, when the country experienced unprecedented economic growth under the leadership of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny" (Lancaster 942). Abouet is very much aware of the discrepancy between the contemporary moment in the Ivory Coast and that of her childhood:

> Aujourd'hui, ce n'est plus le même quartier. La population a triplé et les gens sont aujourd'hui beaucoup plus pauvres. … Je me souviens que quand j'y suis retournée, après 15 ans d'absence, j'en ai pleuré: je ne reconnaissais pas mon quartier avec ces gosses qui traînent sans rien à manger... c'était un choc. (X. D'Almeida "Marguerite Abouet")
>
> Today, it is no longer the same neighborhood. The population has tripled and the people today are much more poor… I remember when I returned here, after 15 years of absence, it made me cry: I did not recognize my neighborhood with these children hanging about with nothing to eat… it was a shock.

Nevertheless she points to the need for counter-narratives to the negative stereotypes of Africa circulating in the Western media. In her own words,

> There are even people living there now just like Aya, even though the story is set in 1978. They want to advance their lives, they have good relationships with people and their relatives, and everything's going fine, even though there are problems with AIDS. It's everywhere. It doesn't only happen in the Ivory Coast, it's in every country. But people are still living normally. (Zuarino)

Sincerely trying to capture the intricacies of everyday life, Abouet has said that one of her greatest joys is when her fans ask her if life *là-bas* (over there) is really like how it is portrayed in her *bandes dessinées* (Cherruau).

However, we must keep in mind that *Aya de Yopougon* is the result of an intimate collaboration between Abouet and French illustrator and cartoonist Clément Oubrerie. In interviews, Abouet repeatedly explains that she does not draw, though she has stated that she provides the dialogue and page layouts for Oubrerie (Berretta). When asked how Oubrerie succeeds in capturing an authentic feel for life in the Ivory Coast, Abouet has explained that when he went with her to visit the Ivory Coast:

> Il s'est imprégné de cette ambiance typiquement ivoirienne. Elle ne s'invente pas. Cette ambiance, il faut se rendre sur place pour la comprendre. Clément s'est promené un peu partout. Il a même été dans les maquis, l'allocodrome. C'était important pour lui de connaître la Côte d'Ivoire qu'il a d'ailleurs aimée de suite. Cet amour, il a su le traduire dans les pages d'Aya. (Cristèle D.)
>
> (He soaked up the typical Ivoirian ambiance. It doesn't make itself up. This ambiance, you have to go there to understand it. Clément walked everywhere. He even went to the

> *maquis* [outdoor restaurants], the *allocodrome* [a specific maquis]. It was important for him to know the Ivory Coast which he already loved. This love, he knew how to translate it in the pages of *Aya*.)

Indeed, while Abouet creates a taste of the Ivory Coast with her characters, the local version of French they speak, and the social and cultural intricacies of everyday life, the texture and feel of Abidjan and of the suburb of Yopougon are due in large part to Oubrerie. One reason this is interesting is because while Abouet is adamant that *Aya de Yopougon* is not an autobiography, she has stated that "[t]he bit that's real is Yopougon, the joie de vivre that is everywhere" (Aka). It is worth noting that Abouet singles out Yopougon, as the authentic and autobiographical aspect of the series and yet this is the domain of Oubrerie, not Abouet. While the visual styles of *Aya de Yopougon* and *La vie de Pahé* differ radically, when representing the landscape of the Ivory Coast and Gabon respectively, both series take on a more realistic aesthetic as if to remain faithful to the local geographies and cultures. Oubrerie's visual aesthetic and subsequent contribution to the charm of the series should not—and yet often is—understated.

In fact, Oubrerie's explanation of how he and Abouet came to the project of *Aya de Yopougon* suggests a much more collaborative effort than Abouet's explanation. Oubrerie considers himself an active part in the conceptualization of this series. From his point of view, he and Abouet embarked on the project together. In his own words:

> Marguerite écrit des scénarios depuis très longtemps, moi je suis illustrateur, et il se trouve qu'on est mariés. On a donc eu cette idée un peu folle *d'écrire cette histoire ensemble*. Mais ce n'est pas qu'un hasard, c'est vraiment un sujet qui nous tient à cœur à tous les deux. J'ai été en Côte d'Ivoire moi aussi, et sans être un spécialiste, je pense être un peu qualifié pour en parler. C'est un sujet qui me passionne et même si on aurait aussi

> pu proposer son scénario à un autre dessinateur, c'est quelque chose que je tenais vraiment à faire. En fait, il y a un vrai angle dans notre BD, c'est justement de montrer une Afrique différente de ce qu'on voit d'habitude: de la vie quotidienne, quelque chose qui soit assez heureux, insouciant. (X. D'Almeida, "Marguerite Abouet," my emphasis) Marguerite has been writing scenarios for a very long time, I'm an illustrator, and it so happens that we're married. We thus had the somewhat crazy idea to write this story together. But it isn't a coincidence, it is very much a subject dear to both of us. I, myself, was also in the Ivory Coast, and without being a specialist, I think I'm a bit qualified to speak about it. It is a subject that fascinates me and even if we would have proposed this project to another cartoonist, it is something that I very much wanted to do. In fact, there is a real angle in our *bande dessinée*, it's precisely to show a different Africa than what one normally sees: from the point of view of the everyday, something that is quite happy, carefree.

I have included this lengthy comment from Oubrerie because it complicates the assumption that *Aya de Yopougon* is solely the product of Abouet's memories and it challenges what is repeatedly suggested in the paratext of translations of *Aya de Yopougon* and in reviews of the series, namely, that the series' success is the sole product of Abouet's writing talents. I am not suggesting that Abouet's writing and her contribution to the artistic side of *Aya de Yopougon* (in the form of layout design and sketches) are not without merit. Nor am I suggesting that Oubrerie does not receive due credit. In fact critics and prefacers make sure to include at least (and usually only) one sentence devoted to Oubrerie's artistic abilities. Furthermore, Oubrerie's career as a cartoonist has flourished as a result of *Aya de Yopougon*'s success. Rather, I would argue that though Oubrerie's passion and commitment to *Aya de Yopougon* is unmistakable and though he

is sincerely invested in the image of Africa that Abouet conveys in her writing, the series and Abouet are packaged and marketed in such a way that Oubrerie's role in the success of the series is purposefully downplayed precisely to highlight the uniqueness of Abouet's success as an authentic sub-Saharan African voice. Moreover, the representation of Yopougon and the local inhabitants in *Aya de Yopougon* are hybrid fabrications grounded in Abouet's childhood memories and in Oubrerie's visual renderings.

To complement Abouet's writing style and to capture the ambiance of the Ivory Coast, Oubrerie's illustrations are bright and expressive. Oubrerie's aesthetic is informed by his prior professional work as an illustrator for children's books. There is an unmistakable whimsy and playfulness in his approach coupled with deft restraint as we can see in Figure 2.1. The frames of the panels in *Aya de Yopougon* are hand-drawn and irregular; this visual strategy implies an energetic sensibility, it also suggests a handcrafted and artistic approach to the art. Indeed, these approaches to the visual dimension of *bandes dessinées* are hallmarks of the *bandes dessinées* in Sfar's Bayou collection. Similarly, Oubrerie uses a sophisticated and vibrant color palette, relying on matte colors with minimal shading "achieved," as Harris explains, "by applying gouache over his pen-and-ink drawings" (Harris, "Aya of Yopougon" 72). Though Oubrerie makes use of a wide array of different colors, often pages are dominated by a single color that changes to evoke changes in time (daybreak, midday, evening, night), changes in weather, and changes in the moods of the characters. Oubrerie's organic visual style supports the fluidity evoked by and associated with the urban lifestyle central to *Aya de Yopougon*. However, just as Abouet's writing shifts to include more serious discussions of social and cultural issues beginning in volume three of *Aya de Yopougon*, Oubrerie's art becomes much more refined, detailed, and realistic over the course of the series.

Figure 2.1. Example of Clément Oubrerie's energetic images. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 23.

Ultimately, *Aya de Yopougon* is a kind of autofiction best understood in conjunction with other texts by women writers from sub-Saharan Africa. While many specialists of francophone African women writers have underlined the prevalence of autobiographical narratives in novels

by African women writers, they are also quick to underline that the use of this Western genre varies from writer to writer and usually tends to focus on the individual's relationship to society. For D'Almeida, all autobiography is fiction because it reconstructs the past as narrative (35). More specifically, D'Almeida argues that "[i]n the African context, auto-fiction is generally turned into socio-fiction, and within African societies, recounting the story of the individual life is often a pretext for reviving a historical moment and depicting a whole society" (35). Madeleine Borgomano makes a similar observation and explains that African women writers "mettent au contraire, au premier plan, la partie publique (familiale et sociale) de leur existence et tendent à minimiser ou effacer les traits particularisants pour constituer leur personnage en modèle ou en type" ("foreground, on the contrary, the public part (familial and social) of their existence and tend to minimize or erase specific traits so as to establish their character as a model or type"); she also suggests that the "I" of autobiography in such texts is not presented as a unique and exceptional voice but functions, rather, more as "la voix d'un représentant, d'un délégué" ("the voice of a representative or delegate") (13). Aya is admittedly not a representation of Abouet herself yet this notion that an autobiography or auto-fiction in the francophone African context functions more as a socio-fiction in which the main characters are representatives of individuals works well to describe *Aya de Yopougon*. Embedded in such a strategy is the desire to challenge existing definitions; according to D'Almeida, "Self-representation is also the very fact of writing the self, of restructuring experience to make room for a new self-definition" (22). The comparison between *Aya de Yopougon* and literature by women writers from sub-Saharan Africa extends beyond the issue of autofiction to the narrative structure of *Aya de Yopougon* and to the many themes explored by Abouet.

Feminine Perspectives

In pursuit of the goals of undoing Western stereotypes about Africa and Africans and of immersing readers into the everyday life of young adults in the Ivory Coast of her childhood, Abouet has created *bandes dessinées—Aya de Yopougon* and *Akissi*—that have strong affinities with literature (fictional and non-fictional) by African women. In fact, I would argue that the preexistence of such literature has helped create a space in the metropolitan French-language literary market (including *bandes dessinées*) for Abouet to succeed for many of her narrative strategies echo those of women writers who published before her, thus aiding to render *Aya de Yopougon* exotic in a familiar fashion. Abouet's focus on daily life and the "femino-centric perspective" presented, to use D'Almeida's term, firmly place the question of gender at the heart of *Aya de Yopougon* as is the case with texts by African women writers. For although texts by women writers from sub-Saharan Africa vary a great deal, the main underlying factor that aligns them, is their focus on women's experiences of everyday life. As we will see, Abouet's organizational and narrative approaches to *Aya de Yopougon* very much reflect this fact.

The most obvious aspect of *Aya de Yopougon* that aligns it conventionally with other traditionally female-centered genres is the organization of the series as a kind of soap opera. Indeed, as mentioned above, Anna Galvada alludes to the American soap opera *Dallas* in her preface to the first volume. This allusion is later echoed in the text when one of Aya's friends, Adjoua, names her son after a character from *Dallas*. This might be a surprise for some since *Dallas* first aired the same year in which *Aya de Yopougon* is set. This illustrates that people in the Ivory Coast are up to date on their cultural references it also presents readers with a familiar genre. Like the use of the *bande dessinée* as a means of self-expression, the choice of the soap opera genre is an example of transculturation and corresponds with Mary Louis Pratt's argument regarding autoethonograpahic texts in which the author/artist appropriates and "*engages with* the

colonizer's terms" (9, emphasis in the original). *Aya de Yopougon* is often characterized by critics as a comedy of manners and Marla Harris even compares it to the American television show *Sex in the City* arguing that the series, "about four attractive single African women, may be read on one level as a kind of 'Sex and the City' transposed to 1970s Yopougon, a working-class suburb of Abidjan, in Ivory Coast" (Harris, "'Sex and the City:' The Graphic Novel Series *Aya*" 119). Interestingly, *Blues pour Élise* (2010), a novel by Paris-based Cameroonian writer Léonora Miano also functions in a similar fashion focusing on four young women and their personal relationships. Yet whereas *Aya de Yopougon* is set in the Ivory Coast in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Miano's novel is set in contemporary Paris. For both Abouet and Miano, the purposeful affinities between their respective work and soap operas, social comedies, and comedies of manners reflect Huggan's description of how postcolonial exoticism functions since it allows Abouet and Miano to balance the familiar and the strange.

If we look at the main narrative arcs throughout the series, we see, in broad brushstrokes, how *Aya de Yopougon* emulates *Dallas* and *Sex in the City*. While each volume is rich with multiple storylines, usually there is one particular story arc that spans the entire volume and leads to a cliffhanger. Generally, these larger narrative arcs focus on feminine concerns: pregnancy, love interests and advice regarding relationship problems, the Miss Yopougon competition, hanging out at *maquis* (outside restaurants where one can also dance) and going to nightlife hot spots to dance and flirt with men, and trying to get along with one's parents. There is even a short two-page vignette in volume four that switches registers and mediums from a *bande dessinée* to a photo-novel that marries a conventionally feminized genre with a particularly feminine side-plot. A young woman visits the relationship counseling booth of one of Aya's friends for advice on what to do about her boyfriend. The two-page photo-novel consists of the

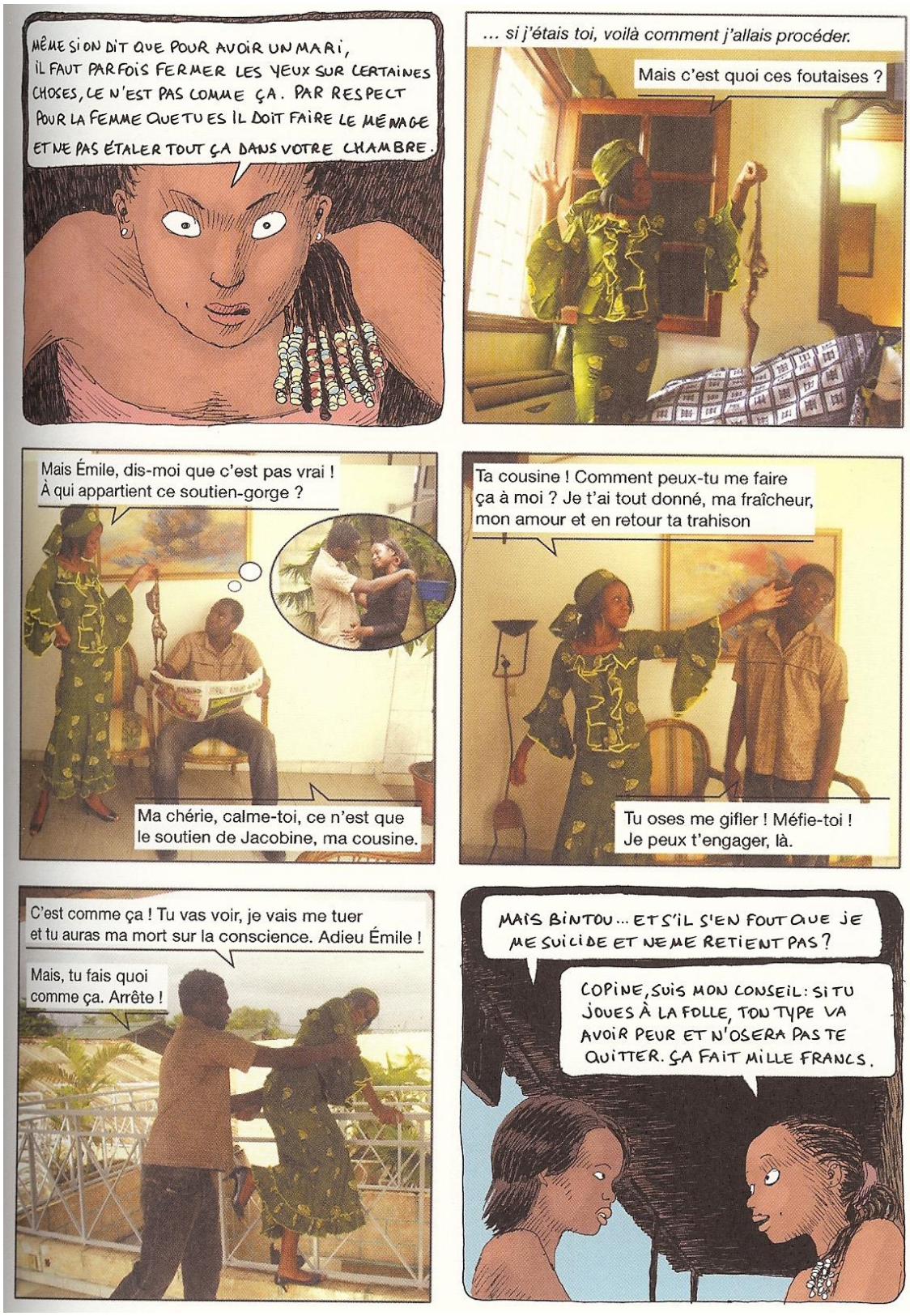

Figure 2.2. The mix of the photo-roman style in *Aya de Yopougon*. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 23.

young women's account of her relationship problems. As Harris insightfully points out, the photo-novel style "often the vehicle for clichéd sentimental plots… itself borrowed from Italian popular culture, is humorously well-suited to the situation" (Harris, "'Sex and the City:' The Graphic Novel Series *Aya*" 123). As we can see from Figure 2.2, the overly dramatic staged photographs that make up this short two-page vignette and the typed text in the speech balloons are purposefully kitschy; ironically, though the photographs depict real people, because of the artificiality of the people's posture and the staged nature of the photographs, they seem less realistic than Oubrerie's drawings. Likewise, the typed speech in the balloons during the photo-novel panels reads as less real and less authentic than the cursive, hand-written speech in the balloons in Oubrerie's panels. In fact, the use of the sensationalized photographs to depict the young woman's relationship problems in contrast to Oubrerie's drawings of the woman speaking with Bintou seems to heighten the young woman's overly dramatic take on her relationship and points to her tendency to see her life in terms of sensationalist novels and photo-novels.

Adding to the femino-centric aspect of *Aya de Yopougon,* Abouet has added to the end of each volume a section entitled "Le Bonus Ivoirien" or the Ivorian Bonus that serves as a (usually humorous) appendix that provides morsels of Ivorian culture. Though the focus of each bonus section changes over the course of the series—the bonus section has evolved and become a sort of public platform for Abouet to discuss contemporary issues facing people in the Ivory Coast and to comment on social realities—in the early volumes, Abouet provides tidbits of information specific to the everyday life of women in West Africa. In the first two volumes, there are instructions for how to properly wear a pagne (Figure 2.3), how to "rouler les fesses" or shake your hips when you walk (Figure 2.4), and how to carry a baby on your back "à la Yopougon" (Figure 2.5), each with how-to illustrations that render these markedly feminine activities

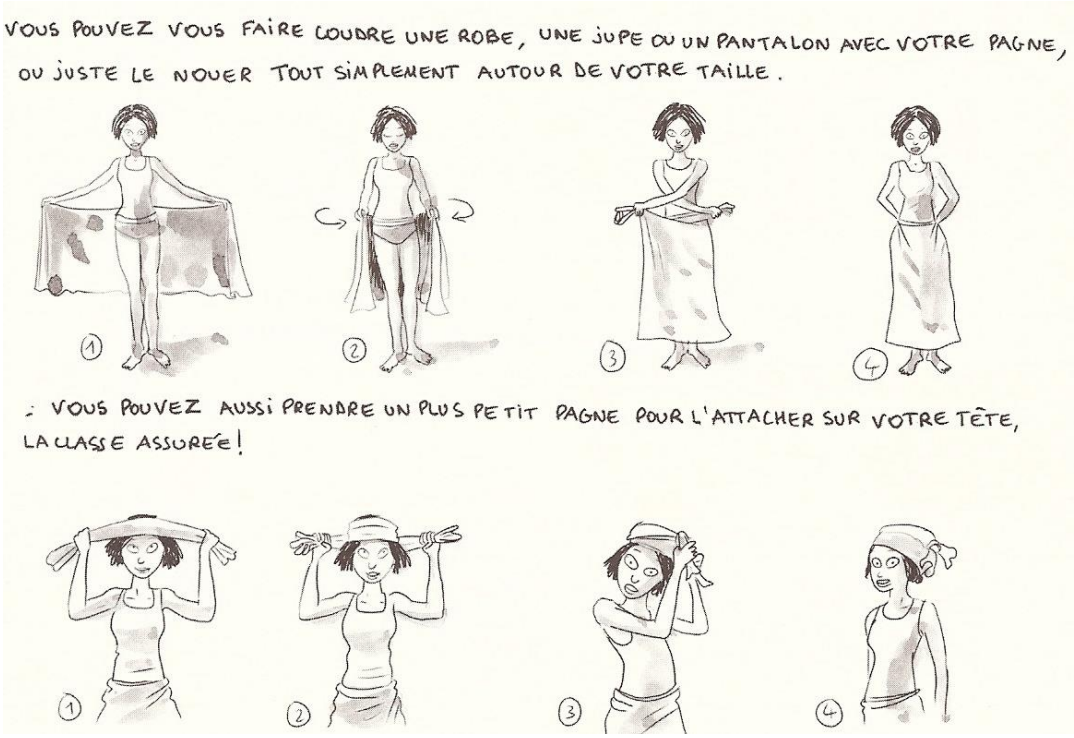

Figure 2.3. Illustrations for how to wear a pagne. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), "Le Bonus Ivoirien."

charming and, not unimportantly, easily accessible. In the bonus section of the second volume, Abouet also presents readers with a detailed cultural note in which she describes how family and friends assist in raising children in the Ivory Coast, thus explaining the local proverb "[l]osqu'un bébé est dans le ventre, il appartient à la mère. Losqu'il naît, il appartient à tout le monde" ("[w]hen a baby is in the belly, it belongs to its mother. When it's born, it belongs to everyone").[50] All of these are unmistakably feminine, and while they might be humorous, they also denote a rather singular view of women's roles in Yopougon. The image of young women projected by these tidbits of information, due to the topics selected, presents them as only interested in how to attract men, keep them, and how to care for the children that they will subsequently have. This more singular representation of women's everyday life, while perhaps

[50] All English translations of text from *Aya de Yopougon* are taken from the complete series published by Drawn and Quarterly in two volumes—*Aya: Life in Yop City* (2012) and *Aya: Love in Yop City* (2013)—and translated by Helge Dascher.

describing Aya's girlfriends in these early volumes, ironically contrasts with Aya and also with other women in the text. Indeed, as we shall see, Abouet moves away from such a gendered focus in the Ivorian Bonus section starting in the third volume.

Figure 2.4. Instructions for how to shake your hips when you walk. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), "Le Bonus Ivoirien."

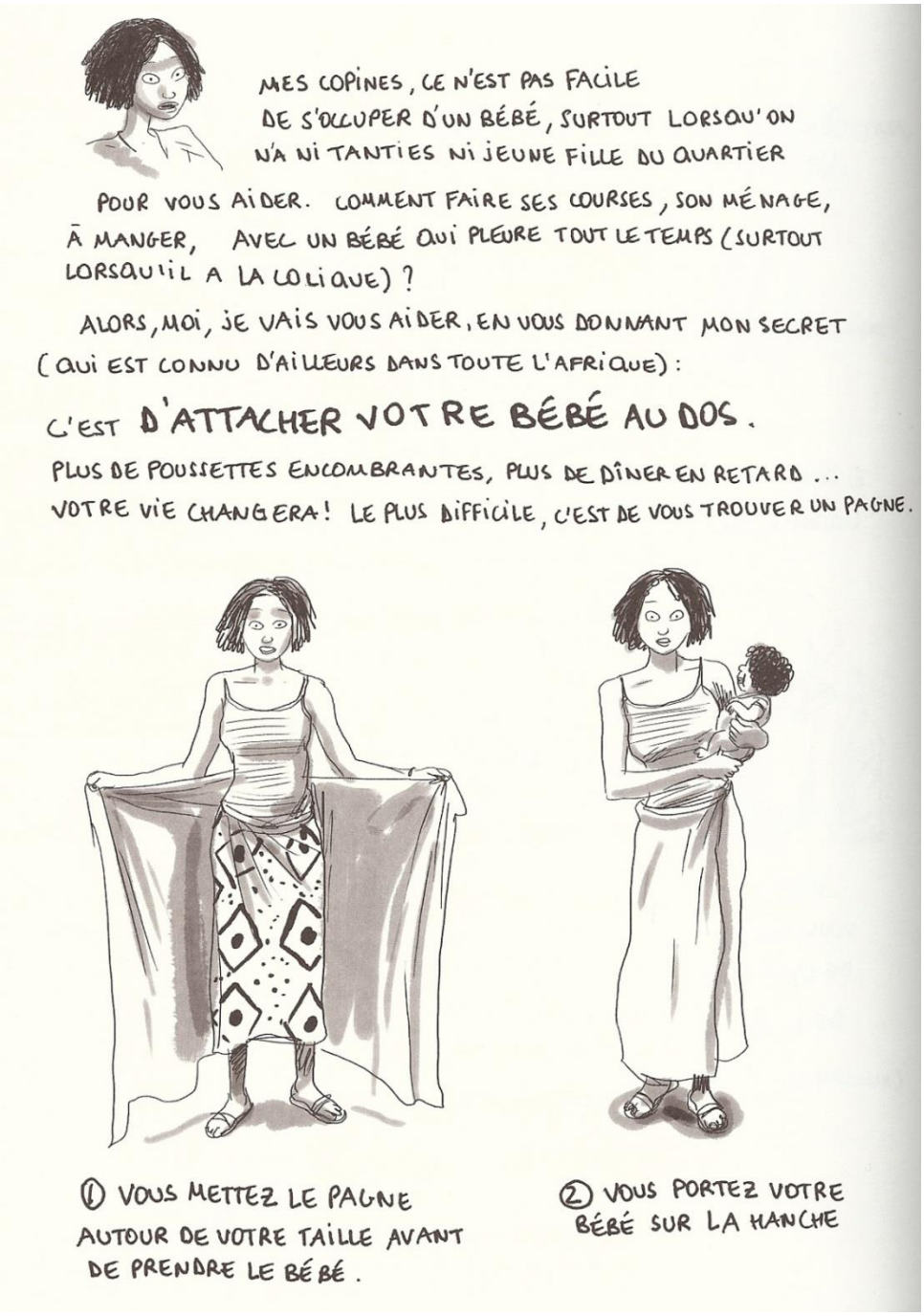

Figure 2.5. Example from instructions for how to carry a baby on your back. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), "Le Bonus Ivoirien."

The Local and the Global

It is in these last few pages that Abouet underlines the specificity of the local whereas the narrative itself oscillates between the local and the global. The cultural and social atmosphere of Abidjan and Yopougon are captured visually by Oubrerie while the characters, their mannerisms,

and their speech provide an insider's view of local culture. In fact, the combination of these various elements, including the Ivorian Bonus, reflects textual strategies used by postcolonial women writers as characterized by Françoise Lionnet:

> To represent their regional cultural realities, [postcolonial women writers] make use of appropriative techniques that interweave traditions and languages. The way they portray characters transforms the way they see the realities of their own worlds, as well as the way we—readers who are outsiders to those regions or cultures—will in turn perceive them. (Lionnet, Postcolonial Representations 18, emphasis in the original)

The formalistic qualities of *bandes dessinées*—namely the co-presence and interaction of text and images and also the interaction of multiple panels on the page—lend themselves well to transforming how readers see life in the Ivory Coast. Though the focus of each Ivorian Bonus changes over the course of the series, there are two elements that repeatedly reappear and that are exclusively linked to local culture: a lexicon of terms used throughout the narrative and recipes for local dishes presented by characters. The recipes are meant to provide readers with local flavors in a literal sense. Interestingly, the recipes are presented by both female and male characters. The lexicon of terms and the speech of the characters throughout *Aya de Yopougon* provide, slightly more abstractly, an aural feel of life in Yopougon by granting readers access to the linguistic richness at work in the narrative. Harris describes the speech of the characters as "a slang-filled Ivorian French dialect (nouchi) that includes loan words from African languages, repurposed French words, and a liberal sprinkling of colorful Ivorian proverbs" (Harris, "'Sex and the City:' The Graphic Novel Series *Aya*" 119). According to Abouet, nouchi is an Africanized French that is spoken with smile and invented by the youth in the streets and Abouet admits to employing it rather soberly in the text so as not to overwhelm it (Cristèle D.) I would

like to point out that the use of proverbs and nouchi varies from character to character—depending on economic and educational background—and from situation to situation—characters speak with close friends and family members differently than they do with work colleagues. For example, in volume one of *Aya de Yopougon*, one of Aya's friends, Adjoua, at one point scolds Aya for thinking she is the only one who knows how to speak "gros français compliqué" ("use big words") (49).

Interestingly, Harris suggests that the hybridity (visual, linguistic, and narrative) of *Aya de Yopougon* "underscores the universal claims that Abouet makes for her story… [and also] exposes ironic discrepancies between these cultural influences and the lives of her characters" (119). It is maintaining the balance between the individual and the universal, the local and the global in which the power of *Aya de Yopougon* lies. According to Stuart Hall, "[g]lobalization is a process of profound unevenness" (Hall, "The Local and the Global" 182). For Hall, "the margin, can only come into representation by, as it were, recovering their own hidden histories. They have to try to retell the story from the bottom up, instead of from the top down" (Hall "The Local and the Global," 184). Abouet's cast of characters in *Aya de Yopougon* seems to address Hall's uneven globalization and also his call "to retell the story from the bottom up." For, to demonstrate and explore the unevenness of globalization and the wide range of reactions to such unevenness, *Aya de Yopougon*, in addition to being multiphonic (the characters use nouchi and slang to varying degrees) is also polyphonic. In this regard, Abouet can be seen as following in the footsteps of francophone African women writers according to Nicki Hitchcott's characterization of their texts in *Women Writers in Francophone Africa*: "the different styles of these writings dislocate the French language," and subsequently, "[s]ometimes violent, sometimes lyrical, the texts of the new generation mix registers as well as genres, moving away

from the univocal autobiographical narratives and creating a multiplicity of voices that reflect the multifaceted nature of African female subjectivity" (27). African francophone women writers generate polyphonic narratives through the use of different discursive techniques that effect a multifaceted female subjectivity. For example, Cameroonian Werewere Liking often mixes genres as in *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail (journal d'une misovire…*) (*It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral (Journal of a Misovire)*) and even uses multiple narrators in *L'amour-cent-vies* (*Love-across-a-Hundred-Lives*) whereas Ivorian Véronique Tadjo's (Ivory Coast) prose often verges on poetry and her texts, *A Vol d'oiseau* (*As the Crow Flies*) and *A l'ombre d'Imana* (*In the Shadow of Imana*) function as collections of vignettes (usually by unnamed narrators) that generate a rich mosaic of understanding of individual experience in Africa (whether in West Africa as is the case in *A Vol d'oiseau* or during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and its aftermath as in *A l'ombre d'Imana*). In contrast, the visual dimension of *bandes dessinée* allows Abouet to construct a polyphonic narrative in which each of the characters speaks for themselves. Of course, there is much more to the polyphonic nature of *Aya de Yopougon* than what the formal elements of the Ninth Art have to offer; each of the characters, female and male, have their own opinions and bring different points of view to the narrative.

According to Odile Cazenave, polyphonic narratives and effects in novels by women writers since the 1990s represent alternative approaches for women writers to move beyond simply attesting to the negative aftermath of colonialism; rather, Cazenave suggests that such novels "offer a new gaze turned to the future, actively reflecting on the elements necessary for a transformation of African society and a reevaluation of woman's status within that society" (202). Though *Aya de Yopougon* focuses on the past, it nevertheless does so with an eye toward the future, as I mentioned earlier. In fact, because of the range of strong female characters, *Aya*

de Yopougon, like contemporary literature by African francophone women, as Hitchcott argues, "resists the compartmentalization of feminine identity in a predetermined semantic space," and, rather, "begins to create a new space for an analysis of cultural identity which attempts to overcome the binary and articulate the repressed and the silent: the unspoken selves. The plural nature of the feminine identity that evolves provides a useful model for feminism on a universal scale." (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 159). Indeed, Abouet and Oubrerie's combined efforts to represent the "plural nature of the feminine identity" in *Aya de Yopougon* through Aya and her friends and their families helps to attract readers through identification with the characters. Moreover, it presents readers with an array of characters who blend local tradition with international influences to varying degrees.

Abouet's cast of characters purposefully echoes that of Western soap operas in that it focuses on a handful of young adults (Aya and her friends) and their families, specifically their parents. Interestingly, the only grandparent other than Adjoua's parents—who become grandparents at the beginning of the second volume when Adjoua gives birth to a baby boy—appears at the very end of the series in volume six and is the eldest character of any importance. Extended family members in *Aya de Yopougon* consist almost exclusively of second wives, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The effect is a focus on only two generations: parents and children. This choice squarely anchors *Aya de Yopougon* in a postcolonial setting by effectively limiting the cast to individuals who were born just before or after independence with no characters possessing intimate memories of French colonization. Furthermore, this choice precisely places emphasis on the mixing of the local with the global and on how each individual engages with such mixing and in so doing, once again establishes an important correlation between Abouet's work and that of other African francophone women writers.

The focus on the lives of these individuals in the sociocultural reality of Yopougon brings the universal into dialogue with the local—a complex relationship that has often been presented as a dichotomy between modernity (read the universal and the West) and traditionalism (read the local and, in this case, the Ivory Coast), but that is treated by Abouet differently. Hitchcott suggests that in many novels by francophone African women writers, "the contemporary African woman is presented as a problematic figure trying to bridge the gap between 'traditional' socio-cultural expectations and 'modern' ideologies" (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 10). However, in *Aya de Yopougon*, Abouet presents an array of different women, many of whom do not correspond to Hitchcott's characterization of "the contemporary African woman." While Aya and her girlfriends all struggle to balance their own aspirations with those of their parents, Abouet is careful to demonstrate that each character's desires are motivated by an overlapping of traditional expectations and modern ideologies. For example, Aya's mother, Fanta, has a job as a secretary for a white businessman living in the Ivory Coast while simultaneously working on her own time as a healer skilled in traditional healing methods.[51] That Aya wishes to become a doctor seems like a logical decision informed by her mother's success at maintaining her two professions. Indeed, African women's access to professional careers during this time, at least in urban centers, was not unheard of and, in fact, shows up in *Aya de Yopougon* as well as *La vie de Pahé*. If we remember from the last chapter, it was because his older sister, Rose, was pursuing a medical degree in France that Pahé had the opportunity to travel to and live in France at a young age.

[51] Surprisingly, Fanta's boss, pictured only once in the whole series, is the only white character depicted as living in the Ivory Coast. While some characters mention famous white individuals (French President Giscard d'Estaing and characters from *Dallas*), no other white characters are pictured in Yopougon or Abidjan, though of course there are many white characters in the scenes that depict Innocent's experiences in France. This conscious choice is not to say that there were no Westerners living in the Ivory Coast in the late 1970s and early 1980s.; it does, however, suggest that Abouet, and by extension people living in Yopougon, did not have much contact with Western people while growing up in the Ivory Coast.

Abouet does address the unevenness of globalization and the tension between modernity and a more traditional lifestyle, but this tension is best understood through the representation of Yopougon itself. Yopougon is no doubt an important central protagonist. Although the title of the series is *Aya de Yopougon*, Aya wanders in and out of the tale while the urban setting of Yopougon is what binds the various narrative threads.[52] This is no surprise for the urban areas of decolonized Africa are contact zones where the mixing of tradition and modernity is most visible, where the public and private spheres intermingle due to their close proximity, and where new strategies of co-existence emerge as a result of cultural *métissage*. Accordingly, Oubrerie offers many vibrant images of Yopougon that tend to be more realistic in their verisimilitude than images related solely to plot development. Specifically, the splash pages that interrupt the flow of the narrative at regular intervals are often landscape images such as in Figure 2.6. The fact that the vast majority of pages consist of six panels with little variation of layout means that the splash pages necessarily have more impact. Indeed, the splash pages function as moments of sostenuto within the text. Hilary Chute has remarked, "cartoonists such as Chris Ware and Ben Katchor, among others, have compared the form of comics with music, with its beats and syncopation, and the orchestrated tension of its various phrases and parts" (7). This musical analogy works well with *Aya de Yopougon* as there are moments of emotional crescendo and decrescendo in the plot, which are enhanced by Oubrerie's use of colors and varying degrees of verisimilitude (a slightly more exaggerated and cartoonish style are used in moments of heightened emotions whereas solemn and serious moments tend to be more detailed and

[52] Unlike the original French versions of this series, the English translations of the first three volumes have each been given a different title to differentiate them: *Aya* (2007), *Aya of Yop City* (2008), and *Aya: The Secrets Come Out* (2009). These alternative titles point more directly to the character of Aya and the narrative content of the series rather than maintain a focus on the setting as the original series does. Similarly, Drawn and Quarterly later combined the six volumes of *Aya de Yopougon* into two English language editions respectively titled *Aya: Life in Yop City* (2012) and *Aya: Love in Yop City* (2013). Though these two new titles retain the geographic location of Yop City, there is still an emphasis on narrative. Furthermore, the use of the nickname Yop City removes the specificity of Yopougon, which seems to diminish the verisimilitude of the text.

Figure 2.6. Detailed splash page of Yopougon. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 3, Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 100.

realistic). With regards to representations of Yopougon and the surrounding areas, the splash pages often establish the tone for following scenes and provide a sense of pause for the reader to indulge in the landscape of the Ivory Coast. Several splash pages are either devoid of text or are accompanied by very little text, and help create an intricate depiction of the world in which Aya and her friends and family live.

Visually, Yopougon stands in contrast to both more modernized and developed areas of Abidjan and to villages where a more traditional lifestyle presides. Located in Abidjan facing skyscrapers and government buildings across a wide street lined with electric streetlamps, the Sissoko family home is a visual sore thumb, as we can see in Figure 2.7. In *Aya de Yopougon*, the Sissoko family—Moussa (a friend of Aya's) and his parents Bonaventure and Simone—metonymically represent an extreme version of modernity. For the Sissokos, in opposition to the other families in *Aya de Yopougon*, modernity is synonymous with Westernization. Bonaventure Sissoko, the patriarch of the family, represents those wishing to advance their socio-economic and political status through the adoption of Western aesthetics and mentality. Not only does the Sissoko family have a Western-style house, in accordance with the Western capitalist notion that bigger is better, as was undoubtedly the case in the television show *Dallas*, the family's house, in its attempt to be the biggest and most Westernized, is comical in its exaggeration of form and the shocking choice of bright pink for its exterior color, impossible to miss as it towers over the other houses in the area. It unabashedly displays Bonaventure's economic prosperity and is meant to convey the power attained by such wealth; indeed, Bonaventure often drops the names of both Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny and French President Giscard d'Estaing into his conversations to demonstrate his importance.

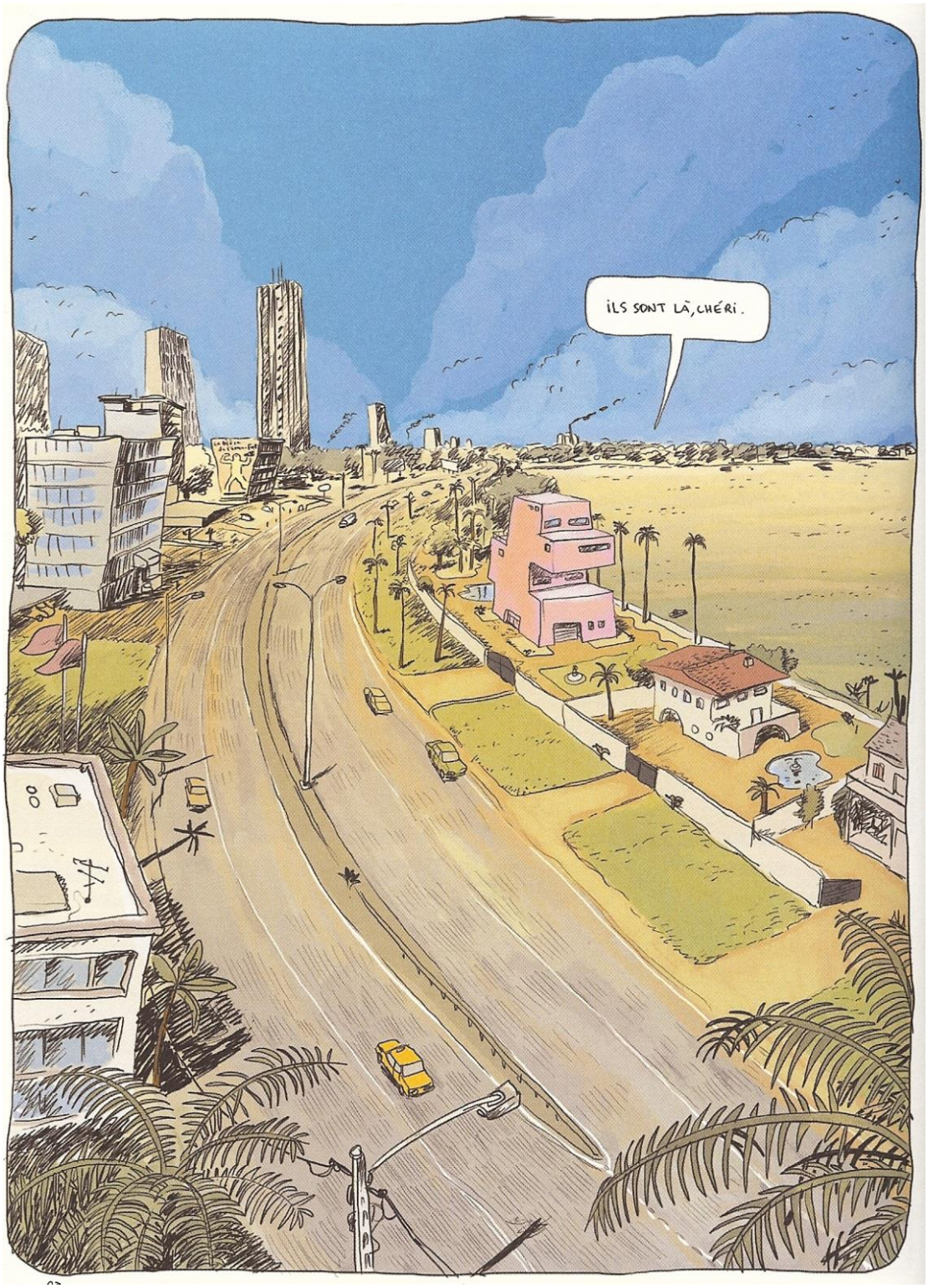

Figure 2.7. Splash page depicting the Sissoko house. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 80.

This blind devotion to the accumulation of Western capital, both material and cultural, is mocked by Abouet. Indeed, the Sissoko family house is downright ugly and an eye sore. When it is first introduced it is ironically juxtaposed with the comment "Quelle belle maison!" ("What a beautiful house!") (Figure 2.8). The Sissoko house is, without doubt, not a beautiful house from the outside. The exaggeratedly abstract architecture is meant to be modern, yet comes across visually as absurd and non-functional. The small upstairs balcony, devoid of furniture, is evidently not used. Moreover, it is superfluous in the face of the large grounds of the compound surrounding the house complete with a well-maintained swimming pool. The few small windows placed at odd intervals also seem extraneous. Unlike the houses in Yopougon where the courtyards are an extension of the familial space, the Sissoko home is closed and private. This notion of privacy underlines Bonaventure's adoption of the Western ideal of private property for within the house is a wealth of Western luxury goods and even a safe where Bonaventure keeps emergency funds. To satirize the Sissoko's blind obsession with Western culture further, included in the Western-influenced interior design of the house are African influences presented in a re-exoticized manner. For example, the Western-style furniture is adorned in exotic animal skins, exotic animal pelts are used as area rugs, and on the walls are strategically-placed emblems of traditional African culture including a shield with two spears, a mounted elephant head, and a small mounted crocodile, all which imitate the emblems and iconography exploited by political leaders in the region including Ivorian President Houphouët-Boigny to Jean-Bédel Bokassa, president of the Central African Republic, and Mobutu Sese Soko, president of the Republic of the Congo. In the Sissoko home, these fetishized objects lack authenticity and are little more than tourist souvenirs.

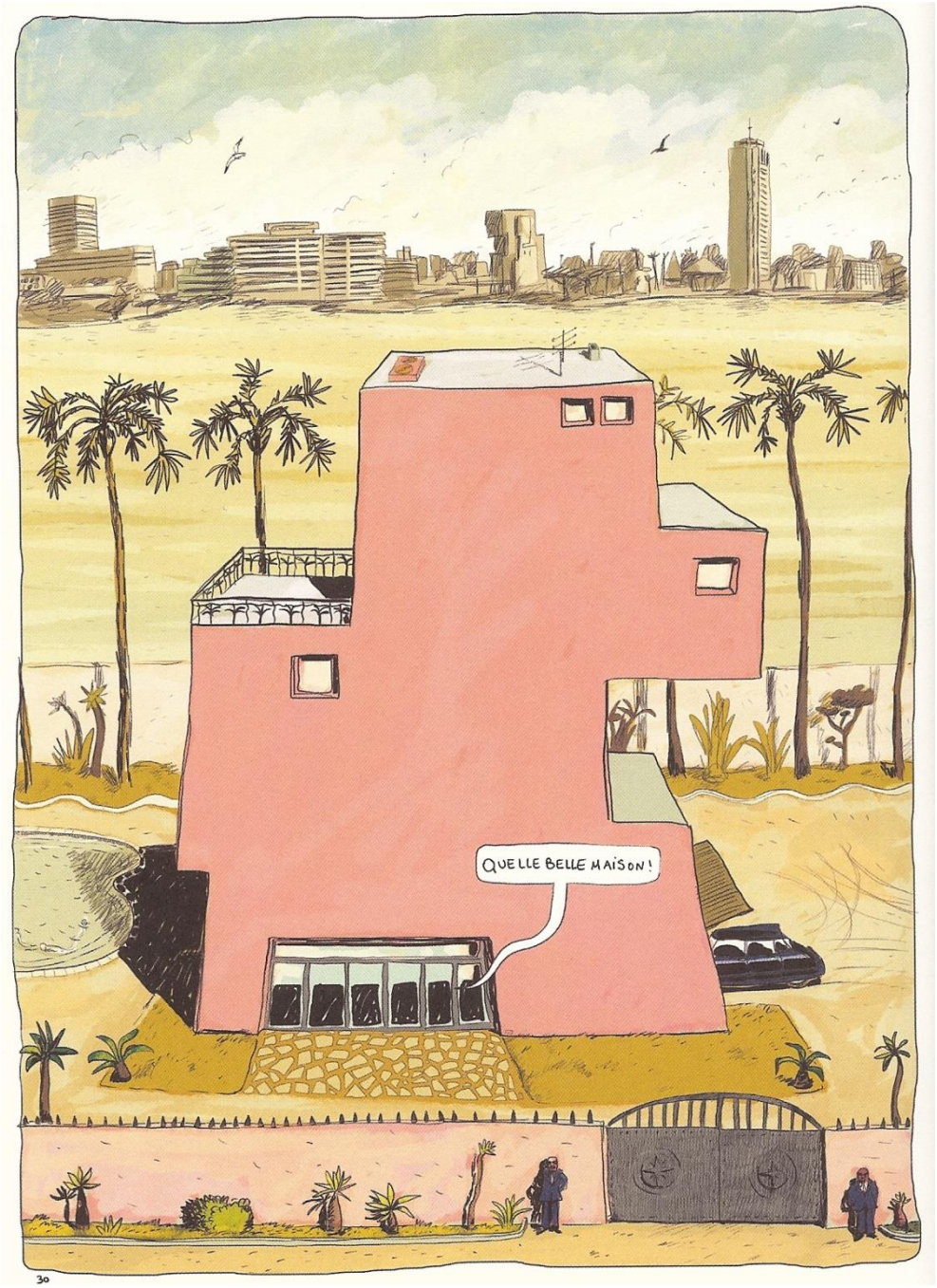

Figure 2.8. The Sissoko house. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 30.

At the other end of the spectrum in *Aya de Yopougon* in stark opposition to the Sissoko household and lifestyle are representations of villages outside of Yopougon. In particular, at the beginning of volume two Adjoua, her new born baby, and her parents take a road trip to her father's home village and in volumes four and five, Félicité is returned to her father's compound

in her home village against her will. In both cases, the journey outside of Yopougon to a village is associated with a traditional patriarchal sociocultural system and both are staged as momentary returns. For Adjoua, her father, Hyacinte, decides to return to visit his extended family to introduce Adjoua's baby to them, to offer them gifts, and to take family photos so that he might later determine who in the family Adjoua's baby resembles as the question of his paternity is uncertain. In Félicité's case, her father, Zékinan, travels to Yopougon to bring Félicité back home to the village of Domolon after hearing of her success after winning the Miss Yopougon contest. Zékinan had previously given Félicté to Aya's family when she was four years old as she was unimportant to him; however, in exchange, Aya's parents had given him livestock and money. Thus, by bringing Félicité back home against her will, Zékinan once again hopes to benefit financially from her. Ultimately, even though Aya, Bintou, and Adjoua hatch a plan to rescue Félicité and even though Félicité and her mother also concoct a separate plan for her to escape, Aya's father, Igance, must return to Domolon to plead his case before the village chief to forever negate Zékinan's claim to Félicité.

For both Hyacinte's home village and that of Aya's father, Ignace, Oubrerie provides splash pages of open spaces where the presiding earthy colors of the land mix with the verdant greens of the local flora. In fact, as we can see from Figures 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11, village life in both cases resides around the traditional family compound where the outside space is just as important as inside the home. Also, in each figure, outdoor spaces under large trees serve as meeting places. In Figure 2.9, the men of Hyacinte's family meet under what is known as the "l'arbre à palabres" ("the palaver tree"). As this example demonstrates, space is organized according to use and by gender. The palaver tree—where familial, social, and also financial issues are discussed—is a male dominated space. In contrast, in Figures 2.10 and 2.11, other

Figure 2.9. The village palaver tree. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 2, Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 25.

outside spaces are used to carry out the everyday tasks of agricultural work. However, even though life in the villages is much more traditional than in the urban settings of Yopougon and Abidjan, we still find traces of modernity already incorporated into the landscape. Western clothes including baseball caps are mixed effortlessly with traditional apparel and modern materials such as plastic are in wide use. Moreover, in Figure 2.11 in the middle ground on the left-hand side of the panel is the unmistakable presence of an electric power line. As with the

representation of Pahé's hometown Bitam, Gabon in *La vie de Pahé*, certain modern conveniences such as electricity are part of everyday reality even in village life. Though this is not to say that all small villages throughout Africa have access to electricity, it does work to discredit the stereotype that traditional modes of life in Africa are at odds with modernity.

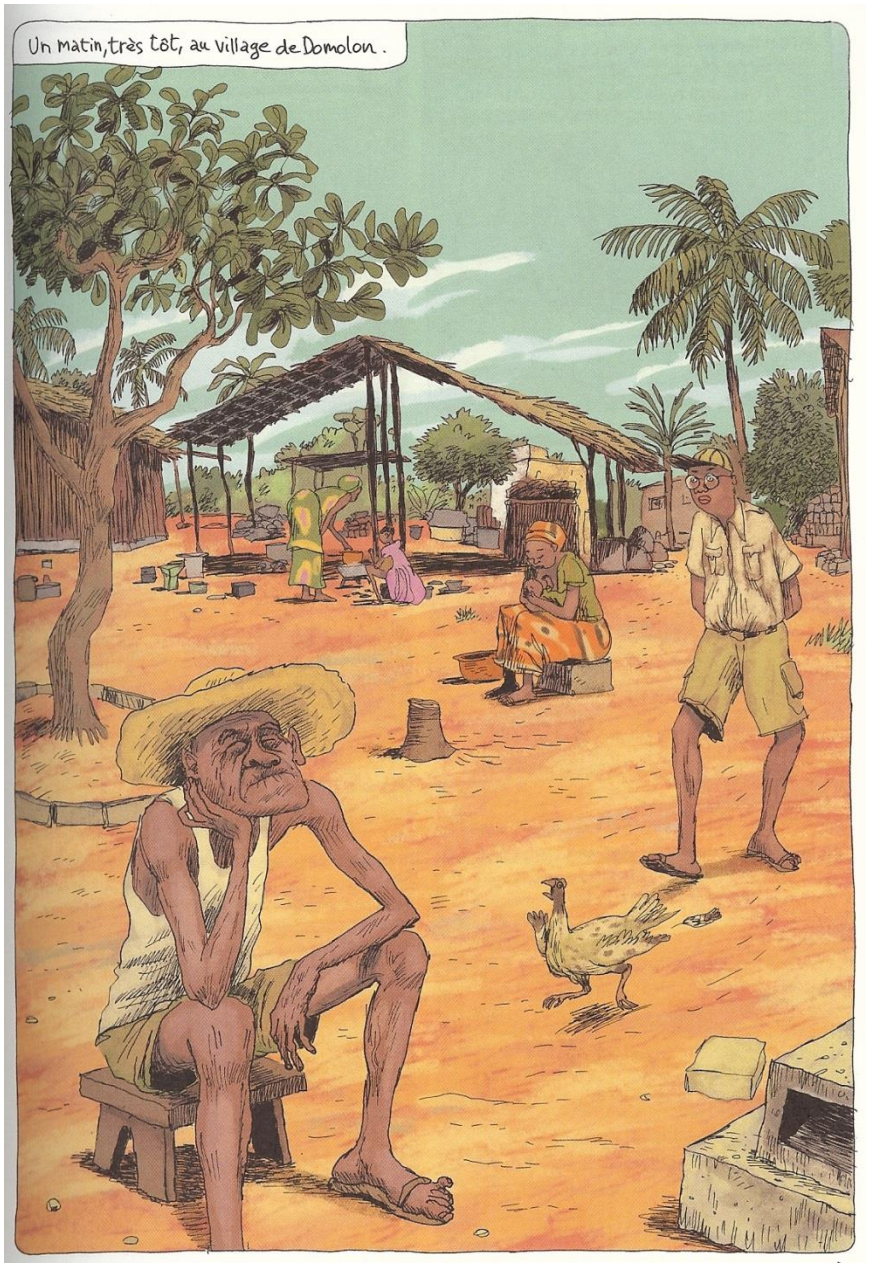

Figure 2.10. An example of village life. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 17.

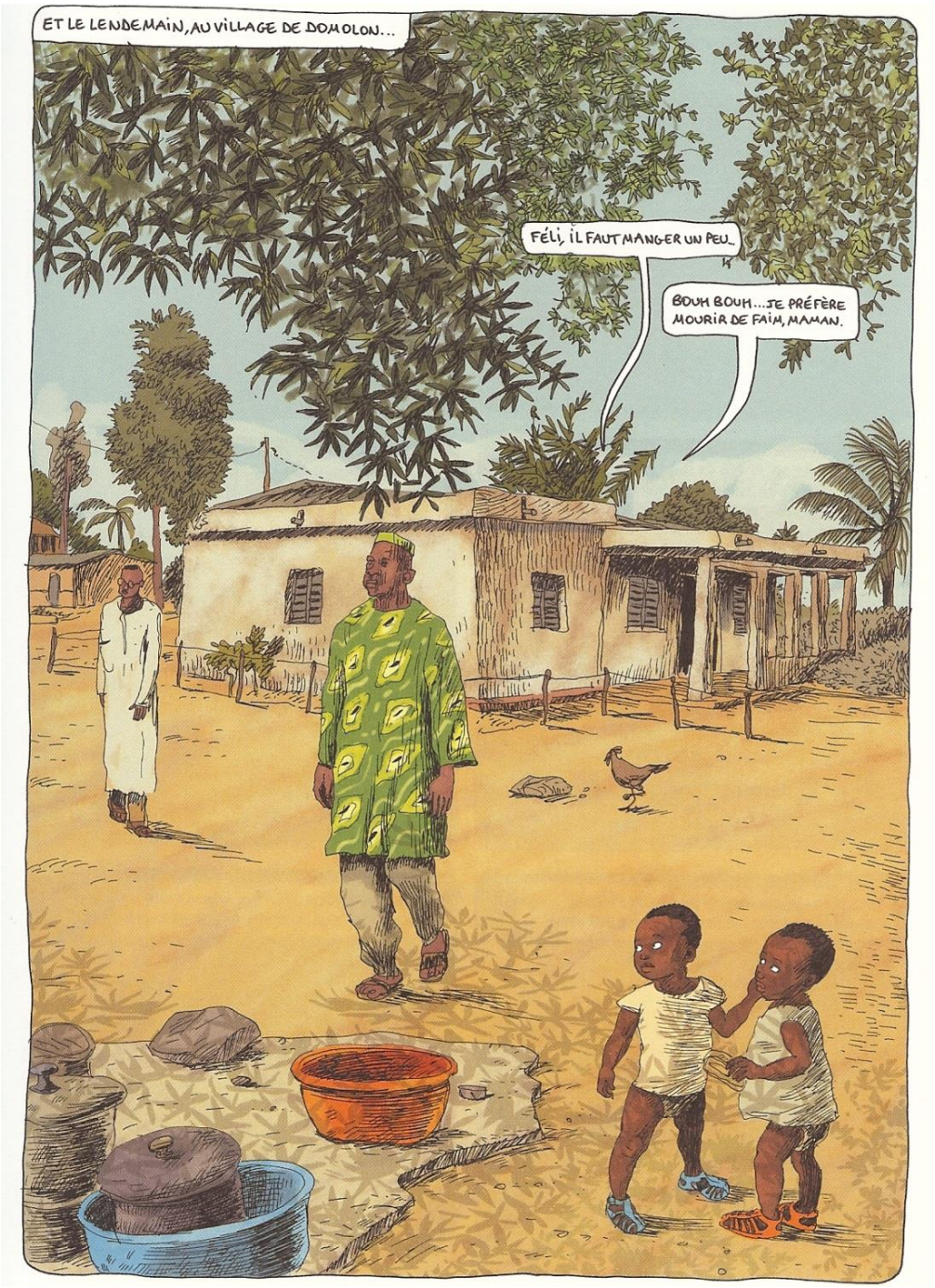

Figure 2.11. Detailed depiction of village life. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 5, Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 19.

Not surprisingly, Yopougon is presented as an intermediary between village lifestyle and the complete adoption of a Western lifestyle epitomized by the Sissokos. Life in Yopougon is best represented by the family homes of Aya, Adjoua, and Bintou, the various *maquis* in the

neighborhood, and by the Yopougon marketplace. In each of these spaces, traditional African and modern elements coexist and are integrated into daily life. Yopougon, a working-class neighborhood, is a lively tableau of the complexity of cultural *métissage* that counters the sterility projected by the Sissoko home. Outdoor spaces in Yopougon take on multiple functions defined by those who use them rather than serve to convey economic wealth as with Sissoko family house. However, the use of outdoor spaces in Yopougon more closely resembles village life, new reformulations emerge. For example, while *maquis* often serve a similar function as the palaver tree in Hyacinte's home village, the Yopougon market place has an alternative function at night and even an alternative name: "l'hôtel aux mille étoiles" ("Thousand Star Hotel"). This "hotel" is actually an impromptu meeting place where young adults meet to have premarital sex and operates outside traditional functions (Figure 2.12).

In fact, the Yopougon marketplace plays a crucial role throughout all six volumes of *Aya de Yopougon* for in addition to being an important public institution where the people go to exchange of goods and services, it also serves as a useful vehicle for exploring how modernity and cultural *métissage* crystallize in various manners. In Figure 2.13, a splash page of the Yopougon marketplace in the middle of the day, we see how various cultural influences intermingle in rather orderly fashion. The movement and sheer volume of people and objects are indicative of an urban setting. Many recurrent images are obvious signifiers of modernity such as automobiles. The boisterous quality of urban life is depicted indirectly through the use of a loudspeaker atop a vehicle whose high volume is indicated by the size and jagged edges of the speech balloon. In this case, language functions as the marker of the local since the first words are "La Belle Cité de Yop City!" ("Hey beautiful Yop City!") thus linking this energetic image intimately with Yopougon. If that were not enough, the "grand événement" being publicized in

this panel just happens to be the Miss Yopougon contest, an indicator of the appropriation and adaptation of Western culture as a part of everyday life. Ultimately, the marketplace represents the large, urban community of Yopougon while the family homes of Aya and her friends provide a range of intimate accounts of daily life.

Figure 2.12. The "hôtel aux mille étoiles." (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 28.

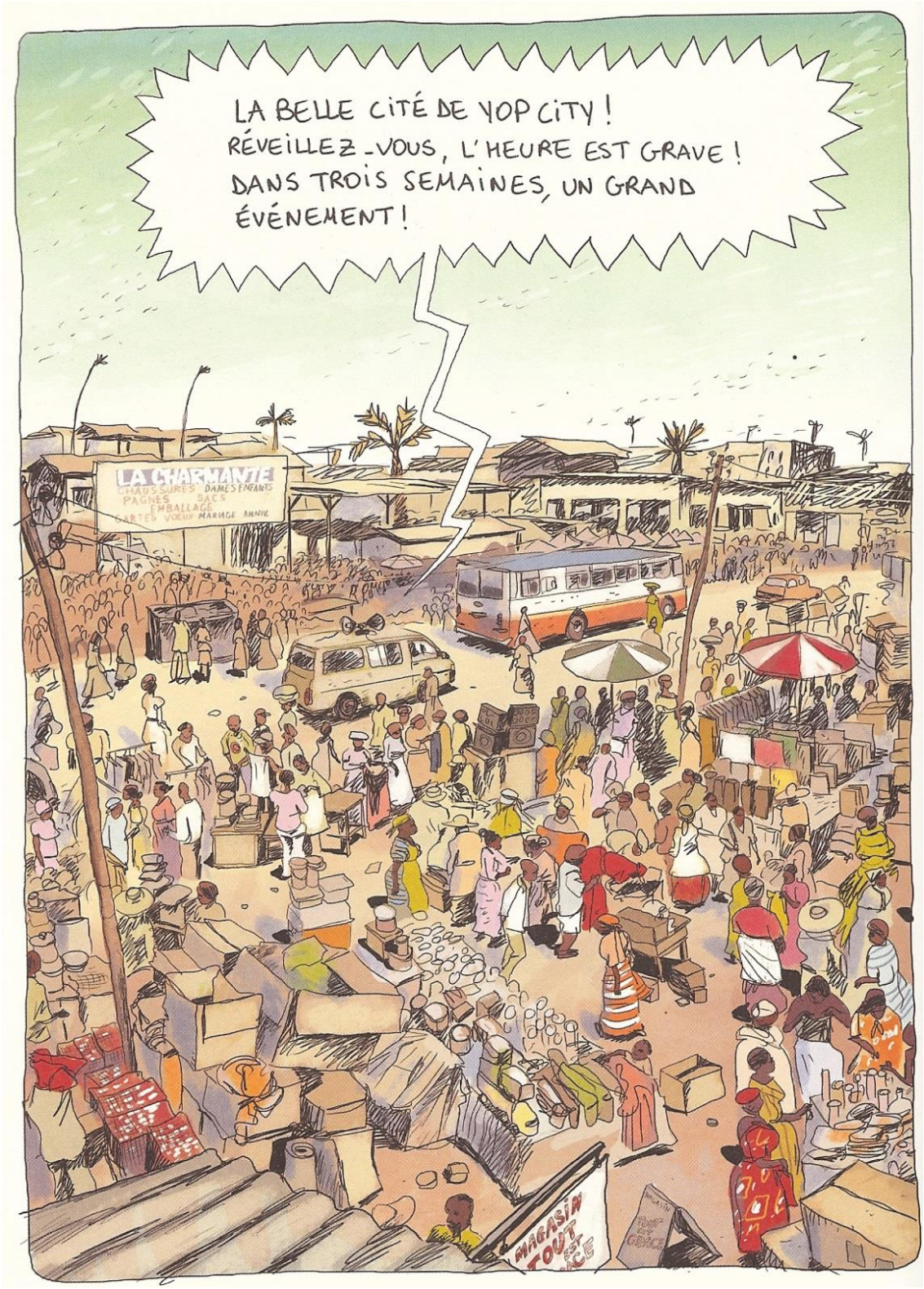

Figure 2.13. The Yopougon market. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 42.

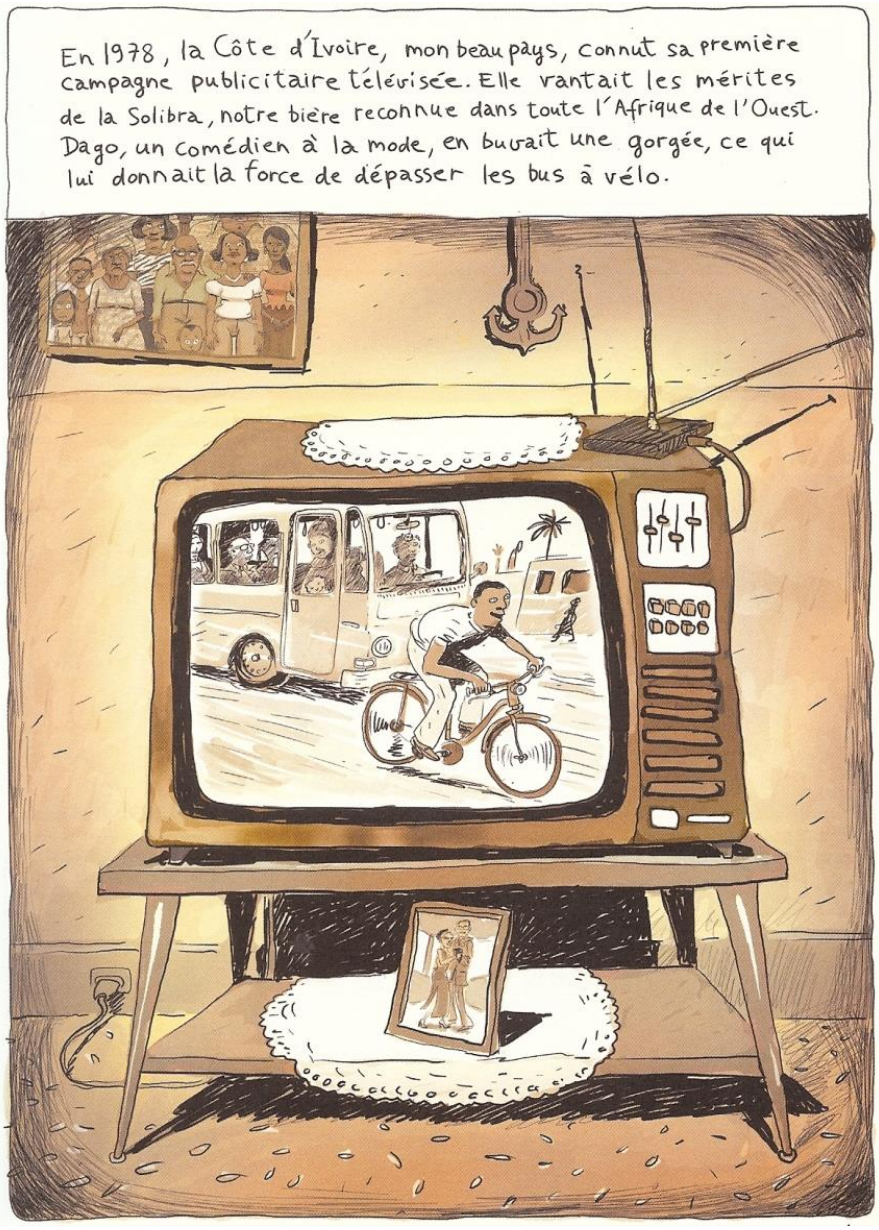

Figure 2.14. Opening of the *Aya de Yopougon* series. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 1.

If we look closely at the opening of the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon*, we see how Abouet and Oubrerie work in tandem to generate an entertaining look at everyday life in the Ivory Coast, a look that actively works to undo stereotypes about Africa. The story starts with an interesting fact: in 1978, in the Ivory Coast witnessed its first televised publicity campaign (Figure 2.14). Abouet immediately establishes the setting and historical moment. The

commercial featured a famous Ivorian comedian, Dago, and was for Solibra beer. Upon turning the page, we see Aya, her family, and two other families seated in front of the television sharing in this moment of national and local pride, the Solibra established in Abidjan (Figure 2.15). Following this, Aya introduces her parents, Ignace who works at Solibra and Fanta who is a management assistant for the Singer sewing machine company and also is a healer who works her own hours; her two closest friends, Adjou and Bintou, and their families; her younger siblings, Fofana her younger brother and Akissi her younger sister (described in interviews by Abouet as a representation of her younger self); and Aya (Figure 2.16). The following panel that occupies the middle of the right-hand page depicts an average walkway in Yopougon and explains that the locals call Yopougon "Yop City" in imitation of American films.

The last two panels of the page end the initial exposition and set the stage for the action of the narrative to start in a rather familiar way. Indeed, the use of colors changes to reflect the narrative shift. At first, Oubrerie applies a sepia tint to the entire images, which suggests a flashback; then, in the middle of the third page, he introduces a wider range of colors that effectively transforms 1978 to the present day of the narrative. In the first panel, the narrator explains "[l]es maquis se remplissent, ça sentait le début des vacances," ("[t]he maquis were filling up, a holiday feeling was in the air"), accompanied by an image of three men seated outside at a table with drinks with the server, standing on the threshold of the building holding a piece of paper perhaps to take their order. The second panel—the last panel on the page—shows a hand reaching to pick up a phone receiver and is accompanied by the continuation of the narration: "et c'est alors que les choses commencèrent à se gâter" ("and that's when things started to go wrong"). Oubrerie's multiple framing of the light reddish-orange telephone emphasizes its role in facilitating the foreboding news that will supposedly ruin a perfectly

carefree moment; the telephone is atop a white, circular lace doily on a small table and Oubrerie has added an extra frame by shading a black circle that encompasses the hand about the pick up the telephone. These multiple frames and the juxtaposition of the color of the telephone with the green background and the black shading that encapsulates this frozen moment effectively convey that the phone is ringing without the use of onomatopoeia and, when coupled with the foreboding statement about things to come functions as a kind of exclamation point.

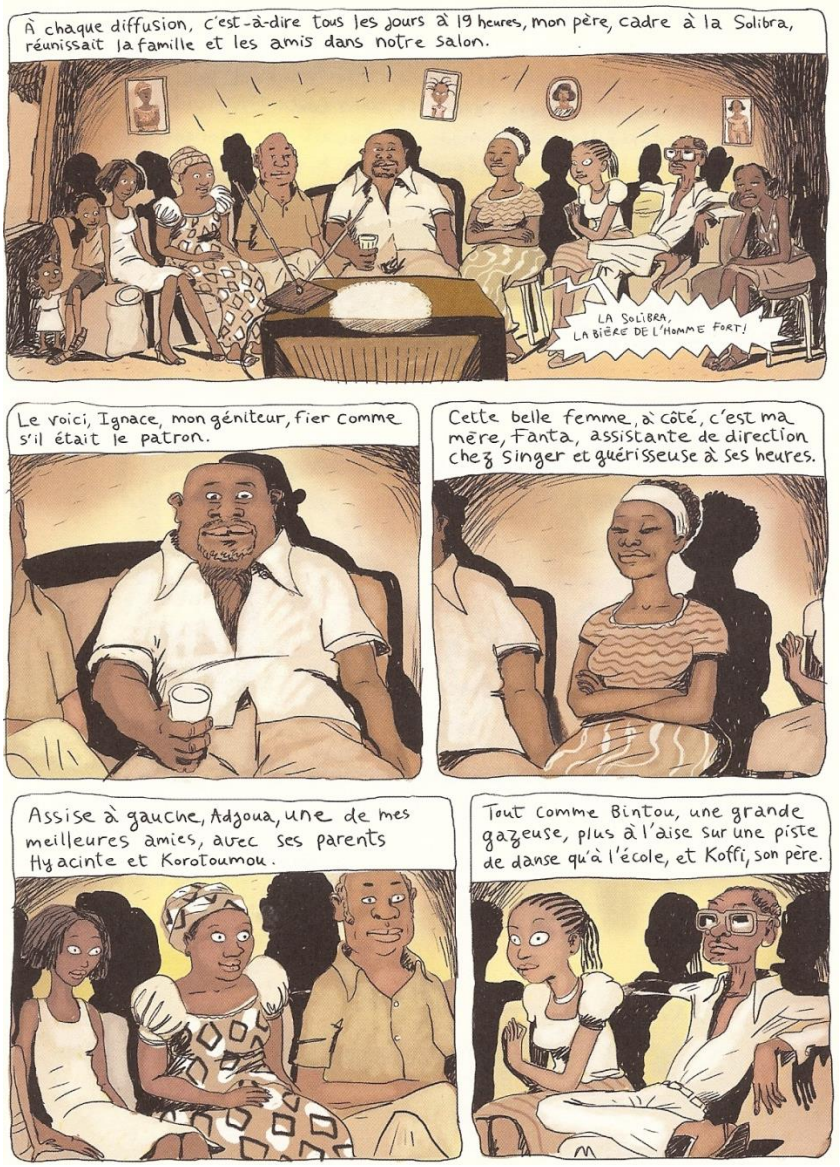

Figure 2.15. Aya introduces her family and friends. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 2.

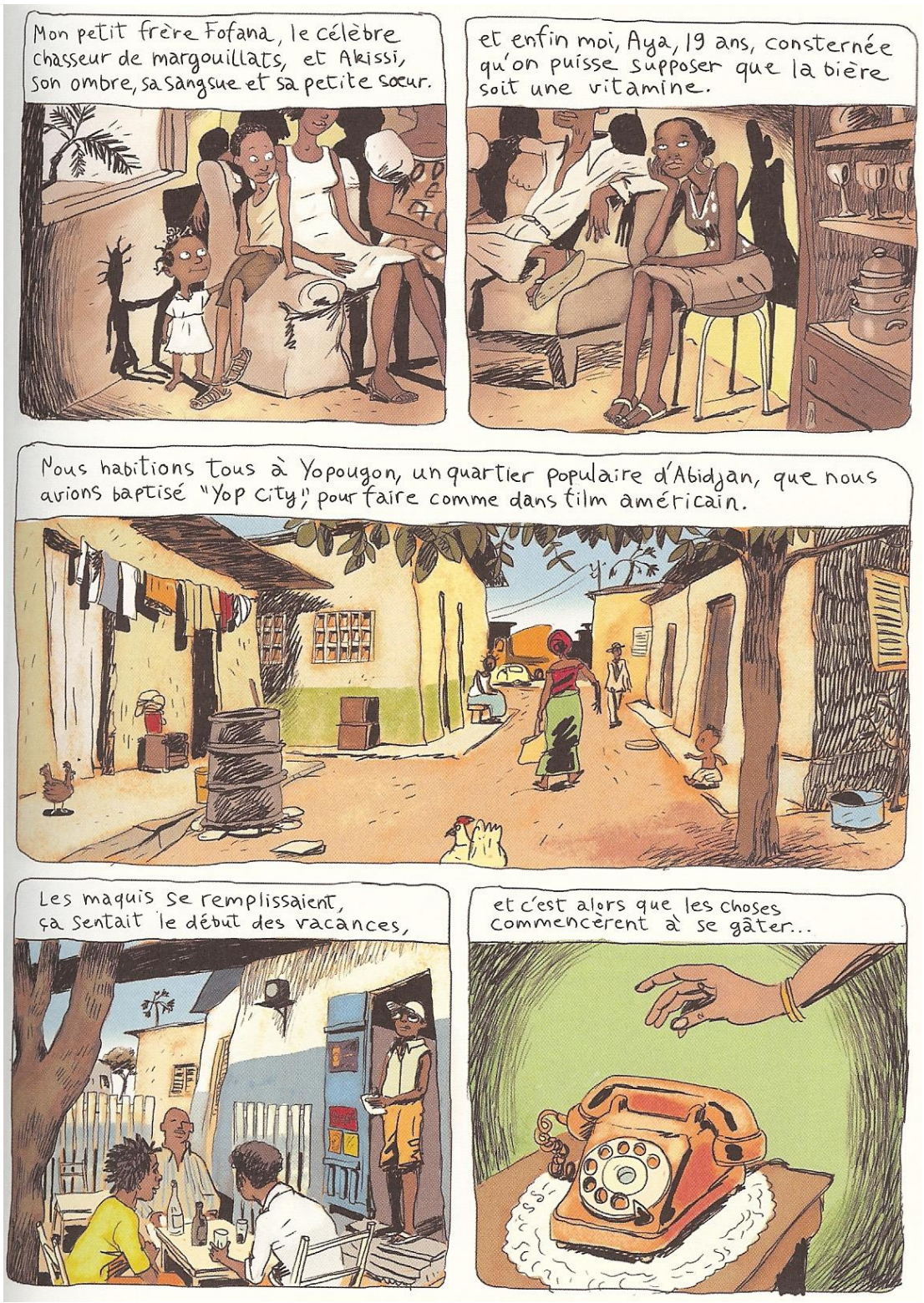

Figure 2.16. Aya introduces herself and Yopougon. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 3.

Moreover, these multiple frames highlight the importance of the telephone itself, a fact that cannot be understated, for the telephone, the vehicle for the narrative action, is also a modern convenience. Like the organized power lines and the airfield in Pahé's hometown of Bitam depicted at the beginning of the first volume of *La vie de Pahé*, the placement of the telephone at the beginning of the series belies the stereotypical image of Africa in circulation in the West as a backward place, or at the very least contests the artificial dichotomy between modernity (read Western) and traditionalism (read African). The television on the first page and the telephone at the bottom of the third page present readers with an image of an urbanized African wherein electricity is unquestionably part of everyday life. Just the television on the very first page is a striking image that affronts readers with an idea of Africa that is far removed from the undefined and un-locatable bush of *Tintin in the Congo* or from the notion of an African village devoid of modern technology. Thus, right away Abouet and Oubrerie, invite Western readers to rethink what they previously thought of Africa.

More specifically, these first few pages also demonstrate to Western French-speaking readers that the Ivory Coast, though very much influenced by the culture of its former colonizer, is simultaneously in contact with many other cultures. In conjunction with the presence of the television and the telephone, the allusion to American films in the use of the nickname Yop City immediately challenge a binary framework regarding cultural hegemony between the former métropole (France) and the Ivory Coast. Indeed, American cultural influences abound in the series and the cover of the fourth volume even features a reference to Michael Jackson (Figure 2.17). At the center of the cover is Innocent sporting Michael Jackson's famous red leather coat and an unmistakable Michael Jackson-inspired hair style. Furthermore, Innocent is flanked on either side by strong-looking African women in leopard-print jumpsuits with short, masculine

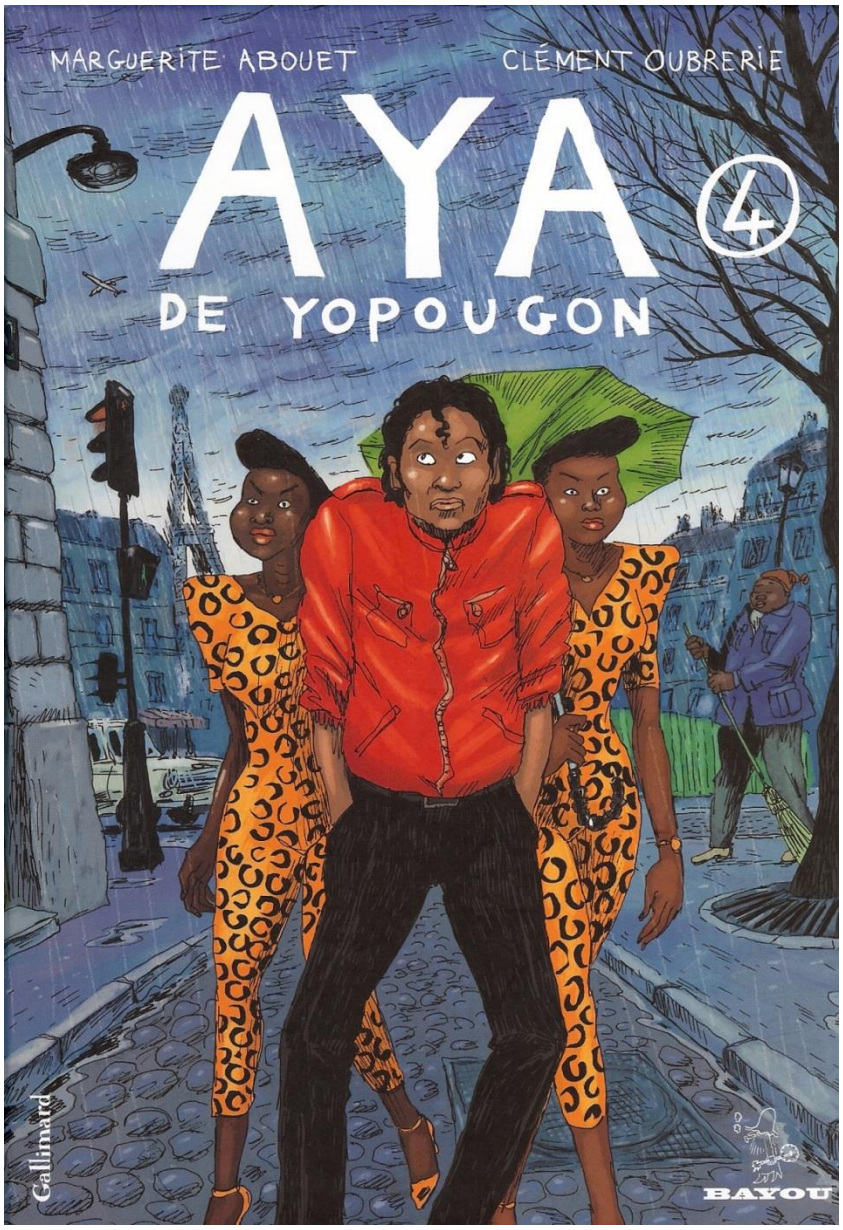

Figure 2.17. Cover of *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

hairstyles à la Grace Jones. Similarly, the Miss Yopougon contest introduced in the second volume and featured in the third is undoubtedly inspired by the Miss America contest. All of these examples speak to the influence of American culture on West Africa, thus complicating a center/periphery model of cultural hegemony in which French (mainly Parisian) culture is understood to have the most influence over Ivorian culture. These examples also, however, importantly underline the immediacy of American cultural capital in circulation in the Ivory

Coast at the time. Abouet succeeds in demonstrating that, contrary to what Western readers might think, individuals in the Ivory Coast (and through extension in Africa), at least in urban centers, have access to Western culture. It is precisely the contemporaneity of the Western (read American and French) cultural references that is central to Abouet's goal of challenging existing negative stereotypes of Africa.

Gender, Sexuality, and Agency

The driving force of *Aya de Yopougon* is Abouet's ability to convey the sociocultural atmosphere of the Yopougon of her childhood through the individual experiences of Aya and her friends. Abouet's rich cast of characters reflects those of other postcolonial women writers as characterized by Françoise Lionnet in *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* in which she argues: "[r]ejecting the binarism of self and other, nationalism and internationalism, Africa and Europe, women writers…point to a third way, to the métissage of forms and identities that is the result of cross-cultural encounters and that forms the basis for their self-portrayals and their representations of cultural diversity" (12). The close reading of the beginning of Aya de Yopougon shows how Abouet as well rejects the same binarisms and chooses instead to present readers with a range of characters each with her own individuated take on cultural diversity. Because Abouet treats female and male characters with equal nuance, she goes beyond the trope of the individual versus the community common among earlier texts by francophone African women writers. According to Hitchcott, "feminine identity in francophone African women's writing is initially expressed as a tension between the two apparently contradictory poles of 'modernity' and 'tradition,' poles which often become translated as an opposition between the individual and the community" (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 153). Rather than pit the young adults against their parents, Abouet offers a renewed sense of community, albeit smaller, altered by the urban landscape. As if to emphasize the continuous sense of

community that underlines the various plotlines, at the beginning of volumes two, three, and four is a two-page illustration entitled "Les personnages" ("The Characters") that closely resembles a family tree and that shows the mains characters and their families.[53]

For D'Almeida, the two poles between tradition and modernity in novels by women writers manifest as a gap that female characters attempt to bridge (I. D'Almeida 90). While one could argue that this might have been the case for Aya's parents and their generation, this gap does not apply evenly to Aya and her generation; though Abouet also depicts Aya's parents and their generation as multifaceted as well. For the majority of the young women in Yopougon and Abidjan, the gap is minimal at best. In contrast, for young women in villages where a more traditional lifestyle reigns, this gap is more pronounced (as in Félicité's case). An important result of the complexity of the characters is that each reader will identify with at least one if not many of them. In this regard, Abouet's narrative strategies correspond to those of other postcolonial women writers who "depict characters whose originality stems from the fact that the authors give them universal appeal, letting them live their métissage in the most original, ingenious, and beneficial ways… [and who] exemplify the inevitability as well as the benefits and disadvantages of intercultural exchange" (Lionnet, Postcolonial Representations 17). In his review of the English translation of the first volume of *Aya of Yopougon*, Guy Lancaster points to this precise aspect of Abouet's narrative as part and parcel of its broad appeal: "Throughout the book, both main characters and those who appear for just a panel or two navigate their way

[53] Volume one of *Aya de Yopougon* lacks a list of characters as the reader has yet to be introduced to them. In volumes five and six, in lieu of a list of characters is a two-page spread entitled "Résumé des épisodes précédents" ("The story so far") with small snapshots of action from the previous volume. One reason for this change is logistical; as the plotlines have diverged, the short recapitulations allow Abouet and Oubrerie to remind their readers quickly where the various plotlines left off. Another reason, I would argue, is that this strategy once again reinforces *Aya de Yopougon*'s affinity with soap operas as the trope reads like the first couple minutes of certain dramatic television series that use footage from previous episodes to jog the audience's memory.

between the chic of modernity and their own traditions, defining themselves by what they pick and choose from this new cultural cafeteria" (Lancaster 943).

Though undoubtedly all the characters contribute to a rich tableau of the diverse community in Yopougon and its surroundings, three characters in particular stand apart from the rest in that their experiences do the most to challenge existing sociocultural and gender norms: Aya, the eponymous main character; Moussa Sissoko, the only child of the wealthy Sissoko family; and Innocent, a homosexual hairdresser. Though Aya and Innocent have obvious differences, they are in fact very much alike; they both harbor goals grounded in pushing the limits of change and opportunity. Each one is marked as different by the community: Aya for being more interested in becoming a doctor than dating men and Innocent for seeking a situation where he can be openly homosexual. In contrast, Moussa initially resembles the other young men in Yopougon and Abidjan, though with the added bonus of having access to luxury goods including his own Honda vehicle due to the wealth of his family. However, unable to live up to his father's expectations, having been spoiled since birth, Moussa travels along an unusual trajectory that ironically challenges social norms.

Before turning to an analysis of the eponymous main character, I would first like to pause to discuss Abouet's series *Akissi* because I believe it provides useful insight into how Abouet challenges gender stereotypes with the character of Aya. As mentioned, this series is a spinoff of *Aya de Yopougon* that focuses on Akissi who represents Abouet herself. *Akissi* is also published by Gallimard Jeunesse, though it is not part of the Bayou subdivision edited by Sfar and while it is written by Abouet, it is illustrated by French cartoonist Mathieu Sapin rather than Oubrerie. However, the title page of each volume explains that *Akissi* belongs to the same graphic universe created by Oubrerie for *Aya de Yopougon*. Thus, Sapin takes his visual cues from Oubrerie, yet

his approach is more simplified and cartoonish, and even more fluid that Oubrerie's and at times resembles quick sketches. This shift in visual style reflects the shift in narrative focus from Aya to her younger sister, Akissi and establishes the point of view as that of a child's. In fact, the target audience for *Akissi*, based on the packaging, seems to be much younger than that of *Aya de Yopougon*. Unlike the physical format for the Bayou *bandes dessinées* that cultivates a high-art connotation, *Akissi* much more resembles mainstream industry standards, its size placing it part way between children's literature and *bandes dessinées*. Moreover, the organization of *Akissi* as a collection of short vignettes resembles other series such as *Titeuf* and *Dipoula* all of which are intended for a younger audience than *Aya de Yopougon*.[54] If we return to the first few pages of the first volume of *Aya de Yopougon*, we see that Akissi is introduced as her older brother Fofana's shadow (both the younger siblings of Aya). Even without reading the *Akissi* series, Abouet makes a connection between Akissi and Fofana; by extension, she also aligns Akissi with activities and interests more typical of young boys rather than young girls. Indeed, through the short vignettes, Abouet paints an autobiographical picture of an energetic and inventive little girl who is somewhat of a tomboy and who likes to play soccer with boys just as much as she enjoys playing dolls with girls.

Though Akissi is a closer representation of Abouet herself, Aya follows suit as equally strong-willed and determined not be limited by gender stereotypes, yet she does not completely dismiss social gender roles either. In this regard, Aya seems to represent the "third way" described by Lionnet. Abouet even includes a small anecdote about Aya as a young baby that hints at her rejection of gender binaries regarding social norms. In volume five when her father

[54] Though *Akissi* is intended for a younger audience, there is still cohesion between this series and *Aya de Yopougon*. As mentioned, the art is based on Oubrerie's drawings and the stories take place in the same setting as *Aya de Yopougon*. Abouet even goes so far as to incorporate a miniaturized version of "Le Bonus Ivorien" found at the end of each volume of *Aya de Yopougon*; at the end of each volume of *Akissi* is a section titled, "Pages Bonus" ("Bonus Pages"). The tone is more cartoonish and childish and the recipes included are child-friendly so that young readers might actually attempt them.

recounts how it is that Félicité came to live with his family, he explains that he and his wife journeyed to his home village when Aya was a baby to present her to the community and all his father could say was "Mais ce n'est pas un garçon!" ("But it's not a boy!"). Upon hearing this, Aya began crying and would not be consoled until Félicité arrived (96). Though Ignace tells this story to attest to Félicité's status as a member of his family, it also demonstrates Aya's refusal to accept things as they are, including gender norms. Unlike earlier francophone African women writers for whom the "central axis of modernity/tradition … figuratively represents a gap between the genders" (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 113), Abouet's Aya character suggests that such a gap need not exist. Aya has been called the moral center of the series (Harris, "Aya of Yopougon" 70) and she is able to talk with her parents and young men—in particular Hervé and Innocent—as easily as she talks to her closest girlfriends. In addition to consoling Adjoua and Bintou, Aya also inspires and helps Hervé to improve his financial and social status and befriends Innocent after learning that he is homosexual even though she is aware that it is not accepted behavior in the Ivory Coast. An underlying factor that informs Aya's acceptance of Innocent as a close friend is that, on some level, she identifies with his sense of difference from the rest of the community. In the scene when Innocent discusses his sexuality with Aya, Oubrerie visually links the two through the play of horizontal shadows that create the illusion of prison bars (Figure 2.18). Harris suggests that this "film noir effect… [underscores] their shared sense of being trapped, although in quite different ways" (Harris, "'Sex and the City:' The Graphic Novel Series *Aya*" 127). Though neither are literally outcasts—in fact both are equally praised by the community, Aya for always helping others and Innocent for his talent as a skilled and fashionable hairdresser—they each harbor feelings of being outsiders to those around them.

Figure 2.18. Innocent tells Aya of his plans to move to France. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 97.

From the beginning of the series, Aya stands apart from Adjoua and Bintou who represent social norms for young women in Yopougon. Unlike them, Aya easily brushes off advances from young men in the street, does not flirt or go dancing at night, and she does not

chase after rich men. She avoids unwanted attention as best she can and is subsequently, for the most part, spared the types of relationship problems that Bintou and Adjou face on a regular basis. Rather, Aya focuses diligently on her studies and aspires to become a doctor. While her dream of becoming a doctor is not unheard of (her father is initially against it, but Aya passes the baccalaureate and attends the local university where there are other young women students), her ostensible lack of interest in finding a boyfriend is remarked upon by most of the characters. As if to enhance how Aya's sense of morality and her dream of becoming a doctor do in fact set her apart from the community, she becomes the victim of an attempted rape at the hands of her professor and then is later punished by him for having escaped with a failing grade that inhibits her from continuing her studies. While this could be read as revenge by a symbolic male patriarch—Aya's professor—for not abiding by normal gender roles and also for not being complicit in a corrupt system in order to succeed, Abouet turns the situation around. At first, when Aya discovers that other female students have been subjected to what happened to her, the other students accept such situations as standard practice. However, after listening to Aya, they also feel betrayed and eventually assist her in successfully obtaining enough evidence to prosecute the professor. Interestingly, that Aya's only love interest in the entire six volumes of the series—the one young man that would equal her in his professional aspirations as a deputy judge and in his sense of moral justice—ends up being the godson of Aya's professor once again recalls the soap opera genre.

Abouet's approach to female and male sexuality in *Aya de Yopougon* is very liberal in that it presents young adult sexuality in a rather straightforward manner. Just as Abouet challenges the dichotomies between tradition and modernity, local and global, she also subverts taboos about sexuality and the representation of male and female sexuality. Subsequently,

Abouet's characters differ from those of earlier texts by francophone African women writers "for whom the concept of sexual equality is fraught with ambiguity" (Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* 113) and more closely resembles characters from texts by more recent women writers such as Calixthe Beyala, Werewere Liking, and Véronique Tadjo, all of who, rather than shy away from female sexuality, often foreground it in their work. Though Aya refrains from sexual activity, nearly all her friends do not. In fact, when Aya returns from her first date (which does not take place until the last volume of the series), her mother is quick to have a frank discussion with her about birth control. Similarly, Abouet treats Adjoua's pregnancy and her initial desire to abort it, a taboo subject, in a rather un-sensationalized manner; for although Aya is shocked that Adjoua would pursue an illegal and risky procedure, that Adjoua knew she would able to find a woman in the marketplace capable of performing such a procedure suggests that Adjoua's situation is part of the psychological reality of the everyday landscape in Yopougon. The work thus provides readers with very specific insights on the socio-cultural environment depicted.

Just as Abouet presents female sexuality in a rather frank manner, thus attempting to shed light on the reality of young women's lives in the Ivory Coast, she also questions male authority in this patriarchal society through the character of Moussa Sissoko. Cazenave points to a similar treatment of male characters in recent novels by francophone African women writers suggesting that with the "new representation of woman in her being and social functions… we also end with an entirely innovative reflection on man" (242). While Moussa at first resembles other young men in his interests (chasing pretty girls, displaying his wealth, and partying), he is unable to live up to his father's expectations and hold down a job at his father's company. Eventually, he decides to run away. It is worth pointing out that because Moussa fails to adopt the path his

father has chosen (read capitalism and a complete adoption of Western customs) he flees to the countryside and turns to a more traditional way of life. Ironically, the money he stole from his father before running away, rather than providing Moussa with the kind of capital that would propel him economically and politically, is used to create maternity hospitals in rural areas outside of Abidjan, thus bestowing upon Moussa cultural clout and symbolic capital within a traditional value system. In other words, rather than stay in Abidjan and continue his father's legacy of Westernization, Moussa uses these funds to propagate traditional values in the form of population growth through the establishment of maternity hospitals. In an ironic twist of fate, it is Moussa and his support of the next generation of Ivoirians, not his father who inserts names of important political figures into his conversations, who is honored by President Houphouët-Boigny at the end of *Aya de Yopougon*.

With the character of Moussa, Abouet is able to challenge the artificial dichotomy between Western and traditional African lifestyles. Similarly to other female sub-Saharan African writers, Abouet concentrates on the choices of individuals and suggests that those who succeed are people who can incorporate aspects of Western and traditional cultures and who are nimble enough to respond to social and cultural changes. Also, as some women writers have done in their work, Abouet uses male characters to challenge the stereotype of traditional African society as male dominated and to subvert the role of males. I am not implying that Abouet suggests that Moussa is the ideal male role model. In fact, as with the rich and varied cast of female characters, Abouet creates a varied and complex cast of male characters. For example, whereas Moussa's father has, in the name of economic and political mobility, opted to adopt Western customs (his over exaggerated modern house, the fact that he has only one son, his choice of clothes, his job as a CEO, and his visible discomfort outside the urban setting), Aya's

father and his friends have office jobs while engaging in more traditional customs (most of Aya's friends' families have multiple children, Aya's father has a mistress with whom he has two other children, and Aya's father and his friends congregate in the shade of large trees or in outside bars and restaurants to discuss politics and social happenings).

Innocent, the Marginalized Immigrant

In contrast to Moussa who flees Abidjan for village life after failing to follow in his father's footsteps, Innocent, though a successful hairdresser in Yopougon, leaves Abidjan for Paris so he no longer has to hide his homosexuality. Innocent's decision to move to France is no surprise as he is visibly comfortable with blending various cultural influences and embodies the confluence of different cultures through his personal style. Moreover, as a successful hairdresser who is up-to-date on international trends, he participates in actively effecting and creating new hybrid cultures in Yopougon. Yet his decision to move to France indefinitely, shows that there are still limits to how much change is possible and what is socially acceptable. In his insightful article "Wheyting be Dat?: The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature," Chris Dunton argues that "homosexuality is treated as an aspect of the degenerate transformation wrought on Africa through its contact with the West" (Dunton 428). With this in mind, it is not surprising that Innocent's visual appearance would be so heavily marked by Western influences. However, Innocent's cultural hybridity is not presented in the text as a form of degenerate transformation. Rather, his familiarity with Western cultural trends serves as a source of inspiration for his profession and his talent for providing his clients with the latest trends fuels his success.

He is nevertheless different and his otherness is internalized and marked by his own confession to Aya that he is tired of hiding who he is. Dunton's analysis of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is useful in understanding how Abouet constructs Innocent's otherness: "Soyinka's

tactical delay in releasing information about Golder emphasizes the 'specialness' of his position, excluding him, as a marked term, from the mainstream" (Dunton 440). Abouet uses a similar technique gradually building up to Innocent's coming out in the series. Throughout volumes one and two of *Aya de Yopougon*, Adjoua's brother Albert is pictured frequenting the "Hôtel aux mille étoiles," yet we only know the identity of Albert, that he is meeting in the liminal space of the outdoor "hotel" to have sex secretly with someone else, and that he is terribly worried that other people might find out who his sexual partner is. As a result, throughout the first two volumes, readers are meant to assume that Albert is secretive about one of the main female characters in the series. However, in volume three we are introduced to Innocent as a new character and only half-way through volume three do we learn that Innocent is Albert's secret lover and that he has been trying to convince Albert to leave with him for France. At this point, the gradual build up leading to Innocent's coming out in the series, as Dunton would argue, marks him as different. Consequently, it is important that Abouet chooses Innocent, a socially marginalized character, as the one to travel to France in search of a better life.

Since Innocent is already marginalized, Abouet is able to complicate the stereotypes associated with immigrants from the inside. Innocent's experiences, or rather mishaps, in Paris are very comical in that although many of them are clichés, they are re-envisaged through Innocent's personality and reactions to the situations. Through the staging of certain tropes common to migrant literature such as the scene of arrival and the shock of cultural differences, Pahé and Abouet put their own spin on familiar territory for their readers and capitalize on their readers' expectations. Not surprisingly, the arrival in Paris is depicted similarly in both series: grey skies and rain, a kind of visual short-hand for Paris, especially for people traveling from geographical regions that are regularly much warmer than in France (Figure 2.19). Also, the

impersonal voice of the plane captain as an introduction to one's potential home underlines the cold and impersonal experience of traveling such a distance with so much at stake. Usually a very easy-going guy, Innocent is able to carve out a niche for himself as a women's hairdresser in the HLMs or project housing where other male immigrants from Africa have allowed him to stay. Unfortunately for Innocent, the liberal openness he expected to find in France is thwarted in the immigrant communities by traditions brought from respective home countries. Moreover, when Innocent rescues a young man, Sébastien, from being assaulted by two other men, he is shocked to learn that the reason for such violence is because Sébastien is homosexual. Thus, the image of a socially liberated France is shattered for Innocent.[55] However, not one to give up, Innocent is determined to make the best of his situation and he and Sébastien help one another accept and embrace who they are.

Although expelled from the immigrant community and far from home, Innocent retains his own identity and defends his origins when he encounters a black musician in the metro playing guitar and singing for money. While Innocent has thus far never let his situation lead to outright anger, the negative, yet stereotypical image of Africa (one of poverty, starving children, civil wars, etc.) that is conveyed through the musician's lyrics are what drive Innocent beyond annoyance to anger (Figure 2.20). He demands to know why the musician perpetuates this inadequate and grossly skewed vision of Africa and slams his economic and sensationalist exploitation of Africa, suggesting he get a job as a janitor like other immigrants if he really wants to earn money. This incident can be read as a metaphor for Abouet's own response to critiques that her work, by only focusing on everyday life and excluding more violent subject-matter,

[55] Widespread intolerance of homosexuality and gay rights in France has recently been foregrounded in the media due to violent protests leading up to the vote to legalize same-sex marriage. Though the measure passed in April of 2013, thus making France the fourteenth country to pass such a measure, there was much debate in both the French Assembly and the Senate before the final vote. Moreover, the massive mobilization of the conservative right in the form of violent protests reveals how controversial the subjects of same-sex marriage and homosexuality are in France.

Figure 2.19. Innocent's plane landing in Paris. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 1.

"lacks depth and seriousness" in its portrayal of life in Africa (Walker 60). Indeed, it is almost as if this moment represents Abouet's own "coming out" in the series. By conveying the social realities of African immigration in France, Abouet's strategic move echoes what Christopher L.

Miller has termed, borrowing from Hélène Cixious, the "coming to writing" of francophone African women in the 1970s (C. L. Miller, *Theories of Africans* 273). Also, by using Innocent as her spokesman, Abouet calls attention to the limits of liberalism and the complexity of life in the West, denouncing the double standard applied by Western critics, who do not launch the same attacks on Western artists and writers and who also project onto African societies while failing to address their own limitations regarding issues such as gay marriage and adoption.

Figure 2.20. Innocent's anger at negative stereotypes about Africa. (Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, Volume 4, Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 76.

Volume four begins Innocent's plane landing at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris and ends with a discussion in the Ivorian Bonus section about Ivorian immigration in France that compares the situation in 1983—when Abouet arrived in France—with that of today. The title page for this section shows a hand-drawn passport with the words "Bonus de Côte d'Ivoire" ("Bonus from the Ivory Coast"). Similarly, following the lexicon is a section entitled "Visa" that is accompanied by a photograph of Abouet as a young girl. The addition of Abouet's photograph, like the photo album at the end of *La vie de Pahé: Bitam*, reinforces the autobiographical dimension of the text. Starting in volume three, Abouet shifts from presenting Ivorian cultural tidbits of information regarding everyday life in the Ivory Coast and instead inserts autobiographical information, directly addressing her ostensibly faithful readers. This strategy of directly addressing faithful readers has been a useful strategy for *bandes dessinées* and comics and helps establish a personal connection with readers.[56] In the last four volumes, Abouet presents her own experiences and memories of life in Yopougon and in Paris as a way to discuss some of the harsher realities facing people living in Africa and throughout the diaspora today. Even though Abouet maintains a somewhat light writing style in these sections, she nevertheless has changed her strategy and responded to the critiques of her work by physically inserting her own words, not simply those of her characters.

In this chapter, I attempted to account for the international success of *Aya de Yopougon* to provide insight into the logic of the French-language *bande dessinée* industry. Stressing the importance of how paratextual elements work to frame Abouet and *Aya de Yopougon*, I argued that both are often presented as postcolonial exotic figures. To put it another way, Abouet and

[56] In America, Stan Lee is famous for directly addressing his readers in his Marvel comics to help boost sales and consequently generating a cult of personality around him. In France and Belgium, mainstream monthly *bande dessinée* magazines such as *Pilote* and *Spirou* would sometimes include surveys to pool for readers' interests, thus involving them in shaping various genres and trends.

Aya de Yopougon are marketed as simultaneously palatable and authentic. Many of the textual strategies employed by Abouet and Oubrerie do much to enhance the familiarity of everyday life in the Ivory Coast of Abouet's childhood. On the one hand, the high quality of the material and artistic dimensions of *Aya de Yopougon* in addition to the indirect endorsement of Joann Sfar ensure a large audience for this series. On the other hand, by taking Sfar's suggestion and by using the genre of the soap opera to organize the narrative, Abouet has created a series that appeals to readers on multiple levels. However, though the series comes across as lighthearted and has even been criticized for not delving more extensively into serious issues, I would argue that Abouet succeeds in subverting negative stereotypes about Africa and life in Africa from the first page and also succeeds in challenging binary thinking in favor of *métissage* and polyvocality. In fact, such oversimplified assessments of *Aya de Yopougon* are misplaced and unjustified, as I hope my analysis has convincingly demonstrated. Furthermore, while the first to volumes of *Aya de Yopougon* focus mainly on female concerns and excel in painting an intricate portrait of the local culture of Yopougon in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the later volumes tend to focus more closely on political issues such as immigration in Europe and fraud and corruption in the Ivory Coast, the logical evolution from the colonial to the postcolonial and gradual disintegration of society and economies, push factors that trigger emigration, throughout all six volumes, Abouet presents a radically straightforward look at female and male sexuality and at the dynamic process of identity formation in the Ivory Coast where the local and global and the traditional and modern are not perceived as exclusive poles at either end of the spectrum. By focusing on the reality of everyday life, Abouet and Oubrerie create an image of Africa that is tangible in its similarities to the rest of the world. In the next chapter, I consider how Belgian cartoonist Jean-Philippe Stassen also works to present readers with a tangible image of Africa.

However, rather than transform readers into local inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in West Africa, Stassen attempts to establish a personal connection between readers and his characters to ultimately engage them in a critical rethinking of the legacy of European colonialism in central Africa, more specifically in Rwanda, including imperialist modes of representation such as *bandes dessinées* themselves.

Chapter Three

Rwanda and Its Lasting Effects: Jean-Philippe Stassen the *BD journaliste*

In this chapter, I analyze Stassen's oeuvre, in particular the works dedicated to the 1994 Rwandan genocide,[57] to explore how using the Ninth Art to represent contemporary issues in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa is fraught with tension, particularly due to what Mark McKinney calls the "colonial heritage" of French comics. On the one hand, though Stassen's Belgian nationality appears to exclude him from a discussion of sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées*, I would argue that, in fact, he is integral to understanding the changing shape of European *bandes dessinées* today and is representative of a new generation of European artists ready to combat stereotypical representations of Africa that dominate Western media and popular culture. On the other hand, in choosing the Ninth Art whose origins are coterminous with European colonialism, Stassen must contend with the imperialist overtones embedded in the medium as well as the continued legacy of colonial visual rhetoric that endures in mainstream *bandes dessinées*. I argue that Stassen's self-stated goal of wanting to detach this medium from other mediums (such as literature and cinema) subsequently also involves, for him, detaching it from its historical and cultural background. Thus, it is imperative to ask how Stassen contests, transforms, and interferes with the logic of the existing visual iconography. Through bold graphic outlines and rich colors, he seduces readers into a prolonged engagement with difficult subject matter, thus creating a productive tension. Throughout his oeuvre, he depicts a complex vision of the relationship between Europe and Africa, often focusing on the infinite subtleties of everyday life to invite Western readers to interrogate the continued role of European colonial

[57] I use the term Rwandan genocide to mean the events that took place in Rwanda during the spring of 1994 starting with the assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana on 6 April and lasting for approximately one hundred days. Though the term Tutsi genocide also exists to describe the same series of events, I choose to retain the term Rwandan genocide so as not to ignore the fact that many victims of the genocide were also moderate Hutu and to underline that the genocide was a pre-planned political move to maintain power by Habyarimana's political party.

epistemology in contemporary politics. In particular, he exploits the potential of *bandes dessinées* to implicate Western readers in a call for justice for those responsible for the Rwandan genocide. Choosing to use *bandes dessinée* as a form of journalism allows him to fill the void created by the international (Western) media silence during the genocide while simultaneously undermining the reports that came out afterwards that mischaracterize 1) the genocide as a civil war and ethnic violence and 2) the refugees—often Hutu fleeing the advancing Rwandan Patriotic Front forces lead by Paul Kagame—as victims.

To address Stassen's work on the Rwandan genocide, I first situate his relationship to mainstream *bande dessinée* production in Europe through an analysis of his early career characterized by a distrust of all forms of authority and institutions. Then, I examine Stassen's unique use of trauma fiction to represent the Rwandan genocide in *Déogratias* and compare it with his highly experimental *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* to illustrate the range of his strategies for engaging Western audiences in questioning the sustained dominance of colonialist discourse. In the last sections of this chapter, I examine how Stassen's extensive work on *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* influenced the rest of his subsequent *bandes dessinées* and how, by stretching the elasticity of the medium beyond conventional limits, he actively seeks to decolonize the medium from its colonial origins, thus succeeding in helping change its shape and cultural status.

Stassen's Early Career and Mainstream Tendencies

To grasp the inventiveness of Stassen's work, we must first understand his relationship to mainstream *bande dessinée* practices in France and Belgium. This chapter will not offer an exhaustive analysis of Stassen's complete oeuvre, but rather briefly touch upon his early work to contextualize his emergence as a *BD journaliste.* As we will see, his early work draws heavily from his personal experiences and is very much concerned with the gritty reality of life in

Belgium. Moreover, the multicultural community in which Stassen grew up as a result of various waves of immigration in Belgium greatly shaped his subject matter and his visual aesthetic. For example, in *Louis le Portugais* (1998), Stassen's first solo *bande dessinée*, key issues include systemic discrimination against immigrants and people of immigrant background and police brutality. Subsequently, his early work is marked by anti-establishment portrayals of life in Belgium that later blossomed into full-blown investigations of international power structures and European hegemonic practices, specifically as they pertain to non-European populations.

Jean-Philippe Stassen was born in Liege, Belgium in 1966 and worked as an illustrator at age seventeen when, in desperate need of money, he agreed to illustrate Denis Lapière's *bande dessinée* scenarios.[58] Initially, considering his work as just that, work, and not an artistic form of expression, he poured over other popular *bandes dessinées* of the time and mimicked their style. Thus, his first publications imitate the *ligne claire*, or clear line, aesthetic—the visual style associated with and perfected by Hergé in his Tintin series. As the term implies, simplicity and a democratic thickness of lines mark this aesthetic, its driving forces readability and the effectiveness of transmitting narrative information. Essentially, Stassen's work during this phase was indistinguishable from other mainstream competitors as can be seen in Figure 3.1 taken from *Bullwhite*. Though Stassen demonstrates his talent for mimicking others' visual aesthetics, few if any indicators of his personal style come through. In interviews he explains that this imitation was meant to make his work more professional.[59] It took Stassen some time and lots of traveling

[58] Stassen worked with Lapière on *Bahamas* when he was only 18 and soon after worked on *Bullwhite*. The two were published in book form in 1988-1989.

[59] For the work he did on *Bahamas* and *Bullwhite* with Lapière, Stassen used the pseudonym Dean Marlowe. Thus, even though this early stage is marked by a lack of visual specificity, certain key elements of Stassen's outlook and personal interests surface with the use of the name Dean Marlowe—perhaps simultaneous references to the American actor and poster boy for rebellious youth James Dean, the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe, or the main character of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—a name that evokes a sense of wandering and rebelliousness. According to Stassen, during this phase, he continued to use different pseudonyms, a practice carried over from when he used to make posters for local punk rock concerts (Ciment, 109).

before he developed his own style. From a young age he exhibited a rebellious spirit that pushed him to question and disregard all forms of authority and to flee life in Belgium; in particular, he displayed a dislike for expectations and preconceived notions. It comes as no surprise then that Stassen would feel confined by the conventions of the medium at first and ultimately go beyond mainstream aesthetics as well as mainstream genre-defined content.

Figure 3.1. An example of Stassen's early work. (Denis Lapière and Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Bullwhite*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 52.

The development of Stassen's own aesthetic came as the result of his greatest passion: traveling. At an early age, he became infatuated with traveling, particularly to francophone regions of Africa. That Stassen's voyages would be greatly influenced by French and Belgian postcolonial trajectories and would follow along previously established routes from the colonial era comes as no surprise. Indeed, the first time Stassen traveled to Africa was with his childhood best friend who was born in Belgium and whose family had emigrated from Morocco. For Stassen, this personal immersion in another culture would lead to subsequent voyages in other Francophone regions of Africa; he traveled extensively though West Africa and eventually traveled to Rwanda just after the genocide. These voyages would ultimately re-shape his thinking in general, and, in particular, his thinking regarding cultural stereotypes, their origins, and how they are perpetuated. As a result of his travels, Stassen produced a series of paintings of people from a wide range of different cultures, marked by an intense interest in cultural diversity, other people, and, more importantly, the politics involved in representing cultures other than one's own. This new aesthetic, cultivated first in collaboration with Lapière in *Le bar du vieux français* (1992-1993), consists of distorting the *ligne claire* style to produce a much more nuanced, distinctive, and subjective view of the world. This distortion has a political dimension as well. As Laurence Grove highlights, the *ligne claire*, in reducing visual style and information to serve as the vehicle of the narrative, is instilled with an essentializing characteristic (Grove 123). Consequently, in attempting to complicate visual stereotypes and clichés, it is logical that a singular approach to seeing and representing the world would no longer be sufficient for Stassen.

What emerges in his work is a profoundly intense exploration of individual identity in the midst of an oppressive system and of the drive to escape authoritative institutions. Always trying to escape, always dreaming of elsewhere, always too constricted by tradition and authoritative

social norms, many of Stassen's main characters clash with their surroundings. In particular, his early *bandes dessinées* themselves also mimic this work in thwarting simplistic explanations of historical events and social cohesion. Starting with *Le bar du vieux Français*, Stassen began both cultivating his new style and experimenting with the conventions of the medium. Citing the repetition of the slippage between the scenario and the images, Cécile Danehy argues that *Le Bar du vieux Français* puts the reader face to face with the other only to find that the other is oneself. Through the piecing together of the main characters' lives–Célestin, Leila, and the old French bar owner—the reader is exposed to various cultures only to realize that growing up is never a straightforward path. Similarly, multiculturalism, while highlighting universalism, also highlights the universal dimension of racism and the hardships young people face when at odds with the cultural traditions of their families. Stassen also extends the elasticity of the medium through the use of gaps and blanks that serve an equal narrative function as the text and images. The *non-dit* (unspoken) and the *non-vu* (unseen) underline and reinforce violence, but also the changing point of view and limitations of the narrator, the eponymous old French expatriate living in North Africa. Celestin, the young African man does not find peace or happiness even though he successfully makes it to Europe and obtains a job. He is not accepted and he is alone. Likewise, Leila, the young woman of North African descent and born in Belgium, escapes Belgium (caught between the traditional culture of her family and the more liberal Belgian culture) only to find an equally oppressive social structure in Morocco. Like her male counterpart, she is also alone. However, because of her choices, her solitude can be read as a positive outcome; through her marriage to a wealthy Moroccan man whom she does not love, she gains a kind of economic freedom and agency when her husband is away on business.

In conjunction with the change in form came a change in function. The *bandes dessinées* from this phase take place both in Europe and Africa and, more importantly, focus exclusively on interpersonal relationships between people from different cultural backgrounds, as is evident by the titles: *Le bar du vieux Français* (1992-1993), *Louis le Portugais* (1998), and *Thérèse* (1999). One could argue that *Le Bar du vieux Français* marks the real beginning of Stassen's career as a cartoonist, for even though the scenario was written by Lapière, the subject matter and general idea for the narrative stem from Stassen's voyages. Soon after, he began writing and illustrating his own *bandes dessinées* starting with *Louis le Portugais* and *Thérèse* in which he used the lens of a single character to examine class struggles and cultural pluralism in Belgium. All three of these *bandes dessinées* focus on trapped individuals dreaming of escape to an elusive elsewhere devoid of the social, political, economic, and cultural confines in which they currently reside. Many of the characters are good-natured and yet victims of oppressive systems that keep them trapped. These tales of desire to leave one's home and to have the freedom to choose one's culture are tinged with the cancerous nature of prejudice and racism that pervades all societies. In each of these texts, we witness individuals locked into an unforgiving and uncaring world. Social, economic, and geographic mobility are practically unattainable. Escape is but a dream. In *Le bar du vieux Français*, the two main characters attain geographic escape (they both flee their respective birthplaces) only to find themselves constrained by new social and cultural constructs in a different location. Similarly, the eponymous character of *Louis le Portugais* tries to escape Belgium for an idealized version of sunny Portugal with a young woman of immigrant background, but, because of a violent car accident, ends up even more trapped in a prison hospital, the young woman and the child she was carrying having died in the accident. It is only

Thérèse who successfully escapes the stark and oppressive reality of Europe and this is only possible since this text functions primarily as a fable, thus taking place in a fantasy world.

It is interesting that in both *Le bar du vieux Français* and *Thérèse,* it is the women who make a place for themselves in Africa, who have the determination and tenacity to forge ahead, and who are willing to manipulate and subvert existing power structures to achieve their goals. Success in these texts is not measured by the acquisition of economic capital, nor is it measured by attaining an ideal, mythic dream perpetuated by European hegemonic culture. In fact, all those who succeed in the face of hardship, have, in fact, thwarted rules and regulations, whether governmentally or traditionally dictated and enforced. In contrast, the male characters (in particular Louis from *Louis le Portugais* and Momo from *Thérèse*) stuck in Europe, both physically and psychologically, suffer a life equal to death. Louis, imprisoned for the death of his beloved, ends up even more enclosed than at the beginning of the story. In *Thérèse,* Momo, the European man who refuses to abandon a European culture and value system, thus psychologically remaining in Europe, meets his actual death in Africa at the hands of Thérèse, his death serving as a symbolic cutting of ties to European value judgments and epistemologies.

From these early works, we already get a sense of Stassen's main concerns: individuals and the messy complexity of everyday life in today's globalized metropolitans. Even though the references to Europe (in particular Belgium) and Africa (in particular former French and Belgian colonies and territories) are linguistically obscure and function as a blanket effect in which Liège stands in for any European city of a similar size and Morocco loosely represents any of the former colonies or territories, there is also, more importantly, an aesthetic authenticity. Stassen imbues his work with a kind of legitimacy derived from his own personal experiences. Accuracy does not reside in a photographic faithfulness to locations, but rather in Stassen's ability to evoke

the cultural specificities of various locales. Unlike Hergé and other European artists who often relied and rely on photos, museum collections, archives, and other secondary sources and who only rarely travel to the locations they depict, Stassen's work critiques this superficial engagement with the elsewhere just as it questions the authority of such secondary sources. This mistrust of existing archives, stereotypes, clichés, and all preconceived notions is explicitly addressed in Stassen's preface to *Thérèse* in which he announces that *Thérèse* marks a turning point in his career and that, from that point on, his work would focus more on concrete stories set in real places about real people. Whereas his work up to this point was informed by his life in Liège and his travels to North and West Africa, *Thérèse* was produced in the wake of his first visit to Rwanda in 1997-1998. It is interesting that such an announcement prefaces *Thérèse*, his most fantastic *bande dessinée* that functions as a fable. In his own words, "l'Afrique que je montre dans *Thérèse* ne correspond pas du tout au Rwanda, un pays qui ne ressemble en rien aux autres pays africains que je connaissais, le Burkina Faso, le Mali, le Sénégal, etc." ("the Africa that I present in Thérèse does not correspond to Rwanda at all, a country that does not resemble in any way other African countries I know, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, etc."). It is almost as though Stassen's encounter with Rwanda—the reality of which at the time was so shocking for him and so far from any image of Africa projected in Western media—resulted in an overly-idyllic portrayal of Africa in *Thérèse*. The Africa to which Thérèse escapes and in which she finds her true identity, is part of a fantastic fairytale world in which she has special powers and where some peoples' physical appearances distort to match their inner qualities. While this particular vision of Africa serves as an imaginary backdrop, the manifestation of the discrepancy between inner beauty and outward ugliness represents Stassen's initial attempt to reconcile the extreme conditions (both positive and negative) he experienced while in Rwanda.

At the level of content, Stassen's early texts function outside industry norms and offer alternatives to mainstream genres such as action-adventure *bandes dessinées* and fantasy *bandes dessinées*. Rather, they participate in the larger trends of postcolonial literature and cultural production in that they focus on individuals and their practices of everyday life, thus denying the primacy of master narratives and, consequently, the dominance of a Euro-centric view of history. Similarly, Stassen definitively moved away from simply imitating the *ligne claire* style, effectively rejecting its oversimplified and reductionist logic and its underlying racist ideology. This new, more politically-engaged approach to *bandes dessinées* that couples a distinctively powerful graphic aesthetic with an investigative employment of the medium led to Stassen's work on the 1994 Rwandan genocide starting with *Déogratias* (2000) that would go on to win many awards. This harrowing tale, though fictional, is steeped in historical information and can be seen as a kind of *bande dessinée de reportage,* a term theorist Thierry Groensteen coined to categorize *bandes dessinées* and graphic novels that function as journalism (Groensteen, *La bande dessinée mode d'emploi* 187); it also marks the beginning of Stassen's active disruption of normal conventions in an attempt to decolonize the medium from mainstream tendencies and to affect a rich and personalized reader experience.

Representing the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

In 1998, ten African writers traveled to Rwanda as part of the "Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire" project ("Rwanda: Writing as a Duty to Memory") to experience, firsthand, the devastation of the genocide and to learn more about it. This project, first proposed at the 1995 Fest'Africa festival,[60] had the goals of contesting France's continued refusal to officially recognize the genocide and of producing novels that told of the physical and psychological

[60] Diop, Boubacar Boris, *Afrique au-delà du miroir* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2007). 20.

devastation of the genocide. In 2000, eight books, mainly novels,[61] were published including Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: Livre des ossements* (*Murambi: The Book of Bones*), Véronique Tadjo's *L'Ombre d'Imana. Voyage jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (*The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*), and Abdourahman Waberi's *Moisson de crânes* (*Harvest of Skulls*). In a collection of his essays entitled *L'Afrique au-delà du miroir* (*Africa Beyond the Mirror*), Senegalese writer Diop touches upon the concerns of the writers involved, explaining the humbling effect of their enormous task and the important role fiction played in conveying the human dimension of the genocide (30-32). Admittedly all of the writers struggled with finding an appropriate register for representing the genocide; subsequently, many of the novels, including the three mentioned, are a polyvocal blend of fiction and non-fiction that often, either directly or indirectly, account for the author's own belated arrival in Rwanda for, as Diop describes it, this meeting of fiction and non-fiction is also a meeting with oneself (Diop, *L'Afrique au-delà du miroir* 33). While much critical attention has been paid to the texts produced for the Fest'Africa project *Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire* and to the many documentaries and films about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, little has been written about *bandes dessinées* that address the same subject. Similarly, in comics studies, while much work has been done on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, very little has been written about the texts that represent the Rwandan genocide, whether they are personal eye witness accounts (as is the case with Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears: The Story of the Rwandan Genocide*) or outsider reports (as is the case with Stassen's work and the two-volume

[61] Koulsy Lamko (Chad) *La Phalène des collines* (The Moth of the Hills); Boubacar Boris Diop (Senegal) *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (Murambi: The Book of Bones); Tierno Monenembo (Guinea) *L'Aîné des orphelins* (The Oldest Orphan); Véronique Tadjo (Ivory Coast) *L'Ombre d'Imana. Voyage jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda); Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa (Rwanda) *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger* (The Tutsi Genocide Explained to an Outsider); Nocky Djedanoum (Chad) *Nyamirambo!*; Monique Ilboudo (Burkina Faso) *Murekatete*; Abdourahman Waberi (Djibouti) *Terminus*: *Textes pour le Rwanda* (Terminus: Texts for Rwanda).

piece *Rwanda 1994* by documentarian Cécile Grenier and artist Pat Masioni). Moreover, what little attention exists only mentions these texts in passing.[62]

This lack of attention to Stassen's work is quite shocking for a number of important reasons. First, this medium has already demonstrated itself capable of dealing with serious subject matter, yet there is a lack of critical attention paid to such texts. This fact is particularly pertinent in the context of the Rwandan genocide when we consider the active role of pervasive scathing political cartoons, specifically in the newspaper *Kangura*, from before and during the genocide that demonized Tutsis and pro-democracy politicians.[63] As Linda Melvern explains in *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, these cartoons were used as political weapons to assist in engraining hatred and fear towards Tutsis. Second, though many of the complex questions regarding the role of fiction and testimony in texts about the genocide, particularly in films and novels, are also crucial to *bandes dessinées*, how such questions are rendered through the unique properties of *bande dessinée* have yet to be addressed. A common goal in such novels and films is the need to implicate the reader, thus hindering their ability to "pass on"[64] the genocide, its victims, and survivors. Thus, most of these texts halt readers' ability to pass lightly over the events, so as not to pass on or continue the legacy of hatred and politicized identities central to the efficacy and alarming speed of the genocide. Like writers and filmmakers who experiment with literary and cinematic techniques to raise awareness and investigate the reasons

[62] See, for example, Catherine Coquio, *Rwanda: Le réel et les récits* (Paris: Éditions Belin, 2004) , p. 98 or Aedín Ní Loingsigh, "Lying to Tell the Truth: Fiction and the Rwandan Genocide in Véronique Tadjo's *L'ombre d'Imana*." *Postcolonial Violence, Culture and Identity in Francophone Africa and the Antilles*. Ed. Milne, Lorna (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) 83-102, p. 85.

[63] Detailed analyses, descriptions, and actual reprinted political cartoons from *Kangura* can be found in *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide*, Jean-Pierre Chrétien, Jean-François Dupaquier, Marcel Kabanda, Joseph Ngarambe, with Reporters sans frontiers, eds. (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1995). In addition, see Jean-Paul Goutex, *La nuit rwandaise: L'implication française dans le dernier génocide du siècle* (Paris: Izuba Editions, 2002), which offers examples of political cartoons from European journals that depict violence and problems in Rwanda in a strongly colonialist way.

[64] Here I am thinking of the expression 'pass on' from the end of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* in which the notion of passing on means both to hand down and to pass over.

for the genocide, so does Stassen experiment with various visual and textual strategies in *Déogratias* (2000), *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* (2002), and *Les enfants* (2004).

These three *bandes dessinées* complement one another and function as a two-pronged approach to raise consciousness about the genocide while also involving readers in generating a critical understanding of the genocide, its causes, and, most importantly, its aftermath. Keeping in mind Stassen's outsider status as a Belgian artist, in this section, I examine his tireless labors to manipulate this medium to involve a Western and mainly francophone audience in an effort to make the genocide, in Mahmood Mamdani's terms, thinkable. In *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Mamdani stresses the need to wrench an understanding of the Rwandan genocide apart from numbing statistics and unimaginable violence so as to make it thinkable. Mamdani convincingly foregrounds the sheer scale and grassroots enormity of the genocide as integral to what makes it so difficult to comprehend: "[w]e may agree that genocidal violence cannot be understood as rational; yet, we need to understand it as thinkable. Rather than run away from it, we need to realize that it is the 'popularity' of the genocide that is its uniquely troubling aspect" (8). Moreover, as part of Mamdani's goals in making the unimaginable thinkable, is a desire to understand more completely the potential of such events to prevent further violence: "[t]o show how the unthinkable becomes thinkable is my central objective. It is this fact that needs confronting, not because of what it can tell us of Rwanda and Rwandans, but because of what it can tell us about ourselves as political beings—as agents with a capacity to tap both the destructive and the creative potential in politics" (18). Indeed, Stassen's work on the genocide, as we will see, participates in trying to make the genocide thinkable so as to implicate Western readers in the contemporary political moment. In what follows, I examine how *Déogratias* (and to a large

extent *Les enfants*) creates a personal connection between the reader and the events of the genocide, thus leading to a kind of indirect or secondary witnessing of the events. In contrast, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* engages readers in rejecting simplistic explanations of the genocide in favor of the continued construction of meaning that is fraught with tension and that requires critical thinking. I argue that Stassen's work actively seeks to involve readers in an exploration of the extremes of human nature that the genocide reveals, thus making the genocide thinkable.

Déogratias centers on an adolescent Hutu and plunges readers into the personal lives of teenagers while exposing them to the conditions leading up to and following the genocide. Illustrating Déogratias's everyday struggles and concerns before the genocide, Stassen creates a character with whom readers can easily identify. In fact, reader identification with the eponymous character is not only the main goal of the text; readers identify with the main character in order to ask what they would have done in his situation. However, Stassen stages the narrative as Déogratias's traumatic memory effectively complicating easy identification and demanding that readers work through the trauma and, consequently, an understanding of the genocide. The result is a powerfully interactive text in which gorgeous visuals collide with the extreme ugliness of violence to generate an awareness of the genocide in the West that resonates with readers on a personal level. As we will see, Stassen's ingenious aesthetic and narrative choices engender a productive tension between over-identification with the main character and a weary suspicion of him that results in a useful critical distance on the part of the reader. Indeed, this critical distance also becomes the basis of a critique of the West's role in the genocide, in particular the role of European colonial ideology and, more recently, the roles played by the French and Belgian governments in the actual genocide. The striking lack of paratextual material

to contextualize the narrative speaks to the overarching importance of reader identification. In an interview, Stassen admits having decides against adding a bibliography at the end of *Déogratias* (Ciment 113). While most films, novels, and even other *bandes dessinées* about the genocide provide introductory information—itself often problematic[65]—to contextualize the events of 1994 for non-Rwandan audiences, the absence of such information in *Déogratias* effectively means that readers must gain their bearings as they go. Historical contextualization and background information are woven into the very fabric of the narrative for an organic encounter. Similarly, the narrative and aesthetic strategies deployed in *Déogratias* adhere to the guiding principle of reader identification and, as we will see, hinge upon the question of trauma.

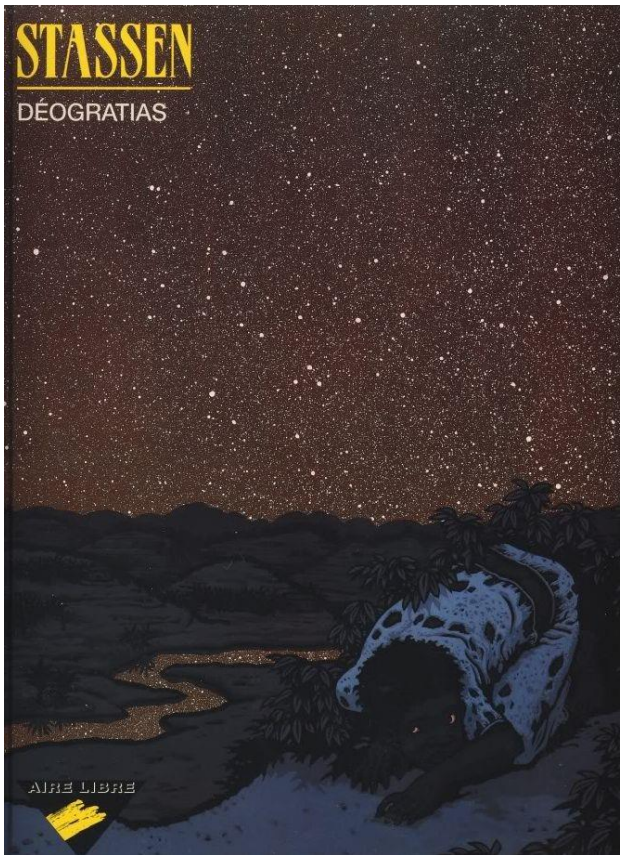

Figure 3.2. Cover of *Déogratias*. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000).

[65] See Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), in particular Dauge-Roth's discussion of directors' approaches to history lessons in "Part Three: Screening Memory and (Un)Framing Forgetting: Filming Genocide in Rwanda."

Stassen's aesthetic choices echo his narrative choices and both establish a powerful link between the reader and the main character. The composure of the cover of the album with the main character huddling in the bottom right corner from an unknown aggressor that might be the stars draws the reader in (Figure 3.2). The title, meaning "Thanks be to God" in Latin, strengthens a potential connection between the celestial heavens and the crouching figure on the cover. The other striking feature of the cover that draws readers in is its complete lack of referential or contextual information. Whereas the English translation of *Déogratias* has an added subtitle that clues readers into the subject matter of the text (*Déogratias: A Rwandan Tale*), the original version lacks such cues. At first glance and without physically picking up the book, potential readers have no visual markers that hint at the story within. If the reader choses to pick up the text, there is a description on the back cover that alerts them to the fact that *Déogratias* focuses on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

The visual loneliness of the main character on the cover continues throughout the entire *bande dessinée* and functions as an indicator of the destructive force and devastation of the genocide. Visually, *Déogratias* is dominated by two intertwined figures: Déogratias and the landscape. The constant juxtaposition of tight close-ups of Déogratias's expression—whether his bright and optimistic cheerfulness from before the genocide or the hauntingly haggard vacancy from after the genocide—with a lush and verdant landscape creates dynamic tension, the beauty of the landscape playing against the ugliness of the events of the genocide. Indeed, the absence and sheer lack of certain visual features common to comics and *bandes dessinées* such as onomatopoeia, action lines, and thought bubbles that transmit what characters are thinking create an introverted text that draws readers into Déogratias's psychological state without giving them total access. Furthermore, the ubiquity of these two figures creates a feeling of loneliness and

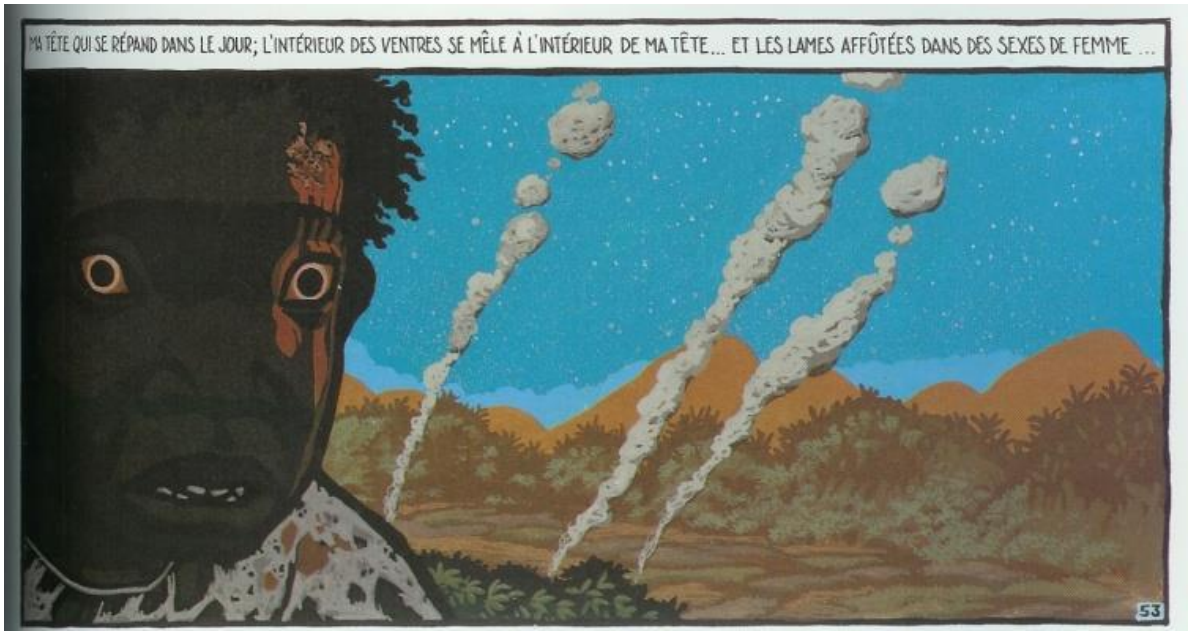

Figure 3.3. A traumatized Déogratias incapable of distinguishing the past from the present. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 55.

emptiness. The suspiciously empty landscape highlights, through the lack of bodies, the staggering absence of people. The emptiness of the countryside is the result of the genocide and the mass exodus of Rwandans—perpetrators and victims alike—through the French-protected Zone Tourquoise towards the end of the genocide. In addition, to combat graphically sensationalizing violence, the visual representations of genocidal violence actually in *Déogratias* are sparse and subtle. This creates and enhances the haunting and disturbing quality of the text. Leading up to the climax of the story, the visual representations of violence are easily overlooked, but their impact literally and symbolically bleeds out from the panels. For example, in Figure 3.3 we see a close-up of Déogratias bleeding from having been hit with a rock by other children; while this takes place after the genocide, the framing of the panel (with just Déogratias's expression in the foreground and the Rwandan landscape in the background, smoke rising from burning cleared brush) combined with Déogratias's traumatized interior monologue about violence meted out on unnamed (at this point) women produces a contentious ambiguity; the blood from Déogratias's head wound and the smoke suggest a moment in time during the

genocide and, in fact, expose the haunting and prolonged effects of the genocide, a tension that is matched in the structure of the narrative.

I would now like to turn to the narrative strategies to analyze how Stassen subtly engages readers with first the main characters' lives and then with the underlying political and ethical questions surrounding the events of the genocide. The choice to put Déogratias in school has many implications: it functions as an effective way to create a relationship between the readers and Déogratias; and the school, as a remnant from European imperialism, stands as a colonial institution that links the contemporary racist ideology that fueled the genocide with nineteenth-century European epistemology that justified colonialism and the subjugation of non-white populations. A closer look at a classroom scene from *Déogratias* reveals the multi-layering at work. In this scene (Figure 3.4), Stassen alludes to *Tintin au Congo* by reproducing the charged and institutional site of the classroom when explaining the "ethnic" breakdown in Rwanda before the 1994 genocide. In addition to being a haunting echo of Hergé's colonial classroom in the various versions of *Tintin au Congo* (Figure 3.5), this scene also draws attention to the very nature of Hergé's classroom and what is being taught, namely the Belgian *mission civilatrice*. The parallels between these two scenes points directly to one of the most negative effects of such a mission: the division of the Rwandan people. Stassen literally writes new equations on the palimpsest of the chalkboard, thus inscribing an added dimension of Belgian colonial legacy to the present moment: if, as Tintin asserts, "*Votre patrie*" is "*La Belgique*" and if Congolese children can be taught simple additions, then, it would appear logical, and, even mathematically sound, that the division of Rwandan ethnicities into the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa that the Belgian colonialists institutionalized and enforced through the issuing of identity cards in 1931 remains a reality even after Rwanda gained its independence. Indeed, the ideological rhetoric the

teacher employs in *Déogratias* when ascribing essentializing attributes to the three categories is a blatant carryover from the colonial era.

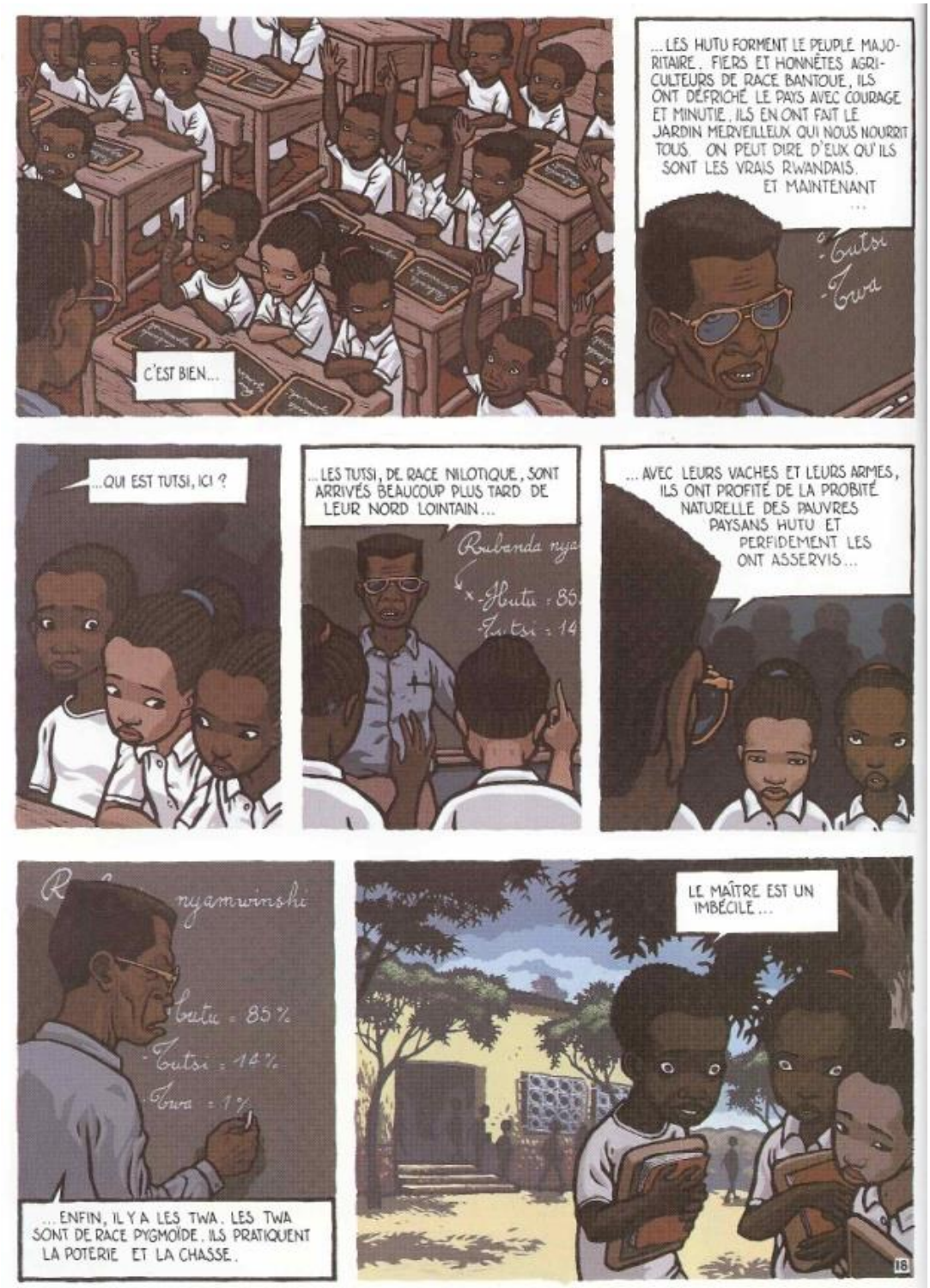

Figure 3.4. The classroom scene in which the teacher singles out non-Hutu students. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 20.

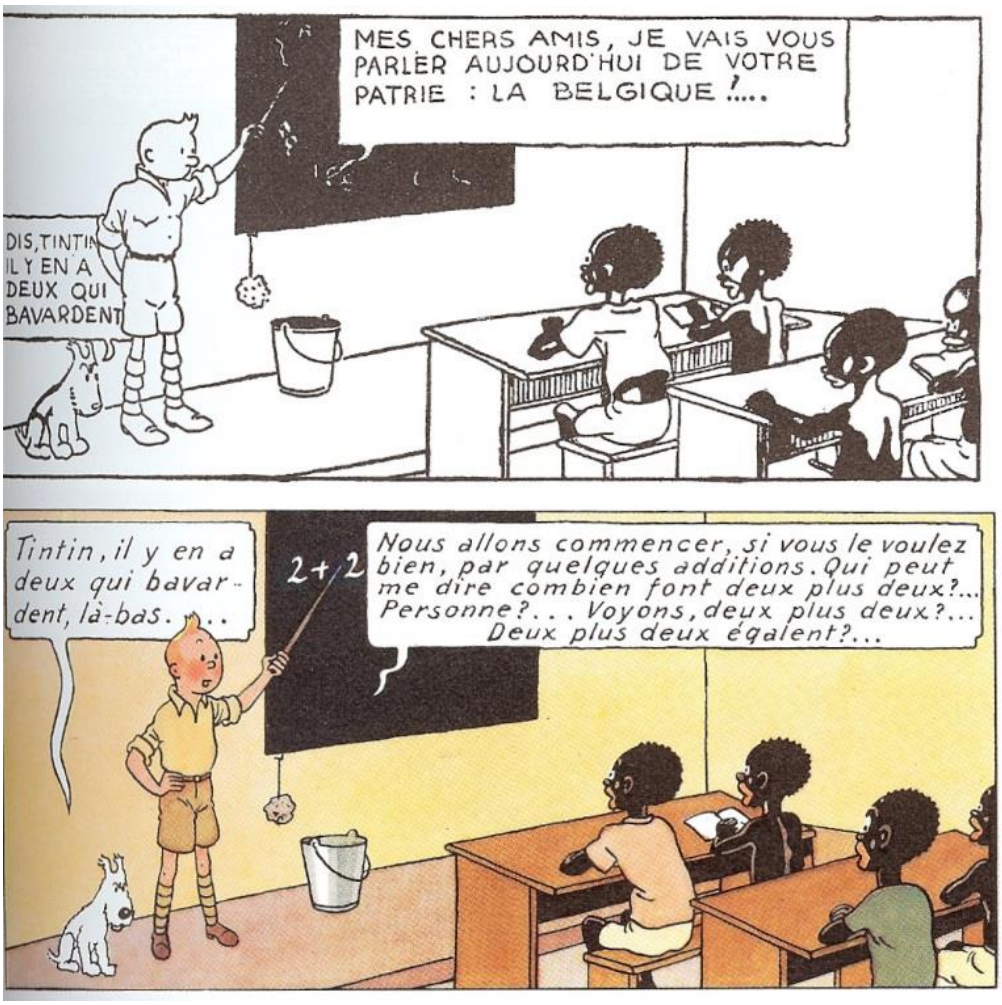

Figure 3.5. Two versions of the school scene from *Tintin au Congo*, Hergé. The top image is from the original series (1931) and the bottom image is from the re-printed, color version (1946). (Benoît Peeters, *Tintin and the World of Hergé: An Illustrated History.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 31.

Though Stassen represents the classroom as the continuation of the Belgian colonial legacy, he recontextualizes its social status by providing the reader with the various points of view of the students. Whereas the students listening to Tintin are passive and ostensibly blank receptors ready to be "cultivated" by their Belgian patrimony, the young students in *Déogratias* each react differently to the official discourse being inscribed on the chalkboard and, subsequently, on them. For example, the two girls, half-sisters from a Tutsi woman, represent two different responses to being marked with the negative and biting portrayal of their supposed ancestors. Though one is physically marked as different through her skin color, having a Belgian

father, both are scrutinized as outsiders. When the teacher asks for a show of hands of who is Hutu, the girls, obviously singled out from the majority of the students, appear uncomfortable. Further complicating the situation is Déogratias's reaction when the teacher asks who is Tutsi and the girls are meant, yet again, to feel as outsiders, doubly compounding their shame; though Déogratias is Hutu, he sympathizes with the girls' feelings because he cares about them. After class, he attempts to make them feel better by reassuring them that the teacher is an imbecile. However, while it might be relatively easy for Déogratias to critique the teacher, it does not change the discrimination faced by the two girls. It does not change the fact that the rhetoric taught by the teacher indicates widely-held views of the time.

As we can see from the classroom scene, the other characters and how they are portrayed provide depth, historical contextualization, and a means of exploring the complexities of the genocide. Linguistically and visually Stassen does not represent a difference between the characters; that is to say that rather than use Kinyarwanda and providing translations, Stassen only uses French. Contextually readers are aware that a different language is being spoken due to the presence of a translator who mediates between Europeans and Rwandans. Furthermore, there is no visual difference between Hutu and Tutsi characters. There is, however, Apollinaire, who has lighter skin due to the fact that her father is the Belgian priest at the local church who flees and leaves his Tutsi lover and their daughter to the fate of the genocide. The Twa character, Augustin, is markedly shorter than the other characters. The absence of physical difference functions as one of the ways in which Stassen addresses the reality of the genocide as a political move on the part of a small group who, in an attempt to maintain power, perpetuated the ideology of ethnic hatred and difference after independence.

Nowhere is the powerful potential of Stassen's unique blend of aesthetic and narrative choices more evident than in the construction of the text as a traumatic memory. Recognizing that while it is impossible to have direct access to the actual genocide, Stassen nevertheless attempts to make the genocide thinkable by focusing on the before and after of the genocide. By staging *Déogratias* as the main character's trauma, Stassen invites readers to work through the trauma as they work through the text. Though Cathy Caruth and other specialists of trauma theory warn against over-identifying with those who have witnessed traumatic events,[66] Stassen purposefully exploits the sequential nature of *bandes dessinées* to mimic and dramatize traumatic memory. This serves two main purposes that are continually at odds in the text. First, as stated, it draws readers in by suspending the ambiguity of Déogratias's innocence and guilt. Ironically, the process of working through Déogratias's trauma also leads to the second effect which is the creation of a critical distance between the reader and the text. Like other trauma fiction, this text "shifts from a reflective mode – based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding – to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us, " (Whitehead 13) thus meant to facilitate a dynamic thinking through of the genocide.

Many novels and films about the genocide employ trauma as a productive approach to engaging readers and spectators in the subject. Indeed, the title of Alexandre Dauge-Roth's analysis of such novels and films, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History*, points to the prevalence of trauma in attempts at representing and remembering the genocide. By involving readers and spectators in the narratives through the staging of trauma, Dauge-Roth sees these novels and films as

[66] See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

addressing the discrepancy between public and private memories of the genocide. According to Cathy Caruth, "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* 11). Because of its repetition and the belatedness of meaning, trauma often behaves as a kind of haunting. Consequently, many writers have experimented in producing such a haunting effect in their work. According to Anne Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction*, "[n]ovelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection" (3). While Whitehead's argument refers specifically to the strategies employed by novelists, we can see similar strategies successfully adopted and adapted in other mediums such as in film and *bandes dessinées*. Whitehead goes on to underline repetition as one of the primary literary strategies in trauma fiction since it "mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (86). Repetition is integral to the make-up of both film and *bandes dessinées* and many filmmakers have exploited and experimented with repetition to address the question of trauma. However, I would argue that *bandes dessinées*, even more so than film, offer a uniquely productive opportunity to explore trauma in that, unlike film whose ruptures are sutured over for viewers, *bandes dessinées* are defined by the gutter and by constant interruptions. Though many artists and writers seek to reduce the inherently fragmented nature of *bandes dessinées* through continuity, there are those, like Stassen, who embrace such a dynamic feature.

Brandy Ball Blake also makes this connection in her article "*Watchmen*: The Graphic Novel as Trauma Fiction," arguing "[i]n their most typical forms, graphic novels possess many formalistic features that could be used to express trauma" (Brandy). The formal characteristics of graphic novels replicate the symptoms of trauma: the fragmented page, the repetition of images, the constant interruptions, and the gutter or white space on the page as a manifestation of omissions from the narrative are particularly conducive to dramatizing and staging trauma. Moreover, the co-presence of multiple panels on the page that represent discrete moments in time and the relationship between the left- and right-hand pages also provide for the simultaneity of the past, present, and future in the narrative. In *Déogratias*, the past and present inhabit the same physical and psychological space for the main character who cannot distinguish between the two moments. The life he knew before the genocide haunts his present predicament and the actual events of the genocide continually disrupt his understanding (and the reader's) of reality.

Trauma, in *Déogratias*, manifests in a handful of familiar and useful tropes usually found in novels and films, the most important being repetition and the breakdown of chronologic time. Stassen mimics traumatic temporality in *Déogratias* with a narrative that is fractured, repetitive, and continually interrupted by flashbacks. This creates a static quality for Déogratias who is incapable of moving forward or beyond his trauma, while, paradoxically, that is precisely what readers must do. Indeed, these diametrically opposed movements are reflected in Whitehead's description of traumatic memory that "is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition, while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling" (87). In the text, flashbacks are seamlessly interwoven creating a kind of haunting superimposition of the past on an ambiguous present. The repetitive mode of the images in the text conveys a sense of closed circuitry. Indeed, Whitehead suggests

that "[r]epetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis. In its negative aspect, repetition replays the past as if it was fully present and remains caught within trauma's paralyzing influence" (86). The ambiguity and paralysis symptomatic of trauma that Whitehead underlines are crucial to maintaining tension throughout *Déogratias*. Visually, the past and present are not so easily distinguishable, though Stassen provides traces and visual markers of trauma such as Déogratias's tattered clothes and the battered exterior of many of the local buildings. That there seems to be a kind of paralysis in the text is no surprise since, as mentioned, Déogratias and the landscape, as the two dominating figures in the text, establish a solemn sense of stasis.

Figure 3.6. Adjacent panels that juxtapose two moments at the church. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 15.

One crucial example of how Stassen mimics the ostensibly static nature of traumatic temporality can be seen in the representation of the local church. It is telling that Stassen would choose a church as the focal point in the text and in Déogratias's traumatic memory, for during the genocide, churches played a vital role, often becoming sites of mass killings under the

watchful eyes of clergymen, some of who protested, some who opted to remain neutral allowing violence to take place, and some who actively participated in violent acts. This gruesome and startling fact is even more drastic when we consider that, as in *Déogratias*, churches also contain orphanages and had been, in previous bouts of violence leading up to 1994, safe havens. However, the perpetrators and participants of the 1994 genocide took advantage of this tendency to seek shelter at churches, ultimately converting holy houses into sites of mass killing and mass graves. For example, in Figure 3.6 are two panels juxtaposed on the same page in which we see two separate moments in time: the first panel contains visual cues such as Déogratias's torn clothes, ragged appearance, and the marred church exterior (the bullet holes in the side of the church wall visually echoing the holes in Déogratias's clothes) that imply a moment after the destruction and the second panel contrasts with a shockingly pristine representation of the same place from before the genocide. For Déogratias, these two moments coexist though are separated by an ostensibly unfathomable in-between moment, namely, the genocide. A hint into the in-between moment of the genocide is suggested by Déogratias's haunted expression in the first panel. According to Whitehead, "[t]he event is not experienced as it occurs, but is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time" (12). Stassen seems to imply the belated character of Déogratias's trauma through the juxtaposition of these two panels. An actual illustration of violence at the church does not surface until much later in the text and is an almost impenetrable void. The shocking image from during the genocide (Figure 3.7) is easy to pass over upon first glance and eludes comprehension. The framing of the doorway enhances the black interior that prohibits readers from having direct access to the violence just as Déogratias's access to his own memory is fraught with gaps and omissions. However, the trickle of blood that

emanates from within the church underlines this absence and haunts the text while also hinting at the inevitability of the genocide bleeding over boundaries in its excess of violence.

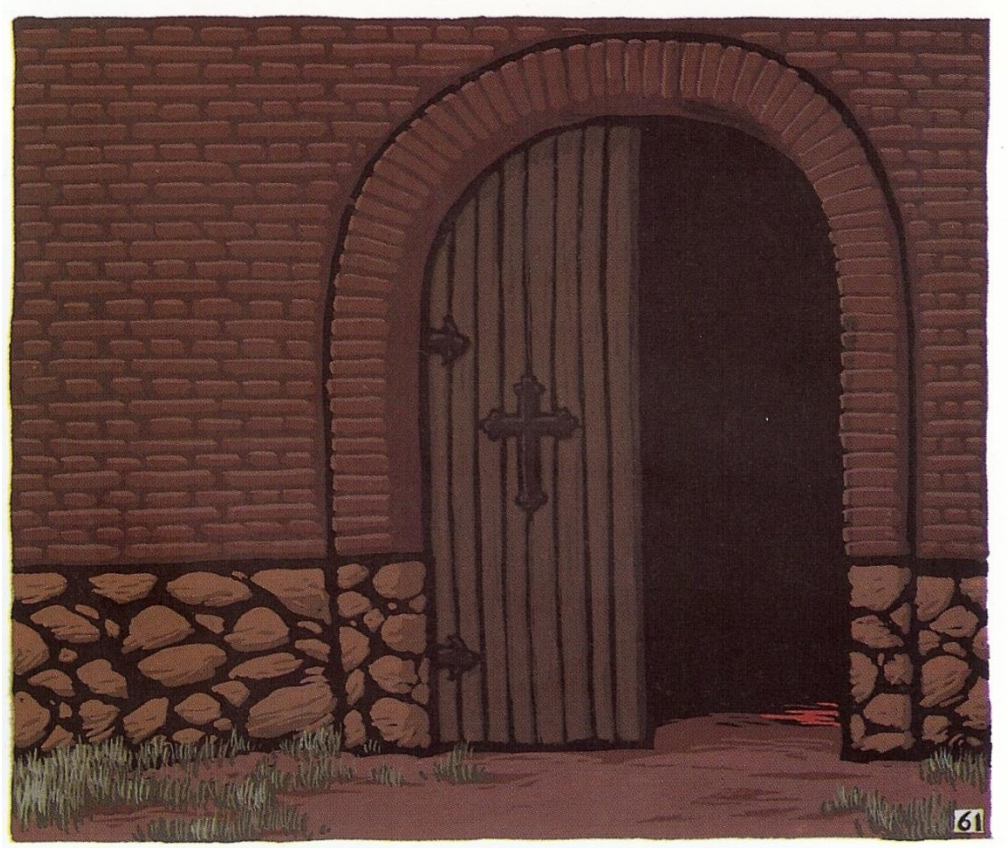

Figure 3.7. An image of the church from during the genocide. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias,* Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 63.

Likewise, access to memories coincides with the intersection of Déogratias and specific locations in the landscape. In *Déogratias,* Stassen dramatizes the haunting effect of trauma through the correlation between sites (places) and sight (seeing). *Bandes dessinées* consist of images and in this particular text, Stassen repeatedly draws attention to the complex acts of looking and seeing. The prevalence of sight and seeing is foregrounded on almost every page of the text. Sites become catalysts, triggering memories that haunt the present. Furthermore, the text is possessed by the image of Déogratias paradoxically seeing and not seeing. In fact, there are a total of 76 panels dedicated to medium close-ups, close-ups, and extreme close-ups of the main

character's face. In an album approximately 85 pages long, this means that practically each page is haunted by Déogratias's expression. Even the cover and the very first panel of the text (Figure 3.8) consist of images of a traumatized Déogratias. The repetition of Déogratias's expression coincides with Caruth's definition that "[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth, *Trauma* 4-5). Indeed, while Déogratias is possessed by images of the past, Stassen also seems to apply this understanding of trauma to the entire *bande dessinée* in that the text itself is possessed by the image of a traumatized Déogratias, thus producing a kind of indirect or secondary trauma. Of course, as the narrative unfolds, the reader begins to wonder the reason for Déogratias's trauma. The lack of direct access to the trauma, however, creates a vast gulf between the reader and Déogratias.

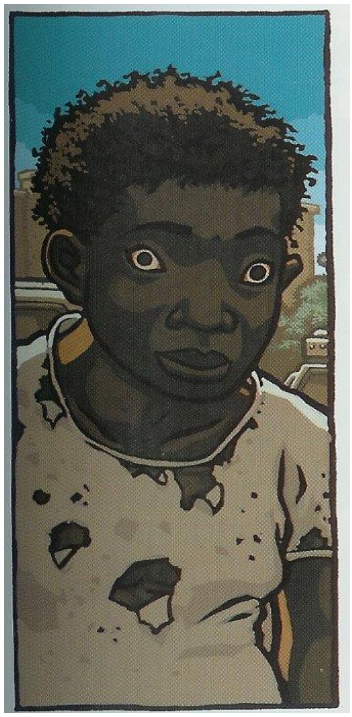

Figure 3.8. The first panel of the book: Déogratias with a vacant expression and worn clothes. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 3.

This gulf is further exacerbated by Déogratias's descent into madness that creates a necessary distance between the reader and the main character. For Stassen, it is imperative to

maintain this tension throughout the text to keep readers invested in Déogratias's situation: "c'est justement que les auteurs du génocide ne sont pas des monstres mais des gens comme vous et moi, qu'il faut les juger et les condamner" ("it is precisely that the authors of the genocide are not monsters, but rather people like you and me that we should judge and condemn them") (Ciment 114). While Stassen portrays Déogratias as visibly unsettled from the very first panel of the text, the status of his innocence is not so clear cut. Visually, the tension between innocence and culpability is represented by the contrast between daytime and nighttime as well as marked by the deformation of Déogratias into an inhuman creature that eventually manifests as a dog. When night settles in the text, Déogratias's transformation commences and he vocalizes the image that haunts his sight—dogs feasting on human flesh—drawing a parallel between the stars in the sky with the lives of his friends who have died and are now in heaven. Each of the three times this transformation occurs in the text, it is directly followed by a large swath of white (the *non-dit* and the *non-vu*) that finishes the page (Figure 3.9). When the reader turns the page, the dawn of a new morning alights on a sleeping Déogratias. The silent white spaces that cover almost half a page are visual representations of the unbridgeable gap between the reader and the main character that deny direct access to Déogratias's trauma. However, tension arises when readers must nevertheless pass over this gap and turn the page, thus maintaining a sense of ambiguity. Stassen perpetuates this tension throughout the text and, in effect, this tension is, as Robert Eaglestone argues, symptomatic of perpetrator testimony. In discussing the genre of Nazi testimony, Eaglestone explains that, in contrast to victim testimonies, "the past perpetrator is split from the present" and when "the narrator is the perpetrator in a forced confession, the split is enacted by … mendacity and pleading [which] has a corollary in the splitting of the reader, who is constantly drawn into the text, with moments of almost unwitting sympathy … and

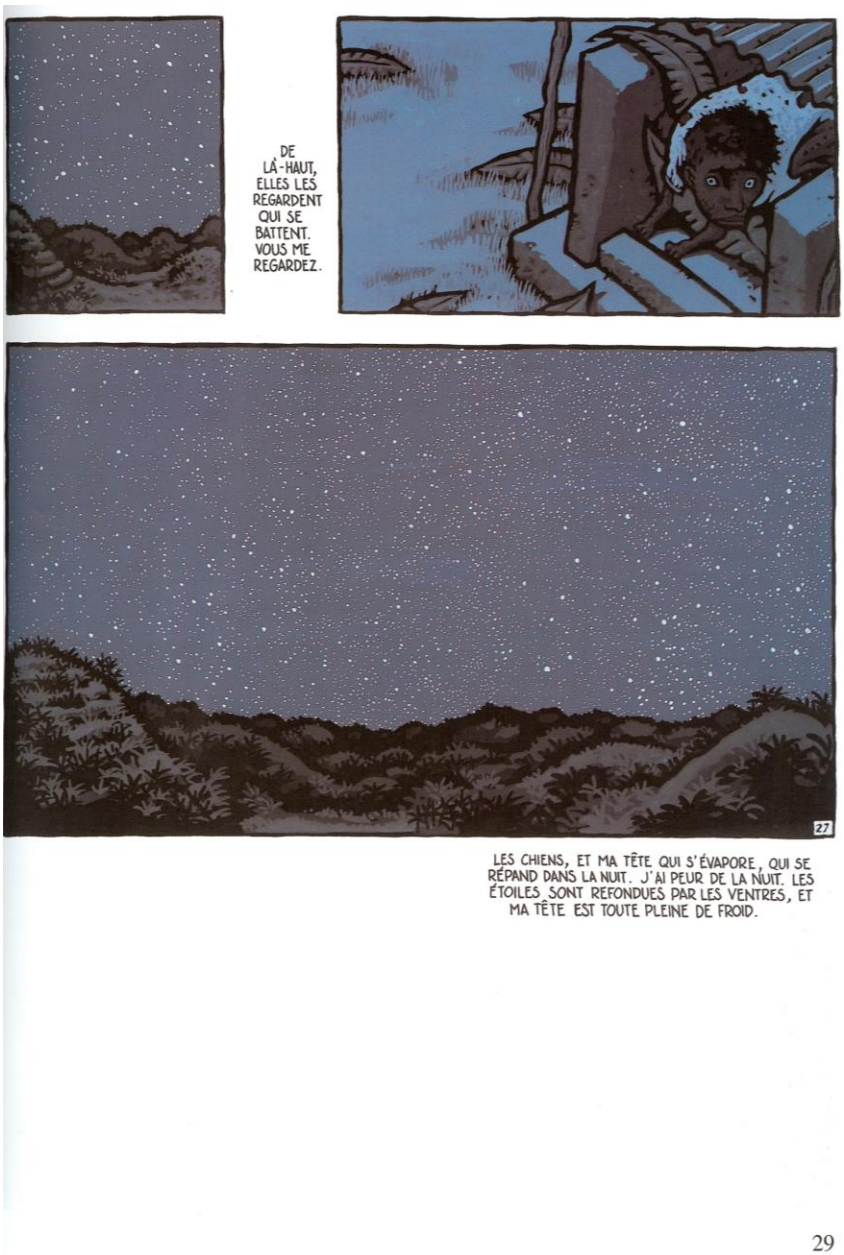

Figure 3.9. An example of Stassen's use of empty space on the page. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 29.

simultaneous repulsion" (128). At first, following Eaglestone's description, the reader is meant to believe that Déogratias is traumatized by the horrific things he saw during the genocide. As the text progresses, it is revealed that Déogratias actually participated in the genocide and is responsible for the death of those he loved. Though Déogratias claims that he was coerced into committing violent acts, the fact that he is pictured as an actual dog during his confession to

Brother Philippe belies his sense of guilt. Like the choice of the church as an important site in the text, Stassen's choice of a dog has larger implications in the context of the genocide. Anyone familiar with the genocide will know that one of the most horrendous sights was various animals, in particular packs of dogs, feasting upon the hundreds of thousands of unburied corpses rotting in the open.

The climax of the narrative coincides with Déogratias's complete transformation into a dog and the utter loss his humanity. His confession to Brother Philippe is plagued by still images of the traumatic events of his actions during the genocide implying that, as he attempts to narrate what happened, he simultaneously relives the events. Through surgical precision and discrete framing, Stassen provides quick shocking glimpses of violence that create an emotional effect but that in no way attempt to represent the totality of genocidal violence. In fact, the rupturing effect the few images of violence have on the rest of the text is, not surprisingly, a haunting one. Literally, the frames that depict the violence of the genocide are spliced into the narrative; they exert a force on the story, the readers, and the main character, literally causing him harm. These interruptions, like gaping, festering wounds refuse to heal over or be sutured, thus disrupting normal life. They cannot be integrated. They are paradoxically contained and spilling over throughout the entire text. The dismembering violence inflicted on the bodies of the victims (by Déogratias) is reproduced by Stassen through framing (Figure 3.10). The close-ups of the mutilated bodies of Déogratias's friends represent ruptures, cuts, dismemberments that disfigure and dehumanize the victims. In the medium of *bandes dessinées*, the disfigured bodies find an echo in the fractured texture of the page. In a sense, the act of reading over the gaps on the page produces a form of symbolic justice. Whereas Déogratias disfigured and dismembered the bodies of his victims, readers, by reading over the gap between the panels and also making sense of the

dismembered body parts, re-cognize the victims as Déogratias's friends, therefore giving them meaning and, most importantly, humanizing them.

Figure 3.10. The horrible images Déogratias saw when he returned to Kigali during the genocide. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, *Déogratias*, Brussels: Dupuis, 2000), 77.

This process of closure on the part of the reader functions as a kind of symbolic reconciliation between the past and the present. Readers bear witness to Déogratias's trauma, work through it, and therefore act as secondary witnesses, thus enacting Whitehead's assertion that, through trauma theory, "reading is restored as an ethical practice" (8). The ethical importance of serving as secondary witnesses is reinforced by the end of the text. For though we follow Déogratias as he repeatedly relives his traumatic past, at the end of the *bande dessinée*, it

is in fact the Belgian priest, Brother Philippe, with whom we identify. Since the target audience of *Déogratias* consists mainly of European francophone readers, they, like Brother Philippe, are outsiders who did not directly witness the genocide. Stassen bookends the text with a correlation between the cover and the last page; while the image of the starry night sky dominates both, the shift in focus from Déogratias to the reader is reinforced by the fact that on the cover, we see Déogratias and his name while on the last page, Déogratias is visually absent, but nominally present though mediated through the Priest's utterance: "C'était une créature de Dieu" ("He was a creature of God").[67] Brother Philippe's words clash with his body language and posture, which belie a sense of guilt at having missed the traumatic events and having had the privilege of leaving Rwanda during the genocide. The accusatory nature of the stars that so haunted Déogratias now face the readers who, like Brother Philippe, are now implicated in what took place in Rwanda, imbued with an ambivalent and problematic responsibility, namely the responsibility of no longer being able to claim ignorance having witnessed, albeit indirectly and secondarily, the genocide.

Stassen's ultimate goal of wanting readers to identify with Déogratias does have its risks and dangers. The stark absence of explicit contextualizing material in the original version of *Déogratias* led to, in Stassen's view, grave misinterpretations of the text in which certain readers argue that it absolves certain *génocidaires* (genocide perpetrators) of their guilt by portraying the main character as having no other options. However, as my reading of the last page demonstrates, this attempt to use *Déogratias* as justification of perpetrators' actions is a blatant misreading and political manipulation of Stassen's message. In fact, Stassen was so struck by the range of reactions to *Déogratias* that he would go on to create two other *bandes dessinées*

[67] From the English translation of *Déogratias* p. 78. Stassen. *Déogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*. Trans. Alexis Siegel. (New York: First Second, 2006).

dedicated to furthering a complex, more nuanced, and much more politically explicit understanding of the genocide. The two texts to which I refer are *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* and *Les enfants*. While *Les enfants* is very similar to *Déogratias*, using similar techniques but focusing on the aftereffects of the genocide throughout the Great Lakes region of central Africa, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* is drastically different and marks a substantial turning point in Stassen's career.

The exposure to Rwanda and its people left an indelible mark on Stassen and his work just as they did on the participants of the Fest'Africa project *Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire*. In particular, Stassen's work most closely resembles that of Senegalese writer Boris Boubacar Diop for whom the struggle to represent the genocide in fiction inevitably led to further exploration of the genocide in non-fiction. As a result of the Fest'Africa project *Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire*, Diop published the acclaimed novel *Murambi: livre des ossements*; however, the research he conducted for the novel eventually sparked an insatiable appetite to know more about the genocide and, in particular, France's involvement. In *Afrique au-delà du miroir*, Diop takes an investigative approach to the genocide and explains the difficulties of writing about the genocide, many of which have also been expressed by other writers of the *Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire* project.[68] All of these writers struggled with finding an appropriate register for representing the genocide, often leading to a blend of fiction and non-fiction that includes autobiographical elements to situate the author's own experiences. Indeed, the subject position of an outside author is problematic and, as Catherine Coquio points out, can be particularly ambiguous when the outside author is European and

[68] The run in with Rwanda and its history further blurs the always already ambiguous boundary between fiction and non-fiction. The result is often a mix of various literary genres. Like Diop's *Murambi: le livre des ossements*, Abdourahman Waberi's *Moisson de crânes* and Véronique Tadjo's *A l'ombre d'Imana* directly address the inability of one genre to represent the genocide; both texts are polyvocal and hover between various genres.

therefore linked to the former colonizers (103). Stassen addresses these problems directly and makes a similar shift from fiction to a more journalistic approach in *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*, a complex text rife with tension that refuses easy categorization just as it refuses easy integration and appropriation.

While *Déogratias* generated awareness of the genocide in the West, there were many misinterpretations and politically-motivated misuses[69] of the text that upset Stassen. His desire to address the mishandling of *Déogratias* and his fortuitous meetings with famed American comics artist and investigative journalist Joe Sacco and celebrated *bande dessinée* artist Marjane Satrapi resulted in the publication in 2002 of *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*. I contend that, in fact, these two texts (*Déogratias* and *Pawa*) are meant to be read together and that the specific goals of each complement the other in such a way as to produce a corpus of work that fully seeks to engage readers on a personal and critical level with the genocide. *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* is, in Stassen's own words, his attempt at saying what he truly wanted to say about the genocide and its aftermath (Ciment 115). Right away we notice a striking difference in titles that reflect Stassen's varying intentions: one is the name of a person (*Déogratias*) while the other is a statement about the nefarious backstory surrounding the genocide (*Pawa*). The main thrust of *Déogratias*, as I have shown, is reader identification with the main character. In drastic contrast, *Pawa* does not explicitly seek reader identification. Moreover, it stands apart and differs drastically from Stassen's other work and is his only *bande dessinée* without the mention of an eponymous character or characters in the title.

[69] In his interview with Gilles Ciment, Stassen explains that he was perplexed at being nominated for the Ecumenical Comic Book Award at the International *Bande Dessinée* Festival of Angoulême in 2001 (he actually won the France Info Award for *Déogratias* that year) and that he was troubled that some people argued that *Déogratias* was proof of the innocence of genocide perpetrators who claim to have committed acts of violence only in self-defense and under threat of death. (Ciment, 114).

Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune, as the subtitle suggests, is a collection of chronicles, tales, narratives, reports, and subsequent information that seek to represent and investigate the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, its history, and the various discourses used to record such history. The subject of the chronicles—*les monts de la lune*—harkens back to Antiquity while also calling forth the role played by European colonial ethnographic, anthropologic, and travel writing in shaping how the Great Lakes region was and is represented.[70] In *Rwanda: Le réel et les récits*, Catherine Coquio explains that this term originated with Ptolemy and was taken up by subsequent geographers and historians of Antiquity; it appeared in texts dedicated to the search along the Nile for a region in central Africa that contained great lakes and snow-covered mountains (Coquio 40). Later, during European colonial expansion in the second half of the 19th century, this term continued to inform European understanding of the area and the term *pays de la lune*, or "Mountains of the Moon," resurfaced on maps of the region composed by European (mainly English) explorers.[71] Moreover, the idyllic overtones of this term were coupled with the Hamitic Hypothesis to devastating consequences. In Rwanda, this dangerous blend of fantasy and pseudoscience led to the separation of the Rwandan population along racial lines as defined by the colonizers. Coquio illustrates how these overlapping Western epistemologies eventually created a situation in which the Tutsi population was harkened to a kind of African Jewish population, thus laying the groundwork for the rhetoric of their extermination (45). In fact, Coquio argues that the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda can be seen as a kind of replaying and displacement of the Shoah onto European colonies, "comme si

[70] Catherine Coquio. *Rwanda: Le réel et les récits*. Paris: Belin, 2004. 39-40.

[71] "Les cartes [européennes] qui servirent au partage de l'Afrique, dessinées par les explorateurs anglais, portent encore la mention des 'Monts de la lune'. L'Europe du XIXe siècle inscrivait là l'épaisseur temporelle d'un rêve nilotique qui lui venait de l'Antiquité grecque, et plus précisément de la *Géographie* de Ptolémée, c'est-à-dire de presque vingt siècles." (The [European] maps used during the division of Africa, drawn by English explorers, still carried the mention of the Mountains of the Moon. 19th century Europe thus inscribed the temporal layer of a Nilotic dream that came to them from Greek Antiquity, and more specifically from Ptolemy's *Geography*, that is to say, from across almost twenty centuries.) (Coquio 39).

l'Europe, incapable d'assimiler son histoire et de dépasser son antisémitisme, avait continué, au-delà de la seconde guerre mondiale, d'exporter en Afrique, à la faveur de la domination coloniale, une idéologie raciale qui allait produire un nouveau génocide, noir cette fois, mais contre des 'Juifs d'Afrique'" ("as though Europe, incapable of assimilating its history or of overcoming its anti-Semitism, continued, beyond the Second World War, to export to Africa, thanks to colonial domination, a racial ideology that would produce a new genocide, black this time, and against 'African Jews.'") (Coquio 45).

Already with the title, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune,* Stassen thus creates a direct link between the extremist ideology of the Hutu Power movement responsible for the genocide and the racist logic of European colonialist ideology. Pawa, meaning power, was chanted by the militia perpetrators of the genocide leading up to and during the events of the genocide to rally moral: "Hutu Power is the name given to an ideology whose adherents were rabidly anti-Tutsi. Racist and nationalistic, they were opposed to the Arusha Accords, the international peace agreement that provided for the creation in Rwanda of a power-sharing democracy. Hutu Power sought the elimination of all Tutsi and all pro-democracy Hutu" (Melvern, *A People Betrayed* 297). In the fall of 1993 immediately following the assassination of the elected Hutu President of neighboring Burundi, there was a rally in Kigali at which a member of the MDR-Parmehutu (*Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation Hutu-Parmehutu* [Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement]) political party (an iteration of the single political party ruled by the Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and his cohorts) energetically told the crowd that there was work to be done—meaning that the Tutsi would all have to be eliminated—and exclaimed that "All Hutu are one power" (Melvern, *A People Betrayed* 97). In response, the crowd began chanting "Pawa, pawa;" Linda Melvern explains that "[i]t was at this rally that the

exclusionist ideology found a catchy name. From now on these words would be used as a rallying call" (Melvern, *A People Betrayed* 97). Hutu Power's exclusionist ideology functioned as an extension of colonialist ideology. In 1931, Belgian colonialist administrators officially divided the Rwandan population, through the issuing of identity cards, into three separate 'races:' Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. By systematizing identity and privileging the Tutsi to control and manipulate them while further exploiting the Hutu, the Belgian colonists helped sow the seeds of social unrest and resentment that soon after the Second World War provoked the publication of the Hutu Manifesto in 1959 calling for a pure Hutu nation. Read as an analogy then, the title *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* equates Hutu Power with colonialist epistemology. Thus, the chronicles of Hutu Power are also the chronicles of Western understanding—or misunderstanding rather—of the Great Lakes region of central Africa.

While *Déogratias* is marked by an absence of information extraneous to the narrative, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* is the polar opposite. The chronicle entries vary widely in range including linguistic notes, short stories, plays, recipes for local dishes, and a multitude of secondary sources (a chronology of events in the region and an extensive bibliography). The mix of genres and the aggressive surfeit of information suggest that it is impossible to contain the genocide in any one form. The overall effect of this plethora of constantly changing visual and textual information capitalizes on the inherent instability in the medium and pushes it to its limit so as to reject easy assimilation. The reader, face to face with this enormous and decentered amount of information necessarily becomes caught in the thick of complexity and accompanies the narrator on his journey throughout the region, the main concern being the contemporary situation of the countries in the region in the wake of the genocide. Exercising satire and a critical eye, Stassen presents vignettes of quotidian life in the region from various points of view

to highlight the ubiquity of stereotypes and the engendered nature of prejudice discourses while at the same time, drawing attention to the tangled history that has produced such discourses. I would argue that, in choosing to present as much information as he does in a medium not readily associated with official discourse, he purposefully challenges readers to question the sources of meaning making. Put another way, the simple choice of an alternative format—*bandes dessinées* as a form of journalism in this case—undermines the authority of official discourse that dominates, regulates, and constitutes archives and thus, knowledge. This choice also disrupts mainstream *bande dessinée* trends in France and Belgium. Furthermore, *Pawa*, as a *bande dessinée de reportage* allows Stassen to 1) counter the Hutu propagandist political cartoons implemented to fuel the genocide in Rwanda; 2) fill the void created by the international media silence during the genocide; and 3) undermine the reports that came out afterwards that mischaracterize the genocide as a civil war between different ethnic groups.

Just as the title stands apart from Stassen's other work, this *bande dessinée* also stands apart in that it is his only text in black and white. Whereas *Déogratias* seduces readers with a rich and indulgent palette of lush colors coupled with bold, graphic outlines, *Pawa*, with its lack of color, draws attention to itself, to the information it is presenting, and to the ways in which this information is delivered. Other pioneers of *bande dessinée de reportage* such as Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), Joe Sacco (*Palestine*), and Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*) have adopted the ideology that black and white denotes a more serious tone and is effective at generating a critical distance between the subject matter and the reader. However, while *Pawa* is in black and white, it is not completely devoid of color. For example, to create depth, texture, and shading, both Spiegelman and Sacco use crosshatching whereas Satrapi forgoes such techniques, opting instead for a much more iconic aesthetic produced from the stark black of her images and the cream

color of the page. In contrast, Stassen deploys a vast array of greys in *Pawa*, creating images that seem to be painted with an endless supply of different hues rather than simply drawn. Stassen's palette of greys in a text about Europe and Africa is telling and highly provocative in that it purposefully draws attention both to the "color" (race) question and its ostensibly attendant moral overtones. In a world where binaries remain powerful, Stassen employs this aesthetic choice as a means of foregrounding his political aim with the text. The range of greys points to problematic binaries between white and black, good and bad, here and there, Europe and Africa.

The text deconstructs knowledge while also deconstructing how a typical *bande dessinée* functions. Instead of providing answers, the text invites readers to generate their own questions, thus participating in destabilizing facile understandings. For example, Stassen uses a continually varying font size to disrupt the flow of the text. While some sections, such as the bibliography and the lexicon of terms, are presented with a somewhat regular font size, other sections' font sizes vary rapidly and drastically. This dizzying effect calls attention to itself and, consequently, draws the reader's attention to its content. Certain words, because they are larger, take on more importance. The most striking example of this is in the vignette titled "James" in which Stassen exposes and problematizes existing racism and prejudice, disassociating them from a uniquely European point of view. The vignette begins with an identification of James including his nationality, the major events of his upbringing, in particular his changing refugee status, his religious status as a Protestant, and a few general comments about his character. All these facts are meant to situate James to give the reader an understanding of his point of view, since what follows are framed as James's preconceived notions of other peoples. However, this ostensibly simple identification already points to the problem of identification that is essentialist and reductive in nature since no one term suffices for capturing the complexity of each individual.

James* est burundais.
En 1972, suite à Ikiza[19], ses parents se sont réfugiés en Tanzanie.
C'est là que James a grandi et étudié.
Après avoir travaillé quelques années dans des hôtels de Tanzanie et du Kenya, il est revenu au Burundi.

James appartient à une petite Église protestante.
Il ne boit que de l'eau et ne fume pas. Il est contre la guerre.

"La vie sur terre est une chose difficile.
Mais c'est aussi une chose qu'il nous faut accepter.
Pour vivre dans le monde terrestre, le mieux est de comprendre ce monde.

Dieu est amour.
Il aime ses enfants.

19. Ikiza = le fléau.
Voir chronologie, 1972.

Figure 3.11. A description of James. (Pahé, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*, Paris: Delcourt, 2002), 49.

The first page is broken into three sections (Figure 3.11), the first consisting of the identification of James. Right away, Stassen uses a slightly larger font for specific pieces of

information to draw attention to them including the date when James's parents fled Burundi for Tanzania after the Ikiza (a series of genocidal events in 1972 in Burundi) and the various locations James has lived before returning to Burundi. In the middle of the page is the beginning of a quote whose origin is, at first, unknown. The bottom of the page confirms that it is James who is talking for, inside his speech balloon, is the closing quotation mark. It is interesting to note that, due to the spatial economy within each panel, the font in the speech balloons remains consistent while the font found outside the panels, usually representing the voice of the narrator, changes drastically almost from word to word. Moreover, in this first quote, certain words are significantly much larger in size, almost as if in all capitals: "LA VIE sur TERRE est une chose DIFFICILE. MAIS c'est AUSSI une chose qu'il nous faut ACCEPTER. Pour VIVRE dans le MONDE TERRESTRE, le MIEUX est de COMPRENDRE ce monde" ("Life on earth is a difficult thing. But it is also something that we must accept. To live in the terrestrial world, the best is to understand this world") (49). Thus, Stassen sets up the Christian figure of James as a device to expose and ultimately denounce prejudice for, as the narrator explains two pages later,

> James a besoin pour y vivre de comprendre le monde terrestre. Pour le comprendre, il dispose d'un système de casiers où il range les morceaux du monde (les gens). Pour que le système fonctionne, il faut que les morceaux du monde correspondent exactement à l'idée qu'il s'en fait. Il ne faut pas, une fois qu'un morceau est bien rangé dans son casier, que ce morceau proteste de n'y être pas à sa place. (51)
>
> James, in order to live in the terrestrial world, must understand it. To understand it, he has at his disposal a system of slots in which he arranges the world (people). For the system to work, the pieces must correspond directly to the idea that he makes for them. Once a piece is well-placed in its slot, it should not protest for not being in its place.

The irony and sarcasm in the narrator's tone is not to be missed. Indeed, the narrator's mocking tone takes over as he explains "Le monde ainsi est compris. Et l'on peut y vivre" ("The world is thus understood. And one can therefore live in it") (51). The word *comprendre* is always bigger than the surrounding words insisting on its own presence and consequently asking what comprehension in such a situation means.

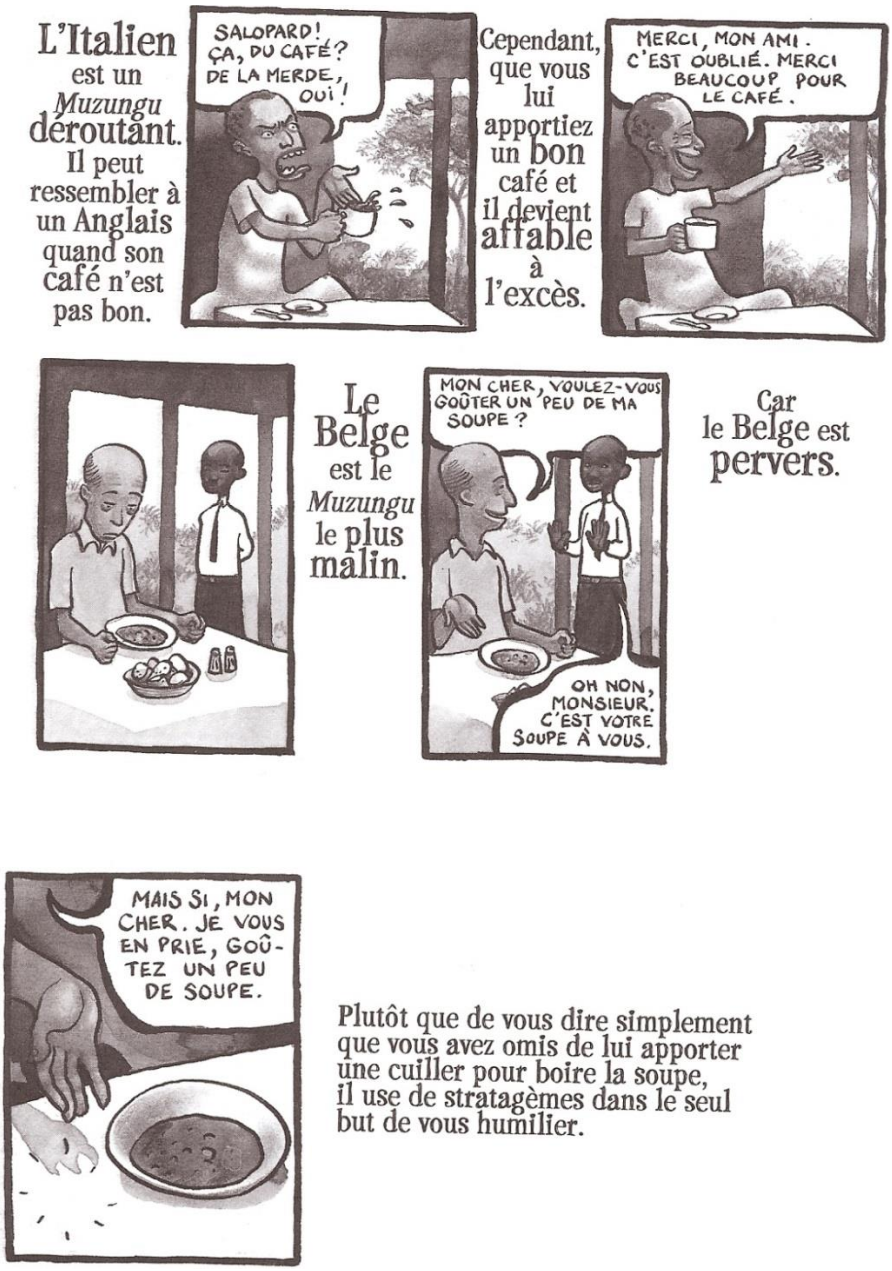

Figure 3.12. Illustrations of local stereotypes of non-Rwandan populations. (Pahé, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*, Paris: Delcourt, 2002), 53.

The stereotypes laid out in this vignette foreground the problem of categorization. While some categorizations follow national boundaries, others are culturally or ethnically based (Le Kenyan, Le Tanzanien, Le Burundais, Les Banzungu, L'Anglais, L'Italien, Le Belge, and Le Français). Each category is ascribed a quality—the Belgian is the most malicious because he is the most perverse, while the Kenyan is brutal and the Tanzanian very polite—and is accompanied by a short explanation of how such an attribute governs each group's social interactions with others (Figure 3.12). The absurdity of these stereotypes rendered comedic in their exaggeration is brought to bear on the question of stereotypes in general when the narrator directly addresses the reader by suggesting that perhaps even the reader has been the object of ridicule and cliché. At the end, the narrator provides a list of other clichés about Tutsi, Hutu, Congolese, and Europeans, much more nefarious, reductionist, and aggressively gendered and sexualized, to demonstrate the violence of discourse and to illustrate how prejudice towards a group of people actively seeks to dehumanize them. It also reinforces the inaccuracy of categorization, always already skewed and biased, that, when officially applied can produce devastating consequences.

Throughout *Pawa*, Western rhetoric and discourse is mimicked, questioned, mocked, thwarted, subverted, and even inverted. Often, Stassen appropriates the Euro-centric ethnographic mode and incapacitates it through irony and satire. For example in "HHH: Carte postale ethnographique," while the notion of the ethnographic postcard draws up memories of colonialism, exoticism, and the culture of leisurely travel intimately associated with the imaginary myth of the colonial space, Stassen reverses the anticipated roles of the ethnographer

and the other.[72] The *Nous*, or us, of the narration includes the reader, but is not defined along racial lines, as one might expect. The "other" in question being observed and described is precisely a group of Europeans known as "les HHH (Hash house harriers)." The pseudo-scientific tone of the language works with the descriptive drawing of an HHH member to create an attack on Westerners in the area who cling to colonial lines of power or who adhere to new modes of empire (i.e. American imperialism). Stassen's ethnographic discourse is plagued by an ostensibly never-ending series of references in the form of footnotes. He also introduces certain Kinyarwanda vocabulary with translations– "*Icyongereza cy'Amerika*" = l'anglais d'Amérique" ("American English") and "*Uburayi* = L'Europe (littéralement: le pays de la pomme de terre)" (Europe [literally: the county of the potato])—that, while humorous, creates and reinforces a critical distance between the readers and the people being presented. Indeed, Stassen purposefully problematizes identification with the HHH when the narrator says, "Mais, encore une fois, contentons-nous d'observer et gardons-nous bien de juger ce que nous ne comprenons pas" ("However, once again, let us be content with observation and let us be careful not to judge that which we do not understand") (74). However, while the narrator advises against judgment, Stassen precisely demands readers question such imperialistic culture.

Like *Déogratias*, *Pawa* is also intimately caught up with making the genocide thinkable. In fact, this drive towards comprehension is made much more explicit in *Pawa* than in *Déogratias*. The vignette "Byimana" (a small region in southern Rwanda) centers on Immaculée, a survivor of the genocide, and uses her unique story as a means of discussing the complex issues of the genocide and of justice. The narrator repeats multiple times throughout that "Avec Immaculée, on a l'impression de COMPRENDRE" ("With Immaculée, one has the impression

[72] Here I am thinking of Edward W. Said's reading of travel culture in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), in particular his reading of the emergence of consumerist leisure culture in the section "The Empire at Work: Verdi's *Aida*" in chapter two.

of understanding") (32), the word *comprendre*, as before, visibly large than the text surrounding it. "Byimana" is a blend of *bande dessinée* scenes and a written account of the narrator's interactions with and reactions to Immaculée and her testimony; indeed, the asterisk next to her name at the beginning informs readers that her name has been changed to protect her real identity. Stassen purposefully buffers Immaculée's story with a reflection on the sheer overwhelming character of the genocide when mediated through impersonal statistics: "Les crimes commis pendant le génocide, la débauche de détails monstrueux, leur irréalité, leur inconcevabilité; le nombre de victimes qui dissout les individus dans une masse impersonnelle" ("The crimes committed during the genocide, the debauchery of the monstrous details, their unreality, their inconceivability; the number of victims that dissolves individuals in an impersonal mass") (32). He goes on to inscribe a violent torrent of atrocities that, in their very wordiness, are unthinkable and incomprehensible. Similarly, he asks: "Que peut bien nous dire encore : un million de morts, ou 500.000, ou 800.000, ou 'entre 500.000 et 800.000', ou même 1.074.017 ? " ("What can we learn: a million dead, or 500,000, or 800,000, or 'between 500,000 and 800,000' or even 1,047,017?") and explains that "Tout ça ne peut rien nous dire. Nous ne pouvons pas y reconnaître notre humanité. Nous ne pouvons pas comprendre" ("All of that tells us nothing. We cannot recognize our humanity in that. We cannot understand") (32). Yet he hints that comprehension is not completely out of reach and that, indeed, it is crucial. Engaging with the genocide at the human level allows for the beginning of understanding.

Immaculée has been called to testify in front of the community at a Gacaca[73] hearing in the case of a local priest accused of having killed some people while also saving others,

[73] The use of Gacaca courts (traditional, local, community-based courts) was first implemented in Rwanda in 2001 as a way to speed up the process of justice for the hundreds of thousands of low-level *génocidaires*. While the Gacaca courts have been heavily criticized (in particular by survivors of the genocide), they offer a realistic response to the sheer number of cases that the courts of law would be utterly incapable of processing in a timely manner.

Immaculée being part of the latter group. How are we to react to what we learn about him and how should we read Immaculée's testimony? In her own words: "Il nous a cachés pendant une semaine. Il nous a apporté à manger plusieurs fois. Pour moi, ce n'était pas un méchant homme. Les gens disent qu'il a tué. Moi, je ne l'ai pas vu tuer. Et s'il a tué, c'est beaucoup moins que les autres" ("He hid us for a week. He brought us food many times. For me, he is not a bad man. People say that he killed. Me, I never saw him kill. And if he has killed, it's much less than others") (32). Immaculée's ability to forgive and continue living is remarkable for its moral integrity, but also somewhat beyond the comprehension of an outside observer. That does not mean, however, that we should not try to comprehend; in fact, it is our duty to try to understand. The second half of this vignette turns to the urgency for justice in Rwanda. Though Stassen already problematized statistics, he turns to them once again to implicate readers in the current and continued need for justice, to express the sheer immensity of the question of justice in Rwanda, and to shed light on the need for the Gacaca courts even though they are problematic. Stassen foregrounds the human dimension of Gacaca by contrasting it with the more Westernized proceedings in Arusha, Tanzania at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda through two opposing images. The first is an illustration of an average prisoner from the local jails in Rwanda while the other is of a high-ranking official living in the lap of luxury at the prison in Arusha. No longer in the realm of the everyday, high-ranking officials are treated differently by Western powers. Stassen denounces such corruption and counters it with the difficult yet necessary acts of forgiveness and reconstruction such as those being lived by Immaculée and her community.

One striking feature that Stassen maintains from his early work and that he brings to bare on his work on the Rwandan genocide is an intense focus on individuals. Indeed, while

Déogratias and *Les enfants* use fictional characters inspired by real people and research to engage Western readers, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* represents an altogether different approach, as I have shown. Furthermore, though many *bande dessinée* critics consider *Déogratias* a powerful example of a *bande dessinée de reportage*, *Pawa* is much more explicit about its status as the product of extensive research and interviews. It constitutes a deliberate rejection of the limitations of mainstream conventions as the basis of what constitutes a *bande dessinée* and it marks a giant shift in Stassen's work towards the use of this medium as an active vehicle for investigation. In fact, the passion for research and experimentation with the medium sparked by *Pawa*, as we will see, bleeds over in to all of Stassen's subsequent work.

Deconstructing European Colonialism through Illustrations

In 2006, Stassen put out edited editions of two well-known books from the European colonial era: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness (Cœur des ténèbres*) first published in totality in 1903 and Luìs Bernardo Honwana's *We Killed Mangy-Dog (Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux*) originally published in a collection of Honwana's short stories in 1964. Through the addition of Stassen's illustrations, both texts function as a reimagining of European colonialism and imperialism. That Stassen would apply this strategy to a canonical colonial text written by a European (Conrad) and a text written on the eve of Mozambican independence from the point of view of a Mozambican under Portuguese colonial rule (Honwana) is telling of the entirety of his overhauling of colonial discourse. In addition, though Conrad's text was originally published in English and Honwana's in Portuguese, these new translated editions target a specifically francophone audience while underlining the prevalent character of European colonialism, the ubiquity of European colonial epistemology, and its lasting legacy on Western representations of Africa. Both texts can be seen as an extension of Stassen's move from fiction to investigation that manifested with the publication of *Pawa*. Reading these texts as innovative manifestations of

bandes dessinées de reportage allows us to consider how disrupting and adding to the originals, Stassen deploys strategies inherent to *bandes dessinées* to expose pertinent aspects such as gaps and short-comings in Conrad's text and silences and the subtle power of the piercing eye in Honwana's allegorical text.

Though it has become a mainstream tendency to adapt canonical and well-known texts (mainly novels) into *bande dessinée* form, Stassen goes against the grain by adding illustrations to original texts. Literally inserting his own visualizations of key scenes, Stassen, in the case of *Heart of Darkness,* interrupts the original and, in the case of *We Killed Mangy-Dog*, enhances an understanding of the original. In addition, the illustrations interfere with the textual mode of the original texts; again, this subversion of the primacy of writing with regards to *bandes dessinées* harkens back to Stassen's self-stated goal of wanting to abolish the hierarchy between literature and *bandes dessinées* (Ciment 115). However, the reality of the situation, as Laurent Demoulin explains in "Du Rwanda au *Coeur des ténèbres*. Jean-Philippe Stassen illustre Conrad" ("From Rwanda to *Heart of Darkness*. Jean-Philippe Stassen Illustrates Conrad") is such that Stassen's versions of Conrad and Honwana's texts are usually sold in specialty stores; in the rare cases they are in mainstream bookstores such as FNAC, they are not in the literature section under Conrad and Honwana's names, but, rather, housed under Stassen's name in the *bande dessinée* section (Demoulin 106). A quick online search reveals that the same is true of FNAC's website.

Similarly, just as these texts are meant to challenge the hierarchy of the purely linguistic mode, they also represent Stassen's attempt to decolonize the logic of the colonizer. If the novel was a key genre of modernism and instrumental to imperial culture back home in Europe,[74] perhaps the *bande dessinée* as a key genre of postmodernism also fits as an instrumental genre of

[74] Here I am thinking of Edward W. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* and his analysis of the relationship between European imperial culture and the realities of European colonialism.

postcolonialism. The choice of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the object of Stassen's interest is thus no surprise when we consider Christopher L. Miller's assertion that it "reads as an allegory of all other Africanist texts; it defines the condition of possibility of Africanist discourse" (C. L. Miller, *Blank Darkness* 170). Many artists that adapt literary texts into *bandes dessinées* often have an affinity for the author of their choice; as Demoulin explains, both Conrad and Stassen are interested in the complex relationship between Belgium and its (former) territories (Demoulin 105). They are also equally invested in self-consciously exploring their own roles in such a relationship. Indeed, the question of colonial epistemology is at the heart of Conrad's text and Stassen's appropriation of it. According to Miller, "*Heart of Darkness* is a master text … where it is not so much the African object as the Africanist subject—the explorer, the writer—who is called into question. For *Heart of Darkness* is a self-conscious meditation on misunderstanding" (C. L. Miller, *Blank Darkness* 170-171). Stassen, through the insertion of his illustrations, seeks to expose Conrad's own shortcomings and the limitations of his project.

Interestingly enough, Stassen spent much time reading Conrad's original oeuvre and even worked on translating *Heart of Darkness* from English himself, though time and budget constraints restricted him from finishing (Demoulin 106). The result of the time he spent manifests as a surplus in his edition of *Heart of Darkness* in which Conrad's text is preceded by 1) an introduction ("Ce que c'était que le Congo en 1898") ("That which was the Congo in 1898") by Sylvain Venayre about the historical context of the Belgian Congo and 2) a translation of another of Conrad's short stories that also deals with life in the Belgian Congo: "Un avant-poste du progrès" ("An Outpost of Progress"), also accompanied by Stassen's illustrations. Directly following the text are three short articles: "Postface: *Coeur des ténèbres*: Une histoire de couleurs" ("Postface: *Heart of Darkness*: A History of Colors") by Venayre that touches upon

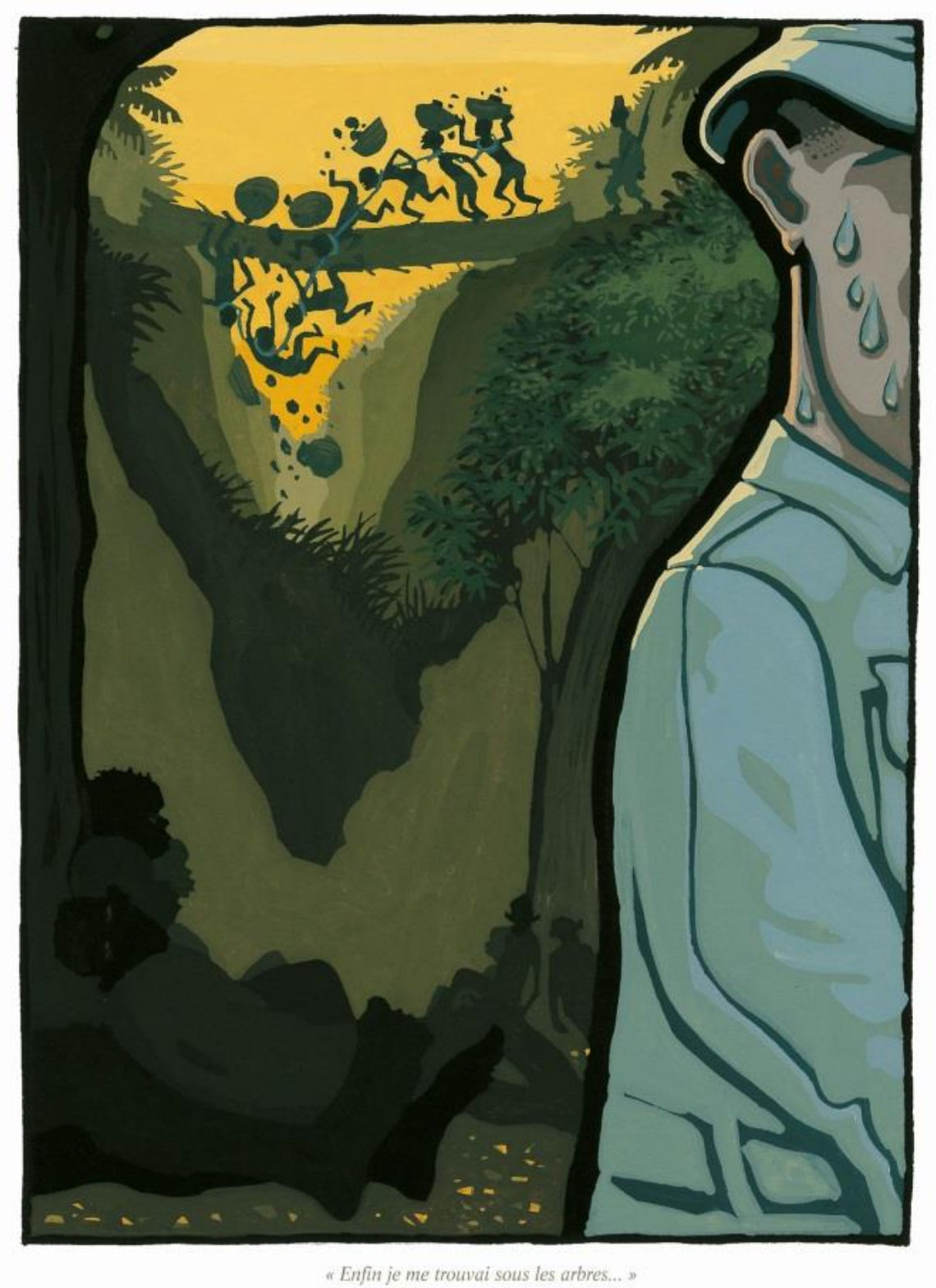

Figure 3.13. Marlow's relief in the shade. (Joseph Conrad, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Sylvain Venayre, *Coeur des ténèbres: Précédé d'un avant-poste du Progrès*. Paris: Futuropolis-Gallimard, 2006), 48. (©Futuropolis 2006).

the varying approaches of Conrad and Stassen to the original text; "Sur les cartes" ("On Maps") by Stassen that discusses his fascination with maps, particularly of Africa; and "A Bruxelles, la Capitale des Singes" ("To Brussels, the Capital of Apes") also by Stassen that analyses Charles Baudelaire's poem "La Belgique déshabillée" ("Stripped Belgium") in conjunction with *Heart of Darkness*. All of the paratextual information provided by Stassen and Venayre is meant to frame–literally and physically–Conrad's original text. As is evident from the amount and character of these framing texts, Stassen and Venayre make every attempt to spell out the objectives of Stassen's added illustrations; namely, the reconsideration of the original through an exploration of its gaps and the limitations of Africanist discourse as embodied by Conrad's writing. Even Stassen's dedication of the book to his daughter—"Merci à Lou, ma fille aimée, qui m'a expliqué la difference entre rien et un trou" ("Thank you to Lou, my beloved daughter who explained to me the difference between nothing and a hole")—underlines the drive to expose the silences of Conrad's text.

Though Stassen's added illustrations are not comics vignettes, they nevertheless rely on a dynamic interplay between images and words to produce meaning. Where we see the force of Stassen's creativity is in the choice of scenes and the quotes he extracts to serve as captions. Most of the illustrations' effectiveness comes from the use of subtle details in the images (such as tortured bodies in the background, bloody details and dismembered body parts in the foreground) and expert framing in conjunction with specific citations from the text that redirect the reader's awareness specifically to the violence of gaps and silences of the narrative. The illustration and caption in Figure 3.13 exemplify Stassen's complex strategies at work; in the foreground on the right is an interrupted outline of Marlow that vertically spans the entire frame while in the background African bodies are portrayed as exhausted, mistreated, and even in the

process of dying. Scale and color play important roles by contributing to the overall emotional impact of the illustration. The grotesquely large drops of sweat on Marlow's face and the stunted caption, "Enfin je me trouvai sous les arbres…" ("At last I got under the trees…") become ironic in contrast to suffering in the background; that Stassen selects only a portion of the citation highlights and gives primacy to Marlow's sense of physical relief from the sun. The Hell or Inferno that Marlow describes once in the shade, namely the suffering of Africans, is dramatized in Stassen's illustration. In fact, I would argue that the outline of the ravine strikingly resembles the outline of the African continent at whose heart is the body of a subjugated African forever falling to his demise and, through the chains linking him to the other Africans, pulling them down with him.

Similarly, through a single image and a barrage of maps, Stassen brings Conrad's text into dialogue with other texts and imperialist narratives of the historical moment of *Heart of Darkness*. The single image in question (Figure 3.14) accompanies Marlow's return to Belgium while drawing from Charles Baudelaire's poem "La Belgique déshabillée" for inspiration; the three indistinguishable men in Stassen's illustration, metonymically standing in for all bourgeois Belgians, are pictured looking behind them like, as Venarye explains, in Baudelaire's poem (Venarye, "Postface" 125). In "A Bruxelles, la Capitale des Singes," Stassen explains that, as a native Belgian, the revulsion that both Conrad and Baudelaire express for Belgium is at first upsetting, but also admirable in that it allows the necessary distance to unveil the anguish in the face of nothingness. For Demoulin, the intertexual workings of this one image speak to the efficacy of Stassen's work and "rend à l'illustration sa véritable portée métalittéraire" ("give the illustration its veritable metaliterary range") (Demoulin 111). This intertextual play reflects the time Stassen spent working (and thinking) through Conrad's text. As Demoulin suggests, the

power of Stassen's images resides in their ability to establish links across texts and across time, thus opening up the original text and its historical context to new interpretations.

Figure 3.14. Marlow's impression of being back in Belgium. (Joseph Conrad, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Sylvain Venayre, *Coeur des ténèbres: Précédé d'un avant-poste du Progrès*. Paris: Futuropolis-Gallimard, 2006), 112. (©Futuropolis 2006).

Likewise, in "Sur les cartes," Stassen focuses on maps in *Heart of Darkness* to demonstrate how the inaccuracy of Conrad's description of maps exposes the Africanist construct of the continent. It is no surprise that Stassen would zero in on the representation of maps in *Heart of Darkness* for the only time in the entire text that Africa is named is during Marlow's musings on his passion for maps and, as Miller stresses, the blank that becomes filled in by European explorers and imperialists, is also an absence onto which Conrad and Marlow alike inscribe meaning through narrative (C. L. Miller, *Blank Darkness* 173-174). For Stassen, such narratives lead to a "cartographie violente qui découpe le continent en formes géométriques simplistement coloriées" ("[a] violent cartography that cuts the continent into simply colored geometric forms") (132). He dramatizes the legacy of European cartography by providing a total of six very different maps of the African continent. While most of the maps represent the changing colonial divisions of the continent, the back cover (Figure 3.15) of the book is the most interesting. It is a distinctively discursive map of Africa with no shapes, no lines for borders of territories, no figural representations, only names of places and geographical features in both French and Arab that evoke a spatial imprint of Africa. Each bit of nominal information takes on a particular significance for having been chosen and creates a dynamic network of spatial, historical, social, and political significance. The identification of certain regions such as Togoland, the German protectorate from 1884 until 1914, and the Independent State of the Congo, the private territory of Belgian Kind Leopold II, highlights the colonial act of naming and organizing visual representations of the continent. This unique map exposes the emptying out of the landscape—both physically and symbolically—that was a necessary step for European imperialism to establish power. However, Stassen complicates the dominance of a solely European system of meaning making by including Arabic and also other, non-European, local

names (such as the Songhai Empire) to reflect the actual synchronicity of local traditions and Western narratives of history. It is not Stassen's goal to denounce outright the limitations of Conrad's work, but rather to engage with it (and by extension invite readers to do the same), so as to investigate such limitations.

Figure 3.15. Back cover of *Cœur des ténèbres*. (Joseph Conrad, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Sylvain Venayre, *Coeur des ténèbres: Précédé d'un avant-poste du Progrès*. Paris: Futuropolis-Gallimard, 2006). (©Futuropolis 2006).

In contrast, Stassen draws attention to and enhances the silences in Honwana's text and even visually mimics them. The physical makeup of Stassen's version of *We Killed Mangy-Dog* underlines this fact since, in contrast to his treatment of *Heart of Darkness*, there is essentially no contextualizing material apart from the short summary from the publisher on the back cover. Moreover, the small format of the book and the rich quality of the cover and pages suggests that the text is more of an art object along the lines of an expensive children's book. Whereas Stassen attempts to shed light on the gaps in Conrad's original text and the confines of Africanist discourse, with Honwana's *We Killed Mangy-Dog* he seeks, through visual references to *Déogratias*, to establish a correlation between the corruption of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique and the atrocities of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Put another way, the choice of illustrating Honwana's text draws a direct link between European colonialism and postcolonial violence across sub-Saharan Africa. It is no surprise that Stassen would be drawn to Honwana's text and his style; if Stassen had an affinity for Conrad based on his formation and geographical background, he assuredly has an affinity with Honwana along aesthetic and political lines. Right away the narrative similarities between *We Killed Mangy-Dog* and *Déogratias* are evident: both center on the lives of children and their coming of age, both feature young people as killers, and both make extensive use of anthropomorphized dogs as metaphors for dehumanized figures. And, as we will see, Stassen's visual aesthetic is very much in tune with Honwana's discursive style in that both seek to draw readers into the text through an exploration of the interior psychology of the characters.

The silences in *We Killed Mangy-Dog* are much different from the silences in *Heart of Darkness* in that, rather than being the effects of the shortcomings of Africanist discourse, they are deliberate and function as a kind of calculated observation. Honwana's writing purposefully

invites readers to fill in the silences, thus engaging on a personal level with the narrative. Irene Marques describes Honwana's writing "as the acute optical surveillance of a failed regime that dehumanizes both oppressed and oppressor: it functions as the literal mirror of oppression, self-oppression, unconsciousness, humiliation and trauma" (127). She goes on to argue that "Honwana is more interested in 'displaying' than overtly 'saying' or explaining" (128) and that, "By putting that mirror before our eyes the author is taking a firm stand against a highly inhumane regime, and informing the oppressed (and perhaps also the oppressor) about their own condition … Honwana's writing is indeed the 'eye' that accuses and incites" (129). Indeed, accusing and inciting eyes and the gaze are highly thematized in *We Killed Mangy-Dog*. The opening of the narrative begins with a description of Mangy-Dog that is repeated throughout the text and it immediately focuses on Mangy-Dog's eyes: "Le Chien Teigneux avait des yeux bleus qui ne brillaient pas, mais ils étaient immenses et toujours pleins de larmes qui coulaient sur son museau. Ils faisaient peur, ces yeux, si grands, qui regardaient comme quelqu'un qui demanderait quelque chose sans vouloir le dire" ("Mangy-Dog had blue eyes that did not shine, but that were immense and always filled with tears that run down on his snout. They were frightening, those eyes, so big, that were like someone who would ask for something without wanting to say it"). Each time this refrain reappears, it reinforces the human quality of Mangy-Dog and his suffering. Stassen echoes this refrain and uses it as inspiration for his images. Of the sixteen illustrations that he provides, nine are explicitly concerned with the characters' expressions and the acts of looking and seeing. Interestingly enough, Stassen refuses us direct access to adults in his illustrations; when pictured, they are always in the presence of the children and Stassen frames them in such a way that they are in a position of power and authority and their eyes are obscured (Figure 3.16). This aligns the readers with the children and creates a

divide between the adult world, a stand-in for the colonial institution, and the lived experiences of the children, a stand-in for the hardships of everyday life.

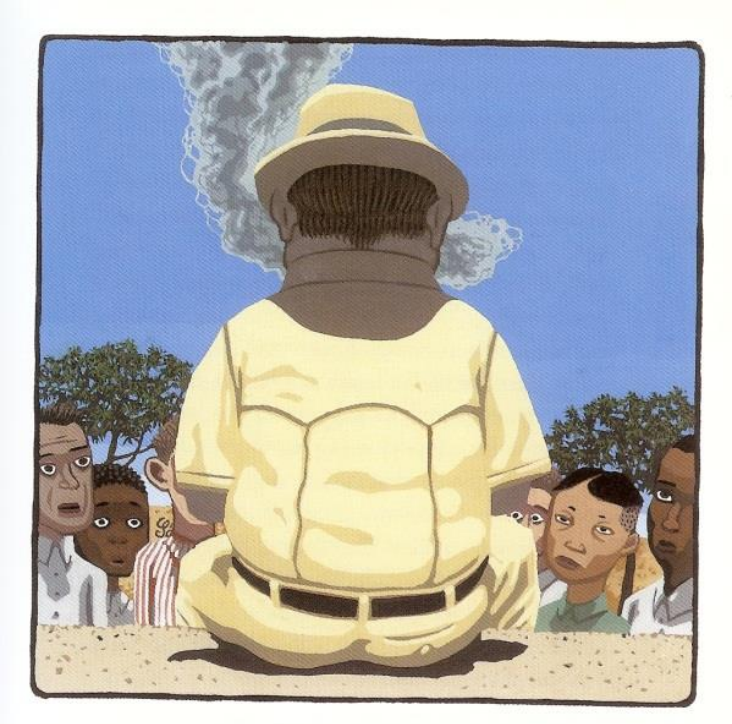

Figure 3.16. The veternarian addresses the children. (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Michel Laban *Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux* Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2006), 37.

Figure 3.17. Isaura pictured as a kind of saint. (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Michel Laban *Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux* Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2006), 15.

The illustrations that most effectively allude to Stassen's work on the Rwanda genocide are, rightly so, those of Ginho, Isaura, and Mangy-Dog since their fates are intertwined and their suffering is related. These images are very much evocative of the exorbitant number of frames in *Déogratias* of the main character's expression and they often function in the same manner. They engage the reader and elicit a deeper probing into the psychological state of the characters. In the first image of Isaura (Figure 3.17), her eyes and tragic expression dominate the tone of the image while the sun behind her head bestows upon her a saint-like quality that foreshadows her attempt to save Mangy-Dog from being murdered. Moreover, during the climax of the story, both Ginho and Isaura are pictured with Mangy-Dog (Figures 3.18 and 3.19), cast into the role of the victim and sharing in Mangy-Dog's terror. The image of Ginho with Mangy-Dog (Figure 3.18), I would argue, can be seen as a reformulation of Déogratias's dual nature as a young man and a dog with the trauma of murder separating the two. Indeed, the correlation between site and sight so integral to trauma in *Déogratias* resurfaces in *We Killed Mangy-Dog* at the height of the dramatic action when the other boys fire upon Mangy-Dog. Rather than directly show the violence, Stassen takes his cue from Honwana's subtle text and illustrates, in a close-up of Ginho's and Isaura's eyes, the fire from the rifles reflecting in Ginho's pupils (Figure 3.20). Like in *Déogratias*, Stassen mediates the violence for the reader by making them witnesses to those who experience trauma firsthand and, like Honwana, thus encourages readers to reevaluate their role in the perpetuation of such violence.

Figure 3.18. Mangy-Dog singled out by the boys. (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Michel Laban *Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux* Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2006), 67.

Figure 3.19. Isaura attempts to save Mangy-Dog. (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Michel Laban *Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux* Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2006), 79.

Figure 3.20. Isaura and Ginho watch as Mangy-Dog is murdered by the other children. (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Jean-Philippe Stassen and Michel Laban *Nous avons tué le Chien Teigneux* Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2006), 85.

Stassen's appropriation of this text and Conrad's text functions as an ongoing dialogue with European colonialism in Africa. Whereas in his earlier work he focused more on the contemporary moment and the complexities of identity in a globalized world from a European vantage point, with these two illustrated texts, Stassen goes back to the 19th and earlier 20th centuries investigating colonial systems of logic to understand better both the historical moments in and of themselves and, more importantly, their sustained bearing on contemporary politics, thus drawing parallels across geographic spaces and historical eras. His sharp critical approach, kindled with *Déogratias*, perfected in *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*, and extrapolated in *Heart of Darkness* and *We Killed Mangy-Dog*, not only speaks to the power of his work, but has also helped forge a new avenue for *bande dessinée* artists and the medium itself. Alongside other innovators such as Art Spiegelman, Joe Sacco, Marjane Satrapi, and Guy Delisle, Stassen

bridges the gap between journalism and *bande dessinée* and has become a veritable *BD journaliste*. Indeed, the emergence in 2008 of the experimental journal *XXI*, equally dedicated to investigative journalism and the investigation of the genre of journalism itself, can be said, at least in part, to be a result of Stassen's work.

The Emergence of a *BD journaliste*

I would now like to turn to some of Stassen's most recent work in the French journal *XXI*—"Les visiteurs de Gibraltar" ("The Visitors of Gibraltar") in volume one (2008) and "L'étoile d'Arnold" ("Arnold's Star") in volume eleven (2010)—to examine his maturation as a *BD journaliste*. "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar," focuses on the dynamics of contemporary immigration and the global movement of people across borders, juxtaposing lived experiences of geographical space by tourists and immigrants (legal and illegal). "L'étoile d'Arnold," centers on the testimony of a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who is currently pursuing a degree in political science at the University of Bukavu. Stassen uses Arnold's personal experiences as a way to present an analysis of the complex sociopolitical and historical situation that has led to the emergence of child soldiers as a fact of life in Africa. It is telling that Stassen figures prominently in the experimental journal *XXI* in that his philosophy regarding *bandes dessinées* is reflected in the goals of the journal; both seek to report on contemporary issues in a critical manner, thus implicating readers in the investigation of such issues. Central to both is also a desire to experiment with the relationship between content and form. Indeed, featuring Stassen in the first issue allowed the editors, Laurent Beccaria and Patrick de Saint-Exupéry to set the tone of the journal by calling upon his previous successes. Along with pioneers Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi, Stassen paved the way for such a journal to exist and for other journals to seriously consider the Ninth Art as a viable vehicle for the transmission of critical inquiries.

In the introduction to volume one of *XXI*, Beccaria and Saint-Exupéry cite the return to in-depth reports and the pursuit of innovative approaches to investigative journalism as their main goals. They go on to explain that *XXI*, as the subtitle "L'information grand format"[75] suggests, is committed to providing a high-quality product both at the level of format and content. Subsequently, in addition to a close attention to visual layout and design, each issue contains at least one *reportage en BD* (Comics Journalism) starting, in volume one, with Stassen's "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar." *Reportages en BD* or *bandes dessinées de reportage* differ from political and editorial cartoons, though there are important commonalities. As with political and editorial cartoons, they are imbued with a distinctive point of view. Yet in contrast, rather than require readers to be familiar with the current events explored in the text, the main purpose of many *bandes dessinées de reportage* is to introduce readers to issues that are overlooked by the media or whose depth is often oversimplified. In addition, though most political and editorial cartoons rely on caricatures, *bandes dessinées de reportage* often employ a sophisticated visual style to seduce readers into prolonged engagement with difficult subject matter. In the short prefaces to "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar" and "L'étoile d'Arnold," the editors of *XXI* validate Stassen's journeys to carry out research, stressing the verity of the accounts presented. According to Saint-Exupéry, "Les dessins tout comme les mots de son récit sont vrais. Tirés du réel, ils sont simplement revisités par sa sensibilité" ("The drawings and words of his story are real. Pulled from the real, they are simply revisited by his sensibility") (156). Stassen's *sensibilité* consists of constantly challenging readers by exploiting the elasticity of the gutter on the page and by experimenting with framing and layout. The importance of margins and the in-between that functions at the formal level also corresponds in "Les visiteurs" to Stassen's

[75] This term refers to broadsheet reporting, a form of journal printed on long, vertical pages. Such journals are usually thought to be more intellectual and serious than other journals.

investigation of the interstices between European Union policies and the lived experiences of individuals. In "L'étoile d'Arnold," the in-between often represents the distance between the past of Arnold's life as a child soldier and the present moment of his testimony of such an experience.

Stassen often uses the in-between spaces to investigate preconceived notions and the ways in which meaning is produced, as I demonstrated above in the analysis of *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune*. For example, the first page of "Les visiteurs" (Figure 3.21) presents the reader with a recognizable, yet slightly awry image: a map of the geographical location in question turned 90 degrees to the left of how maps are usually presented so that north, rather than being at the top, is now to the left, and south to the right. This shift in representation thus forces readers to reorient themselves with regards to the region. Similarly, the text that accompanies this image purposefully foregrounds how one's point of view informs one's perception: "Le détroit de Gibraltar, par lequel pénètre l'océan Atlantique dans la mer Méditerranée (ou qui ouvre la Méditerranée sur l'Atlantique), est l'endroit où l'Afrique et l'Europe sont les plus proches" ("The Straits of Gibraltar, by which the Atlantic Ocean penetrates the Mediterranean (or that opens the Mediterranean to the Atlantic), is the point at which African and Europe are at their closest") (157). With the parenthetical alternative—or where the Mediterranean penetrates the Atlantic—that demonstrates that even geographical awareness is relative, Stassen immediately dispels the possibility and legitimacy of a singular, all-encompassing understanding of the geographic region, let alone of the contemporary political ramifications of boundaries both natural and manmade. Furthermore, that such discrepancies in understanding and representation exist where Africa and Europe are at their closest speaks to the vast gulf between competing narratives and the reality of everyday life. Similarly, to preface Arnold's testimony, Stassen begins "L'étoile d'Arnold" with a visit to the *Musée d'Afrique*

Figure 3.21. Map of the Mediterranean Sea. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar," *XXI* volume 1, 2008), 157.

Centrale de Tervuren (Central African Museum of Tervuren) in Belgium, also visited in the past by, as Stassen informs us, Hergé, the creator of the famous Tintin series. There he no doubt saw the famous Aniota statue or the statue of the Leopard-Man who literally embodies and incorporates everything savage that European colonialist discourse ascribed to people of Africa. Stassen begins precisely at the same museum and with the exact same image that so impressed Hergé as to become a central figure in *Tintin au Congo*; retracing Hergé's steps thus draws out European colonialist discourse, ideology, and iconography to frame an investigation of the contemporary issue of child soldiers in the DRC and the surrounding region.

Similarly, in "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar," Stassen continues to draw on a rich understanding of history to inform his report on the contemporary issue of immigration into the Schengen Area in Europe. He continuously layers historical facts of the geographical areas that he visited while conducting research to skew readers' understanding of the multiplicity of lived experiences in such place. Interestingly, at the end of "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar," he turns to the story of another trajectory mapped onto the same landscape, namely that of Walter Benjamin's tragic flight from France to Spain during World War II in an effort to escape Nazi persecution. The choice of Benjamin's journey is no coincidence; it not only points to the arbitrariness of politically defined borders and their attendant operations of surveillance, policing, and enforcement, it also exposes the palimpsestic nature of history. Furthermore, the choice of Benjamin's flight is particularly pertinent if we consider Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory. Indeed, "Les visiteurs" functions as a kind of constellation (in the Benjaminian sense) and, through the mapping of multiple histories onto the same landscape activates a problematized depiction of contemporary migrations. It challenges the authority of policing and surveillance entities as well as calls into question the institutions that continue to

fan the violence of a binary 'us'/'them' logic just as the *bande dessinée* form itself challenges a linear and singular narrative.

The closing scene following the explanation of Walter Benjamin's failed attempt to flee France is a somber one; Stassen's return to an unnamed, but nevertheless recognizable Liège is reminiscent of Marlow's arrival in Belgium at the end of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Though Stassen's own journey to the heart of the unknown, in this case a kind of political unknown demarcated by the Schengen Agreement and unevenly policed at various geographic intervals, does not lead him to any singular Kurtz-like figure. It does, however, bring him face to face with the horror of the mistreatment of others based on ideological and politically-motivated stances. Likewise, his return to Liège echoes Marlow's in its sober tone and focus on death. Whereas Kurtz died far from home, the deaths of the fathers of Stassen's friends Hafid and Rachid in Belgium call into question the notion of home itself. Both Hafid and Rachid are Belgian citizens and both of immigrant background; yet that they have differing opinions regarding burial rites and the question of repatriation of their respective fathers underscores the reality that immigrant communities are not homogenized spaces. Whereas Rachid is trying to raise the funds to have his father's body sent back to Algeria to be buried, Hafid states that his own father was buried in Liège next to his mother explaining that "on n'allait pas l'envoyer là-bas [à Tanger]: on est tous ici, non?" ("We weren't going to send him over there [to Tangiers]; we're all here, are we not?"). As this subdued end highlights, the term visitor is problematic and in tension with self-defined identities. Furthermore, like most of Stassen's work, local locales as indicators of identity supersede nationally-aligned identities. Stassen ends on this notion of "ici," in this case Liège, as a driving force for self-identification and self-awareness. Though the choice to determine one's definition of "ici" speaks of agency, the enormous sense of loss—of one's

parent, one's potential homeland, and ultimately one's origins—that saturates this final moment and, subsequently, the reality of immigration in today's world presents the reader with the task of rethinking the effects of immigration in their own daily lives.

With "L'étoile d'Arnold," Stassen aims for a deep look into the lives of child soldiers in the DRC to counteract the stereotypes perpetuated by the media. The verity of Arnold's testimony is a key element in that Stassen attacks Western journalists for reinforcing existing stereotypes by comparing them to Hergé within the first two pages of the text. Moreover, "L'étoile d'Arnold" is immediately followed in *XXI* by two pages of information such as an historical timeline of the Kivu region of DRC, bibliographies for further reading, and information for how to get in touch with Arnold and his humanitarian work, all of which further authenticates Arnold's story. In Bukavu, the capital of the South Kivu province, Stassen encounters workers at the "Bureau du Volontariat au service de l'Enfance et de la Santé" (BVES) (Volunteer Office in the Service of Children and Health); it is also where he meets Arnold, a sort of BVES success story. From Arnold's testimony, we learn that he was caught at age twelve by soldiers from the DRC fighting Rwandans from Kigali and that he spent three months at a training facility learning military discipline and how to use weapons. Though Stassen uses thick graphic lines and strikingly vibrant color combinations, he works against sensationalizing violence by focusing, rather, on the complex nature of Arnold's psychological state while a child soldier. Readers are meant to identify with Arnold on a personal level while also maintaining a critical distance, as with *Déogratias*. For example, during flashbacks of Arnold's time as a child soldier, all the people— including young Arnold—are drawn as impenetrable silhouettes. Moreover, the iconic nature of the figure of young Arnold in army fatigues, cap, aviator sunglasses, and holding an instantly-recognizable AK-47 is purposefully

graphic and imposing (Figure 3.22). The exaggerated size of the gun compared to Arnold's small and skinny frame comes across as obscene, thus emphasizing the violence of turning children into soldiers.

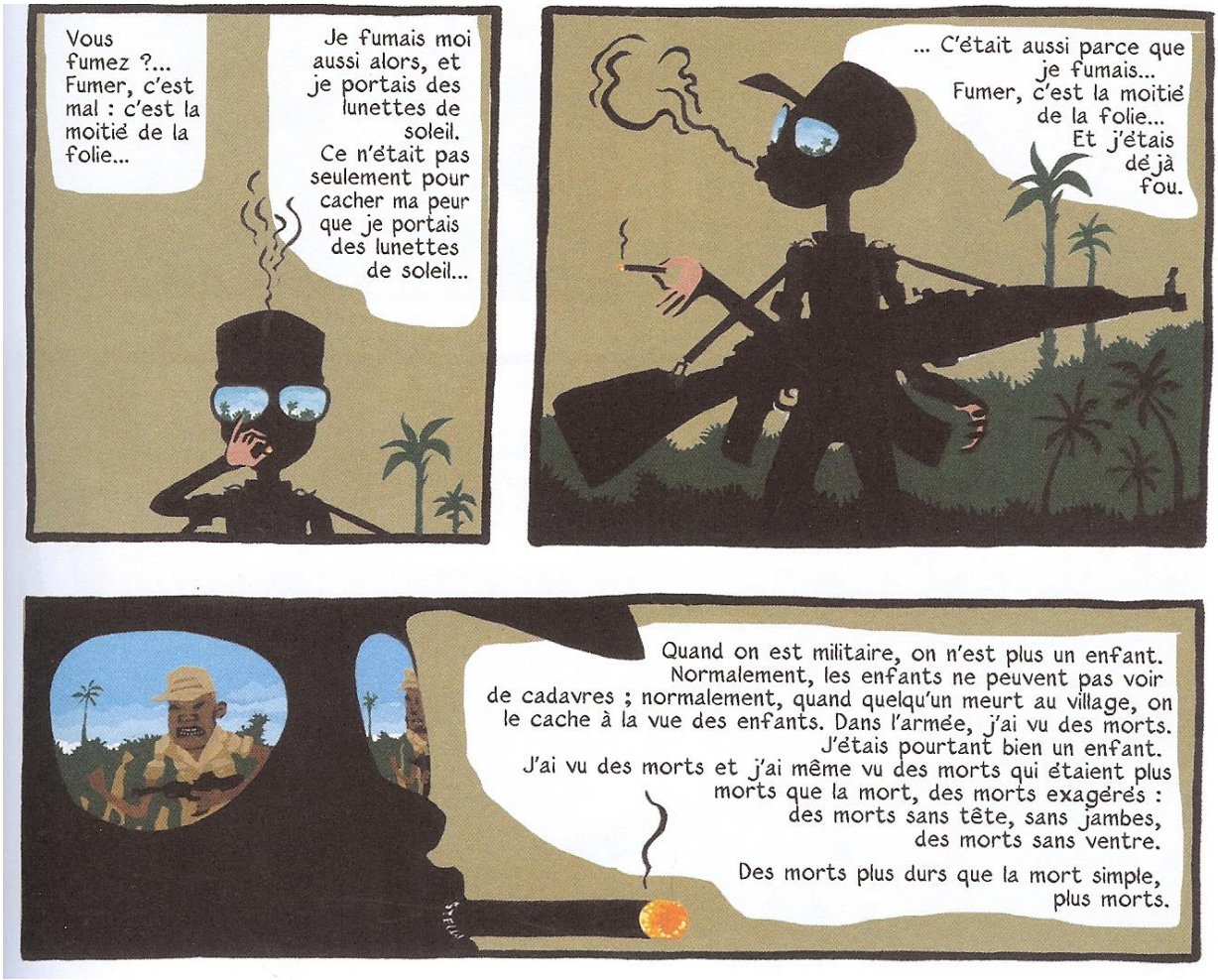

Figure 3.22. Arnold as a child soldier. (Jean-Philippe Stassen, "L'étoile d'Arnold," *XXI*, volume 11, 2011), 179.

That Arnold was attending the University of Bukavu and no longer a child soldier at the time when Stassen interviewed him attests to the success of the BVES and Muna Murhabazi, its director. However, while violence in the region has not ended and various armed forces continue to capture children and force them into armed conflicts, Arnold's testimony and the work conducted by the BVES point to the possibility of change. The title, "L'étoile d'Arnold," is a metaphor for the situation; it refers to one of Arnold's tattoos in which the figure of a star

symbolizes his destiny, hope for the future of the region, and the end of cyclical violence. By engaging Western readers on a personal level with the sociopolitical reality of everyday life of young people in central Africa, Stassen articulates a need for change in Western attitudes and policies towards this region and its people.

Both "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar" and "L'étoile d'Arnold" tackle controversial contemporary issues by embracing the complexity of quotidian life and the specificity of individual lived experiences; in this regard, they adhere to the same guiding principles of Stassen's previous work. Moreover, this faithfulness to individuals and their daily choices aligns Stassen's work with that of other postcolonial writers and artists. That Stassen himself is not of immigrant background does not dispel that he is also the product of postcolonialism; indeed, each of his texts explores the intimate relationship between Belgium and its former colonial territories and, more broadly, the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world. By using this medium as a form of journalism and by engaging readers in actively questioning existing modes of meaning making, Stassen counters mainstream *bande dessinée* tendencies in France and Belgium. His particular interests lie in rethinking European colonial and imperialist narratives as they pertain to Africa.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how Stassen addresses the tension between the specific and the general, invites readers to reconsider and rethink their role in processes of meaning making, and works to decolonize European *bandes dessinées* from their colonial origins. I demonstrated how, through a distortion of the *ligne claire* style and a penchant for experimentation, Stassen succeeds in pushing the limitations of the Ninth Art. By turning his attention to questions of discrimination, immigration, and postcolonial violence in the form of genocide he uses *bandes dessinées* to investigate and deconstruct existing stereotypes in the

West about life in francophone Africa. His early work (*Le bar du vieux Français, Louis le portugais,* and *Thérèse*) greatly reflects personal concerns regarding the practice of everyday life in a multicultural Belgium such as discrimination, socioeconomic differences, and the clash between young people and the traditions of their families. Like Stassen himself, the characters in these early texts display a desire to flee their surroundings and an anxiety for the constrained world in which they find themselves trapped. While these early texts engage with social, economic, and some political issues, it was not until Stassen first journeyed to Rwanda that his work took on an overtly political stance. *Déogratias, Les enfants,* and *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* all share the distinct goals of raising awareness in the West about the 1994 Rwandan genocide and of creating a personal link between Western readers and victims of the genocide. Both *Déogratias* and *Les enfants* rely on bold colors and relatively young characters to engage readers in attempting to make sense of the characters' situation, thus rendering the genocide thinkable from the point of view of victims and perpetrators alike. In contrast, *Pawa: Chroniques des monts de la lune* invites readers to join in an investigation of the deeper reasons for the genocide so as to affect political action in today's world and to hold accountable all those responsible for the genocide.

This trilogy had the greatest impact on Stassen as an artist and led to a serious and self-conscious use of this medium to interrogate other aspects of European colonialism and the ongoing ramifications of Western imperialist logic. Choosing to illustrate Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Honwana's *We Killed Mangy-Dog* and to publish *bandes dessinées* in the French journal *XXI,* Stassen participates in the larger intellectual movement of critically returning to the colonial moment to rethink what we know about it and its legacy in current international politics. Moreover, by using *bandes dessinées* as the vehicle for such an interrogation, he invites Western

readers to join in such a line of questioning. Just as he fragments, subverts, questions, and interrogates the colonial past and the continued implications of imperialist logic in the contemporary moment, his work challenges mainstream *bande dessinée* tendencies and genre distinctions. Though Stassen is not of African descent, there is no doubt that he ranks amongst other African cartoonists in that his work offers more nuanced and more realistic representations of life in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora than most mainstream European *bandes dessinées*. His dedication to challenging and upsetting existing modes of representation set him apart from the majority of European cartoonists who often continue using stereotypical images of Africa as little more than an exotic locale for their adventure narratives. In contrast, alongside Pahé and Marguerite Abouet, Stassen not only contests such Euro-centric representations of Africa, but actively seeks to expose the inherent colonial and imperialist overtones embedded in the makeup of European *bandes dessinées* to decolonize the medium and demonstrate its capacity as a meaning making tool in as of itself.

Conclusion

In 2010, Christophe Cassiau-Haurie organized two separate events in Paris that were dedicated to the promotion and study of francophone African *bandes dessinées*;[76] as a direct result of these two events, Cassiau-Haurie also launched L'Harmattan BD in December of 2010, a subdivision of the Paris-based publisher L'Harmattan that is committed to publishing works by current and past francophone African cartoonists. As of spring 2013, L'Harmattan BD has published fourteen *bandes dessinées*. The recent recognition of African *bandes dessinées* by the mainstream market, arguably due in large part to the successes of Pahé, Abouet, and Stassen, points to certain shifts in mainstream *bande dessinée* production, consumption, and reception, which are all simultaneously caught up with and representative of the social, political, and cultural shifts taking place in, around, and beyond France as part and parcel of France's colonial legacy. Furthermore, the rise in the number of publications of *bandes dessinées* by African cartoonists not only reflects the cultural diversity found in Europe as a result of new migratory patterns across national borders over the last five decades, it also brings to bear on the reaction of the mainstream French-language *bande dessinée* market to such changes and demonstrates that the Ninth Art, alongside literature and film, constitutes a rich site for meaning-making. Indeed, Pahé and Abouet directly correspond to what Mark McKinney characterizes as "the arrival on the comics publishing scene of artists with a direct family connection to colonial history and its links to multi-ethnic France today" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 114). Though Stassen does not explicitly fit this description, his work and his interest in Africa reflect

[76] "A la rencontre de la bande dessinée africaine," ("Towards an African *bande dessinée*") took place at the Quai Branly Museum in February over the course of three days in which there were interviews with cartoonists, publishers, editors, and curators all of whom discussed the current state of francophone African *bande dessinée* production and consumption. Many of the cartoonists' work was exhibited and there was screening of the documentary *Résistants du 9ème Art* (*Rebels of the Ninth Art*) by Nicolette Fagiolo. The second event, the "Premier Salon des auteurs africains de bande dessinée" ("First Salon of African *bandes dessinées* Cartoonists") took place in December and also featured discussions about the status of francophone African *bande dessinée* production and consumption as well as an exhibit on the history of francophone African *bandes dessinées*.

the multi-ethnic reality of everyday life in Belgium, Belgium's colonial legacy, as well as the interest in this history in recent here's in Belgium in a more general manner.

Focusing specifically on sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* in this dissertation, I argue that postcolonial *bandes dessinées* offer insights into the sociopolitical and cultural contours of, on the one hand, the everyday experience of identity formation and, on the other hand, the multifaceted legacy of European colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the diaspora. My goal has been to explore the hegemony of traditional and mainstream French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* in the francophone world to examine how certain contemporary cartoonists from sub-Saharan Africa and also from Europe actively work to expose, interrupt, challenge, subvert, and reconfigure the imperial logic embedded in the visual language of *bandes dessinées*. For while the circulation of translated texts and in particular translated graphic narratives has done much to disseminate culturally-specific visual conventions, the continued prevalence of French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* in francophone regions of the world is undeniable as are the racist undertones encoded within the fabric of *bandes dessinées*. The relative absence of scholarly inquiry that addresses the racist and exoticizing nature of the visual and linguistic stereotypes (such as grotesquely exaggerated black bodies and the use of *petit-nègre* for African characters' speech) crystallized in early French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* has led to the uncritical re-publication of colonial-era *bandes dessinées* as well as a nostalgic return to the colonial past in contemporary *bandes dessinées*, which can be seen as part of a conservative reaction to growing ethnic minority groups in France. I agree with McKinney that understanding the continued impact of early French and Belgian *bandes dessinées* is crucial for determining "how far *bande dessinée* has been decolonized, and to what extent it remains a colonialist cultural formation" (McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* 29).

As a starting point to this project, I attempted to offer a rather fluid description of what we can consider a sub-Saharan African *bande dessinée* to demonstrate the problems inherent in categorizing postcolonial cartoonists, problems endemic to the larger questions of postcolonial literature and art. For example, Pahé was born and lives in Gabon yet has spent long periods since childhood living in France and is published by a Swiss-based French publisher whereas Marguerite Abouet was born in the Ivory Coast and has been living in France since the age of twelve. Indeed, it is no wonder that the relationship between transculturation and identity formation figure prominently in their works, both *La vie de Pahé* and *Aya de Yopougon*. In contrast, including Belgian cartoonist Jean-Philippe Stassen in such a project might seem, at first glance, counterintuitive. However, if we consider Richard Watts's explanation of postcolonial literature as that which seeks "to represent the shades of gray in a world that had previously been divided between black and white" (Watts 119), then it would seem logical that European cartoonists committed to challenging such binaries can also be seen as participating in postcolonial literature. Indeed, Stassen's inclusion in anthologies dedicated to the study of francophone African *bandes dessinées* and his participation in festivals and salons consecrated to African *bandes dessinées* seems to support this claim.

While sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* employ many of the same strategies as their literary counterparts—appropriation, abrogation, mimicry, allusion, distortion, caricature, plurality of meanings (literally on the page and figuratively through interpretation)—they mobilize them through text and image. Consequently, they offer a productive form of artistic expression that elevates and dramatizes the cultural and political experiences of cultural in-betweenness (as in Pahé and Abouet's cases respectively) as well as experiences of postcolonial violence such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the dangers associated with contemporary

immigration into Europe (as in Stassen's case) to restructure not only the images of Africa in circulation, but also to reconfigure the political acts of looking, reading, and representing.

Focusing on Pahé (Gabon), Marguerite Abouet (Ivory Coast), and Jean-Philippe Stassen (Belgian), three very different cartoonists, I investigated a wide range of self-reflexive strategies at work in sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* while also addressing the various ways in which contemporary cartoonists position themselves with regards to the mainstream *bande dessinée* industry. For example, Pahé's *bandes dessinées* correspond to the industry standard of a hardback book with glossy paper and bright colors and his visual aesthetic and use of humor are unmistakably informed by the Charleroi style exemplified by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's blockbuster series *Astérix*. Furthermore, the narrative choices for both the *La vie de Pahé* and *Dipoula* series, influenced by Pahé's European publisher Pierre Paquet, reflect popular trends in the industry. Put another way, the use of autobiography in *La vie de Pahé* allowed Pahé to demonstrate (and therefore legitimate) his artistic talent whereas the use of a narrative structure and main characters reminiscent of Zep's bestselling *bande dessinée* series *Titeuf* guaranteed Pahé a larger readership. However, through the appropriation and mocking of mainstream *bandes dessinées* such as *Astérix*, *Tintin*, and *Titeuf*, Pahé subverts the authority of such modes of representation and thus invites readers to question the racist and reductive ideologies embedded in stereotypes and racial caricatures. In contrast, Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie's *Aya de Yopougon* series, though not corresponding to the mainstream industry standard in terms of its format, nevertheless stems from and is a direct result of the independent and small press movements in *bandes dessinées* during the 1990s and benefits from an affinity with cartoonist Joann Sfar. As part of Sfar's Bayou collection at Gallimard Jeunesse, *Aya de Yopougon* was destined for a large audience from the beginning and successfully set the

tone for the Bayou collection as a high-quality product at the level of narrative and art. Through a polyvocal representation of the everyday and a focus on the wide range of female and male experiences in the Ivory Coast and in the diaspora in France, Abouet counters negative stereotypes of Africa and Africans in the West. Lastly, the mobilization of a highly distorted and purposefully politicized version of the *ligne claire* aesthetic in the hands of Jean-Philippe Stassen reimagines this originally Belgian aesthetic born during the height of European colonialism precisely to disrupt the imperialist and racist value system it carries with it while also using it to investigate the legacy of Belgian colonialism in the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the long-lasting effects of European colonialism throughout central Africa and the diaspora.

From a broader theoretical point of view, francophone African *bandes dessinées* offer productive insight into issues central to the field of contemporary French and Francophone Studies by providing us with new ways of considering "print culture" while simultaneously visualizing the dynamic relationship between Africa and Europe and the representation of such a relationship. Due to their inherently fragmented nature, I would argue that *bandes dessinées* offer innovative approaches to representing the complexity of individual experience in today's world, approaches that invite readers to think through the question of cultural difference and the various discourses that seek to reinscribe otherness. Specifically, I suggest that there is a productive link between the formalistic notion of "braiding" put forward by French *bande dessinée* theorist Thierry Groensteen in his book-length definition of *bande dessinée, System of Comics*, and related notions such as "hybridity," "*métissage*," "*branchements*" ("connections"), or cultural "entanglement." For Groensteen, the notion of braiding in *bande dessinée* theory goes beyond describing page layout, ultimately "[manifesting] into consciousness the notion that the panels of a comic constitute a network, and even a system" (Groensteen, *The System of Comics* 158). For

others, such as Françoise Lionnet, "braiding" is a form of cultural "*métissage*" in which writers and artists "blend" different cultural traditions, genres, and registers. Indeed, considering *bandes dessinées* as systems and networks is useful when we consider Sarah Nuttall's notion of cultural "entanglement" and Jean-Loup Amselle's model of cultural *branchements* or connections, both of which suggest that identity is intertwined within dynamic networks of cultural signifiers. Put another way, the structure of *bandes dessinées* lends itself well to an exploration of Homi Bhabha's "third space" because it reflects the nonlinear and polyvalent nature of transcultural experiences. Even the liminal space of the gutter, the space between the panels, in *bandes dessinées* can be seen as a charged in-between site where meaning must be generated. Furthermore, understanding *bandes dessinées* as a system of connections reflects certain models of history such as Walter Benjamin's notion of history as a constellation and Michael Rothberg's historical model of "multidirectional memory" as exemplified by Stassen's "Les visiteurs de Gibraltar" in which he illustrates overlapping histories onto the same geography to suggest a palimpsestic understanding of the contemporary issue of immigration.

Throughout this project I have endeavored to demonstrate how sub-Saharan African *bandes dessinées* necessarily engage with French and Belgian visual and discursive modes of representation that have been informed by European colonialism and imperialism. While I focused almost exclusively on *bandes dessinées* published in Europe to illustrate the continued imbalance between European and African publishers, there are a number of successful African cartoonists—T. T. Fons in Senegal, Willy Zekid originally from the Republic of the Congo and who lives and publishes in the Ivory Coast, and Papa Mfumu'eto in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—whose work, because it is published locally, addresses everyday concerns in sub-Saharan Africa and often employs local languages and idioms much more than Abouet does in

Aya de Yopougon. In addition, though I touched upon Pahé's career as a political cartoonist, I chose to limit the scope of this project to long-form *bandes dessinées* to investigate how contemporary cartoonists reconfigure this medium to challenge its colonialist overtones and while there are African political cartoonists who address this issue, the majority of their work, not surprisingly, tends to reflect and comment on the local and international sociopolitical issues of the moment. Indeed, Pahé, Abouet, and Stassen are but three representatives of a growing number of contemporary cartoonists who, in the globalized era of what W. J. T. Mitchell has called the "pictorial turn," experiment with images and text to produce new visualizations of Africa in the twenty-first century, visualizations that incorporate a re-imaging and re-imagining of the past. The recent rise in the publication of *bandes dessinées* by African cartoonists and the increase in the publication of non-fiction *bandes dessinées de reportage* speak to the shift in the *bande dessinée* market due in large part to the success of the three cartoonists considered here and also to the need for further critical attention.

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