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# Frayed Memories, Re-imagined Belongings

## Southeast Asian Post-refugee Generations in France

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### INTRODUCTION

The communist takeover in 1975 and post-war developments in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos engendered a mass exodus of refugees, some 125,000 of whom were

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resettled in France (Lanphier 1983). Though a smaller community had existed in France prior to 1975, products of different historical developments over the course of almost one hundred years of French colonization (Luguern 2007; Daum & Tran 2019; Simon 1981; Simon-Barouh 1981), the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian populations in France (heretofore referred to as “Southeast Asians”) increased exponentially with the refugee resettlement from the region in the mid-1970s-mid-1980s. Over the last five decades the communities have grown in size and complexity with the emergence of the *post-refugee generations* whom we define as comprised of those who are of refugee families but who were born or grew up in France. According to the 2019 statistics on immigrants in France (that include naturalized French citizens) those from the three countries of former French Indochina (i.e Southeast Asians) are among the six largest Asian populations in France, with Vietnamese ranking second after Chinese, followed by Cambodians and Laotians ranking fourth and sixth respectively.<sup>1</sup> Combined, they form the largest group of Asian immigrants in France, accounting for 2.4% of all immigrant populations in France and approximately 5% if we exclude European immigrants. Besides the size of the populations, the post-refugee generation Southeast Asians are also registering their presence in significant ways in various sectors of French society, including politics, business, and the arts.

Despite the numerical, economic, and social importance of the Southeast Asian community, little is known about these populations, and even less about the post-refugee generations—their identities and politics and especially their relationship to their parents’ traumatic history of migration. While French scholarship on colonial Indochina is abundant, researchers have paid little attention to the diasporic communities in France. With the call for increased attention to diversity and multiculturalism in France in recent years, some national surveys have begun to highlight these populations in their demographic analyses, as evidenced by the inclusion of the category “South-East Asia” in a recent survey on population diversity in France, *Trajectoires et Origines*, conducted by the Institut national d’études démographiques (INED).<sup>2</sup> These initiatives notwithstanding, Southeast Asians in France remain barely visible in major statistical works, as most studies continue to lump them together under the undifferentiated national origin category of “other Asian countries.”

The invisibility of Asians in France has enabled myths and assumptions about these communities, both positive and negative, to persist unchallenged. For Asians in France, as is true for those in the US, both valorizing and pejorative stereotypes are burdensome and harmful. The “positive” stereotypes of the “model minority” that dominate discourse about Asians both in France and the US obscure the challenges that these communities face, pit minority communities against each, and fuel anti-Asian resentment and violence. The flagrant nature of anti-Asian violence that surged during the Covid-19 pandemic only makes more legible, or at least makes it more difficult to deny, the resentment, racism, and violence that have long been directed at people of Asian ancestry in France. The pandemic may have exacerbated the hostility, but it did not create it; notions such as the

“Yellow Peril” that were reified in different manifestations during the pandemic are centuries-old (Live 2021). They underscore the precarious positions that Asians occupy in France, being at once invisible and hypervisible, as well as the perils of homogenization that account for the indiscriminate nature of the anti-Asian violence.

For Southeast Asians in France, the everyday challenges that they share with other people of Asian descent are compounded by the traumatic history of war and genocide that continues to haunt many refugee families. Whereas the refugee generation had developed coping strategies to deal with the challenges of displacement, resettlement and integration, the post-refugee generations of French-born and raised Southeast Asians are positioned, and are positioning themselves, differently both in their relationship with France and with their ancestral countries in Asia. These positionalities that are shaped by histories and lived experiences, hence never uniform or generalizable, inform their politics that heretofore remain largely unnoticed. With the exception of works on Chinese immigrant mobilization that has been well documented (Chuang, Le Bail & Merle 2020; Du, Le Bail, Lévy & Li 2021; Chuang 2021), few studies on community mobilization against discrimination and racism focus on Asians, and none on Southeast Asians in France. Their mobilization, particularly in the face of rising anti-Asian violence, attests to the growing political consciousness and activism among younger generation Asians in France that contest and debunk the long-standing assumptions of passivity and compliance.

As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Southeast Asian refugee resettlement, this article aims to bring much needed scholarly and political attention to the concerns of the post-refugee generations of Southeast Asians in France. It is a by-product of a larger project that began with the convening of a colloquium at Sciences Po Paris in December 2018 that brought together academics, researchers, journalists, filmmakers, writers, community organizers, and advocates to engage some of the critical questions that inform the identity and politics of the post-refugee generations of Southeast Asians in France. From this convening emerged our edited volume *Génération post-réfugiées. Les descendants des réfugiés d’Asie du Sud-Est en France* [Post-refugee Generations: Descendants of Southeast Asian refugees in France] (Um & Le Bail 2023). Among issues addressed at the colloquium were historical traumas and identity construction, representation, belonging, and activism among the post-refugee generations of Southeast Asians. The high and diverse attendance at the colloquium underscores the importance of the questions that we were addressing and the critical need for such discourse among Southeast Asians, and between Southeast Asians and the larger French society.

Drawing from key findings of the colloquium and from the many discussions developed in our edited volume (Um & Le Bail 2023), this paper illuminates the lived experiences of Southeast Asian individuals and families in France, centering on the post-refugee generations and on questions of identity negotiations, inter-generational transmission of trauma and transgenerational memory work, problematic representation that continues to be perpetuated by uncritical scholarship and

popular media, persisting racialized imaginaries, and the experiences of “othering” that many Southeast Asians face. In electing to complement the larger French-language publication with this English-language essay, we hope that our findings will also contribute in significant ways to the scant Anglophone scholarship on these communities in France, particularly on the post-refugee generations, and serve as an epistemic bridge that reflects the robust transnational connections and flows across the various nodes of the Southeast Asian diaspora.

In this article, we begin by positioning our work and critique in the context of refugee studies, and particularly in the emerging field of critical refugee studies. We then structure our discussion of post-refugee generations around four themes: 1) how the post-refugee generation Southeast Asians in France negotiate dominant assumptions and conceptions of refugees and the colonial and postcolonial imaginaries that inform them; 2) how they negotiate the historical traumas, frayed memory, and duty to remember; 3) how they turn to art and its potential for alleviating pain and rupture; and finally 4) how they interrogate both the missing histories and the “missing *in* histories” as well as the larger questions of misrepresentation and invisibility in the French society.

## SITUATING THIS STUDY IN EXISTING REFUGEE STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP: IDENTIFYING GAPS AND CHARTING NEW DIRECTIONS

### Refugee Studies and Southeast Asian Refugee Studies in France

In the current political landscape where diversity, anti-discrimination and anti-racism discourse emerges simultaneously with increased stringency in border management regime and hostility towards immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, the questions of reception, belonging and othering are more important than ever. While this article is focused on the Southeast Asian populations, many of the issues they face resonate with the experiences of other immigrant and refugee groups who are also struggling with and against marginalization, exclusion, and othering. As such, insights gained from the Southeast Asian experience could help illuminate the experiences of other immigrant and refugee populations and racialized minorities in France and elsewhere. They lend themselves to comparative and relational studies that are important to our understanding of the growing pluralism of French society. These insights are particularly instructive given that, despite increased attention to the need to welcome new refugees in Europe, we know little about the post-reception experiences of refugees. As Akoka, Clochard, and Tcholakova noted in their essay, *Recognised refugees and after?* (2017), research on refugees is largely confined to the moment of reception (or non-reception) and is only rarely attentive to refugee futurities.

Our work on the Southeast Asian post-refugee generations seeks to redress the intellectual lacunae in both refugee and diaspora studies. It is, first and foremost,

driven by the paucity of scholarship on Southeast Asians in France in general, and the absence of research on the French-born descendants of refugees in particular. Almost five decades since the initial refugee resettlement in 1975, research on Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians in France remains rare. Some scholarly attention was given to these populations in the late 1980s-1990s following the mass resettlement of refugees. The works of Jean-Pierre Hassoun on the Hmong (1977) and of Le Huu-Khoa on the Vietnamese (1985) were among the first publications that laid the foundation for later studies. Some doctoral research on the reception and initial resettlement of refugees was also carried out in the 1990s, though they were largely ethnic specific and localized, with a negligible few providing comparative analysis with communities in the US (Montagnon 1990; Bertheleu 1994; Leynaud 1996; Massé 1996; Billion-Laroute 1999). Several studies on the migration journeys of Hmong, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese were compiled into a 2001 special issue of the journal *Hommes et Migrations*, titled *France Terre d'Asie* (Cha & Simon-Barouh 2001). Additionally, a limited number of works on ethnic Chinese from South-East Asia, who feature quite prominently among Southeast Asian refugees in France, also appeared among studies of Chinese diaspora or of ethnic neighborhoods such as “chinatowns” that grew in significance in Paris with the arrival of Southeast Asian refugees in 1975 (Live 1991; Guillon & Taboada-Léonetti 1986; Costa-Lascoux & Live 1995).

Already scant, research interests in these populations waned even more in recent decades as the now established communities no longer spark debates or interests, as they did during the 1980s and 1990s. Over the last two decades we were able to locate only three doctoral theses on the Vietnamese communities (Vu-Renaud 2001; Nguyen 2001; Le Hoangan 2023), three on Cambodians and the Teochews of Cambodia (Meslin 2004; Nann 2005; Teng 2022), and four on Laotians (Gauthier 2003; Rigaud 2012; Sangkhavongs 2019; Wilhelm 2021). Of particular note is the virtual absence of scholarly work on the French-born generations who are now an integral part of French cultural, political, economic, and social fabric. With the exception of the work of Lê Huu Khoa's titled *Les jeunes vietnamiens de la deuxième génération* [Young Second Generation Vietnamese] (1988), Marie Hélène Rigaud's thesis (2005, published in 2012) on children of Laotian refugees in Montpellier, and more recently Julien Le Hoangan's thesis (2023) on the descendants of Vietnamese refugees and memory work and, aspects of Jenny Teng's thesis on the Sino-Cambodian diaspora (2022), there has been little interest in these younger populations.

Limited as they were, the earlier works were foundational and provided important historical glimpses of the early histories and experiences of Southeast Asians in France. Our colloquium and volume build on and extend beyond this earlier scholarship in our foregrounding of new issues, perspectives, contexts, and conceptual and theoretical framing. Unlike many earlier studies, our project addresses more than one ethnic community and locale, and is multidisciplinary and multimedia in its approach. It also departs from many prior studies in the focus placed on the “post-refugee generations” of Southeast Asians who were

born or grew up in France. Their experiences generate new perspectives and insights, and underscore new concerns that differ from those of the previous generations. While first-generation Southeast Asians in France may have been forced to assimilate and seek security behind the homogenizing stereotype of the “model minority” because of their refugee status and near impossibility of return, the post-refugee generations are confronting two simultaneous and compounding challenges—the silence in the home and invisibility/hypervisibility in society—two central themes that we will discuss further in this essay. Both compel them to push for knowledge and acknowledgement of their stories and experiences. Through their critical scholarship, art, and activism, they interrogate the politics of representation, including “positive stereotypes” that obscure the challenges and sacrifices, as well as the structural, normative, and ideological conditions that invisibilize certain communities, histories and experiences, under the labels of “successful integration” and resilience. From different temporal perches and through different generational lenses, we interrogate notions and concepts such as “model minority,” the “good refugee,” and “successful integration” that undergird the policies and politics of refugee reception, and that continue to inform both the identity of younger generation Southeast Asians as well as French popular imaginaries of Southeast Asian communities. We also grapple with the notion of postmemory, the transgenerational haunting of historical trauma, and the challenges of transgenerational transmission of memory. Though we aim to illuminate the challenges, we are also attentive to emergent and insurgent counter-discourses, mobilization, and activism of the post-refugee generations.

Thus, in conceptualizing our project, we were guided by the following questions: For descendants of Southeast Asian refugees, born in France or who arrived at a very young age, whose lives have blended almost seamlessly into the economic, political and cultural life of French society, what, if anything, defines their Southeast Asian identity? How do the post-refugee generations live with the weight of history, the specter of loss, and the silence that still hovers over many families, and that marks them in fundamental ways? How do their families’ migration histories inform their artistic production, their activism, and their efforts to amplify the unspoken memory of first-generation refugees, and give presence to communities that have long remained invisible to the larger public under the pan-ethnic label of “Asians” or “Chinese”? What impact does linguistic disconnect have on intergenerational dialogue and transgenerational transmission of memory?

## Through Critical and Creative Lens: A Critical Refugee Studies Approach

In engaging with the issues and concerns of the Southeast Asian post-refugee generations, we situate ourselves and our approach within the Critical Refugee Studies framework<sup>3</sup> that privileges the lived experiences, voices, and perspectives of refugees that are commonly marginalized, ignored or silenced in refugee studies.



In our epistemic interrogation, we also deviate from the academic privileging of scholarly work to include voices of artists, advocates, and community researchers. Shifting the analytic gaze from refugees simply as objects of study, rescue and protection, we advance the notion of refugees as producers of knowledge and as narrators of their own stories. In foregrounding refugee agency, we strive not to speak for but to give voice to refugees and their descendants. In so doing, we seek not only to highlight experiences and concerns that have been obscured but also to showcase the agency, resistance, and reclaim that are manifested in different ways, forms and contexts in the individual and collective responses of Southeast Asians to the challenges that confront them.

In deploying the term “post-refugee generations” to refer to the French-born generations that are the focus of our project, we are cognizant of the need to interrogate and contextualize the concept of “post-refugee” given the long and complex histories of conflict and of migration to, from, and between Southeast Asian countries that predated the refugee exodus of the mid-1970s-1980s. The predominance of Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry among the initial cohort of “boat people” from Vietnam, and the large presence of ethnic minorities such as the Hmong from the highlands of Laos and Vietnam among the refugees resettled in Western countries, for instance, are all legacies of the older history of migration to Southeast Asia engendered by the political and economic turmoil that plagued China at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. War and conflicts continued to displace communities in Southeast Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the Second World War, many Vietnamese workers who were enlisted in the war efforts in France could not return home because of the intensification of the anti-colonial war in Vietnam and subsequent formation of the socialist state in North Vietnam in 1946. The collapse of the French colonial regime and partition of Vietnam in 1954 engendered a mass exodus from the North to the South of almost one million Vietnamese—mostly Catholics, Eurasians, and people associated with the colonial regime who feared persecution by the new socialist regime in the North. Some ethnic minority groups such as the Hmong and Thai Dam, who had fled from China to North Vietnam, also moved South; some eventually migrated to Laos before being displaced again as refugees after 1975. For many Southeast Asian families, the history and experience of refugeehood thus predated 1975, and must be taken into account in our conceptualization of “generation” as well as of the temporal location of “post” in the historical continuum.

While cognizant of the longer histories of forced migration, this article takes as the historical and temporal referent the seizure of power by the communists in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in 1975. As such, by “post-refugee generations” we mean the children and grandchildren of Southeast Asians who were granted refugee status and resettled in France following the communist victory in 1975, and who are linked by the shared experience of forced displacement catalyzed by war and post-war political turmoil that ravaged their three countries. In our critical approach, we are also attentive to the importance of interrogating and deconstructing the term “Southeast Asian” or “Indochinese.” Though bound by



the shared histories of French colonization, the three “Indochina Wars”—first with the French, then with the Americans and finally with each other—and the final regime collapse in 1975 that took place in domino effects in all three countries in the Spring of 1975, Southeast Asians in France are also distinguished by differences in the condition and circumstance of departure, in their pre-migration experiences, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, gender and, over time, generational cohorts. The retention of different ethnic and cultural identities, such as “Hmong,” “Chinese” or even more specifically “Teochew” or “Cantonese,” that many refugee families from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam embrace problematizes the concept of a “Southeast Asian” identity. This internal diversity is often overlooked in research and popular discourse, as illustrated by the frequent usage of the term “boat people” to refer to all refugees from Southeast Asia despite the fact that the exodus by sea was comprised of almost all migrants from Vietnam. This homogenization effectively obscures the particular histories and experiences of the different Southeast Asian refugee groups, adding yet another dimension of invisibility that bears heavily upon the post-refugee generations.

Situating certain concepts in specific country contexts also presents important challenges. In our work, we had to reflect on the use of the term “community” in the French context where ethnic identification is not valorized and where suppression of ethnic identity is seen, in accordance with the French republican ideology, as evidence of successful integration. Conversely, belonging to a community or several communities (for instance Teochew and Cambodian, or Vietnamese and Laotian) is often confused with communitarianism and read as reluctance to integrate. As a result, identities and concepts such as “Asian American” do not exist in France, though such a construction could offer refugees and their descendants a space for self-definition and identity, not just in cultural or ethnic but also political terms. Just as the “Asian American” political identity was constructed in the context of racial tensions in the 1960s in the United States, the recent mobilization in France against anti-Asian violence could be the catalyst for the construction of a pan-Asian identity (Le Bail 2021). By extension, terms such as “belonging/non-belonging” do not translate easily from English to French, despite the fact that it is a theme that threads through the discussion among colloquium participants. These are some of the political, intellectual, and discursive tensions and contradictions that our work seeks to foreground through the critical and creative lenses of the post-refugee generations.

## THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE FIGURE AND COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL IMAGINARIES

As with first generation refugees, the post-refugee generations of Southeast Asians in France are simultaneously confronting and navigating their place and identities as French of Asian ancestry while working through the historical traumas that they inherited. As French-born or French-raised Southeast Asians, they not only

have to make sense of their own Southeast Asian identity given the historical, cultural, and linguistic disconnect, but also contend with identities that are super-imposed upon them by the larger French society, some of which are deeply rooted and nurtured in French colonial and post-colonial imaginaries. Situating Southeast Asian contemporary experiences in the longer historical context, Boulomsouk Svadphaiphane's essay in our edited volume (2023) argues that representations of Southeast Asian refugees are nourished by various imaginaries, extending back to French colonial infantilization of their colonized subjects, and the essentialization and sexual objectification of Southeast Asian women. In fundamental aspects, the myth of the "model minority"—one that poses no problem, that integrates well, is hardworking, and thrives on the basis of their own resourcefulness and self-reliance—coined in the US in the 1960s (Trueba 1966: 76) and uncritically applied to all Asians, resonates in France as well. To the longer genealogy, the Asian model minority notion was reinforced by the arrival of refugees from Southeast Asia and given new form—that of "the good refugee." As with its progenitor, it emanates from specific historical contexts. As noted by various participants in our project, the notion of the "good refugee" that was attributed to Southeast Asian refugees is shored up by an admixture of French compassion, guilt toward and, to some extent, respect for the former colonized subjects. Karine Meslin discusses the context in which refugees from Southeast Asia became the "good refugees" and, subsequently, the "model minority" in France (Meslin 2017, 2020 and 2023). Emphasizing the layered and reinforcing histories, she notes how as refugees from former French colonies and fleeing communist regimes whose oppressiveness was intensely publicized during the Cold War, Southeast Asians benefited from an exceptionally favorable reception, extended largely to discredit the communist regimes during the Cold war, as compared to many other asylum seekers in the 1970s and 1980s (Massé 1996). For one, Southeast Asians were granted a quasi-automatic UN Convention refugee status that was not extended to many other groups. As a result, they were spared the distrust and bureaucratic violence that many asylum seekers experienced at that time and even more after the 1980s; As Karen Akoka (2011) notes, Zairians, among other forcibly displaced populations who sought asylum a few years later, did not benefit from the favorable reception that was extended to the Southeast Asians. Unlike many other refugee groups that command little regard, Southeast Asians whose successful integration is held up as a testament to the effectiveness of French refugee resettlement policies, also benefited from the recognition and residual respect that many French of a certain generation still have for Southeast Asian valor during their anti-colonial struggle for self-determination.

Representations of the former "docile colonial subject," the "good refugees" in the 1970-80s, and later the "model minority" illuminate how Southeast Asians in France occupy a position that is simultaneously hypervisible and invisible. Similarly, Albano Cordeiro's study on the Portuguese immigrants (2015) underscores how such an important immigrant group could become invisible in the media and the political debate. He further notes the paradox of the "visible" immigrant communities

that became “invisible” because they are supposed to have been integrated. For Southeast Asians, to be rendered “invisible” is to become a non-entity in the eyes of policy makers and of the public.

Whereas first generation refugees may have embraced the image of the “good refugee” as a survival and incorporation strategy, as Meslin contends, seeking instead, to the extent possible, to preserve, express, and transmit their cultural identities within the intimate confines of family and community, these decisions are not without consequences. The notion of successful integration, propagated by the larger French society and embraced by the refugees themselves, obscure the challenges and more complex realities that many refugee families encountered. They also weigh gravely on subsequent generations who are left to deal with these persisting myths, assumptions and presumptions that are injurious to them. These tensions and contradictions in their lived experiences are issues that they are confronting with heightened consciousness. At the heart of their critique are the long enduring mis/representations of Southeast Asians in France and the ideologies undergirding them that contribute to the silencing and invisibilization of the communities. According to Mai Lan Nguyen-Conan (Nguyen-Conan 2012, 2023), the demonstration of generosity and acceptance of France’s policy toward Southeast Asian refugees has made it difficult for refugees and their descendants to engage in a more critical discourse about their resettlement experiences. As she notes, with the first generation having been the beneficiaries of a welcome that was presented and experienced as “exceptional,” and the descendants having been supposedly successfully integrated, how can they not be grateful to the host country? In her critique of France’s lack of accountability for her role in Cambodia’s traumatic history, Jenny Teng poignantly contends that refugee gratitude essentially rests on national amnesia (Teng 2023).

The importance of the reception context that have kept certain representations of Southeast Asians as well as their relationship with French society frozen over the decades was further underscored in our volume by Stéphanie Nann (2023) and Christine Huynh (2023) who contend that these representations are transformed into injunctions to be compliant, to assimilate and, by consequence, to subjugate one’s ethnic and cultural identities, all of which bear grave ramifications for the generations-after. Privileging gratitude toward the host nation not only obscures France’s complicated and implicated colonial histories; it also masks the reality of discrimination and racism that exist today and that are among the principal concerns raised by researchers, artists, and advocates. Central to this concern is the “model minority” myth that continues to be perpetuated. Whereas this notion has long been the focus of scholarly discourse among sociologists, Ethnic Studies scholars, political scientists, and historians in the US (Kim 1999; Wu 2014; Zhou & Bankston III 2020), it has received little scholarly and political attention in France (Simon-Barouh 1995; Meslin 2011; Luguern 2016). In their discussions of Asian academic success, which is one of the key attributes of the “model minority,” Mathieu Ichou (in his presentation at our 2018 colloquium, and Ichou 2013) and Vincent Geisser (2023) noted how academic success as a pathway to social mobility is

integrally linked to the notion of successful integration. Ichou's work also invites critical discussion about the roles and limitations of statistics and aggregate studies in accurately capturing the nuances and complexities of the "Asian" experiences. The TeO survey, referenced earlier, highlights the high prevalence of alterity that Asians experience. This underscores the fact that while Asians may not encounter the same form of racism as other minoritized groups in France, they are highly subjected to the symbolic violence of "othering" (Safi & Simon 2013), something that is largely overlooked in the debates about racism and discrimination in France.

Departing from the stance assumed by first generation refugees, the post-refugee generations interrogated both the forms and consequences of these prevailing notions and assumptions such as the "good refugee" that fails, as Nann points out, to truly protect Southeast Asians from discrimination, marginalization, and violence (Nann 2023). Historicizing and extending the critique to the notion of "successful integration," Svadphaiphane (2023) argues that while sexist stereotypes of Asian women as "model companions" or "model sexual partners" may be considered as positive attributes of "good integration," here achieved through intimate relationships, they were in fact relations of domination that undergirded colonial imaginaries, and that continue to be injurious to Asian women today. Playing on the metaphor of the republican school, Mai Lam Nguyen-Conan (2023) similarly speaks of the "good students of integration" and forcefully notes that such a perception renders invisible the sacrifices that this integration model entails. Many authors also reflect on how the imperative to assimilate has resulted in the loss of the home language and culture, contributing to the intergenerational disconnect and impeding the transmission of memory. For instance, describing the efforts of first-generation Lao refugees to maintain their homeland culture by reconstructing and honoring myths and religious practices in the diaspora, Sangkhavongs (2023) notes that despite the massive investment, these efforts do not always succeed in preventing the post-refugee generations from becoming culturally disconnected. Expounding on the issue of generational disconnect, Nann (2023) contends that the loss of cultural identity engendered by forced assimilation compounds the historical traumas, exacerbating the silence in the family and transforming it into transgenerational haunting. Underscoring the point that Southeast Asian refugee assimilation has not been without significant trade-offs, she also argues that the pull between two cultures to which younger generation Southeast Asians in France are subjected can contribute to an "identity breakdown." The feeling of liminality generated by the denial of a historicized self, in turn, translates into the feeling of non-belonging that many refugees and their descendants feel despite their French identity, and even citizenship, and despite the perception of them as the exemplary, successfully assimilated "model minority."

## HISTORY, MEMORY AND DUTY TO REMEMBER

Questions of identity, representation, assimilation, marginalization, alterization, and belonging are, as such, interconnected. Central to the question of post-refugee generation identity is the traumatic history from which the Southeast Asian refugee diaspora was born, and that continues to bear upon both the refugee and post-refugee generations whose identity as French people of Southeast Asian ancestry is shaped by it despite the generational distancing. The relationship between history, memory, identity threads through the trans-disciplinary and collective discussions among academics, artists, and advocates during our colloquium and in our edited volume. The themes of loss and absence emerged in multiple contexts, not only of the traumatic past but also of the present. They also manifest in varied forms—in the absence of history, knowledge, and acknowledgement, in the perpetuated invisibility of the communities, and in the inability of refugees and their descendants to see themselves in the history of France. Amplified by the aging and gradual disappearance of first-generation refugees, these absences intensify the desire of the post-refugee generations to know their history which, in many families, has remained buried for decades. It is this void that the artistic, political, and critical works seek to fill.

Mutually reinforcing, absence and silence impede the transmission of family histories and disrupt the construction of a historicized identity and, by extension, the sense of belonging for the diaspora-born generations. As many of the project participants have noted in their reflections, the magnitude of genocidal loss that Cambodians have experienced has undermined the ability to articulate, thereby undercutting intergenerational communication and the transmission of memory. While Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory contributes to our understanding of transgenerational legacies of trauma, the Cambodian experience differs from the Jewish experience on this question of articulation; as Jenny Teng points out "Among the Jews, there is a culture of narrative, of history, of transmission words, which is foundational to the Jewish diaspora and culture, which is not the case among Chinese-Cambodians" (Teng 2023). Carol Kidron, working on the legacies of traumatic memories, has also compared the experiences of the descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of Cambodian genocide. While she explains that in both cases descendants spoke of parental silence about the genocidal past, and of their choice to respect survivor silence, she also notes the different nature of the silence within the families:

Fragmented mythic tales of survival create a silent, or partially silent, matrix of Holocaust presence, which is perpetually interwoven within the everyday domestic life-world. In contrast, Cambodian-Canadian descendants recount the almost total absence of non-verbal presence of the genocidal past and only infrequent verbal references to the past. (Kidron, 2009 193-194.)

In her conclusions, which are not uncontested, she underscores the absence of verbal and non-verbal presence of the past in most Cambodian refugee families

while “Israeli descendants depicted a complex matrix of non-verbal mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of surviving traces of the past.” (Ibid.)

Further exacerbating the historical traumas are the lived experiences of French of Southeast Asian ancestry that are often marked by invisibility and dismissal. The absence and silence that emanate from genocidal loss—including the absence of the body of the disappeared—are compounded by the silencing and the invisibilization of Southeast Asians that result from forced assimilation, and that prevail despite the long history of colonial entanglement. Thus, in engaging the issue of inherited traumas, we emphasize the importance of not only looking at the past but also at the prevailing conditions that perpetuate and exacerbate trauma.

In illuminating Southeast Asian post-refugee memory work, we seek to contribute to the larger, rich field of memory study through our focus on populations that are virtually absent from this discourse. In France, intergenerational transmission of memory between the immigrant/refugee generation and their descendants has emerged as an important intellectual enterprise since the 1980s. The focus, however, has been on other groups of refugees such as the Spaniards, Armenians, or Chileans. These works underline the roles that the generation-after play not simply as passive recipients of memory, but also as actors in memory work in their roles as “memory entrepreneurs” (Baussant et al. 2017). Though they may respect their parents’ silence, as Kidron notes, the younger generations are also compelled by the desire to know their histories.

For reasons, both internal and external to the communities, that we noted here and discussed in greater details in our edited volume, transmission and documentation works have been very limited in the Southeast Asian refugee communities in France; in fact, our volume published in 2023 was a pioneering attempt to capture those emerging stories, and to illuminate on the relationships between temporality, memory and identity. While all migrations entail some form of dislocation, fracturing, and perhaps even rupture, the forced migration caused by political conflict, war and genocide engenders a type of fracturing, the nature and scope of which are rarely manifested in other experiences (Um 2015). This context is important for understanding both the silence of the first generation and the desire of later generations to break that silence. In her own research, Um questions and problematizes the concepts of silence and absence that continue to cast their spectral shadows trans-generationally, simultaneously necessitating and hindering the articulation of family histories. Rather than a void, silence is encrypted with cultural significance, hence must be understood through cultural prisms (Um 2023). In her critical examination of the relationship between history, memory, and identity, and her conceptual interrogation of “postmemory,” she argues that the processes of articulation and transmission must be situated not only in the context of history and prevailing structural conditions that refugees and their descendants have to negotiate, but also of culture (Um 2023).

Despite the constraints, post-refugee generation memory work is slowly emerging. Engaging the question of the “duty to remember” that preoccupies both survivors and their descendants, as well as the challenges in fulfilling that duty,



academic and community researchers, writers, and artists in visual arts, literature, dramaturgy and cinema discuss in their contributions to the volume the ways in which the post-refugee generations negotiate their “generational distance” and their varied connections to family histories through different artistic expressions. Reflecting diversity in disciplinary training, approach and perspectives, their contributions also constitute different forms and sources of knowledge, ranging from academic essays, community-generated research, autoethnographic testimonies, poetry, and plays. Through different disciplinary and methodological approaches, they reflect on the impact of historical traumas, and on the intersecting questions of memory, identity, and creation, underscoring factors that facilitate as well as hinder the transmission of memory within refugee families. How, for instance, can art serve as a tool for negotiating the relationship between history and identity for the generations that have not experienced historical trauma but are nonetheless haunted by it? How can it contribute to intergenerational dialogue? What are the privileges afforded by temporal distance and what ethical responsibilities must be borne in postmemory work?

Doan Bui, author of the autobiography *Le Silence de mon père* (2016), and Lana Chhor, author of the autobiographie *Génération peau de banane ou la vie après les Khmers rouges* (2018), provide poignant insights into the detrimental impact of silence that permeates refugee households, and on how the threat of losing a parent for Bui and the act of becoming a parent for Chhor set them on their quest to recover their family histories. Similarly for Christine Huynh (2023), who participated in a European oral history project carried out by descendants of refugees,<sup>4</sup> it is the void created by silence and the desire to recover and preserve endangered cultural and historical memories to which so much of the identities of the post-refugee generations are tied, that stimulated her interest in conducting the oral histories of the Teochew Chinese who constitute a significant part of the Cambodian refugee populations in France. For Huynh, this oral history project is a platform for bringing together the personal and the collective. She provides useful insights into the personal and collective meaning attached to such documentation projects, and on how personal memory is enhanced when placed within a larger social and collective frame. The seldom-heard life stories, told by refugees themselves and collected by their descendants, also offer new perspectives on silence and absence. Attesting to the agency and fortitude of the refugee generation, the life stories make visible the richness and complexity of refugee lifeworld that serve as counter-narratives to the dominant representations of refugees. While oral history is increasingly seen as an important epistemic approach to making visible histories and memories that have been peripheralized, Huynh’s essay also highlights the challenges inherent in documenting life stories in a community still trapped in silence and haunted by fear, especially when the project is conducted with filtered linguistic access, and using certain research methods such as video-taping that can constitute a violent experience for refugee-survivors accustomed to surveillance as a tool of control. Her essay also points to the power of external forces—funders, publishers, museum curators, and other institutional actors—to



legitimate, valorize and determine whose stories and experiences are worthy of preserving. All these challenges account for the relative scarcity of such initiatives despite their importance and the risk of irretrievable loss over time.

## ART, MEMORY AND HEALING

With impeded intergenerational transmission of histories and memories that adversely impacts the identity and sense of belonging of the post-refugee generations, academics and artists turn to art and its potential for alleviating pain and rupture. Adding to the discussion of biographical and autobiographical writing as a way of breaking intergenerational silence, literature and art scholars, Thanh-Vân Ton That and Soko Phay respectively, filmmakers Jenny Teng, Mathieu Pheng, and playwrights Jean Baptiste Phou and Randal Douc address the role of literature and art, particularly that of cinema and theater, in providing the post-refugee generations with the needed space and tool for accessing stories that remain opaque and difficult to formulate. Art and literature also serve as a platform for making connections vertically across generations and, as Randal Douc points out (2023), “horizontally” across groups through the sharing of similar stories and experiences. From their scholarly and artistic perches, they reflect on the weight of history on the generation-after in the haunting absence and silence that register trans-temporally. Drawing from the works of diasporic, particularly Francophone Vietnamese, Thanh-Vân Ton That’s essay offers an academic framework for thinking about the role of literature in memory work, and for reflecting more deeply about literary expressions as auto-ethnography (Ton That 2023). For Thanh-Vân Ton That, the long history of wars and displacement experienced by the Vietnamese people, dating back to colonial and postcolonial experiences of occupation, resistance and the geopolitical partition of Vietnam, is captured in Vietnamese diasporic literature. She reads silence as imbued with intentionality, and as an index of the agency of refugees and their descendants. She places this lived tension not in the context of linguistic neutering by trauma but by linguistic constraints, specifically the challenge of working with a language that is not one’s own, be it Vietnamese for those who were born in the linguistic fraying of the diaspora, or French for those who remained “exiled” despite their birth in France.

Complementing Thanh-Vân Ton That’s focus on literature, Soko Phay’s essay on cinema (2023) addresses the role of refugees and their descendants as “minders of ghosts,” and of the post-refugee generation filmmakers’ and playwrights’ struggle to reconcile with the historical traumas that shape their identities and inform their artistic and intellectual projects. Film presents itself as a medium for coping with the legacies of war, forced displacement, and genocide. Elaborating on the links between art creation, archives, and identity re/construction, and drawing on the works of post-refugee generation filmmakers Jenny Teng (director of *Tours d’exil*, 2013 and *Gorgone*, 2022), Mathieu Pheng (director of *L’Absence*, 2007), and Guillaume Suon (director of *Le Goût du secret*, 2019), she engages the issues of

silence, generational haunting, and the “in-betweenness” of diasporic identity. Elsewhere, she discusses the role of cinema in making it possible to engage histories of which we have few remaining images. Reflecting on Rithy Panh’s film *L’Image manquante* ([The Missing Picture] 2013) in which he ceases to look for the images that cannot be found, opting instead to create new archives, she writes:

[...] “archives-works”; these do not replace the traces and objects that have disappeared, but “call the viewer to witness” events not recorded by official History. They are immediately expressed as something missing and a gap and make the absence and otherness of the past ever more present to us, which they attempt to fill through creation and narration.<sup>5</sup>

For Teng, Pheng and Douc (2023), historical haunting manifests as an ever-present absence—of the unspoken past, of unarticulated loss, of voided language and speech, and of the disappeared—hence the absence not only of stories but also of narrators. For Douc, absence is also the memory void of those born into but are without any memory of this history,

[...] it is perhaps also because we have no answer that in the silence of the nights we decide to write. I also think the force of illusion directed me. The power of fiction. Having left the country before the genocide took place, I witnessed no event, no pain. Consequently, I will not give the world any testimony since inside me there is no testimony to give. In the absence of memories, I formed pieces of fiction.<sup>6</sup>

Absence is also the voided memories of a country that no longer exists except in the diasporic imagination. As part of that generation born in Cambodia but without memory of Cambodia, he asks what it means to engage in memory work in the absence of memory. By extension, it is also the absence of speech, both in the form of the unsaid and the unsayable that compromise verbalization. Rather than liberating and restorative, words and images can engender friction and a sense of betrayal, but, as Jenny Teng evokes through the title of her doctoral thesis *Le cinéma peut-il nous consoler? Transmission et silence autour du génocide cambodgien* [Can cinema console us? Transmission and silence around the Cambodian genocide], it can also break the impasse to some relief of suffering.

For the post-refugee generations, however, the challenge is not only in confronting and reconciling with inherited historical traumas but also in doing so in the face of generational disconnect. Of their different generational positionings and positionalities, a theme that also informs Jean-Baptiste Phou’s play *Cambodge, me voici!* (Phou 2023), Teng, Pheng and Douc spoke of the “in-betweenness” that they occupy—as part of the “isolated generation” for Douc, and of the generation born in France, fully assimilated yet not fully belonging for Teng and Pheng. For the latter, this liminal positionality is reinforced by his cultural “in-betweenness” as a biracial Franco-Cambodian artist.

If the “in-between” is a liminal space of tension and negotiation, it is also a site of possibilities. Straddling different generations, countries, languages and cultures, it is for Teng, a creative, connective, and transversal space where she

locates her art. In this context, the interstice both divides and connects, allowing new “myths,” meanings, reinterpretations and reinventions to emerge, as Pheng and Phou insightfully note. The “in-between” is also the site and source of creative and reconciliatory potential for scholar and poet Thanh-Vân Ton That, for it is in the interstice between the identity of the migrant, the post-refugee, and the imagination that “double writing” emerges (Ton That 2023). Her poem *Négations* shifts ontological questions of loss and liminality to what Um calls “the everyday-personal”—a mother waiting in vain for her son’s return, seeking solace and simplicity in her “repose” that marks the diaspora’s reconciliation with rootlessness and the irretrievability of time and lost past (Um 2023). Fixed on new possibilities, Douc notes that the gaps and ellipses that hamper “vertical” intra-familial transmission also produce opportunities for new horizontal connections with other groups of shared experiences.

While the generational distance creates a space for new creative possibilities, it also evokes critical questions about accountability. If reconciling history and fragmented memory through documentary filmmaking presents certain challenges, the relationship between art and memory is even more complicated when it comes to works of fiction that makes no claim to actuality or authenticity of memory. Questioning the affordances as well as constraints offered by fiction, Phou (2023) interrogates what it means to engage works of memory that have practically no place in French public imagination. This points to the need to center the work of memory on the question of power, as it relates not only to the question of what is considered important to remember, but also of who has the power to determine, as well as of the conditions under which it is possible to remember. Extending the challenges of the “duty to remember” to the world of artistic creation, Douc and Phou simultaneously acknowledge the freedom granted to post-refugee artists but also question their accountability to the stories that are bequeathed to them.

Faced with the infinite respect given to memory, what freedom should we still grant to the artist? And since we restrict his freedom, is he still able to create?<sup>7</sup>

What, in fact, is the ethical responsibility in the exercise of creativity that falls on the descendants to whom these histories and memories are bequeathed?

## STRUGGLES AND CLAIMS OF THE POST-REFUGEE GENERATIONS

Be it the interrogation of the missing histories and the missing *in* histories or the question of mis/representation, invisibility is a key concern for the post-refugee generations. While first generation refugees may have sought safety in invisibility, the post-refugee generations are asserting their presence and pushing against the homogenization, invisibilization and peripheralization of Asians in the racial discourse in France; as the artist Lee Djane points out in his lyrics, the motto “*Black-Blanc-Beur*” [Black, White, Beur]<sup>8</sup> leaves no room for Asians. The myth of acceptance and presumption of security conveyed through the positive image of diligence, industry, and conformity that have long obscured the pernicious

effects of stereotypes and racism directed against Asians crumbled in the face of rising anti-Asian violence in France that became pronounced in the early 2010s. While the surge of anti-Asian violence during the pandemic and the 2016 fatal attack on Zhang Chaolin, a Chinese tailor in Aubervilliers, that catalyzed Asian political mobilization, may have captured national attention, violence—both actual and symbolic—that many Asians in France experience is long standing, but has been largely ignored (Chuang & Merle 2021; Attané 2021); the outcry against the “yellow peril” and the association of Asians with pathology and diseases that reared their heads during the pandemic have deep historical roots (Live 2021; Luguern 2016). They are by-products of what Um called the “paradox of visibility” with descendants of Asian refugees and immigrants being hypervisible on one hand, and invisible and politically absent on the other, a theme that is also addressed, with a particular focus on the Chinese experience, in a special issue of *Migrations Société* titled “Chinese in France: Visible, Invisible?” (Du et al. 2021.)

What this paradox underscores is not only the danger of xenophobia but also of homogenization as the lumping together of all Asian groups contributes to the indiscriminate nature of anti-Asian violence, whether it is the “Chinese virus” being deployed against all Asians or the “Chinese” label being ascribed to anyone of Asian ancestry. As it is for Asians in the US, this presents a challenge for the post-refugee generations in France who have to negotiate between the strategic importance of the pan-Asian collectivity for political mobilization and solidarity work (Chuang, Le Bail & Merle 2020; Le Bail & Chuang 2020) and the desire to assert their own particular histories and cultural identities. These negotiations inform the work of community advocates and activists. While working to deconstruct the homogenizing categories, and to highlight the diversity of “Asians,” younger generation Asians also effectively deploy the pan-Asian identity as a political framework for mobilization, seeking solidarity in common agendas and strength in coalition building (Chuang 2021; Le Bail 2021, 2023).

Disconcertingly, anti-Asian violence and discrimination also stem, in large part, from “positive” stereotypes of Asian success and passivity. Vincent Geisser examines essentialist representations of Asians in France and the paradoxes of what he calls “philo-Asianism”—a phenomenon of positive essentialism which is a form of racism despite its “positive” characteristics, and which is no less damaging (Geisser 2023). Describing the connections between essentializing representations and xenophobia, Geisser points to the stereotypes of Asians as fueling competition and resentment among minority groups, namely Asians and Arabs in France. If anything, the surge of anti-Asian violence underscores the fact that “the model minority” image does not protect against xenophobia. In his play *Cambodge, me voici!* [Cambodia, here I am! (2017)], Jean-Baptiste Phou debunks the idea that positive stereotypes protect against racism. Similarly, through his songs, hip-hop artist Lee Djane shows that, far from being protected, many refugees and post-refugee generations of Asians have experienced racism and the feeling of exclusion (Djane 2023). While the refugee generation may have feared that visibility and the maintenance of strong cultural identity would undermine the necessary assimila-

tion into French society, opting instead for the expression of their cultural identity in intimate spheres, the post-refugee generations are bringing these concerns into the public domain. In our edited volume H el ene Le Bail (2023), journalist Linh-Lan Dao, blogger and novelist Grace Ly, and community activist Jacques Hua (Dao, Hua & Ly 2023) challenge the representation of communities as being strategically passive in pursuit of security. Debunking the stereotype of the compliant and silent minority, these younger generation Southeast Asians are asserting their right to self-representation, and reclaiming ownership over their own histories and experiences, as well as their place in French society. Through individual and collective endeavors to denounce racism and discrimination and resist homogenization, such as the media project of the *Koi Magazine* created by Julie Hamaide (2023), they are confronting these issues and building alliance with other minority groups in France. Where myths and misperceptions have fueled antagonism and hostility among racialized groups, there is also solidarity in the alignment of concerns with other minorities in France. The essay contribution of artist Boulomsouk Svadphaiphane further extends these racially informed concerns to the denunciations of gender discrimination and the structural nature of racism and sexism (Svadphaiphane 2023). Taking a political stance against racism, however, involves taking the risk of aligning oneself with stigmatized minorities in France, an association that first generation refugees had tried to protect themselves against.

## CONCLUSION

The process of organizing the colloquium and producing our co-edited volume has been rich and enlightening, but not without challenges. Development of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks was particularly challenging because of the differential levels of engagement with critical concepts, especially of “race” in France and the US. Given that assessment of effective integration must take into account discrimination and alterization, the difficulty of factoring race into the analysis of exclusionary politics and practices in France proves to be one of the greatest conceptual and analytical challenges. In the US, Critical Race Theory that emerged four decades ago but has recently gained political attention centers its critique on color-blind laws and approaches to social policies (with race being defined as a social construction contributing to unjust and cumulative inequalities).<sup>9</sup> Expanding this framework beyond the US, scholars working on social justice issues outside the American context, including in France, have pointed to the shortcomings of this color-blind approach that fails to consider the racial factor in their formulation of laws and policies to address discrimination and inequality. While it is important to recognize the different histories and country contexts that inform race relations and notions of citizenship, and that make it difficult to uncritically transpose a theory from one national context to another, it is important to confront the question of race in France where, despite long-standing inequalities and social tensions along racial and racialized lines, there is still a political reluctance to accept that race

matters and that racism is the source of many inequities. This was underscored by the 2018 debate at the French National Assembly on whether or not to remove the word “race” from the French Constitution. By extension, discourse on multi-cultural identity has also been undermined by the political reluctance to criticize the failings of the republican ideals despite persisting exclusion of many racial and ethnic minority groups in France.

As underscored by some contributors to our volume and many activists in France, the most visible being the collective Justice for Adama, even if the biological definition of race is contestable, racism still exists, and it kills. In her 2021 article, Magali Bessone provides a detailed analysis of the debates around the removal of “race” from the French Constitution and the arguments presented by French elected representatives regarding the decision. She concludes that the arguments used to justify the suppression of the word “race” were not aligned with the political and social fight against racism. Along the line of Critical Race Theory, she argues for the importance of raising consciousness and understanding of racial issues in France rather than suppressing the concept in order to promote republican values of social cohesion, equality and emancipation for all (Bessone 2021).

The result of France’s “color-blind” approach is the scarcity, if not absence, of disaggregated data that impairs our ability to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of diversity in French society (Simon 2008). Data that lump together different and disparate communities such as well-resourced immigrant groups with new refugee populations, for instance, lose their analytical prowess. Such aggregated data obscures the differences and disparities that exist between and within highly diverse “Asian” populations, and reinforces the myth of the “model minority.” Without more granular data, we are deprived of the tool necessary to quantify and effectively analyze the experiences that can inform policies, and can only anecdotally assess the well-being of the most invisible populations. Recognizing these limitations, French socio-demographers are beginning to use ethno-racial categorization in the quantitative measure of discrimination (Beauchemin, Hamel & Simon 2018). Nevertheless, the polemics of the early 2000s around the creation of the TeO (Trajectories and Origins) Survey to evaluate inequities among groups based on their ethnic and religious affiliations, are still alive and attest to the persisting reluctance to accept the importance of “ethnic statistics” (Simon 2008; Héran 2017; Léonard 2014).

Although our work centers these important and timely questions on the Asian populations, particularly Southeast Asian populations we hope that insights gained and shared through our project would contribute more broadly to critical reflections about French society and identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the proportion of immigrants, excluding their descendants, accounting for more than 10% of the population in France, ethnic diversity and issues of integration and belonging are more relevant now than ever. The refugee conditions in Europe further highlight the political and social importance of the issues raised in this article. Given its timeliness and salience, we see this essay and our corresponding volume not as definitive works, but as spaces for illuminating and disseminating the concerns



and perspectives of the descendants of refugees from Southeast Asia that have been absent since the 2001 publication of a special issue in *Hommes et Migrations* (Cha & Simon-Barouh 2001). In this sense, we hope that the ideas shared in this essay will serve as a starting point for further discussions and new collaborations. We also hope that our work will not only expand and deepen our understanding of the populations originating from Southeast Asia but will also contribute to the larger reflection about other ethno-racial and racialized minorities in France, and on questions that are at the heart of the nation's political future.

## Notes

1. The INSEE, French National Institute for the statistics and economic surveys, includes the countries of the Middle East in the broad category of Asia. It is not our case, and we limit the definition of Asia to South Asia, Southeast Asian, Central Asia and East Asia. See INSEE statistics online, "Étrangers et immigrés en 2019. Nationalités et pays de naissance détaillés. Recensement de la population", URL: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6478089?sommaire=6478362>, published on the 26/07/2022.
2. URL: <https://teo.site.ined.fr/fr/>.
3. Critical Refugee Studies is an emerging field of which Khatharya Um is one of the founding scholars. See the website of the Critical refugee Studies Collective, URL: <https://criticalrefugeestudies.com>, and her publication (Um 2015). See also Espiritu et al. (2022); Troeung (2022).
4. Christine Huynh was involved in two projects, one was conducted on the European level involving different groups of refugees in different countries ("Specially Unknown", URL: <https://speciallyunknown.eu/life-stories/>) and one is a project launched within the collective of "Jeunes Teochews," Young Teochews in France (*100 Fleurs de Lotus*, URL: <https://100fleursdelotus.wordpress.com/>). See Huyn (2023).
5. Phay (2014), our translation from the original: "« archives-œuvres » ; celles-ci ne viennent pas remplacer les traces et les objets disparus, mais « prendre à témoin » le spectateur des événements non-inscrits par l'Histoire officielle. Elles s'énoncent d'emblée comme manque et comme écart et nous rendent toujours plus présentes l'absence et l'altérité du passé, qu'elles tentent de combler par la création et le récit."
6. Douc (2018), our translation from the original: "c'est peut-être aussi parce que nous n'avons pas de réponse que dans le silence des nuits nous nous décidons d'écrire. Je pense aussi que la force de l'illusion m'a dirigé. La force de la fiction. Ayant quitté le pays avant que le génocide ne s'y abatte, je n'ai été témoin d'aucun événement, d'aucune douleur. En conséquence, je ne donnerai au monde aucun témoignage puisqu'à l'intérieur de moi il n'y a aucun témoignage à livrer. En l'absence de souvenirs, j'ai formé des pièces de fiction."
7. Douc (2018), our translation from the original: "Devant le respect infini rendu à la mémoire, quelle liberté malgré tout accorder à l'artiste ? Et dès lors que l'on restreint sa liberté, est-il encore en mesure de créer?"
8. "Beur" is a slang word coming from "Arab" and mainly designating descendants of North African's immigrants.
9. On the question of the Critical Race Theory read Bentouhami & Möschel (2017) and Sabbagh (2021).



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**Abstract:** The communist takeover in 1975 and post-war developments in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos catalyzed a massive exodus of refugees, some 125,000 of whom were resettled in France. Despite the growth, both in size and in complexity, of the Southeast Asian communities in France over the last five decades, little is known about these populations, and even less about the post-refugee generations, their identities, and politics, and especially their relationship to their parent's traumatic history of migration. The invisibility of Asians in France has enabled myths and assumptions about these communities, both positive and negative, to persist unchallenged. This article aims to shed light on the post-refugee generations of Southeast Asians in France. Drawing insights from academics, researchers, journalists, filmmakers, writers, community organizers, and advocates, it engages some of the critical questions that inform the identity and politics of the Southeast Asian post-refugee generations in France, centering on questions of historical traumas and identity construction, representation, belonging, and activism. It advances the notion of refugee communities as sites of active knowledge production, and foregrounds refugee agency by giving voice to refugees and their descendants. In so doing, it aims not only to highlight experiences, concerns, and perspectives that have been obscured or marginalized but also to showcase the agency, resistance, and reclaim that are manifested in different ways, forms, and contexts in the individual and collective responses of Southeast Asians to the challenges that confront them in France.

***Mémoires effilochées, appartenances reformulées :  
générations post-réfugiées sud-est asiatiques en France***

**Résumé:** La prise du pouvoir et l'établissement de régimes communistes en 1975 au Cambodge, au Laos et au Vietnam ont engendré l'exode de nombreux réfugié-e-s, dont quelque 125 000 furent installé-e-s en France. Bien que les communautés d'Asiatiques du Sud-Est aient alors, et au cours de cinq dernières décennies, pris de l'importance et gagné en complexité, elles restent peu étudiées. La construction identitaire, le rapport à la politique, la relation au trauma des parents des descendants de ces réfugié-e-s – les générations post-réfugiées – sont encore moins bien documentées. La relative invisibilité des populations d'origine asiatique en France a permis à un certain nombre de mythes et de représentations sur leurs communautés, à la fois positifs et négatifs, de s'imposer sans remise en question. Cet article propose de faire un point sur les générations post-réfugiées du Sud-Est asiatique. Croisant les perspectives de chercheur-e-s, de journalistes, de cinéastes, d'écrivain-e-s de responsables associatifs et de militant-e-s, il aborde de manière

*critique, les questions de la construction en miroir des repr esentations et des identit es, de l'h eritage du traumatisme, de la r eappropriation et de l' criture de la m emoire, de la revendication de l'appartenance et de l'engagement pour le changement social. En leur donnant la parole, la d emarche critique   la base de cet article consid ere la notion de communaut e de r efugi e-e-s comme un espace de production de savoir et de valorisation de l'agentivit e de ces r efugi e-e-s et de leurs descendant-e-s. En faisant cela, l'objectif n'est pas seulement de mettre en avant des exp eriences et des points de vue peu connus, mais aussi de pr esenter la diversit e des formes d'actions, de r esistance et de revendications que produisent de mani ere individuelle ou collective les g en erations post-r efugi ees du Sud-Est asiatique face aux d efis qu'ils rencontrent dans la soci et e fran aise.*

**Keywords:** refugees, post-refugee generations, memories, representation, prejudices, trauma, alterity resistance, collective action, art.

**Mots-cl es :** r efugi e-e-s, g en eration post-r efugi ee, m emoire, repr esentations, pr ejug es, alt erit e, trauma, r esistance, action collective, art.