

Depicting French Caribbean migration through *bande dessinée*

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Abstract

1. In the post-war era, Europe relied on Caribbean migration to strengthen its work
2. force, and France was no exception. From 1962 to 1983, 160,000 men and
3. women migrated from Guadeloupe and Martinique to mainland France through
4. the BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départe-
5. tements d'outre-mer). Technically speaking, these people were not immigrants
6. because they remained in France despite undertaking a transatlantic voyage.
7. However, the experiences of French Caribbeans in metropolitan France are almost
8. always described as experiences of immigration. There is a distinct lack of French-
9. language literature that discusses this state-organized migration, in contrast to
10. a relatively large corpus of texts by anglophone authors (such as Sam Selvon)
11. that examines Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom. This article argues
12. that *bande dessinée* fills the gap in representations of migration through an
13. analysis of *Péyi an nou*, written by Jessica Oublié and illustrated by Marie-Ange
14. Rousseau in 2017. Drawing on semiotic approaches to *bande dessinée* advocated
15. by Laurence Grove, the article contends that *Péyi an nou* has successfully raised
16. the visibility of migration from the French Caribbean, despite failing to make full
17. advantage of the ways in which meaning is conveyed through the interaction of
18. textual and visual layers.

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Résumé

22. Après la guerre, l'Europe a dépendu de la migration antillaise afin de renfor-
23. cer sa main-d'œuvre, et la France faisait pareil. De 1962 à 1983, 160,000
24. hommes et femmes se sont déplacés de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique vers la
25. France métropolitaine à travers le BUMIDOM (le Bureau pour le développement
26. des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer). À vrai dire, ces personnes
27. n'étaient pas des immigrés, parce qu'ils sont restés en France, bien qu'ils aient
28. traversé l'Atlantique. Cependant, les expériences des Antillais en France métro-
29. politaine se définissent presque toujours comme des expériences de l'immig-
30. ration. On voit une lacune importante dans la littérature de langue française
31. qui traite de cette migration organisée par l'état, contrairement à un corpus
32. assez large de textes écrits par des auteurs anglophones (tels que Sam Selvon)
33. qui examinent la migration caribéenne envers le Royaume-Uni. Cet article
34. soutient que la *bande dessinée* remplit cette lacune-là dans les représentations
35. de la migration antillaise en analysant *Péyi an nou* (2017), écrit par Jessica
36. Oublié et dessiné par Marie-Ange Rousseau. En se référant aux approches
37.

Keywords

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BUMIDOM
overseas departments
(post)colonial history

sémiotiques que préconise Laurence Grove, cet article déduit que Péyi an nou a réussi à renforcer la visibilité de la migration antillaise, bien qu'il ait négligé de profiter entièrement de la façon dont la matière véhicule du sens à travers l'interaction entre les couches textuelles et visuelles.

The 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush generation to Britain in June 1948 – which has sadly been eclipsed by the current legal scandal, in which people from the Caribbean Commonwealth (many of whom are ex-servicemen), who had made Britain their home, are now being deported – has shone a spotlight on other instances of Caribbean migration to Europe in the twentieth century. In the French case, approximately 160,000 men and women from the French Caribbean islands were actively recruited, trained and brought to metropolitan France between 1963 and 1982 to work in public services (Lucas 1983: 1). Migration through the BUMIDOM (Bureau du développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer) occurred considerably later than migration to Britain; Britain sought workers from its Caribbean islands to plug the gaps in its labour force immediately following Second World War.

This time lapse in Caribbean migration helps to explain the relative lack of canonical French-language literary texts that discuss mass migration from Guadeloupe and Martinique, on the one hand, and the considerable *œuvre* that addresses similar issues in the anglophone context, on the other. Writing for *The Guardian* on 25 April 2018, the author Colin Grant selects five important novels that chart the trials and tribulations of the Windrush generation. It is unsurprising that Trinidad-born Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 1956) is the first text to feature on the list as Selvon's novel is a pioneering work that offers a realistic portrayal of the lives of West Indian immigrants and that raised his profile as an author significantly (Grant 2018: n.pag.). However, there appear to be no equivalent fictional representations of the BUMIDOM by key French-Caribbean writers. As Malachi McIntosh observes, canonical writers from the French Caribbean, such as Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, did indeed write fictional accounts of their individual experiences of migration, but they had arrived in metropolitan France much earlier than their anglophone counterparts, during the 1920s and the 1930s, and had therefore already established themselves as writers and intellectuals before their arrival (McIntosh 2015: 105). Their literary representations of migration are thus not entirely representative of those who arrived through the BUMIDOM scheme. Migration remains a focal point for younger successful writers from the French Caribbean, such as Gisèle Pineau and Suzanne Dracius. *L'Exil selon Julia* (Pineau 1996) is an autobiographical account of Pineau's multiple displacements between Guadeloupe, the African continent and metropolitan France during her childhood, while Martinican Suzanne Dracius has also written extensively about migration between Martinique and the metropole in texts such as *L'Autre qui danse* (Dracius 1989). These writers have experienced a continuous 'va-et-vient' between the Caribbean islands and metropolitan France for both personal and professional commitments, a migration both enabled and encouraged by the islands' administrative frameworks. Yet their migration was not instigated by the BUMIDOM either, but rather by their specific family situation: Pineau followed her father (an officer in the French army) on his military endeavours, while Dracius left Martinique to continue her studies in Paris.

1. The BUMIDOM, then, remains underrepresented in the French imagi-
 2. nary, specifically in literature. While there has been a growing academic
 3. interest in this state-organized migration in recent years,¹ these articles
 4. and monographs are framed by historical and sociological studies, and are
 5. thus aimed at an academic, rather than a popular, audience. Documentary
 6. films, such as *L'Avenir est ailleurs* (2006), directed by Antoine Léonard-
 7. Maestrati, and *Bumidom: Des français venus d'outre-mer* (2009) by the direc-
 8. tor Jackie Bastide, are attempting to fill this gap in cultural production
 9. about the BUMIDOM. It is doubtful, however, that these documentaries
 10. have succeeded in reaching a particularly wide audience either. For
 11. instance, *L'Avenir est ailleurs* was broadcast on the television channel
 12. France Ô on 19 December 2013 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of
 13. the creation of the BUMIDOM (Tray 2013: n.pag.), but this network's
 14. audience is 'destinée et consommée principalement par la population ultra-
 15. marine de métropole', a relatively small proportion of the population of
 16. the Hexagon (France TV 2017: n.pag.). France Ô is in fact reputed to be
 17. one of the worst-performing television networks in France; it is thus
 18. unlikely that the documentary attracted a large audience. In an attempt to
 19. redress this imbalance, more popular forms of cultural production have
 20. explored migration from the French Caribbean, targeting a younger, more
 21. diverse audience in the metropole and on the islands themselves. The film
 22. *Le Gang des Antillais* (2016), directed by Guadeloupean Jean-Claude Barny,
 23. is a thriller charting the struggles of a group of young men migrating
 24. through the BUMIDOM and who are driven into a life of crime. It is worth
 25. noting that Barny's film career has been dominated by a desire to depict
 26. key moments in Guadeloupean history: his debut feature film *Nèg marron*
 27. (Barny 2004) portrays youth violence and delinquency in Guadeloupe in
 28. the years preceding the 2009 general strikes that brought life on the
 29. islands to a halt, while his later television film *Rose et le soldat* (Barny
 30. 2016) confronts the underexplored role of women in the Guadeloupean
 31. Resistance during the Vichy era. As film theorist Charles Eidsvik observes,
 32. thrillers are aimed at a young, primarily male audience who have a rela-
 33. tively low social status and limited access to 'high' culture (Eidsvik 2005:
 34. 76); Barny's *Le Gang des Antillais* thus targets a demographic unlikely to be
 35. familiar with the historical details of the BUMIDOM, and who would not
 36. tend to opt for the documentary films that had already been broadcast.
 37. More recently, the television film *Le Rêve français*, directed by Christian
 38. Faure, was shown on the public French television channel France 2 in two
 39. subsequent instalments on 21 and 28 March 2018 and was reviewed for
 40. the online television section of *L'Obs* by Maryse Condé, one of the French
 41. Caribbean literary greats, on 21 March 2018. Such support gave addi-
 42. tional cultural capital to the film, which has, in turn, helped to catapult
 43. the BUMIDOM into the contemporary French public sphere.

44. This article examines the representation of the BUMIDOM in a differ-
 45. ent, yet arguably equally accessible and successful, medium: *bande dessinée*.
 46. *Péyi an nou* (2017), written by Jessica Oublié and illustrated by Marie-Ange
 47. Rousseau, narrates Oublié's discovery of her family story as one of migra-
 48. tion as the narrator-protagonist Jessica learns to her surprise that her
 49. grandfather migrated from Guadeloupe to Paris in 1974.² His migration
 50. was not organized by the BUMIDOM as such – he left of his own accord
 because the famous Darboussier sugar factory where he worked, now the

1. See Félix Germain (2016), *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*; and Sylvain Pattieu (2017), 'The BUMIDOM in Paris and its Suburbs: Contradictions in a State Migration Policy, 1960s–1970s', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*.
2. Throughout the article I distinguish between Oublié, the author of *Péyi an nou*, and Jessica, the narrator-protagonist who is creating a *bande dessinée* of her grandfather's life and documenting the BUMIDOM.

3. The Centre caribéen d'expressions et de mémoire de la traite et de l'esclavage was inaugurated on 10 May 2015 by François Hollande in the presence of nineteen other heads of state. The museum houses a permanent exhibition which traces the history of the transatlantic slave trade, in addition to temporary exhibitions about slavery in a global context. See <http://memorial-acte.fr/>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

site of the slavery commemoration centre Memorial ACTe,³ was about to close down – but many of his contemporaries did indeed make use of this scheme. Arguing that *bande dessinée* acts as a site of historical commemoration, the article questions the success of *Péyi an nou* in bringing recent Caribbean history to a younger, more diverse audience and to write the stories of those overlooked both by current francophone cultural production and by scholarship. Engaging with the considerable research on francophone *bande dessinée*, the central argument of this article is that while *Péyi an nou* should be praised for raising awareness of the BUMIDOM across the Francosphere, it fails to exploit fully the potential of the medium in depicting the entire range of experiences of twentieth-century Caribbean migration.

BUMIDOM: 'L'instrument de la déportation'?

The post-war period was particularly turbulent for France's former colonies in the Caribbean, where rising birth rates and a growing unemployment rate were exerting increasing pressure on resources on the islands. While Alain Anselin refutes the claim that population growth in the Caribbean was becoming uncontrollable – he notes that in Martinique, the birth rate actually declined by 8 per cent between 1954 and 1968 (Anselin 1979: 77) – the population was certainly growing at a much faster rate than in mainland France. Furthermore, the islands were experiencing rapid economic decline due to the collapse of the sugar cane industry, on which the islands were almost exclusively dependent; more modern and efficient machinery on the plantations, coupled with the development of the refinement process in mainland France, 'meant that the capacity of the sugar industry to employ the Caribbean population declined, even as the population increased', as Margaret Byron and Stephanie Condon point out (2008: 26). Poverty, unemployment and a lack of opportunities were all contributing factors to the increasingly tense political situation. Martinique and Guadeloupe had been converted from French colonies to French overseas departments via the *loi de la départementalisation*, which was passed on 19 March 1946, a law that, in H. Adlai Murdoch's terms, 'paradoxically drew these territories further into the ambit of the metropole instead of expanding their capacity for self-determination' (Adlai Murdoch 2001: 132). In other words, the islands remained economically and politically dependent on the metropole. Writing the politically charged *Le Discours antillais* (1981) 35 years later, Glissant perceives departmentalization as a continuation of colonial domination because the islands remain trapped (and many believe this is still the case today) by 'une des formes les plus pernicieuses de colonisation: celle par quoi on *assimule* une communauté' (original emphasis) (Glissant 1981: 15). Such disenchantment with the political system in the French Caribbean led to a growing threat of rebellion on the islands, particularly among the youth, and the French government feared that the French Caribbean population would demand outright independence from France. It must be remembered that by the early 1960s, France had already lost many of its African and Asian colonies, and was in the midst of a bloody war to attempt to maintain control over Algeria; it simply could not afford to lose its Caribbean territories too.

1. Meanwhile, metropolitan France was in desperate need of a work force
2. during the economic boom of the *Trente Glorieuses*. In the wake of Second
3. World War, France preferred to encourage European labourers to rebuild
4. the infrastructure that had been damaged or destroyed. As Klaus J. Bade
5. notes, European workers were split into three groups according to how
6. easily it was perceived that they could assimilate into French society. The
7. first group included those from the Benelux countries, Switzerland,
8. Germany, Ireland and Britain; the second from Italy, Spain and Portugal;
9. and the third from Poland, Slovakia and former Czechoslovakia (Bade
10. 2003: 248). Yet by the late 1950s, France had lost many of these workers
11. because the country could no longer compete with the attractive working
12. conditions in Germany and Switzerland. France was then forced to recruit
13. labourers from its former colonies, first from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan
14. Africa, and then from the Caribbean. On 26 April 1963, Michel Debré,
15. former prime minister under Charles de Gaulle from 1959 to 1962 and
16. elected 'député' in Réunion in May 1963, implemented the BUMIDOM
17. scheme, targeting young people to come to France to work in the public
18. sector. One of the most striking aspects of the project was its gendered
19. nature. While initially ten times as many men arrived through the scheme
20. as women, by the end of the 1960s, men and women were arriving in
21. almost equal numbers (Condon and Ogden 1991: 515). In fact, female
22. migration was actively encouraged for both demographic and moral
23. reasons: it was hoped that women would transmit more 'modern' family
24. values that they had learnt in the metropole once they returned to the
25. Caribbean, in addition to contributing to a decline in the birth rate. As
26. Kristen Stromberg Childers explains, however, such emigration schemes
27. meant splitting up families, which 'undermined the French insistence on
28. family as the cornerstone for social and economic development in the
29. Antilles' (Childers 2016: 177).

30. Before being accepted onto the scheme, aspiring migrants had to
31. undergo a physical examination and were obliged to sit language assess-
32. ments and personality tests to verify that they would easily integrate into
33. metropolitan French life. They were then given a one-way plane ticket
34. paid for by the French state; the BUMIDOM office negotiated with Air
35. France to obtain a discounted rate, and so inevitably some made use of
36. the scheme with the sole purpose of benefitting from this discount (Goosen
37. 1976: 48). On their arrival, a small proportion were given a job immedi-
38. ately in construction, transportation and public services depending on
39. their capabilities and previous employment experience. Others were sent
40. to training centres, where they learnt to become metropolitan French citi-
41. zens. In a move eerily reminiscent of the gender division at work in the
42. transatlantic slave trade, men and women were separated – the women
43. were sent to Crouy-sur-Ourcq in Île-de-France, where they learnt how to
44. cook French dishes, how to take public transport and how to run a house-
45. hold using 'modern' domestic appliances, while the men were divided
46. between Simandres (Rhône) and Marseille, where they were taught trades
47. such as carpentry and plumbing (Condon 2004: 135). Once their training
48. was complete, many received no further assistance from the BUMIDOM;
49. others (women) were placed in domestic roles working for large house-
50. holds, predominantly in the Parisian region. Indeed, Anselin has rather

4. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider in detail terminological and generic differences between comics, graphic narratives and *bandes dessinées*, and to trace the history of these media. See Scott McCloud (1993), *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*; and Robert S. Petersen (2011), *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives*.

flippantly defined Paris as ‘la troisième île’ of the French Caribbean, so large was the population arriving through the BUMIDOM and making Paris their permanent home (Anselin 1990: 8). By the beginning of the 1980s, the French economy had begun to stall, due, in large part, to the 1973 oil crisis. The Agence nationale pour l’insertion et la promotion des travailleurs d’outre-mer (ANT) was thus set up, and family reunification was favoured over the recruitment of new workers.

The consequences of this state-organized migration scheme on the French Caribbean population were complex. For some, the BUMIDOM was an opportunity for social promotion: men who had been out of work were suddenly granted greater economic stability and regained their purpose in life, while women who previously had enjoyed little independence were suddenly able to earn a living. Indeed, as Childers remarks, many women ‘interpreted the journey in gendered terms that had nothing to do either with “social promotion” or neocolonialist exploitation but was rather a chance to live a life that was less dependent on men’ (Childers 2016: 187–88); it must be noted, however, that gender discrimination was as rife in metropolitan France as it was in the overseas departments, and that women’s roles continued to revolve around the domestic sphere for the most part. In contrast, for others, migration failed to improve their quality of life. The scheme wrenched them from their families, bringing them to the metropole, where they were frequently considered second-class citizens because of the colour of their skin – despite the fact that they were French citizens too, and thus had the same right to access French services, training, housing and employment as everyone else. Those who remained in the French Caribbean also took offense at this project, regarding the scheme as a threat to the traditional Antillean way of life. As Goosen remarks, there were strong tensions between the French Caribbean population, who sought to preserve their indigenous culture, and the French who dismissed this culture as ‘both primitive and bastardized, and an impediment to “evolution”’ (Goosen 1976: 50). Such a stance was corroborated by Césaire, who famously denounced the BUMIDOM as ‘l’instrument de la déportation’ in an article for *Présence Africaine* (1961: 110), recalling through this loaded phrase the mass deportations of Jews in the Holocaust and thus drawing parallels between these two historical moments. Despite the state rhetoric promoting the BUMIDOM as a means to elevate the social status of the Caribbean population, then, the lived experience of the participants did not tend to support this claim. For many, migration simply equated to exploitation.

Migration and *bande dessinée*: A Caribbean case study

Péyi an nou lies within an increasingly dominant literary trend in France: the *bande dessinée* has become a veritable institution in the Hexagon. The term is frequently abbreviated to ‘BD’ and refers to French-language comics. Mark McKinney notes that the French term is preferable to the English ‘comics’ because it ‘contains no suggestion that the material is comic or funny’, while simultaneously drawing attention to the format, style and sequentiality of this medium (2008: xiii).⁴ Labelled ‘the ninth art’ in praise of its innovative and creative aesthetic qualities, its national festival in Angoulême – which began in 1973 – draws hundreds of

1. thousands of *bande dessinée* fans from across the world each year to cele-
 2. brate the newest additions of this art form. French state subsidies have
 3. helped to cement the international reputation of the medium: in 1982,
 4. the socialist president François Mitterrand announced the creation of the
 5. Centre national de la bande dessinée et de l'image (CNBDI), opened in
 6. Angoulême in 1990 and built in Mitterrand's trademark style of expansive
 7. open glass (like the Louvre's pyramid), to assert 'France's aspirations for
 8. the future to the rest of the world' (McQuillan 2005: 11). Becoming the
 9. Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image in 2008, the centre
 10. now houses a specialist library, a cinema and the Musée de la Bande
 11. Dessinée. The museum has been designated a 'Musée de France', meaning
 12. that the *bande dessinée* industry continues to benefit from financial support
 13. from the government—importantly, this appellation puts the museum in
 14. the same category as other key cultural centres in France, such as the
 15. Louvre, further revealing just how greatly *bande dessinée* is revered as an
 16. art form in France.⁵

17. The francophone *bande dessinée*, which has long been a focal point of
 18. French-language scholarship, is becoming a growing field of interest
 19. within the discipline of French Studies in the anglophone academy. Works
 20. such as Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-*
 21. *language Comic Strip* (2007) and Laurence Grove's *Comics in French: The*
 22. *European Bande Dessinée in Context* (2010) provide a general overview and
 23. offer possible theoretical frameworks with which to interpret the medium,
 24. while McKinney's edited volume *History and Politics in French-Language*
 25. *Comics and Graphic Novels* (2008) interrogates the ways in which traumatic
 26. historical events are represented in *bande dessinée*. In addition, *The*
 27. *Francophone Bande Dessinée* (2005), edited by Charles Forsdick, Laurence
 28. Grove and Libbie McQuillan, positions *bande dessinée* history and reception
 29. within a broader francophone context. To date, however, there has been
 30. very little scholarship regarding the depiction of migration in *bande dessi-*
 31. *née*, despite the proliferation of sources that portray migration both in
 32. very personal terms – such as Aurélia Aurita's *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa*
 33. (2008), an autobiographical narrative exploring the French *bédéiste*'s
 34. administrative struggles when attempting to settle in Japan, a migration
 35. that speaks to an elevated social class but that is important nonetheless –
 36. and within a very specific historical context. Amongst many other recent
 37. examples of *bandes dessinées* belonging to the latter category, *Les Linh Tho,*
 38. *immigrés de force: Mémoires de Viet Kieu* (2017), written by Pierre Daum
 39. and Clément Baloup and prefaced by the prolific scholar of colonial history
 40. Benjamin Stora, stands out for its powerful narration of the forced migra-
 41. tion of Vietnamese men who worked in appalling conditions in labour
 42. camps in France during the Second World War. The fact that the Musée
 43. national de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris has prepared a touring
 44. exhibition entitled 'Bande dessinée et immigrations, un siècle d'histoire(s)',
 45. which is touring France between September 2015 and September 2020, is
 46. further evidence of this intrinsic connection between the theme of migra-
 47. tion and the *bande dessinée*, but that is yet to be fully explored in franco-
 48. phone scholarship.⁶ Furthermore, in the catalogue to 'Albums, des histoires
 49. dessinées entre ici et ailleurs: bande dessinée et immigration 1913–2013',
 50. a previous exhibition at the museum that ran between 16 October 2013

5. The website of the
 Ministère de la
 Culture details the
 criteria required to
 benefit from such
 state support and
 offers an interactive
 map of the 1119
 institutions cur-
 rently sponsored by
 the French govern-
 ment: <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Aides-demarches/Protections-labels-et-appellations/Appellation-Musee-de-France#carte>.
 Accessed 22 May
 2018.

6. <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/la-museographie/les-expositions-itinerantes/bande-dessinee-et-immigrations-un-siecle-d-histoires>
 Accessed 22 May
 2018.

7. <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/musee-numerique/expositions-temporaires/albums-bande-dessinee-et-immigration-1913-2013>. Accessed 6 June 2018.

and 27 April 2014,⁷ Vincent Marie and Gilles Ollivier attribute the interaction between *bande dessinée* and migration to the ‘circulation des artistes’ across continents (Marie and Ollivier 2013: 6), and the rest of the catalogue traces the history of migration as represented in graphic narratives in different locations. What is missing, however, is a sustained focus on the relationship between the formal characteristics of *bande dessinée* and representations of migration. One of the broader aims of this article, then, is to redress this imbalance between contemporary, popular French-language cultural production and the academy.

According to Hillary Shute, *bande dessinée* is the medium par excellence for the transmission of traumatic historical events. As she explains:

the compounding of word and image has led to new possibilities for writing history that combine formal experimentation with an appeal to mass readerships. Graphic narrative suggests that historical accuracy is not the opposite of creative invention; the problematics of what we consider fact and fiction are made apparent by drawing. Comics is a structurally layered and doubled medium that can proliferate historical moments on the page.

(Shute 2008: 459)

In other words, Shute argues that the juxtaposition of text and image highlights the slippery nature of fact and fiction, and while it is an accessible medium for younger and older audiences alike, it conceals a complexity that is highly appropriate for the depiction of important historical episodes. Extending Shute’s argument further, I contend that the formal characteristics of *bande dessinée* mean that the medium is particularly suitable for the depiction of migration. Its accessibility, coupled with its use of often poignant images, enables a reader to empathize with the struggles of the characters, while the reader’s rapid movement through the story mirrors the fictional journey undertaken. Moreover, the spatial and temporal limitations of the medium force the writer and/or illustrator to use effective and realistic methods of story-telling to communicate a theme that is simultaneously a collective, shared experience, and a very personal, individual decision, with its own particularities and idiosyncrasies.

So how is Caribbean migration via the BUMIDOM depicted in *Péyi an nou*? Peritextual information on the front and back covers already sets up the stark distinction between Guadeloupe and Paris that will span the œuvre. Miller enumerates five different types of text within the *bande dessinée*, each displaying a greater or a lesser relationship with the image: the peritext; the *récitatif*, or narrative voice-over; the dialogue itself; sound effects; and text existing in the fictional realm (Miller 2007: 97). While for Miller, the covers and fly leaves remain ‘outside the fiction’ (Miller 2007: 97), I argue that they nevertheless require detailed analysis because they constitute the first confrontation that the reader has with the text. Significantly, the title ‘Péyi an nou’ (meaning ‘our country’) is written in Creole and is never translated into French in the text, despite the numerous explanations of Creole idioms, food items and culturally specific references added by the author to the text itself to aid comprehension for a metropolitan readership. This choice of language, coupled with the semantic connotation of the title in terms of ownership of the French Caribbean

1. islands (which, of course, are not independent countries but part of
2. France), suggests a desire on the part of the authors for the islands to claim
3. political agency. It also implies a will to give value to the Antillean Creole
4. language and by extension, to foreground the oft-underexplored history
5. and culture of the French Caribbean – a region that politically is included
6. in the idea of the nation-space, but that frequently falls beyond national
7. rhetoric. The title of the book and the names of the authors, written in the
8. same type-setting as the rest of the narrative, appear in relatively small
9. font at the top of the front cover to frame the image as the focal point. The
10. reader's eyes are drawn to the sparkling, turquoise sea, in which is reflected
11. a tropical palm tree, depicting an idyllic picture-postcard. Footprints are
12. superimposed on the empty expanse of sand in the foreground, represent-
13. ing people leaving the islands; in the background, under a grey, gloomy
14. sky, is an imagined version of Paris. The Eiffel Tower dominates the scene,
15. with other emblematic Parisian monuments also represented, and the
16. tricolour flag flies proudly from the Arc de Triomphe. Such a scene, while
17. attempting to draw attention to the divergences between two locations
18. belonging to the same nation, and thereby highlighting the struggles of
19. those migrating between these spaces, actually reinforces the stereotypes
20. that it seeks to undo. By depicting the French Caribbean as a tropical para-
21. dise, and Paris as a historical and cultural metropolis, the image overlooks
22. the nuances and complexities of both locations. As this article will later
23. argue, the tendency to rely on stereotypes and generalizations undermines
24. somewhat the laudable intentions of the authors to bring a range of
25. perspectives and experiences of Caribbean migration to the fore.

26. The contrast in landscape between metropolitan France and the
27. Caribbean spills over onto the back cover, which also provides a synopsis of
28. the text. Interestingly, the term *bande dessinée* is not used to describe the text
29. here, although the choice of artistic medium in which to depict the
30. BUMIDOM is certainly a deliberate one. In an interview in March 2018 for
31. *Le Français dans le monde*, a bi-monthly magazine aimed at teachers and
32. students of French as a foreign language, Oublié explained that the medium
33. enabled her to tell the stories of migration 'dans une certaine fidélité de
34. propos, d'émotions, de carnation' (in Oublié and Magnier 2018: 64).⁸ For
35. Oublié, *bande dessinée* transmits through the interplay of text and image the
36. raw emotion of those who were frequently excluded from a country that
37. was their own, and is faithful to the range of affective experiences of each
38. migrant. However, the absence of such an explanation on the back cover
39. suggests that the creators seek to place emphasis within the space of the
40. text itself on the historical and sociological content and provide the text
41. with legitimacy, rather than dwelling here on formal techniques. What is
42. also unclear from the back cover is the intended audience of *Péyi an nou*:
43. does the text seek to educate a metropolitan readership about an impor-
44. tant, yet misunderstood part of French history, or does it aim to pay
45. homage to those who actually made their journey themselves? Is it prob-
46. lematic to even make such a distinction in readership, given the legal status
47. of the French Caribbean population as French citizens? The blurb posits the
48. text as both 'une enquête pour comprendre la politique et le fonctionne-
49. ment du BUMIDOM, ses répercussions, son héritage [...] et un hommage à
50. ces Français contraints à l'exil dans un pays qu'ils pensaient être le leur, la

8. The pedagogical aspect of *Péyi an nou* operates here on two levels: the *bande dessinée* itself is informative and educational, and the interview about the text appears in a resource to teach the French language to foreign learners.

9. <http://steinkis.com/les-editions-steinkis-2.html>. Accessed 23 May 2018.

10. No information is available on the project blog or on the museum's website that explains why the museum logo appears on the back cover. It is clear, however, that the authors have collaborated with the museum. On 11 February 2018, Oublié participated in 'Littexil', a literary festival centered around the themes of exile and migration and featuring celebrated contemporary francophone writers, such as Ananda Devi and Linda Lê. See <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/agenda/2018-01/littexil>. Accessed 2 June 2018.

11. Françoise Ega was born in 1920 in Martinique and moved to Marseille in 1956. Initially the target of racial discrimination, she set up sports and cultural organizations to help others from the overseas departments to settle in France. L'Amicale des travailleurs antillais et guyanais (AMITAG) was created in 1964. The extract taken from *Le Temps des Madras* (1966), her only novel published during her lifetime, recounts the young child's amazement at seeing huge boats transporting people across the Atlantic.

France' (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: back cover). This explanation suggests that the primary readership that Oublié and Rousseau target is in fact the population who experienced the BUMIDOM, and their descendants who witnessed its long-lasting consequences first-hand; yet the accessible but highly detailed historical information implies that the text is more likely aimed at a metropolitan audience unfamiliar with the BUMIDOM scheme. While it is habitual for any text to have multiple readerships, the ambiguity created here means that neither audience is left fully satisfied.

Oublié and Rousseau's desire to create an accessible text is mirrored in their choice of publisher. Steinkis is not a publishing house that specializes exclusively in the publication of *bande dessinée*; the independent company in fact publishes work in a range of media, including magazines and children's books in addition to cartoons. According to the mission statement on the company's website, the commonality of the works published is that they are all 'livres accessibles et stimulants autour du thème de la relation à l'Autre'.⁹ Such a choice of publisher reinforces the argument that despite Oublié and Rousseau's claims, the text is pitched at a readership unfamiliar with the theme of Caribbean migration, which is likely to be a young, metropolitan audience, while the series' focus on 'l'Autre' problematically 'others' the Caribbean community in racial terms from the rest of the French population. The fact that the logo of the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration features on the back cover – implying some degree of state endorsement or financial assistance¹⁰ and granting the text greater cultural and political capital – also posits *Péyi an nou* as a pedagogical tool rather than a testimonial narrative.

Yet *Péyi an nou* is clearly also a very personal project, particularly for Oublié, who uses the medium of *bande dessinée* to document her maternal family history. Following an extract from Martinican author and social activist Françoise Ega's *récit d'enfance Le Temps des madras* (Ega 1966) that operates as the epigraph to the text and positions it, like Ega's writing, as a form of political intervention,¹¹ Oublié writes a dedication to her grandparents Somène and Paul (Oublié and Rousseau 2008: 2). The narrator-protagonist Jessica is saddened to learn that her grandfather has been diagnosed with prostate cancer; he comes to visit the family in Paris, and they both realize that they know very little about each other. This realization is illustrated pertinently by cartoon maps of Guadeloupe and metropolitan France cut out like jigsaw pieces, indicating that the psychological distance between the two characters is much greater than the 6761 kilometres that separate the two lands (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 5). Jessica proposes that she visits Guadeloupe in the summer to write his story. The rest of the text is thus a *mise en abyme* of the process that Oublié and Rousseau undertake to create *Péyi an nou*, interspersing personal testimonies of friends of her grandparents who migrated to mainland France in the 1960s and the 1970s with interviews with historians and academics who specialize in twentieth-century Caribbean migration. In this way, *Péyi an nou* demonstrates some overlaps with '*bande dessinée de rapportage*', an investigative sub-genre that, in Miller's view, 'has come to take a prominent place in contemporary *bande dessinée*' (Miller 2008: 97). The historical detail is separated from the narrative thread (the creation of *Péyi an nou*) by the general colour scheme: images referring to the historical

1. context appear in subdued pink and green tones, whereas the main action
2. is illustrated in a range of brighter colours.

3. *Péyi an nou* displays many positive qualities in its depiction of French
4. Caribbean migration. For instance, the reader becomes invested in the
5. history of the BUMIDOM through the text's (auto)biographical features.
6. At the beginning of the *bande dessinée*, we meet Jessica's Guadeloupean
7. family and witness an everyday family gathering, through which each
8. individual's perspective on migration becomes clear (Oublié and Rousseau
9. 2017: 10–11). Generational differences are evident in this rather tense
10. argument: Jessica's cousin observes that 'c'était une chance de pouvoir
11. partir' because those who left gained greater economic stability and inde-
12. pendence, while her uncle Wali angrily retorts that the islands could have
13. offered the youth of the 1960s a promising future too (Oublié and
14. Rousseau 2017: 10). The symmetrical layout of this particular *planche* is
15. worth noting. The *planche* is composed of three *bandes*, in turn composed
16. of a single horizontal *case*, which is not enclosed by a border, or *cadrage*. It
17. is therefore easy to understand at first glance the progression of the action,
18. and to trace how conversation during the family meal quickly escalates
19. into an argument. In the final image, Jessica is placed in the emphatic
20. position in the right-hand corner of the *planche*; her confusion and bewil-
21. derment are thus particularly noticeable and are further emphasized by
22. the interrogation mark and exclamation mark in the *bulle* above her head.
23. She simply does not understand the conversation because she has no prior
24. knowledge of her family history or of the broader social context of the
25. French Caribbean islands in the years before she was born.

26. A further success of the project is the diverse range of voices and
27. perspectives that it features, thus adhering to Miller's definition of investi-
28. gative *bande dessinée*, a genre characterized by its 'plurivocality' through its
29. use of dialogue and gesture alongside the main narrative voice-over (Miller
30. 2008: 111). Evidently, the experiences of those who left Guadeloupe and
31. Martinique through the BUMIDOM between 1963 and 1982 are fore-
32. grounded in the *bande dessinée*. However, Oublié and Rousseau are also
33. keen to narrate other stories of people who were affected by the BUMIDOM
34. in a myriad of ways. Among many others, they interview Oublié's grand-
35. mother Somène, who stayed behind in Guadeloupe to bring up her nine
36. children on her own (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 140–57); a lady called
37. Nadia who worked at the training centre in Crouy-sur-Ourcq as a secre-
38. tary and later as a French and Mathematics teacher (Oublié and Rousseau
39. 2017: 172–77); and even a woman (who wished to remain anonymous)
40. who employed young girls migrating through the BUMIDOM to work as
41. nannies and cleaners (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 178–79). Such a vari-
42. ety of standpoints ensures that the account is both balanced and objective,
43. inciting the reader to trust the historical accuracy of the *bande dessinée*
44. (even though neither Oublié nor Rousseau have previous academic exper-
45. tise in this area). In addition, the intersection between gender and migra-
46. tion (an important element of the BUMIDOM project) is taken into account
47. in Chapter 12, which features an interview with Stéphanie Condon,
48. research fellow at the Institut national d'études démographiques in Paris
49. (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 158–63). Condon explains how opportunities
50. for Guadeloupeans and Martinicans were gendered even once they had

arrived in metropolitan France: 'l'orientation des migrants du Bumidom était d'ailleurs organisée de manière sexuée' (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 161). Somewhat problematically, though, the illustration that accompanies this pertinent comment perpetuates the same gender stereotypes that Condon is criticizing because roles that were aimed at women, represented by an image of a syringe and a baby's nappy, are surrounded by a pink background; in contrast, 'masculine roles', represented by a car tyre, an envelope and a spade, are placed in a blue background (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 161). Accepting Grove's definition of *bande dessinée* as 'the interaction of text and image' that together form 'a coherent whole' (Grove 2010: 17), Condon's expertise as demonstrated in the textual layer is undermined by the stereotypical colours used by Oublié and Rousseau to denote the two genders. In this particular case, the authors do not seem to engage fully with the ways in which *bande dessinée* creates meaning through the composition of both the textual and pictorial layers.

A broader criticism of the portrayal of Caribbean migration lies in the structure of the text. *Péyi an nou* is organized around the creation of the *bande dessinée* itself. It is therefore a chronological account of the people Oublié and Rousseau meet, whose personal stories and historical knowledge appear in the text in the order in which Oublié and Rousseau encounter them. The narrative time, then, matches the development of Oublié and Rousseau's creative journey. Such a chronological, rather than thematic, approach does mean that at times the text is rather repetitive. Information from scholars and activists, such as Philippe Pierre-Charles, founding member of the Groupe Révolution Socialiste in Martinique (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 76–93) and Ary Broussillon, sociologist and political activist (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 94–109), overlaps considerably, and some of the detail, while useful contextual material about the creation of student associations and trade unions on the islands, is not strictly relevant to the topic under study. In addition, the *mise en abyme* of creating a *bande dessinée* within a *bande dessinée* poses some problem. On the one hand, this structural device ensures that the text is accessible because the authors are learning about the BUMIDOM alongside the reader. Oublié and Rousseau position themselves at the same level as the reader; they are not experts themselves, and at the point of departure, they possess the same degree of knowledge about French Caribbean migration as their intended audience. The authors and readers thus depart on a quest for knowledge together. On the other hand, though, at times Jessica's ignorance appears rather patronizing and forced. It seems unlikely that, as a young woman of Guadeloupean descent, whose extended family still live in Guadeloupe, she would have no knowledge of why her grandfather migrated to mainland France, or why her family are still divided across the Atlantic. The protagonist's lack of knowledge about her Caribbean heritage seems unrealistic, and it is likely to irritate an adult audience who would expect her to possess a certain degree of prior knowledge about her family heritage.

Testimonial narratives and archival sources in *Péyi an nou*

While the narrator-protagonist Jessica embarks on the *bande dessinée* project to restore the memory of her family history for her dying grandfather, the author's broader aims lie in the preservation of individual

1. testimonies of Caribbean migration. In an interview given by both Oublié
 2. and Rousseau for the French overseas television channel *La Première* on
 3. 15 November 2017, Oublié remarks that 'le plus touchant, c'est de pouvoir
 4. redonner de la voix à des gens qui pendant longtemps ont vécu dans le
 5. silence'. Rousseau makes a similar comment during this television inter-
 6. view: she explains that the people they encountered during their research
 7. are 'des anonymes, mais auxquels on arrive à réinsérer dans une vie, une
 8. trajectoire, un patronyme'.¹² From this paratextual material, then, it would
 9. seem that the individual testimonies of migration from the French
 10. Caribbean islands to mainland France take precedence over the narrato-
 11. rial commentary, and that the ultimate aim of *Péyi an nou* is to give a voice
 12. to those people who have not previously had the opportunity to tell their
 13. stories, which are frequently (although not exclusively) tales of racism,
 14. exclusion and isolation.

15. However, the way in which these personal testimonies are integrated
 16. into the *bande dessinée* is highly problematic. It is never clear whether the
 17. individuals are telling their own stories themselves, or whether their expe-
 18. riences are mediated through the voice of the narrator Jessica, and of
 19. course through Oublié's own authorial voice. If the latter is true, then the
 20. aims of the entire project are undermined because the French Caribbean
 21. community is still being denied the means to express their own stories of
 22. migration themselves; this, in turn, throws up ethical considerations
 23. regarding power and representation.

24. An example of this blurring between the narratorial voice and the voice
 25. of the characters occurs in Chapter 5, a chapter dedicated to the story of
 26. Édouard. In the *récitatif*, Jessica explains that the creators of the *bande*
 27. *dessinée* had succeeded in contacting Édouard via Facebook after reaching
 28. out to potential witnesses on social media (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 66);
 29. however, the reader is never told his full name or his personal details, and so
 30. is unsure whether Édouard is a pseudonym or not. This lack of personal
 31. information means that the case study loses its emotional potency, although
 32. it does provide an indication of the huge scale of migration from the
 33. Caribbean to the metropole in the mid-twentieth century because the char-
 34. acter of Édouard is merely a representative of a much larger phenomenon.
 35. In this way, the universality of migration is emphasized since Édouard's tale
 36. is replicated by thousands of others with different names but similar stories.
 37. Just before Jessica speaks to Édouard on the phone, two large, vertical *bandes*
 38. of equal size are placed side by side and separated by a thin gutter space:
 39. one representing Paris (where Jessica is located) and the other depicting
 40. Édouard's home in Rivière Salée, a small rural commune in Martinique
 41. (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 65). The two stereotypical images are almost
 42. complete opposites of each other. Paris is depicted in subdued tones; a large,
 43. modern apartment takes up the majority of the image and cars are parked
 44. outside, symbolizing modernity and economic progress. Martinique, mean-
 45. while, is portrayed in much brighter colours. A small, traditional Antillean
 46. house is overshadowed by lush, tropical vegetation, illuminated by the spar-
 47. kling sun. Such an idealized image of a tropical paradise perpetuates the
 48. exoticization of the French Caribbean, while the lack of vehicles implies that
 49. the island is less economically advanced than metropolitan France. Édouard
 50. then proceeds to explain how he crossed the Atlantic on the famous

12. An online article
 for France TV about
 this interview can be
 found here: [https://
 la1ere.francetvinfo.
 fr/peyi-an-nou-
 roman-graphique-
 bumidom-532573.
 html](https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/peyi-an-nou-roman-graphique-bumidom-532573.html). Accessed 1 June
 2018 (my transcript).

13. The *Colombie* was built in 1931 and was used to transport goods and passengers between Le Havre, Fort-de-France and Point-à-Pitre. During the Second World War, it was used as a hospital ship for the United States. Between 1950 and 1970, the ship continued to carry passengers migrating through the BUMIDOM from the French Caribbean to mainland France.

Colombie ocean liner¹³ and arrived in Le Havre, how he trained as a builder at the BUMIDOM training centre in Toulon and how he succeeded in integrating both professionally and socially in mainland France (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 66–72). Yet there is only one image that depicts Édouard speaking on the phone to Jessica, his words featuring in a speech bubble (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 66); the text for the remainder of this section is not enclosed in individual *cases* but appears underneath each image. There is no punctuation or reference note that attributes this text to Édouard, and therefore it is unclear whether these are his exact words, or whether, in the process of creating the *bande dessinée*, Oublié has modified and adapted them to suit the purpose of the text. Furthermore, a note is added in French to explain a specific term that he uses in Creole ('travay an bitasyon', meaning working on the sugar cane plantations) (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 68); has the author added this note or does it belong to Édouard? It is most likely that Oublié incorporated it after the interview, but did the interviewee give permission for his culturally specific speech to be glossed in this way? Jessica only appears in one image in this section, holding a pen and paper and a dictation device (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 68); these recording tools imply that Édouard's story in the text is a faithful representation of his real-life experiences, but the reader has no way of knowing whether they have been manipulated in some way by the author. By rendering the accuracy of this personal testimony ambiguous, *Péyi an nou* not only removes the agency of the very people it aims to empower, but also weakens the power of these individual stories that could have the potential to be important tools for the transmission of (traumatic) memory. In *Pour un neuvième art: La bande dessinée* (1971), Francis Lacassin reflects on the medium's aptitude for providing a space for individuals to offer their own testimonies. Lacassin writes: '[p]lus importante est encore leur aptitude au témoignage. Destinées à la masse et reflétant ses préoccupations, souvent en prise très étroite avec la réalité, [les bandes dessinées] jouent le rôle d'un miroir qui conserverait indéfiniment les images qu'il reflète' (Lacassin 1971: 340). Given that it is unclear in *Péyi an nou* exactly to whom these personal testimonies belong, the mirrored image of reality that they provide about migration from the French Caribbean islands is somewhat distorted.

The most troubling of these personal testimonies is the account of Madame X, the character who employed young women who had been trained at the centre in Crouy-sur-Ourcq to work as domestic servants (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 178–79). The *récitatif* explains that the woman was reluctant to speak openly about her role in the BUMIDOM project on examining the *bande dessinée*, which the character herself is depicted as describing in a speech bubble as 'très [...] euh [...] politique' (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 178). Due to her embarrassment at actively participating in a scheme that has subsequently been portrayed as exploitative, she only agreed to testify as an anonymous witness. The narrative voice-over does not explain how Madame X was persuaded to discuss the BUMIDOM, but simply states that 'comprenant [leur] démarche, Madame X accepte finalement que son témoignage soit utilisé de façon anonyme' (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 178). Did this woman want her voice to be heard? Her reluctance to give her real name would suggest otherwise. The ambiguity in the ways in which Oublié and Rousseau succeeded in

1. persuading the woman to speak renders the inclusion of this testimony
2. rather unethical. In addition, the text and images do not give a nuanced
3. representation of the context in which the young women were employed,
4. nor do they explain in detail how the workers were treated. Such gaps in
5. this particular story undermine the authors' desire to represent this
6. important, underexplored angle in the BUMIDOM story.

7. A further challenge to the historical accuracy of the project can be seen
8. in the slippage between the traditional format of *bande dessinée* and the less
9. rigid forms of graphic narratives that are also employed in *Péyi an nou*. While
10. the inclusion of interviews with historians, sociologists, psychologists and
11. demographers gives the project authority and historical legitimacy, the ways
12. in which the historical detail is incorporated into the narrative poses some
13. problem. When Jessica is speaking to a particular expert in the present
14. narrative time, the typical *bande dessinée* structure is employed – a *planche* is
15. divided into several *cases* of different shapes and sizes to enable the reader to
16. follow the action in sequence. Yet when the academic is speaking about the
17. past, this format is abandoned: images and text coincide in no clear order,
18. and although the colour scheme changes to indicate a switch in narrative
19. time, the lack of references and speech bubbles means that it is unclear
20. whether this information belongs to the narrator or to the character. In
21. turn, this weakens the overall accuracy of *Péyi an nou* because the reader is
22. unsure whether the information originates from a reliable source, and the
23. detached nature of investigative *bande dessinée* as advocated by Miller (2008:
24. 111) is abandoned. The structure of the final chapter, however, goes some
25. way to remedying this problem. Double-page spreads are dedicated to a
26. range of experts: historian Sylvain Pattieu talks about the information that
27. he has discovered from the BUMIDOM archives (in Oublié and Rousseau
28. 2017: 184–87); psychoanalyst Yolande Govindama explains the psychologi-
29. cal reasons behind some participants' hesitation at speaking about their
30. experiences of migration (in Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 188–91);
31. researcher Audrey Célestine focuses on the migration schemes that
32. succeeded the BUMIDOM (in Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 192–95) and soci-
33. ologist and demographer Claude Valentin Marie traces the demographic
34. consequences of French Caribbean migration (in Oublié and Rousseau
35. 2017: 196–99). Each expert is given one question that is enclosed in a
36. rectangular box (like the *récitatif*), suggesting that the question is posed by
37. the narrator; the interviewee is not interrupted but is free to give his or her
38. own opinions on the BUMIDOM. This structure allows the experts' thoughts
39. to reach the reader directly, rather than via the voice of the narrative
40. persona. The text is broken up into short paragraphs – ensuring that the
41. text remains accessible for a wide audience – and is placed around images of
42. the interviewees to posit them as experts in their field. Pattieu, for example,
43. can be seen working in the archives, surrounded by boxes of files and piles
44. of paper (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 185). The text concludes, then, with a
45. strong indication that the text is steeped in reliable historical research, but
46. this explicit nod to expertise needs to be replicated throughout the text.

47. For Jennifer Howell, *bande dessinée* is an effective tool with which to
48. write underexplored histories. Focusing specifically on representations of
49. the Algerian War of Independence in *bande dessinées*, Howell argues that
50. such historical taboos 'are more easily addressed in the *bande dessinée*

14. <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/peyi-an-nou-rem-porte-prix-etudiant-bd-politique-france-culture-577201.html>. Accessed 3 June 2018.
15. <https://peyiannou.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

than in highly codified canonical literatures' because authors feel they have more freedom to tackle difficult subjects in this liminal genre (Howell 2010: 7). Moreover, she claims that 'the hybrid nature and liminal status of the *bande dessinée* allow artists to engage with various historical sources' to combine a range of interesting archival material and engaging sources that are not typically used in academic historical texts (Howell 2010: 8). The same could be argued for representations of migration, an equally taboo theme, and *Péyi an nou* is a case in point. On three occasions, the *bande dessinée* is interrupted by a double-page spread featuring newspaper articles, extracts from official records and personal letters documenting individual experiences of the BUMIDOM (Oublié and Rousseau 2017: 60–61, 138–39, 180–81). Such information lends authenticity to the project; a sketched image of Jessica and Marie-Ange in the right-hand corner, collecting information and reading archival material, reminds readers that they are witnessing an authentic research project in which the authors are becoming experts, and therefore can be trusted. In addition, graphs and statistics about the numbers involved in the BUMIDOM scheme add an additional layer of accuracy to the personal accounts included in the *bande dessinée*. Nevertheless, Oublié and Rousseau do not engage critically or artistically with the information found in the archives – we are not even told which archives have been consulted in their research and when the authors accessed them, nor what the different items reveal about migration from the French Caribbean. The extracts often overlap each other on the page – while this superposition of text perhaps implies the vast quantities of information that the authors were required to sift through to create *Péyi an nou*, it in fact obscures the historical detail of the extracts, overwhelming and confusing the reader. Furthermore, many of the statistics contain no references regarding their origin. This lack of documentation of the historical sources is worrying, given Oublié and Rousseau's overall pedagogical aims. If they seek to educate an uninformed audience about a significant but neglected moment in French history, they must also teach this audience about the ethical considerations of accurate citation practices.

Beyond the *bande dessinée*: The afterlife of *Péyi an nou*

The didactic nature of *Péyi an nou* is not limited to the *bande dessinée* but is also apparent in the secondary projects that have stemmed from the book. It is worth noting first, however, that *Péyi an nou* has enjoyed commercial and critical success: it won the Prix Étudiant de la BD Politique France Culture in April 2018, which was presented to Oublié and Rousseau at a grand ceremony at l'Assemblée nationale in Paris on 9 April 2018.¹⁴ The judging panel was chaired by David Amiel, advisor to the president of the Republic; the fact that *Péyi an nou* was awarded this prize by such a prominent official figure is testimony to its success. This award not only raised the prominence of the *bande dessinée* and increased awareness of migration from the French Caribbean in the mid-twentieth century, but also compounded the status of Oublié and Rousseau as key supporters of the cause of the Antillean community.

In parallel with the *bande dessinée*, Oublié and Rousseau have also set up a blog.¹⁵ While the choice of WordPress platform, rather than a

1. professional service, gives this side-project a rather amateurish impression,
 2. the easy-to-use features and clear layout once again suggests that the
 3. primary intended addressee is a relatively young audience. The authors
 4. invite their readers to engage directly with the *bande dessinée* by inviting
 5. questions and comments on the 'livre d'or' page, in an attempt to widen
 6. discussion of the BUMIDOM beyond the formal constraints of the textual
 7. medium that they have employed. Such an idea is commendable, and yet it
 8. is debatable how successful the creators have been at reaching out to the
 9. general public in this way. To date, no comments have been left on the
 10. page since it was created on 22 November 2017.¹⁶

11. One of the strengths of the blog, however, is the 'carnets de voyage', a
 12. selection of drawings that were created during Oublié and Rousseau's
 13. research trip to the Caribbean.¹⁷ These additional images position the
 14. *bande dessinée* as a part of a larger research venture, reinforcing both the
 15. validity and the accuracy of the historical information that appears in the
 16. text. If the reader can be sure that the authors did indeed visit the
 17. Caribbean, and interview the people they encountered there, s/he is much
 18. more likely to believe in the findings. In addition, the blog contains links to
 19. a variety of television, radio and press interviews undertaken by Oublié
 20. and Rousseau to publicize the text, and a list of events in the Caribbean
 21. and in metropolitan France where they have discussed their work, includ-
 22. ing at the national *bande dessinée* festival in Angoulême, which took place
 23. on 25 to 28 January 2018.¹⁸ The diversity of these events reveals the
 24. prominence of the project in both local and national spheres, although
 25. the fact that Oublié and Rousseau must resort to a WordPress blog to
 26. advertise these events themselves, rather than through a literary agent,
 27. implies that their work has not yet reached its full potential.

28. A more ambitious output stemming from *Péyi an nou* is the travelling
 29. exhibition Memwa, created by Oublié and Rousseau in partnership with the
 30. French research groups L'Association pour la connaissance de l'histoire de
 31. l'Afrique contemporaine (ACHAC) and L'Institut national d'études
 32. démographiques (INED). The exhibition was launched officially at Université
 33. des Antilles in Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, during a study day about the
 34. BUMIDOM on 17 May 2018.¹⁹ The presence of scholars and historians at
 35. the event, such as Jacques Dumont, gave the exhibition its official, academic
 36. resonance. The content of this exhibition is unclear in media information –
 37. there is a tab on the blog entitled 'Memwa' but at present it is empty – but
 38. it can be presumed that the exhibition contains additional information that
 39. was not included in *Péyi an nou* due to spatial constraints. Oublié and
 40. Rousseau have also launched a competition for secondary-school students
 41. in Martinique and Guadeloupe to design their own *bande dessinée*, but again
 42. the details are ambiguous in media articles that discuss the project (Bocandé
 43. 2017: n.p.). While Oublié and Rousseau should be commended, then, for
 44. seeking to expand the project beyond the limits of the *bande dessinée* itself
 45. and reach as wide an audience as possible, their success at publicizing these
 46. additional resources seems relatively limited.

47. Conclusion

48. A close analysis of *Péyi an nou* has revealed the potential of the medium of
 49. *bande dessinée* in depicting complex instances of migration that have been

16. <https://peyiannou.wordpress.com/temoignez/>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

17. <https://peyiannou.wordpress.com/presentation/carnets-de-voyages/>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

18. <https://peyiannou.wordpress.com/rencontres/>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

19. <http://www.carai-bcreolenews.com/index.php/cma-actu/item/13669-guadeloupe-bumidom-des-circonstances-aux-consequences>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

20. <https://peyiannou.wordpress.com/presentation/les-auteurs/>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

overlooked by more traditional forms of cultural production. Oublié and Rousseau skilfully combine emotional textual extracts from first-hand witnesses and poignant sketched images with detailed historical information from a range of experts about migration from Guadeloupe and Martinique to mainland France in the mid-twentieth century. It is true that at times, the authors do not seem to exploit the full potential of *bande dessinée* in its interaction between text and image; furthermore, there are significant problems in the ways in which the archival sources and historical information are integrated into the narrative because they risk being perceived as a continuation of the narratorial voice, and thus lose their historical potency. Oublié and Rousseau are not experienced *bédéistes* – indeed, *Péyi an nou* is their first venture in this medium, although Rousseau did train at the famous *bande dessinée* college le Césaire in Paris, according to her biography on their project website²⁰ – and therefore, it is inevitable that there are occasional omissions in the narrative.

Overall, though, the pair should be praised for their sterling efforts at raising awareness of the issues faced by the French Caribbean community today, who frequently still find themselves relegated to the status of second-class citizens, despite the legal implications of the framework of the *départements et régions d'outre-mer* (DROM). *Péyi an nou*, then, fits into a recent trend of French-language comics that shed light on marginalized episodes in France's colonial and postcolonial history. In *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (2011), McKinney comments on the popularity of *bande dessinée* precisely because of its willingness to portray 'troubling and controversial topics, including French and Belgian colonial injustices and crimes' (McKinney 2011: 1). Drawing parallels with Deloupy and Swann Meralli's *Algériennes 1954–1962* (2018), which focuses on the forgotten role of women in the Algerian War of Independence, and Pat Perna and Nicolas Otero's *Morts par la France: Thiaroye 1944* (2018), a *bande dessinée* about the infamous massacre of between 35 and 70 *tirailleurs sénégalais* killed at Thiaroye, Dakar, in December 1944, *Péyi an nou* can be seen to make a wider argument about the need for accessible cultural production in the discussion of France's colonial past. While *bande dessinée* is bringing these issues to the fore, the French state is yet to catch up. Given the political scandal currently sweeping the United Kingdom concerning the injustices faced by the Windrush generation, it is now more urgent than ever that the French government acknowledges its own traumatic (post)colonial history, the effects of which continue to resonate across generations of French citizens today.

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