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**“Sans hommes, on n’est pas rien”: Defying Patriarchy and Reclaiming Voices in
*Les Rivières***

In *The Performance of Listening in Postcolonial Francophone Culture* (2018), Jennifer Solheim introduces “the call to listen” as a theoretical concept to explore cultural and literacy works from North Africa and the Middle East in a postcolonial context. Tracing back to the evolution of the auditory medium, Solheim’s work highlights how modernity and digital media have transformed our listening practices. She underscores its course from early recordings to radio broadcasts and culminating in the digital platforms that now disseminate stories and cultural expressions with unprecedented reach (15). Against this backdrop, Solheim identifies a dilution of the traditional authority of the speaker, as public engagement is no longer confined to a select group or region—boundaries have been dissolved, opening up a realm of limitless possibilities.

In this expanded auditory space, Solheim raises critical questions: What is being listened to, who are the listeners, which narratives are amplified, and who narrates them? (15-16). She argues that the shift in listening practice and storytelling is as ethical as it is cultural, as it calls for dominant nations such as France to engage with and respond to the narratives of immigrants and minorities (17). Though Solheim’s study is anchored in the context of North Africa and the Middle East, it highlights a broader phenomenon: the emergence of marginalized voices that challenge dominant powers. This framework reveals an expanding digital society that increasingly carves out space an inclusive space for minority voices, driving a new wave of cultural production from these historically underrepresented groups.

Building on Solheim's work, the landscape of media consumption has also been radically reshaped, affecting not just the way audiences engage with art, but also the very processes of artistic creation. This evolution is particularly noticeable in "accented cinema" and "intercultural cinema," as conceptualized by Hamid Naficy and Laura Marks, respectively. In an era defined by globalization and migratory fluxes, a unique cinematic language has emerged from exilic filmmakers. These creators grapple with themes like displacement, home, and identity, producing works that resonate deeply with universal experiences among minority groups. Naficy's "accented cinema" is rooted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "minor literature," which suggests a seismic shift in linguistic structures, a compelling urgency of political engagement, and a collective mode of discourse (131). Naficy's use of "minor" in describing this cinema draws a parallel to literature, suggesting that exilic or "minor" cinema challenges the norms of conventional filmmaking. Like in literary, accented cinema infuses narratives with an urgency and political immediacy that are often overlooked in mainstream cinema.

Echoing Lisa French's observation, the power of representation—"to see others who are like you on screen" (30)—is immensely impactful. Exilic filmmaking thus emerges as a transformative force. It becomes a vital medium for representing exiles, diasporic communities, and "otherized" subjects, providing a collective voice to those typically marginalized (Naficy 131). It is in line with the broader phenomenon Solheim describes, where digital and social media have democratized who gets to speak and who is heard, further amplifying marginalized voices. Naficy underscores that exilic films are often characterized by their low-tech approach, small budgets, and limited crew and cast. Despite these limitations, accented cinema demonstrates a remarkable inventiveness, constructing a new cinematic language through

images, sounds, fragmented narrative, multifocality, and multilingualism while encompassing themes of autobiography, history, and resistance to closure (131). While Naficy's original framework focuses on the exilic filmmakers, I consider his concept to be increasingly applicable to second-generation immigrants and those from post-migratory populations¹.

Laura Marks' exploration of intercultural cinema resonates with the textures of expression that Naficy attributes to exilic filmmakers, both underscoring the cinematic representation of marginalized communities. Laura U. Marks highlights that intercultural cinema seeks to represent knowledge and memory, especially when other resources are lacking (xiii). This form of cinema transcends the act of storytelling; it becomes a living archive, a sensory witness to histories and memories that are at risk of being forgotten and provide continuity to those often excluded from the mainstream narrative. Similarly, Machelidon and Saveau observe a shift in post-*beur* cinema, emphasizing themes of mobility, space appropriation, transgression, fluidity, and hybridity. They point out that films from the 2000s reflect these dynamics, striving for inclusivity and challenging hegemonic narratives through the powerful medium of cinema (3).

In parallel, the concept of the "female gaze" builds on Laura Mulvey's seminal work on the "male gaze," deconstructing modern subjectivity and asserting that the gaze "is a key element in the construction of modern subjectivity filtering ways of understanding and ordering the surrounding world" (5). While Mulvey did not specifically conceptualize the "female gaze," her work laid the foundation for subsequent feminist scholars to explore and define it. Female gaze enables a narrative from a uniquely feminist perspective, elevating the cinematic discourse with

¹ The concept of "post-migratory postcolonial populations/minorities" proposed by Katherine Kleppinger and Laura Reeck in *Post-Migratory Cultures in Postcolonial France* (2020). It is specifically coined to encompass the descendants of immigrants from countries that were formally colonized by France from all geographical areas, including Indochina (2).

the convolutions of female individuality and experience. Echoing this sentiment, Agnès Varda, featured in Marie Mandy's documentary *Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women's Cinema* (2000), articulates the blend of inherent and societal factors shaping women's lives, stating:

[W]e are nurtured into womanhood has to do with thought of the mind, [but] the fact remains we're born into a female body. How can that not be an essential fact whether you're a film director, cleaner, mother, whether you have children or not? We women inhabit a female body. (qtd. in French 55)

Building from Varda's insights, French observes that documentaries by women filmmakers highlight a feminist perspective on the significant influence of the female body on personal stories, urging women to "resist having their gaze colonised by another" (55). These discourses collectively underscore the potency of cinema as a medium for articulating complex identities. Accented and intercultural cinema, as well as films envision through the female gaze, offer varied expressions of identity and memory, forming a mosaic that enriches our understanding of the realms of gender and human experience.

This introductory analysis thus lays the groundwork for a deeper examination of how postcolonial Francophone cultures engage in the act of listening and narrating their own stories. In this article, I examine *Les Rivières* (2020), a documentary directed by Mai Hua, a post-migratory French filmmaker of Vietnamese descent. The documentary explores her family and Hua's personal experiences within family structure in patriarchal society. The documentary's narrative aligns with Josephine Donovan's idea of "women's poetics," suggesting that creativity enables women to express shared experiences of oppression or otherness imposed by patriarchal or androcentric ideologies (101). This sentiment echoes Hélène Cixous's advocacy in *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1975) for *écriture féminine*, urging women to inscribe themselves into the text, "il

faut que la femme se mette au texte – comme au monde, et à l’histoire” (3). Cixous’s call for women to embed themselves within the narrative— “*la Prise de la Parole par la femme*” (Cixous 7, original emphasis)—finds a parallel in this cinematic narrative, allowing women creators to take control of their stories. The technological development I highlighted prior coupled with feminist calls for representation show transformations and the ability that women filmmakers and their vision bring about to the reality.

Les Rivières begins with Hua sketches her family’s genealogical tree, distinguishing genders with circles for women and squares for men (Fig 1). To a casual observer, this might seem like a conventional representation. However, Hua’s recollection of her uncle’s words, “mais la vraie histoire, c’est celle-là” (*Les Rivières* 02:41), hints at a deeper narrative. Hua recounts the stories of the women in her lineage, remarking, “les histoires ne sont jamais celles qu’on voudrait.” Her narration highlights a particularly poignant story: her great-great-grandmother, a woman of exceptional beauty, was sold by her husband to a Frenchman, “mon arrière-arrière-grand-mère, c’était une femme très très belle qui a une famille, un homme avec des enfants [...] un jour, un Français a voulu l’acheter et du coup son mari l’a vendue à cet homme” (*Les Rivières* 02 :57-03 :31).

From the repercussions of that act, the narrative traces the lineage of abandonment, unfulfilled love, and heartbreak, culminating in Hua’s personal experience that “n’a pas marché avec le père des [ses] enfants” (*Les Rivières* 04:08). Hua recreated a visual of her uncle crossing out all the men from their family tree pairing with his statement, “tu viens de ligne des femmes malheureuses avec qui ça ne marche pas avec les homme” (*Les Rivières* 04:34), accentuates the palpable transgenerational trauma (Fig 2). Hua reflects on her lineage, expressing a fear of passing ancestral trauma onto her daughter: “et si je fais rien, je transmet ça à ma fille, et ça c’est

pas possible” (*Les Rivières* 04:46). This personal revelation underlines the document’s broader objective: a quest to bring about and disrupt the destructive cycles perpetuated through generations.

Hua’s distinctive mix of voiceover and narrative storytelling is akin to what Petlevski terms as creating “‘memory trace’ in literary narration” (218). Her method, tracing her genealogical tree, is not a recounting of history but an immersive journey through memory. Drawing parallels with Petlevski’s insights on Rimbaud’s work in “Mauvais Sang” from *La Saison en Enfer* (1873), Hua’s approach shares similarities with Rimbaud’s creative intent. According to Petlevski, Rimbaud’s monologues transcended recollections or rants; they were meant to “create situation” (220), referring to the active construction of a narrative or scene through the writer’s words. These narratives, while literary in essence, also possess a distinct theatrical quality, resonating with the dynamics of a play (219). Hua’s monologue unveils her family history, spotlighting the transgenerational trauma, oppressive experiences with male figures in her lineage, and Hua’s realization stemming from a divorce that she shares a haunting curse with the women in her family:

I felt I was doomed. Of course, I’m cursed. It makes complete sense now. So, this made me feel very fragile. But at the same time, I had something to fight against [...] and then I realized, I’m not fixed at all. And then comes this crazy idea. I’m gonna make a movie. I’m gonna take my camera and film the women of my family. And I will understand. (*Les Rivières* 07:16-08:27)

Exploring Petlevski’s exploration of presituationist theory highlights that a situation is characterized as a cohesive set of behaviors occurring over time (220). The concept of presituationists intrigues, as Petlevski elaborates that they possess the ability to craft new

realities². Their distinctive perspective arises from a keen sense of “the objective need” coupled with an acute awareness of “the present cultural emptiness” (Petlevski 221). Drawing a parallel, while I am not insinuating that Hua identifies with presituationist stance, the inclusion of this theory illuminates an aspect of Hua’s method of shaping situations through her monologue crafts a heightened consciousness—“an objective need”—to address and bridge the prevailing “cultural emptiness.” This void notably comprises the scant discussions surrounding themes of abuse, incest, and transgenerational violence, which cumulatively contribute to a shared trauma within family structures.

A particularly arresting visual motif in the documentary is the portrayal of Hua and her mother with their eyes covered (Fig 3). This could be symbolic of multiple interpretations: vulnerability, introspection, or perhaps an attempt to shield their innermost self from external scrutiny. The subsequent dialogue encapsulates the complex layers of female subjectivity. Hua’s self-reflection—where societal praises for her beauty and achievements starkly contrast her internal alienation:

Tout le monde disait « elle est tellement jolie, elle est intelligente, elle est manuelle, elle sait même faire du sport. » J’étais une fille parfaite, mais tout ça c’est à l’extérieur, pour toujours être parfaite. Mais à l’intérieur, j’ai commencé à construire quelque chose. C’est pour ça je me mets avec les mecs qui ne me concernent pas etc. Parce que même moi, je suis étrangère à moi-même. (*Les Rivières* 40:20-41:57)

This internal conflict mirrors John Berger’s observation about the societal pressures on women, where their self-worth is often based on external validation, leading to a division in their self-

² Petlevski argues that these narratives do more than tell a story; they create an immersive experience for reader, almost theatrical in nature. This approach to narrative is significant in understanding the depth of Hua’s work, as she uses similar techniques in her own storytelling.

perception. Berger explains that women are raised to monitor themselves, resulting in a split between being the observer and the observed, with their own sense of identity being replaced by the perception of being valued by others. (5). The narrative then broaches the subject of Hua's traumatic experiences during her teenage years, marked by voyeuristic invasions of her privacy by her mother's ex-partner, Georges, "imagine, je suis enfant et il y a ce mec derrière moi. Il m'a regardée quand je prenais les douches" equated to a violation as intimate as rape, "c'est un sort de viol, Mai", (*Les Rivières* 43:58-45:50) underscores not only personal trauma but also becomes a broader commentary on female subjectivity in the face of societal transgressions.

With a focus on transgenerational trauma, the documentary, underscored by peaceful nature visuals and Hua's voiceover, confronts the disquieting realities by her mother's voice off-screen, "je ne sais pas qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé dans la nuit, je n'avais que 5, 6, 7 [ans]" (*Les Rivières* 01:01:21). The subtle insinuations of familial transgressions, especially incest, bring to the forefront the destructive nature of such relationships and the accompanying silence that often shrouds them:

My grandmother, my mother, and I know the truth. And the truth is that my grandfather was not only beating. For my mother, it was something else. I think the word has never been spoken out loud in the family. It's said that incest is a form of love, and that's why it's so destructive. And when I look at my mother, I don't know how she could have forgiven both her father for the abuse and her mother for not intervening. I don't know how you do that. (*Les Rivières* 59:52-1:00:02)

In this light, Hua's documentary serves as an arena of witnessing, with its narrative underscoring unique female experiences that, according to French, "could have only been achieved by a female filmmaker" (140), all while navigating the broader terrain of trauma. "The word that has

never been spoken out loud in the family” is followed by Hua’s monologue, unearthing the word “incest” and her mother’s story that has been kept secret.

In addition to exploring the suffering endured by the women in her family, Hua also addresses the hardships faced by the men. Her mother revealed that her grandfather was not raised by his parents but by his uncle, who consistently beat him, “c’est tous ce qu’il a vécu” (*Les Rivières* 01:10:35). With Hua’s reflection, the film surfaces more layers of trauma: “I think of my uncle who is dead. And the others, who have been neglected, beaten. This curse is not about woman, it’s about children, who’s betrayed by generations of adults. Who did not act like adults” (*Les Rivières* 01:06:13-01:06:34). Hua’s narration resonates with Kleppinger and Reeck’s perspective on post-migratory individual who, unlike their parents, through their creative work, voice their opinion on subject matters that bring about to public conscious of what individuals of minority status endure in a private sphere. The documentary does not resort to dramatic cinematic enactments; instead, the raw, unfiltered voices of Hua and her mother become the primary carriers of their shared traumatic experience. A poignant moment in their conversation underscores this, with Hua’s mother revealing the debilitating effect of trauma, noting how it often obfuscates memories for those who have endured severe emotional wounds: “cela arrive souvent chez des gens qui ont subi de nombreux traumatismes et qui, pour se préserver, ne se rappellent pas” (*Les Rivières* 41:00-41:10). Through this lens, the documentary becomes an anthem for countless voices silenced by trauma, echoing across genders, cultures, and generations.

Hua’s Vietnamese heritage, coupled with the visceral themes of her documentary, draws a parallel to Toni Morrison’s exploration of trauma in the African American community in her works. Both artists, although hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds, converge on a shared

thematic exploration: the devastating impact of trauma as it ripples through generations.

Bouson's analysis of Morrison's body of work identifies a recurrent motif—the disturbing stories of abuse and incest—and Morrison's firm commitment to capturing the trauma that emerges from dysfunctional familial ties and relationships (3). This reflection of traumatic experiences, while rooted in Morrison's portrayal of African American lives, transcends cultural boundaries.

Caruth's perspective on trauma adds another dimension to this discourse. She asserts that trauma, with its profound psychological impact, can paradoxically serve as a binding force, establishing “the very link between cultures” (11). Hua's documentary lends credence to Caruth's assertion. While Morrison employs the literary medium to bring trauma to the fore, Hua opts for the evocative power of cinema, particularly emphasizing the authenticity of voice. Thus, both Morrison and Hua, despite representing different cultures and employing distinct artistic mediums, intersect in their profound exploration of trauma's universal impact. Their narratives, whether set against the backdrop of the African American community or the Vietnamese community, underscore the shared human—particularly women—experience of pain, resilience, and the quest for healing.

Following the release of *Les Rivières* demonstrates how the documentary can serve as a bridge between cultures. In her *Banh Mi Media* podcast interview, Hua shares a unique reception from an audience member: “j’ai reçu un mail de Tokyo cet été 2020, et en fait cette femme, elle avait traduit la totalité de *Les Rivières* en japonais. Elle m’a envoyé tous ce qu’elle a écrit, 27 pages” (*Banh Mi Media* 20:48-21:00). The translator conveyed a deep, personal connection with the film, feeling empowered to “entrer dans le texte” (*Banh Mi Media* 21:18, my emphasis). This interaction emphasizes the dual nature of Hua's documentary. It is not only a cinematic narrative; it stands at the intersection of drama and literature, adding voices to the cultural void

of discourse on violence and women's experience within family structures, echoing the principles of Cixous's *écriture féminine* and aligning with Petlevski's interpretation of Rimbaud's writings.

Apart from challenging the social norm through subjects that considered taboo, the documentary also empowers women through a cinematic depiction of Hua's mother. In a particular scene, Hua and her mother are surrounded in the euphoric atmosphere of a nightclub. The camera intimately captures her mother dancing, focusing intently on the movements of her body—her torso, her legs, and her thighs (Fig 4-5). Elena del Río's insights into the cinematic presentation of the body offer an illuminating lens through which audiences can view this sequence. She asserts the indispensable role of bodily motion in cinema, emphasizing its capacity for both "receiving and acting upon the structuration of meaning in the cinema" (2). A moving body, in its dynamism, has the potential to move its viewers both emotionally and intellectually. Particularly in the context of the woman body, its portrayal can often disrupt the narrative (5).

Hua's voiceover provides a contrasting sentiment to the visual narrative of male gaze, "before, I wanted my mom to be less beautiful, less brilliant, less awesome, so that I could have a place. But now, filming her enables us to have a space for each other. Her and her beauty, exuberance and words, and me behind the camera in my vision" (*Les Rivières* 38:01-38:49). Bringing her mother into the narrative does not only solidify the director's authorship but in this case, it also aligns with Donovan's characterization of women's poetics which mothers are often the subject of documentaries (French 62). Through her vision, Hua breaks the notion of what Mulvey called "pro-filmic event," typically led through a male lens (Kaplan 30). This further reinforces Dirse's call for a transformation in "patriarchal way of looking by imposing the

female gaze on our cultural life” (27). Hua’s mother is no longer a passive subject to be observed; her dance and movement are imbued with agency and empowerment, as she transitions from being seen to claiming her own subjectivity. In this light, this scene subverts the male gaze that perceive women of Asian origin as submissive, immature, and exotic (Szymanski et al 10), in accordance with Cixous’s notion of “voler,” both stealing and flying away from traditional male gaze (Dirse 13). Through Hua’s cinematic vision, this scene serves as an expression of autonomy, momentarily stepping outside the realm of “explicable meaning” (del Río 5), symbolizing an ephemeral escape, a fleeting moment of liberation that Hua crafts for her mother.

The documentary does not only reclaim Hua’s mother autonomy but also empower her. Emerging from abusive past at her father’s hands, her mother, self-reclaims her own agency by grounding herself in her understanding of women’s beauty, “c’est important de se parfumer. Même si dans la poussière. C’est ça l’arme, l’arme fatal” (*Les Rivières* 37:48-37:49). Exploring into the classical perception of beauty, Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* (1885) stands as a commentary of the timeless allure of beauty. Ovid talked in length about the art of feminine beauty, urging women to maintain their beauty, but simultaneously advising discretion, “let not your lover discover the boxes exposed upon the table; art, by its concealment, only gives aid to beauty” (Ovid). The observation highlights an inherent contradiction within societal norms: there is a prevalent fascination with aesthetic appeal amongst men, yet there is a simultaneous preference to remain oblivious to the processes and private undertakings that contribute to the creation of such beauty.

By contrast, *Les Rivières* offers a counter narrative to this stance. Through its lens, the viewer is invited into an intimate scene, showcasing Hua’s mother laying out her makeup in foreground (*Les Rivières* 37:32). This scene transcends superficial aesthetics as it morphs into a

symbolic assertion, creating a feminist space, making a realm of empowerment and agency for women that departs from the context of women's beauty through male gaze (Fig 6-7). The documentary shows a prevailing undercurrent of resilience and the wielding of beauty as a tool of resistance against adversity. Such a perspective shifts the understanding of beauty from a superficial attribute to a dynamic construction with multidimensional implications. In the context of Hua's mother, beauty emerges not just as an aesthetic, but as an emblem of strength, resistance, and ultimately, survival.

In the aftermath of trauma and challenges, the persistence to rise again is captured in Hua's mother's sentiments as she claims, "on remonte plus fort" (*Les Rivières* 01:10:44). This does not only suggest recovery but an ascent to an even more empowered state of being. By emphasizing her emergence as "forte" and even Hua considers her mother as "puissante" (*Les Rivières* 01:10:49), not only her mother reflects on her own journey but makes a broader commentary on the strength that is derived from experiences, even the most traumatic ones. Her mother further asserts, "ma chanson préférée que je chante tout le temps, tout le temps: "I will survive, I will survive" (*Les Rivières* 01:02:09). The act of singing "I will survive" is a symbolic gesture, serving as an anthem of her life's philosophy and underscores the mantra of resistance, echoing the spirit of countless women who have faced adversities head-on. Singing it "tout le temps" suggests a constant reaffirmation and a reminder to oneself of one's own strength. In calling herself "une survivante" (*Les Rivières* 01:02:03), Hua's mother does not only refer to the act of survival but to thriving beyond circumstances and using beauty and self-belief as powerful tools in this journey. Hua's innovative approach to documentary filmmaking, characterized by the use of cellphone cameras and a collage of homemade video clips, represents a paradigm shift reflective of the digital age's influence on media and storytelling. This technique resonates with

Solheim's observations regarding the transformation of auditory mediums and narrative structures. Hua's focus, viewed through a distinctly feminist lens, especially on theme such as familial violence, a subject that is often relegated to the private sphere. This echoes Solheim's insights into the evolving dynamics of storytelling and emphasizes the capacity of digital filmmaking to amplify marginalized voices. This aspect of Hua's documentary is in harmony with Cixous's critique of dominant masculine narratives and the silencing of the feminist voice (6).

Les Rivières, in its progression, appears as a powerful response, even an amplification, of Cixous's call for a genuine female narrative, thereby pushing back against and seeking to redefine mainstream representational norms. The document's multivocality, combining the experiences of Hua, her mother, and grandmother, not only completes its narrative but also resonates with women globally, recognizing the universality of their experiences under patriarchal structures. The stories of abuse, violence, and fractured relationships hence evolve into "individually integrated personal memories" (Petlevski 220). Though Linda Nguon told Hua during the podcast that this documentary resonates with her personally, "c'est un film documentaire en français où j'ai ce lien de culturel qui m'appelle. Ça ne me l'a jamais fait avant" (*Banh Mi Media* 34:58-35:07). it crosses cultural boundaries and extends to a global meaning. A particular Japanese audience member provided her testimony to Hua "[au Japon] on n'a même pas les mots pour décrire nos expériences. Et moi, je veux absolument que les femmes au japon peuvent avoir accès d[u] documentaire]" (*Banh Mi Media* 21:29-21:32). Beyond her Japanese viewers, Hua notes that women worldwide have connected with her, "il y a des femmes en Espagne [...] en ce moment, il y a une femme italienne qui est en train de traduire [le

documentaire] en italien parce qu'elle veut absolument montrer à sa maman" (*Banh Mi Media* 22:04-22:09).

Again, these engagements of women further solidify Donovan's notion on "women's poetics" and shared awareness among oppressed groups (101). It also reaffirms Caruth's insights on trauma's ability to bridge cultural divides, illustrating how Hua's documentary serves as a conduit for bringing private experiences, particularly those of women, into the public sphere. Hua's perspective, as shared with Levain, that all families possess some dysfunctionality, yet this often remains unspoken—"je crois que toutes les familles sont dysfonctionnelles sauf que personne n'en parle" (Levain)—underscores this point. In this regard, the documentary inadvertently becomes a testament to its time, capturing stories "that never intended to be read from the historian's perspective" (Guynn 7), exemplifying Solheim's exploration of a significant transformation in the way stories are told and heard.

Conclusion

Les Rivières represents a vital contribution to the evolving landscape of postcolonial Francophone cinema that is increasingly marked by the intersection of global narratives and personal histories. Drawing from the theoretical underpinnings presented by Jennifer Solheim, Hua's work can be seen as an embodiment of "the call to listen," where the act of listening extends beyond auditory engagement to encompass a deeper, empathetic understanding of diverse narratives. Echoing Natasha Trethewey's statement, "[t]o survive trauma one must be able to tell a story about it" (208), the documentary becomes a medium through which the women narrate their collective and individual traumas. By moving away from the traditional exilic themes centered on memory and displacement, Hua navigates new thematic territories,

bringing to light crucial personal and societal issues. This significant departure in both style and content demonstrates Hua's inventiveness as a filmmaker, especially given her unique position as a woman of Asian descent — a double minority in the cinematic world.

In line with Hamid Naficy's concept of "accented cinema" and Laura Marks' "intercultural cinema," Hua's work is a testament to the power of cinema crafted in the margins. The documentary, a collage of various video clips, limited cases, and multilingual aspects display a remarkable creativity and a profound connection to her dual heritage. In her role as a vanguard of the post-migratory Viet Kieu³ community, Hua's desire to explore new thematic realms, particularly through a feminist perspective, is revolutionary. Her approach transcends the traditional paradigms of Franco-Vietnamese cinema, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in the broader cinematic narrative. Essentially, the documentary becomes a living archive and advocates for those who have long been sidelined in contemporary discourse, embodying a strong feminist ethos, challenging entrenched cinematic norms and expanding the horizons of cinematic expression.

Furthermore, Hua's documentary embodies the feminist response to Laura Mulvey's notion of cinematic gaze. This perspective provides a unique feminist lens that challenges and redefines traditional cinematic narratives. Her work thus serves as critical conduct for dialogue and understanding between cultures, providing a platform for voices at the intersection of race and gender. It is worth noting, however, that there is still a lack in research specifically catered to 21st century Franco-Vietnamese cinematic production. With this analysis, I aspire to enrich the discussion around postcolonial film studies. In essence, *Les Rivières* epitomizes the dynamism and unique perspectives of the post-migratory Viet Kieu individual. It proclaims an enthusiastic

³ A term referred to Vietnamese oversea.

desire to introduce fresh thematic content, especially through feminist lens rooted in Asian heritage. It is thus this multilayer of voices and “minor” cinematic creation that holds the promise of a more inclusive and diverse narrative.

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Visual references



Figure 1. Hua sketches her family tree using squares to denote men and circles to denote women. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.

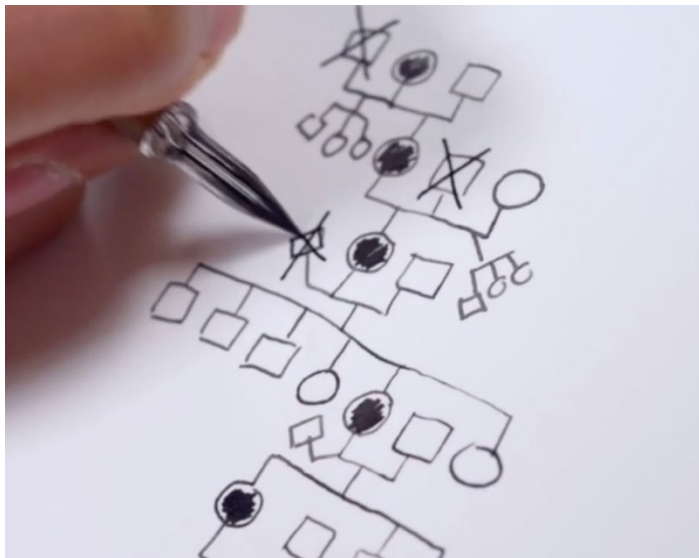


Figure 2. Hua marks off the square (male figures) from her family tree. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.



Figure 3. Hua talks to her mother about her childhood, with their eyes covered. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.



Figure 4. Hua's mother in a nightclub captured by Hua. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.



Figure 5. A close-up of Hua's mother dancing to music. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.



Figure 6. Hua's mother applies makeup while engaging in a conversation with her. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.



Figure 7. A display of a variety of makeup products. Hua, Mai, director. *Les Rivières*. Apsara Films & superbytimai. 2020.