

CHAPTER 3

ANDRÉE BLOUIN: A SISTER AMONG BROTHERS IN STRUGGLE

Andrée Blouin was born in Obangui-Chari (today Central African Republic) in 1921 to Josephine Wouassimba, a fourteen-year-old Banziri girl from the Kwango region, and Pierre Gerbillat, a French colonial businessman. She was placed in a Brazzaville orphanage for children of mixed race at the age of three, ran away when she was seventeen, and fell prey to mistreatment by white men, first as concubine and later as wife. Traveling to Guinea in the 1950s with the man from whom she would take her name, she joined Sékou Touré in his revolutionary activities before returning to Central Africa. After mobilizing women for the African Solidarity Party (Parti Solidaire Africain, PSA) in the Kwilu region of Congo, she became the chief of protocol in Patrice Lumumba's government. *My Country, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria*, a title that frames her life in terms of race and pan-African allegiance, was published in 1983 in English with the collaboration of Jean MacKellar. Blouin's account of events up to the mid-1960s is followed by a brief epilogue by MacKellar.

Blouin's in-between position relative to colonial racial categories and her position within a male-dominated movement mean that analyzing her perspective—not just her views, but also the points of view that arise from her complex positioning—yields significant insights into the racial and gender dimensions of decolonization. While her interracial relationships expose colonial hypocrisy and exploitation and complement our understanding of women's experiences under Belgian rule, her political engagement explodes dominant models of feminine subordination, domesticity, and exclusion from politics. Yet, her own discourse about decolonization is marked by gender in ways that are shaped by the particularities of her in-between status as a *métisse*. A woman of mixed race

working alongside men, her fluid crossing of boundaries of race and gender unsettles the dichotomies informing the discourses of both colonization and decolonization.

Before analyzing the text, we must consider the questions that arise from the genesis of the work. In the short blurb "About the Collaborator," we learn that MacKellar was a graduate of Stanford University and that she lived in Paris for twelve years "where she was closely associated with Andrée Blouin and many other personalities in the African independence movements." Laura Kempen states that MacKellar appears "to have edited" a series of interviews conducted in French "into the chronological narrative that was published, as well as translating them from the original French" (106). We have no way of knowing how much Blouin's words were transformed in the process of transcription and translation. The presentation of the text is unambiguous: Blouin is designated the author of the autobiography, with MacKellar playing a secondary, collaborative role.¹

After the interviewing and editing process was complete, Blouin rejected the book and tried to sue MacKellar in order to block publication.² According to Herbert Weiss, the work presents Blouin's story in social-psychological terms, while Blouin wanted to leave a political testament. Since MacKellar did not understand the intricacies of the political situation and was more conservative than Blouin, as the epilogue clearly shows, she was unable to give the book the political cast that Blouin would have preferred.³ Monique Chajmowiec, a good friend of Blouin's who met her two years before her death in 1986 and considers her "une grande dame," someone of considerable "carrure" "caliber," contests the idea that Blouin could leave a convincing political testament. She contends that Blouin's ideas were starkly Manichean, with rudimentary schemas replacing sustained analysis: Lumumba was good; anyone who opposed him was bad. She also emphasizes Blouin's blind devotion to Sékou Touré, even after there was ample evidence of his tyrannical leadership, decades after her own political involvement in Guinea.

In his study of *Le lys et le flamboyant*, a 1997 novel by the Congolese writer Henri Lopes that alludes to Blouin's life story, Richard Watts contends that the autobiographical text "has no *original author* to speak of, as it was dictated by Blouin to MacKellar, who translated and transcribed it directly into English. Reading Blouin's autobiographical text makes this arrangement appear rather improbable, as MacKellar seems to inhabit Blouin's consciousness" (128). While he draws our attention to Lopes's intention of interrogating this text, which presents itself as "unproblematically true" (129), Watts does not provide an analysis of just how