

# *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*

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## Myth, Modernism, Violence and Form: An Interview with Salim Bachi

je me retrouvais par une sorte d'enchantement maléfique rejeté encore plus loin, englouti par ce mythe que j'avais créé de toutes pièces.<sup>1</sup>

Salim Bachi was born in 1971 nine years after Algeria became an independent nation. In bringing the two events together I want to mark a distance. Born in Algiers but spending nearly all of his childhood in Annaba, Bachi's early years in Algeria were marked not by an anti-colonial war but by its legacies and Colonel Houari Boumedienne's regime (1965–78). It was during this period that the policy of Arabization was pursued alongside a version of state socialism that saw the oil and gas industries nationalized. In the 1970s Algeria's self-image as a country which had defeated French colonialism and would continue to support revolution was still an accepted commonplace. This image began to pale in the late seventies and was laid to rest in the 1980s—a decade which saw the carapace of a state-determined national identity harden, the housing crisis intensify, and unemployment spread widely. Bachi was seventeen when the social protests and subsequent killing of civilians by the military occurred in October 1988. It was at this time too that IMF and World Bank re-structuring plans were implemented in response to Algeria's foreign debt—due in large part to loans taken out by the Algerian government in order to modernize its oil and gas industries. Reacting to these events, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid, President of Algeria from 1979 to 1992, called for multi-party democracy and subsequent elections to the national assembly were held in December 1991. The Islamist party, the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), looked set to win a majority in the second round. The army intervened, cancelled the elections and what followed has been called Algeria's civil war, or *la décennie noire*, a phrase that captures the tragedy of that decade but also its obscurity for the civilian population seemed to be caught between two forces which, if identified as State and Islamism, were in practice composed of many different groups. It was not always clear which killings were carried out by whom. The darkness and horrors of this decade are central to Bachi's early work though he makes clear that his portrayal of violence bespeaks violence in general and not just the specificity of Algeria's *décennie noire*.<sup>2</sup> In his writing Bachi seeks not the specifics of attribution and justice, approaches history through its relationship with myth, works more closely with the legacy of modernism than on the implications of modernity, and, in doing so, says something, if obliquely, about each of these categories.

As a writer, Bachi first came to attention with the publication of a prize-winning short story, 'Le vent brûle', in the January 1995 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.<sup>3</sup> An allegorical tale that nods towards Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' its subject is Algeria during the *décennie noire*. Bachi moved to France in 1996 to pursue doctoral studies at the Sorbonne and worked on the manuscript of *Le Chien d'Ulysse*. Accepted by Gallimard's editor Jean-Marie Laclavetine it was published in 2001. Though Laclavetine was one of the initiators of the *Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français* (2007) Bachi was not one of the signatories and has maintained a distance from the term.<sup>4</sup> *Le Chien d'Ulysse* was met with critical acclaim winning the Prix littéraire de la Vocation, the Bourse Goncourt du Premier Roman and the Bourse Prince Pierre de Monaco de La Découverte. The novel is set within Cyrtha, an

<sup>1</sup> Salim Bachi, *Moi, Khaled Kelkal* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2012), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Exact figures are not available but Human Rights Watch suggest that the number of dead is over 100,000. The figures for the 'disappeared' seem more definite: 7,000. See <http://www.hrw.org/news/2003/02/26/algeria-led-world-forced-disappearances> [accessed 11 July 2012].

<sup>3</sup> The text was the winning short story in a competition organized by Radio France Internationale in 1994. It can be accessed at <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1995/01/BACHI/1079>.

<sup>4</sup> See Roger Célestin, 'Entretien avec Salim Bachi', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 13 (2009), 367–76 (pp. 373–75).

imagined city that borrows from Algiers, Constantine and Annaba. This lateral, geographical condensation, is given temporal depth-of-field as Cyrtha is also a derivation of Cirta the Numidian capital.<sup>5</sup> Cyrtha has the humours of a maleficent character who is marked by historical events but shaped by myths of which it is both matrix and conduit. Set within this urban dreamscape are a range of characters, men mainly, of which the central one is Hocine who, like Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* (a key hypotext along with Homer's *Odyssey*) wanders through Cyrtha with its temporal layers and violence. A mythical space that undercuts nationalist myth, Cyrtha is also the location for the novel *La Kahéna* (2003) and the short stories of *Les Douze contes de minuit* (2007) and these three texts form the 'Cyrtha trilogy'.

*La Kahéna* is a densely poetic novel that is narrated in the aftermath of October 1988; it is mainly focalized through Hamid Kaïm, the journalist who features in *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, and details the life of Louis Bergagna who left Malta to make his fortune as a colonist in Algeria in 1900. The voices in the text, at times difficult to identify, interweave colonial and post-colonial Algeria as well as—in a series of chapters that resonate with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—French Guyana and the Amazonian jungles of Brazil. The key site of the text, however, is the villa that Bergagna has built for himself to mark his political ascendancy and which he names, unwittingly and upon the prompting of one of his workers, 'La Kahéna'. Bergagna dominates the political landscape as Cyrtha's mayor until the 1950s. After the war of independence (1954–62), the ownership of the villa passes to Hamid Kaïm's family, but it is largely abandoned by the 1980s. Nevertheless, the novel, largely narrated by the woman who is Hamid's lover, becomes the setting for the genealogical and historical unfoldings and revelations that make up the text and weave colonial past and present together, in ways suggestive of attenuated forms of reconciliation that come with the passage of time, the enigmatic traces of the past, and the perspective of ineluctable death.

In 2005 Bachi published a *récit* entitled *Autoportrait avec Grenade*. Its ludic combination of the autoportrait, travel writing and metafiction flag a lighter register compared to the previous texts and to the subsequent publication, *Les Douze contes de minuit*, which was to bring the Cyrtha trilogy to a conclusion. *Les Douze contes de minuit* picks up on narrative threads that mainly come from *Le Chien d'Ulysse* and it is Algeria of the 1990s that provides the backdrop and as well as the concentrated content. The 'contes' vary in style and range from the oral sequences of 'Palabres' that are devoid of setting or frame to the allegorical 'Le vent brûle' (a reworked version of his prize-winning story of 1995). The texts are marked by violence, nihilism and the difficulty of finding any space between the absolutist positions of the Algerian state and Islamism. In Bachi's representations it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a tale of mental collapse—the protagonist of 'Le Messenger' is persecuted by a Sphere—and a homage to Kafka such as 'Le Vent brûle', in which the agents of violence have become insects, or 'Insectes' which features a character whose name is Samsa. 'Insectes' brings the collection to a close and ends with a word to the reader, a hermeneutic nod to the Cyrtha trilogy:

le monde en question a disparu — Cyrtha, les insectes, les hommes du Président, Bougras, Samsa et son jeune fils se sont évanouis sous les strates successives de la terre et de l'histoire. L'idéale, toujours, est de traquer le songe, quitte à n'y rien comprendre, et d'en observer avec minutie les métamorphoses qui hantent chaque homme au moment où le sommeil l'enserme et l'étouffe. (DCM, p. 190).

This apocalyptic mode is echoed in subsequent texts by Bachi that often return to the tonal registers of the Cyrtha trilogy but draw from poetic materials that come from beyond Algeria

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Aresu, in one of the first articles on Bachi's work, pays close attention to the polysemous possibilities of Cyrtha and to Bachi's first novel in general; see B. Aresu, 'Arcanes algériens entés d'ajours helléniques: *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, de Salim Bachi', in *Paroles déplacées: Echanges et mutations des modèles littéraires entre Europe et Algérie*, ed. by Charles Bonn, 2 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), II, 97–107.

and its history. *Le Silence de Mahomet* (2008) narrates Mohammad's life through the fiction of four people who knew him: Khadija, his first wife, his close friend Abou Bakr, his lieutenant Khalid, and his third wife Aïcha. These humanizing perspectives make up the book's four parts. Mohammad, the founder of Islam, is silent.

Bachi's next novel, *Amours et aventures de Sindbad le Marin* (2010), reads like a picaresque narrative in rapid changes of scene and action prompted, no doubt, by the original tales of Sindbad. It begins and ends in Carthago (formerly Algiers) and moves from Algeria to Italy and from there to France before reaching Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. Sindbad, represented as one of the many *harragas* that cross the Mediterranean from Algeria, is in search of love, apparently sexual, in a novel that plays with literary allusion and man's illusions as the narrative quickly moves from place to place and woman to woman. This, however, is an ambitious novel that can be read as an allegory of mystical, neo-platonic love and a struggle between Good and Evil. The text features recurring references to the sites of different religions (Jewish, Muslim, Christian) yet the frame of the novel is darker than the content upon which it encroaches. There is the malevolence of the Gnostic figure of Le Dormant who opens and closes the novel and ultimately triumphs over a Sindbad who represents life.

*Tuez-les tous* (2006) is a powerful fiction that brings us into the mind of an Algerian involved in the September 11 terrorist attack. Set on the eve before, and morning of, the event the text is darkly lyrical and represents the pilot (known only by false names such as 'San Juan', 'Pilote') in a way that evokes a form of understanding but not a sympathy of approbation. He is presented not as a believer but as someone who doubts and yet suppresses uncertainty in order to enter the darkness of his time. The literary pulse of the text is generated by a desolate parable recounted by the protagonist. Conrad is often close to the surface of Bachi's texts but is explicitly referenced in *Tuez-les tous* where the last two sentences of *Heart of Darkness* (1902), fittingly, provide the epigraph.

*Moi, Khaled Kelkal* (2012) sees Bachi continue to mine this seam of interiority and language. It is an interior monologue attributed to Khaled Kelkal who was responsible for the RER Saint Michel bombing in Paris in 1995 and who was later shot dead by French police during the course of his arrest. *Moi, Khaled Kelkal*, published shortly before the attacks carried out by Mohamed Merah, prompted Jean Birnbaum, the Editor-in-Chief of *Le Monde des livres*, to commission Bachi to write 'Moi, Mohamed Merah'.<sup>6</sup> It was published on 30 March 2012. Much, but not all, of the reaction was hostile. It raised questions about literature's force and place in society, its timing, as well as forms of reading that still conflate authors with narrative voice.<sup>7</sup> *Le Monde* did not post the piece to its digital edition yet the negative reaction was such that it was quickly forced to respond.

On 7 April 2012 an editorial was published in *Le Monde* entitled 'Indicible...'.<sup>8</sup> The editorial begins by contextualizing the commission: Jean Birnbaum had sought since his appointment (in August 2011), to bring literature close to the 'real'; considered that a writer's perspective on Merah might add to the insights provided by sociologists and psychologists

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<sup>6</sup> The shootings were carried out in March 2012 during three attacks in Toulouse and Montauban which left seven dead including three Jewish school children. Merah was killed by police after a thirty-hour siege.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Tarnero describes the piece as cynical and obscene in an article written for *Causeur magazine*, 'Merah n'est pas un héros de roman: Obscénité littéraire au Monde'; <http://www.causeur.fr/merah-n%E2%80%99est-pas-un-heros-de-roman,16861#>. In 'Un lapsus dans la tête de Merah?', published by *The Huffington Post/Le Monde*, Edith Ochs, views it as pseudo-literary, sub-Célinian and as providing an insight into Bachi's mind and his views on Israel and Palestine: [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/edith-ochs/bachi-mohamed-merah\\_b\\_1399787.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/edith-ochs/bachi-mohamed-merah_b_1399787.html); in contrast, Maxime Ricard, for *France Soir*, reads Bachi's piece, sympathetically, as an attempt at understanding what cannot be known: <http://www.francesoir.fr/loisirs/litterature/salim-bachi-moi-mohamed-merah-203333.html>. All three URLs consulted 22 August 2012.

<sup>8</sup> 'L'indicible ...', *Le Monde*, 7 April 2012, p. 18.

and sought to balance the piece with opposing views on literature's role that he commissioned from Olivier Rolin and Marc Weitzmann. The second part of the editorial provides us with the views of the readers of *Le Monde* that are juxtaposed to form a list that reads: "Obscénité littéraire", "inopportune", "faux cul", "scandaleux", "indecent", "colère", "dégoût", "immonde", "lâche", "faute morale", "honte", "délire putride", "complaisance éditoriale"...'. The rhetorical effect of the list is obvious but, staggeringly, they are presented as views on the literary quality of Bachi's fiction. The editorial ends with the assurance that within *Le Monde* the decision to commission and publish 'Moi, Mohamed Merah' was also the subject of controversy and would be considered by the newly formed 'comité d'éthique et de déontologie...'. Pascal Galinier, the author of the editorial, clearly likes ellipses and finishes his piece by citing another reader: 'Jacques Tarnero (Paris) a son idée: "Permettez-moi de pasticher Camus: 'Mal parler des choses, c'est ajouter au malheur du monde.' *Le Monde* a mal parlé des choses." Indicible, vous dis-je...'. Bachi's text is nowhere cited. And the question of literature and its destination is confused with literature's public reception. The debate could have been more powerful given the issues but that it was not is not simply indicative of the raw timing of the piece but of a failure of critique within the institution of *Le Monde*.

Bachi's next novel is on Albert Camus. If published in 2013, the centenary of Camus's birth, the novel is likely to arouse a range of further comments relating to what literature can or cannot say about whom, and when, and how. In some respects, all of Bachi's texts have raised these awkward, necessary questions.

#### **Quel est votre conception de vous-même en tant qu'écrivain?**

J'écris des livres. Je suis né à Alger, en Algérie. Je suis parti à l'âge de 25 ans pour vivre en France, à Paris. Hormis ces faits, je ne me fais aucune image de moi-même en tant qu'écrivain. En revanche, j'ai écrit des romans sur l'Algérie, l'islam, le terrorisme, la banlieue. Je crois que je travaille essentiellement sur le mythe et ses manifestations dans le monde contemporain.

#### **Quels étaient les textes clés dans votre formation d'écrivain, ceux qui vous ont donné le désir d'écrire et d'être un écrivain?**

J'imaginai qu'en tant qu'écrivain la vie serait facile, que je serais aimé et reconnu pour mon travail. J'avais une image romantique de l'écrivain. Je crois que je suis devenu un écrivain grâce à des livres comme *Nedjma* de Kateb Yacine ou *Le Bruit et la fureur* de Faulkner. Ensuite la lecture de Joyce a été décisive, mais celle-ci avait été précédée de centaines de lectures d'œuvres de toutes origines, pêle-mêle, sans grande hiérarchie avant l'âge de 18 ans où j'ai dû vraiment commencer à lire de manière plus systématique et dans l'idée d'écrire. Il y a eu ensuite la guerre civile en Algérie et le départ pour la France, mais j'avais décidé d'être un écrivain avant cela. Bien entendu, s'il n'y avait pas eu la guerre civile, je n'aurais sans doute pas écrit les mêmes livres.

#### **A maintes reprises on trouve le personnage d'Ulysse dans vos textes, mais dernièrement il y a aussi le personnage de Sindbad. D'après vous quels sont les liens qui relient ces personnages mythiques?**

Ulysse et Sindbad sont les figures archétypales du voyageur. D'ailleurs leurs aventures se ressemblent. On se demande même si Sindbad n'est pas une réécriture de l'Odyssée par les Arabes, ou l'inverse d'ailleurs, aurait ajouté Borgès qui aimait tant les paradoxes. Je crois que j'ai aussi écrit sur Ulysse parce que j'avais beaucoup aimé lire l'Odyssée lorsque j'étais enfant et puis adolescent. C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi j'ai trouvé fascinant le travail de Joyce. Cinquante ans avant ma naissance, il avait écrit un livre qui reprenait la figure mythique qui, avec Sindbad, me fascinait depuis ma jeunesse. Je trouvais cela très amusant que l'on puisse écrire sur un personnage mythique et d'en proposer une interprétation moderne. Je crois que cela m'a beaucoup fait réfléchir pendant mes années de formation. J'ai compris que l'on

pouvait être absolument moderne comme le souhaitait Rimbaud tout en s'inspirant de vieilles histoires. Je me suis aussi beaucoup intéressé à la littérature que l'on a appelée post-moderne, je ne sais pas pourquoi d'ailleurs. A cause du retour à la fiction peut-être, comme s'il n'y avait pas eu de fiction dans la grande tradition moderniste... Pour moi, Joyce et Faulkner racontent des histoires dans leurs romans. Enfin, je me suis intéressé à des auteurs dont on ne parle plus maintenant comme John Barth ou Pynchon, et cela bien avant que l'on ne les découvre vraiment en France, dans les années quatre-vingts, en Algérie! Je me souviens que j'avais été secoué par la lecture de *L'Opéra flottant*. C'était l'époque où l'on disait par exemple que Don DeLillo était un auteur mineur, avec raison, je crois. On a oublié les gens intéressants comme John Barth ou le Pynchon de *Vente à la criée du lot 49*. Je les ai bien sûr lus en traduction. Je me suis aussi très vite plongé dans Faulkner à cause de Kateb Yacine et dans Joyce à cause de *L'Odyssée*... J'ai dû relire cinq ou six fois *Ulysse*, qui a été pour moi avec *Absalon! Absalon!* de Faulkner le grand livre de ma jeunesse.

Quand j'ai posé la question sur Ulysse et Sindbad j'avais, au moins dans mon esprit, déjà établi un lien entre le Grec (l'Occident) et l'Arabe (l'Orient) mais votre réponse nous mène à des écrivains américains et à Joyce. Est-ce que vous sentez plus proche à une communauté déraciné des écrivains (morts et vivants et de partout dans le monde) que dans un cadre plus fixe, plus lié à des récits comme 'la nation' ou 'l'occident'?

Difficile de répondre à cette question. Je cherche des écrivains qui m'apportent quelque chose. Du plaisir d'abord, et ensuite une expérience esthétique. Je ne les ai jamais choisis en raison de leur appartenance culturelle, religieuse ou nationale. Je suis un amateur de romans et de mythes et je suis heureux lorsque les deux se trouvent mêlés. Je suis content aussi lorsque des formes étranges servent de véhicule à une narration qui, par essence, est forcément ancienne. On se raconte des histoires depuis la naissance du monde, enfin du nôtre, seule la manière change à chaque fois. Je ne fais donc pas de distinction entre les écrivains hormis formelle. Je ne crois pas non plus que je les lise parce qu'ils sont des exilés ou des déracinés. Il y a tant d'écrivains de l'exil qui ne m'intéressent pas.

Pour revenir aux mythes grecs, beaucoup de ces personnages ont fourni les noms des constellations. Les étoiles, les constellations plutôt, sont présentes partout dans la trilogie de Cyrtha. Leur fonction varie; parfois elles sont comme des témoins indifférents, parfois elles offrent une perspective plus large, même stable, comme contrepoint au chaos de la violence en dessous, la violence de la décennie noire en Algérie.

Dans *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, le cosmos propose une stabilité et un ordre face aux chaos de la guerre civile qui agite les êtres humains. Il y a un côté profondément indifférent dans ce cosmos ordonné, ces constellations qui assistent à nos pauvres turpitudes sans jamais dévier de leur course. En quelque sorte, le monde d'en haut est froid et lointain. Il assiste aussi bien à la naissance de Hocine qu'à sa mort symbolique. Je dis bien symbolique car il n'est pas sûr que Hocine meure à la fin du *Chien d'Ulysse*. On dit que le ciel a changé depuis dix mille ans. J'essaye d'imaginer ce que devaient voir les hommes il y a dix mille ans. Que devaient-ils penser de ce ciel qui nous paraît, à nous modernes, indifférent? René Girard observe que dans *Le roi Lear*, le cosmos est perturbé par la folie du roi et reflète cet état de tension. Lorsque j'ai vu le *Roi Lear* pour la première fois, j'ai été frappé par la tempête qui secoue le monde lorsque Lear sombre peu à peu dans la folie. C'est intéressant ce rapport entre le cosmos et l'intériorité des personnages.

Pourriez-vous dire un peu plus sur Girard? Je sais que je vous remets encore dans un cadre Algérien mais vu ce que Girard avez dit sur le désir mimétique, la violence, le sacrifice et le lien entre ces notions et la société je me demande si ces écrits ont

**provoqué une réflexion sur les conditions sociales en Algérie pendant les années quatre-vingt-dix.**

Sur la violence en Algérie, sûrement. Mais encore une fois, je ne cherche à comprendre une société qu'à travers le prisme de la littérature et du mythe. Je crois que la violence mimétique comme le désir mimétique sont des mythes élaborés par René Girard qui m'avaient beaucoup inspiré lorsque j'avais commencé à écrire *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, un roman sur la société algérienne bien entendu, mais aussi une réflexion sur la violence et sur la littérature comme miroir de celle-ci et instrument pour la transcender. J'aime beaucoup René Girard lecteur de Shakespeare et Dostoïevsky, démontant les mécanismes du désir, de l'envie et de la violence chez des écrivains qui refusent le romantisme, ce mensonge romanesque. J'ai, à mon tour, essayé de lire les écrivains non pas en romantique, et le sentiment national est aussi un romantisme, comme l'amour d'ailleurs, mais en écrivain conscient que les hommes entretiennent des rapports ambigus, teintés de violence, lorsqu'ils mettent en jeu le sentiment amoureux, le désir de possession ou la recherche du pouvoir. En tant qu'exilé, je comprends d'autant mieux le processus de la victime sacrificielle et du bouc émissaire, concepts si chers à René Girard.

**Les romans qui constituent la trilogie de Cyrtha nous offrent un mélange de mythes, de légendes et d'histoire. Ils nous racontent des moments très précis dans l'histoire de l'Algérie depuis 1830 tout en brouillant le temps linéaire. Pourquoi se servir de l'Histoire si ce n'est que pour le faire perdre sa spécificité?**

Je n'ai pas poursuivi la trilogie de Cyrtha par d'autres romans parce que je crois avoir parlé de toute l'Histoire de l'Algérie depuis l'antiquité, de manière synthétique, sans jamais tomber dans le roman historique. Le mythe de l'Histoire violente de l'Algérie, ce continent obscur et agissant dont on nous parle souvent, m'a permis de faire ces raccourcis dans le temps, utilisant ce mythe pour le déconstruire peu à peu. Il me semble à présent que j'ai épuisé cette première matière romanesque qui concerne l'Algérie. Cette trilogie sur Cyrtha doit être lue comme un récit mythique sur l'Algérie et en aucune manière comme une fresque historique.

**Pour revenir à la spécificité de l'histoire, pourquoi avez-vous opté pour 'des condensés de mythes' au lieu 'des romans historiques'?**

Cela s'est fait naturellement. On cherche une forme pour dire son expérience, et on va au plus simple en général, même si pour le lecteur cette forme peut sembler très étrange. Celle-ci, dans mon cas, est une forme mythique plutôt qu'historique, or comme nous le savons le mythe est antérieur à l'histoire. C'est sans doute pourquoi, on a rarement compris ce que j'avais écrit. Je ne parle pas d'une situation présente lorsque j'écris un roman, mais d'un moment mythique qui s'est déjà produit et qui se produira encore. Dans *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, j'ai décrit la violence telle qu'elle se manifestait lorsqu'elle contaminait une société comme une peste. Bien entendu, je décrivais aussi la guerre civile algérienne, mais j'aurais tout aussi bien pu décrire la guerre en Colombie ou au Liban en vérité. C'est cela que certains lecteurs n'ont pas compris. Ils auraient aimé voir dans *Le Chien d'Ulysse* une description de la situation algérienne et seulement cela, avec en prime une prise de position politique de l'écrivain. Or ce n'était pas du tout mon projet. Mon idée était de replacer l'humain dans un contexte de violence absolue en m'appuyant sur ce que m'enseignaient les mythes. De la même manière, lorsque je m'intéresse au terrorisme, c'est encore la violence comme mythe rédempteur qui me fascine.

**Quel est votre conception du 'mythe'?**

Un raccourci narratif. En y recourant, je n'ai pas besoin d'entrer dans le détail d'une histoire vieille de plusieurs siècles. Cyrtha est le symbole et le mythe de la ville antique qui se survit dans le présent sur un mode violent, insupportable. Carthago agit de la même manière, songe



obscur qui peine à se dissiper au réveil. Ulysse dit tous les voyages même ceux que l'on fait dans sa chambre ou dans son quartier, de même pour Sindbad. Et tant d'autres mythes que j'utilise lorsque j'ai besoin de simplifier ma narration et la rendre pourtant plus complexe si l'on connaît ses classiques sur le bout des doigts. Je sais aussi que le mythe est polymorphe, il échappe à toute volonté de lui donner une seule signification. En plus, c'est un formidable réservoir pour un écrivain. Je m'intéresse aussi au mythe agissant, au mythe contemporain comme le 11 septembre par exemple, au mythe religieux comme Mahomet, figure sacrée, historique, et donc éminemment mythique. Je me suis intéressé à la violence en Algérie en tant que mythe moteur de son Histoire depuis Jughurtha. La figure du terroriste est pour moi une figure mythique, un mythe violent qui me fascine.

**Il est évident que la Méditerranée vous sert comme réserve de figures mythiques. Cependant, dans *La Kahéna* Bergagna traverse l'Atlantique pour se trouver en Guyane. Pourquoi?**

Après *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, j'avais voulu ouvrir le roman algérien vers l'ailleurs, lui donner une dimension spatio-temporelle qu'il n'avait pas en général. Je l'avais ressenti comme cela, obscurément. Il fallait que Louis Bergagna s'en aille à l'autre bout du monde pour se perdre et se retrouver. Il lui fallait prendre une distance très grande pour comprendre ce qui le faisait agir et pourquoi son action même était vouée à l'échec. Mais si l'on regarde bien l'histoire de l'Algérie beaucoup de prisonniers algériens ont été envoyés en Guyane, dans les bagnes. L'histoire des bagnes est liée intimement à la colonisation. On envoyait des prisonniers en Guyane en espérant qu'ils défricheraient une nouvelle terre. Seulement cette terre-là, pour des raisons climatiques, ne s'est jamais laissée conquérir et les bagnes eux-mêmes ont été recouverts par la forêt vierge, effaçant toute trace de cette folie. De même l'Algérie fut une terre où les premiers colons mourraient de paludisme et de dysenterie, ou étaient terrassés par la chaleur, ce qui, d'une certaine manière, donc pour des raisons climatiques et géographiques, a plus fait pour rejeter les envahisseurs que toute autre raison politique, sociale ou économique. Je trouvais ce parallèle avec la Guyane intéressant. D'ailleurs peu de personnes ont compris cela; ils ont pris *La Kahéna* pour un roman d'aventures!

**Louis Bergagna n'est pas un personnage sympathique mais n'est pas sans qualités. S'agissait-il d'une tentative de comprendre ses motivations et ses contradictions?**

J'ai essayé de comprendre l'Autre dans ce roman, et l'altérité radicale pour un Algérien, c'est le colon. Je n'ai pas jugé, j'ai cherché à montrer les motivations de l'aventurier qui finit par tomber amoureux de sa conquête. Bergagna c'est Don Juan amoureux en quelque sorte, ridicule mais tellement humain. Cela m'a permis de déconstruire le mythe de la colonisation telle qu'elle est vue des deux côtés de la Méditerranée. Malheureusement, personne ou peu de monde n'a lu *La Kahéna*.

**Quand vous dites les 'deux côtés de la Méditerranée', est-ce que cela veut dire la France et l'Algérie? Pourriez-vous nous dire que représente la Méditerranée—comme 'réalité' ou comme métaphore—pour vous?**

Oui, la France et l'Algérie. Moi je me fiche de savoir qui se sent méditerranéen. Les Touregs, les Arabes, les Romains, les Grecs, cela ne me concerne pas. Il se trouve, et cela je n'y peux rien, je suis né dans une ville tournée vers la Méditerranée et qui s'appelle Alger; j'ai vécu une grande partie de ma vie dans une autre ville face à la Méditerranée, Annaba. Il se peut que cela ne veuille rien dire. Joyce, né en Irlande, se sentait à mon avis autant sinon plus méditerranéen que moi. On peut l'expliquer aussi parce qu'il a vécu à Trieste et qu'il a écrit *Ulysse*, un mythe méditerranéen probablement, même si certains vous diront qu'Ulysse est né sur les rives de l'Indus... mais enfin, il a bel et bien navigué en Méditerranée selon Homère. On peut continuer à rêver et penser que Grenade, Cordoue, l'Andalousie, ne sont pas en



Méditerranée, ni Rome d'ailleurs ou Alexandrie, ni même Damas où les Omeyyades embellirent une ancienne basilique qui avait été un temple romain afin d'en faire une des plus belles mosquées d'un Orient peu susceptible d'être taxé de méditerranéen puisque musulman et arabe. On me dira sans peine que je n'ai rien d'un Grec, même si un certain Ibn Roch a fait l'exégèse d'Aristote en arabe, exégèse qui fut traduite en latin et enseignée pendant tout le Moyen Age chrétien dans cette même langue que je n'oserais qualifier de méditerranéenne. On me certifiera que je suis un Toureg qui utilise un lointain reflet de l'alphabet de ces Phéniciens dont on sait bien qu'ils ne virent jamais la Méditerranée puisqu'ils vivaient à Tyr, sur les rives d'une mer étrange dont le nom se perd et qui n'intéresse plus personne aujourd'hui, ni les Européens ni les Arabes, sauf lorsqu'il s'agit de la traverser pour aller bronzer sur ses plages ou migrer vers le Nord sur des radeaux de fortune. Bien entendu, la Méditerranée est un mythe, mais elle n'est pas la seule dans ce cas. Les 'confins subsahariens' sont tout aussi brumeux... il n'y a pas de confins, il y a l'Afrique noire d'où viennent une partie des Touaregs plus berbères que les Kabyles selon les tenants d'une autre histoire ou d'autres mythes.

**Vous avez exprimé votre admiration pour l'œuvre d'Albert Camus. En effet, depuis une dizaine d'années nous assistons à un 'retour à Camus' chez certains écrivains algériens, tel qu'Aziz Chouaki. Pourquoi? Est-ce que cela fait partie d'une tentative de mieux comprendre le passé colonial et pour établir un patrimoine culturel plus riche, une tentative de trouver des points de repères disons 'humanistes'?**

Je crois que l'on a fait parfois et un peu vite un mauvais procès à Camus. Je ne sais pas pourquoi d'ailleurs. J'imagine que sa phrase à propos de la justice et de sa mère, en pleine guerre d'Algérie, a été ressentie comme une trahison par les nationalistes et les intellectuels algériens. Pour ma part, j'ai toujours pensé que Camus n'avait pas accepté que l'Algérie se détache de la France et devienne indépendante, mais on ne peut pas dire pour autant qu'il était un colonialiste enragé. Lui-même était le produit de la colonisation française en Algérie, mais il ne se reconnaissait pas non plus dans les grands colons qui opprimaient les Arabes. C'était un homme dont la mère faisait des ménages et dont les oncles étaient de petits ouvriers qui vivaient pauvrement. Il n'a pas compris qu'on le confonde avec les véritables seigneurs de l'Algérie qui ne faisaient rien pour donner plus de droits aux Arabes. Il n'acceptait pas d'être responsable de la colonisation puisqu'il était né en Algérie et n'avait jamais exercé de violence coloniale, l'ayant même dénoncée et ayant été banni d'Algérie dans les années 40 pour cela. Camus, très jeune, a milité pour changer l'état de fait colonial. A vingt ans, il fréquente les cercles arabes qui commencent à parler d'émancipation et rejoint le parti communiste algérien parce que celui-ci est anti-colonialiste. Il le quitte d'ailleurs lorsque celui-ci se détourne des masses arabes et les trahit même. Pendant la guerre d'Algérie, le terrorisme du FLN et des Ultras lui a vite fait peur et même répugné puisqu'il frappait indistinctement des innocents, d'où la référence aux siens et à sa mère qui était une femme de ménage qui n'avait jamais fait de mal à personne. Elle était sourde, quasi muette, et l'imaginer victime d'un attentat ou d'un règlement de compte était pour lui de l'ordre de l'impensable. Il n'a donc jamais voulu exposer sa mère par ses paroles ou ses actes. A cette époque-là, les nationalistes algériens ne l'ont pas compris et l'ont condamné. Camus avait tout autant peur du FLN que des Ultras qui auraient pu se venger de lui en s'attaquant à sa famille s'il avait pris une position plus tranchée. Notre génération a mieux saisi ce dilemme parce qu'elle a vécu la guerre civile et le terrorisme. Camus est complexe, on a voulu le réduire et le caricaturer.

**Vous avez fait le tour de la Méditerranée orientale à bord le pétrolier ravitailleur *Meuse* du 7 au 23 octobre 2009 avec des écrivains et des intellectuels français, tunisiens, algériens, libyens, grecs, chypriotes, libanais, égyptiens, turcs, des diplomates français et**

des parlementaires. Vous avez servi comme Directeur d'une Alliance Française pour promouvoir la culture française et francophone. Que diriez-vous à l'accusation que vous avez été coopté par le ministère de la Culture afin de promouvoir la France par des moyens culturels, en particulier à travers la Méditerranée?

Ce voyage a été une expérience formidable dont j'ai tiré un article et l'idée même de mon roman, *Amours et aventures de Sindbad le Marin*. Cela a aussi été une opération de prestige pour la culture française, je ne le nie pas. Ai-je été pour autant utilisé? La réponse est dans *Amours et aventures de Sindbad le Marin*...

On trouve des références à Kafka, surtout 'Les Métamorphoses', dans les nouvelles de *Douze contes de minuit*, surtout 'Insectes' où un des personnages s'appelle Samsa. Que se passe-t-il quand on transpose Kafka? Si Kafka parle de l'aliénation que dit la nouvelle 'Insectes', même de manière oblique, sur la société?

Il y a bien deux références à Kafka dans les *Douze contes de minuit*, l'une ouvre le recueil et l'autre le clos. Entre temps, il y a tout le cycle des métamorphoses violentes où la réalité devient cauchemardesque comme dans 'La Métamorphose' puisque c'est 'au sortir de rêves agités que Gregor Samsa se retrouva transformé en une ignoble vermine'... Il me semble que toute l'Algérie a été métamorphosée pendant une décennie en quelque chose d'horrible. Et toutes les nouvelles dans *Les Douze contes de minuit* décrivent les transformations de l'Algérie et les cauchemars de sa population. Si les terroristes dans la première nouvelle, 'Le Vent brûle', se transforment bien en gigantesques insectes, dans la dernière, 'Insectes' justement, ceux-ci sont devenus des insectes 'normaux', mais le souvenir de quelque chose de profondément inquiétant et d'angoissant demeure et le narrateur se demande s'il a rêvé tout cela ou si cela s'est véritablement produit. L'écrivain lui-même a subi les métamorphoses relatées par les nouvelles puisque celles-ci émaillent mon parcours d'artiste sur une quinzaine d'année. 'Le Vent brûle' est la première nouvelle que j'ai publiée, en 1995. Les autres textes renvoient souvent au *Chien d'Ulysse*, à Cyrtha, et mettent en lumière mon travail d'écrivain pendant ces quinze années. *Les Douze contes de minuit* ont été en quelque sorte mon laboratoire d'écrivain.

La trilogie nous parle de l'échec de la société mais la communauté des amis persiste. Si chaque société a besoin de son imaginaire nationale afin de se constituer en 'communauté imaginaire', y-a-t-il des liens symboliques qui relie une communauté des amis?

C'est un mythe! Mais nécessaire et fondateur. Vivre en société, ensemble, suppose que l'on adhère à des valeurs communes, à des mythes constitutifs qui ne s'opposent pas et n'opposent pas les êtres entre eux. Je crois que l'islam dans sa vision réductrice et la crispation idéologique autour de la guerre d'Algérie et de l'aspect monolithique de la nation algérienne ont été des mythes destructeurs plutôt que fondateurs.

Existe-il des valeurs de communauté qui sont plus forts que ceux de la nation-état?

Je ne sais pas. Je n'en proposerai pas. Cela est trop dangereux, je crois. En revanche, ce ne sont ni les mosquées ni les casernes qui ont répondu à cette question. Il est nécessaire d'être attentif au monde tout simplement. Cela suppose la capacité à se réinventer à chaque instant. L'Algérie s'est voulu un pays fermé, dans ses frontières, fermé dans sa conception arabe et musulmane, conceptions contradictoires qui sont entrées en conflit dans les années 90. Je crois et j'espère que maintenant les Algériens sont plus sages.

Qu'est-ce qui se trouve au seuil, au rivage, à la frontière?

Dans *Le Chien d'Ulysse* les personnages finissaient par ne plus sortir de Cyrtha, ils restaient prisonniers de leur enfer. Je m'élève et je m'élèverai toujours contre cette conception d'un monde fermé par des frontières que les autres nous imposent—ainsi dans les années 90, il était impossible de sortir d'Algérie, personne n'accordait de visas aux Algériens qui étaient

littéralement enfermés dans leur pays pendant une guerre civile atroce—ou que nous nous imposons au nom du nationalisme ou de la religion comme valeurs ultimes, comme dans certains états totalitaires le furent certaines idéologies socialistes ou comme au dix-neuvième siècle celles de la race et de la supériorité d'une civilisation sur les autres avec ce résultat que l'Europe s'est suicidée au début du vingtième siècle. La vie est dans le mouvement perpétuel des hommes et des idées, dans la rencontre et l'échange, dans le partage des biens et des valeurs. Nous ne devrions plus avoir peur de cela. Il ne s'agit plus de se faire la guerre pour piller les richesses du voisin. Non je crois que nous pouvons entrer à présent dans une civilisation de l'échange universel, du concours de tous au bien de l'humanité. Je dis cela et pourtant je suis quelqu'un de pessimiste en général. Je serais heureux le jour où l'Algérie sera devenue une terre d'immigration et que des gens du monde entier viendront vivre chez nous. Je trouve que c'est une grande richesse et la preuve que le pays se porte bien. Au seuil, sur le rivage, c'est l'Autre.

**Pourriez-vous nous dire pourquoi vous avez écrit un récit fictif—'Moi, Mohamed Merah' qui nous livrent les dernières pensées de Mohammad Merah?**

Parce que cela me paraissait dans le droit fil de mon roman, *Moi, Khaled Kelkal*, qui était le monologue d'un terroriste mort. D'ailleurs le titre, 'Moi, Mohamed Merah', fonctionne comme un écho à ce livre. J'ai eu l'impression de voir dans les tueries de Toulouse, une redite de ce qui s'était passé en 1995 avec les attentats commis par Khaled Kelkal. Comme si l'histoire se répétait et que Merah s'échappait de mon roman. Il m'a semblé que les deux protagonistes des attentats commis en France à plus de quinze ans de distance se répondaient et se survivaient l'un dans l'autre. Et donc cette 'fiction', bien que limitée dans son acception, cette fiction donc me paraissait nécessaire et pertinente.

**Et la réaction?**

Terrible. On eût cru que j'avais moi-même commis les crimes de Merah. Il y eut véritablement une confusion sur la nature du texte publié dans *Le Monde*. Certains y ont vu une tribune pour justifier les actes de Merah, d'autres un appel au meurtre, ou pire encore un exercice de folie. Il ne s'agissait pourtant que d'un monologue intérieur, technique chère à nos modernistes, que personne ne semblait avoir lus. Ainsi va la littérature.

**Et si je vous pose la question à quoi sert la littérature?**

La littérature ne sert à rien. Partis de ce constat pessimiste, elle peut parfois aider à comprendre ou, pour le moins, à tenter de s'approcher d'une forme de vérité. La vérité est toujours sujette à caution, ambiguë, lorsqu'il s'agit d'événements mettant en cause de nombreux protagonistes qui ont chacun leurs raisons, leurs vérités, leurs croyances. La littérature est donc un chemin dans cette forêt de significations et de croyances personnelles. Je crois qu'on peut apprendre de la littérature à se méfier, à ne pas croire tout ce qu'on nous dit. Le statut même d'ambiguïté de la littérature, l'incertain qui la constitue, est le reflet le plus fidèle sans doute de notre monde et de la manière dont nous rêvons nos vies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This interview forms part of a wider project, 'Algeria: Nation and Transnationalism 1988–2010', funded by the Irish Research Council.

## Call to Action and Civic Creativity at the Rochefort Pacific Film Festival\*

According to Michel Degorce-Dumas, the Festival Commissaire of the 'Rochefort Pacifique, Festival de cinéma' (Charente-Maritime, France), 'Le combat c'est l'action et non pas l'invective'.<sup>1</sup> Speaking during the preparation period before the sixth edition of the Rochefort Film Festival, he described the festival as a 'mission de service public en matière culturelle, comme de promotion de la francophonie' that uses public funds from taxpayers in order to create a better understanding between the Pacific, Rochefort and France. For Degorce-Dumas, his engagement with the Pacific through the festival is a continuation of his earlier activism in support of the decolonization of New Caledonia in the seventies and eighties.<sup>2</sup> The annual festival itself is organized over four to five days by a team of local volunteers, some of whom have never been to Oceania. Over the past six years, it has provided an annual forum for local Rochefortais and visitors from around France and the Pacific, as well as filmmakers and artists, to engage visually, dialogically and interpersonally with contemporary issues in the Pacific. The festival features a programme predominantly composed of film screenings followed by public debates in which filmmakers, scholars, civil society representatives, (former) public servants and journalists participate. Roundtables, events in partnership with the town museum and other local venues and organizations, as well as the inclusion of different art forms, complement the film programme.

This article discusses the significance of the Rochefort Festival as a unique site and event in France that focuses on, and supports, the expression of the cultures of indigenous peoples from the Pacific, as well as their socio-political concerns, while also seeking to stimulate dialogue between people from France and Oceania.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the Rochefort festival provides an original case study and a constellation of stories that show an alternative to forms of transnational cultural circulation that are mostly the product or result of consumerism and market imperatives. To articulate and develop these lines of enquiry, I will analyse the principles and values—including economic and symbolic—that are put forward and/or enacted by different cultural or political actors prior to, and during, the creation of this event. In doing so, I will elucidate how the Rochefort festival is both the result and site of calls to action. I will also examine how the festival attempts to create a space in which to address the fundamental question that Stewart Firth has identified as central to a current trend in Pacific Studies scholarship: 'How can we understand the region in ways that will make people better off?'<sup>4</sup> This article is thus not so much concerned with theoretical debates on how festivals function. Rather, it tries to understand how this particular forum interconnects and engages with the plural agencies, cultural struggles and artistic expressions of the indigenous Pacific. It posits that the mobilization incited and enacted by the festival might be aptly described as 'cultural activism', because the actions called for are important to the participants, whether they have immediate or far-reaching consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Degorce-Dumas, personal communication, 28–29 February 2012. Between 2007 and 2012 the festival was called 'Festival du Cinéma des Pays du Pacifique Sud'. The current website is at <http://www.rochefortpacifique.org/> [accessed 21 May 2012].

<sup>2</sup> Degorce-Dumas, interview, Rochefort, 2 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the claims and struggles of indigenous peoples from Oceania, see Natacha Gagné and Marie Salaün, 'Appeals to Indigeneity: Insights from Oceania', *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 18 (2012), 381–98, *passim*. For discussions of festivals in Australia, the Pacific, and France, see *The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples: Spectacle or Politics?*, ed. by Barbara Glowczewski and Rosita Henry (Oxford: Bardwell, 2011), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart Firth, 'Future Directions for Pacific Studies', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15 (2003), 139–48 (p. 140).

By analysing (hi)stories of colonialism and contemporary formations of injustice, or seeking to foster creativity and relationships, as well as networking for collective actions, festival participants engage in axiopraxis, which is the manifested coherence between undertakings and values.<sup>5</sup> This article therefore considers that the showing of films is part of a broader action that the artists are taking; the festival is part of the broader context of that action, while also being the site of calls to action simultaneously aimed at and made by a multiplicity of other 'spect'actors'.<sup>6</sup>

The article is concerned with what Peter Abbs, in his discourse on British education and the arts, has termed the 'qualitative flow of meaning'. Abbs opposes this to 'quantitative measurement', with which 'we have become pathologically obsessed'.<sup>7</sup> Drawing from this polemic, I will explain how festival organizers, participants and attendees are mobilized at and by the event, as well as demonstrate that the analysis of locally driven cultural actions can reveal much about the cultural and civic work undertaken by festivals such as the Rochefort festival. To analyse the Rochefort festival holistically, I will focus, first, on the civic organization of the festival and, second, on its educational programming. I will finally examine the dialogic<sup>8</sup> spectatorship the Rochefort festival creates and for which it provides the space.<sup>9</sup>

The analysis of civic organization, educational programming, and dialogic spectatorship seeks to address, in the context of the Rochefort festival, 'the three c's'—creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggle for social justice)—to which, according to Dwight Conquergood, performance studies is committed.<sup>10</sup> I also seek to participate in what he saw as the radical promise offered by performance studies: the embrace of different forms of knowledge, or, in other words, the weaving together of 'knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print' (and, I would add, images) with 'another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection'.<sup>11</sup> Creativity and relationship-building as a dialogic process is therefore also investigated in this article, which draws on two years of participation and observation, as both a guest speaker (2010, 2011) and an interpreter (in 2010), at the festival, as well as the close study of its archival records (which include the recordings of the debates), media coverage, and interviews with artists, festival organizers and the town mayor.

## Civic Organization

The festival was first initiated to complement the reopening in December 2006 of the Rochefort Musée d'art et d'histoire and to 'bring life' to its rich Pacific collections by giving space to the cultures and the peoples who created them. The festival gained in autonomy from its second edition onwards, but has sought to prolong in new ways the 'maritime relations' Rochefort has had with the Pacific. Although the publicity material has in some instances adopted apolitical or euphemistic phrasings (such as 'maritime relations'), in practice, the content of the festival has aimed to revisit the colonial history of France as well

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<sup>5</sup> I have developed elsewhere the concept of axiopraxis to frame and analyse the interactions between indigenous Pacific cultural practices and events that relay these practices.

<sup>6</sup> Anaïs Goasdoué 'created' this term for the festival publicity material. She did not know about the concept as developed for revolutionary theatre by Augusto Boal (email communication, 29 April 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Abbs, *Against the Flow: Education, the Art and Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> I am using the adjective in its sense of 'relating to dialogue' rather than in the complex acceptations elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin.

<sup>9</sup> Although the festival has dedicated a substantial part of its programme to Indigenous Australians, this article focuses on examples relating to the Franco/pluriphone Pacific.

<sup>10</sup> Dwight Conquergood, 'Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research', *The Drama Review*, 46 (2002), 145–56 (p. 152).

<sup>11</sup> Conquergood, p. 146.

as Rochefort.

In order to define collectively and refine their vision for the festival after its first edition in 2007, the organizers listed the goals, values and principles of the festival in a founding document that responded to the question 'Pour moi, le festival c'est...'. The list emphasizes the logic and logistics of cultural access and exposure through 'making the festival free', opting for cinema as a medium accessible to everyone, creating a space for 'rencontre', 'partage', 'the transversality of shared values between cultures',<sup>12</sup> 'and for dialogue with the filmmakers'.<sup>13</sup> This document sheds light on what the festival organizers are acting for, towards and against. The festival is *for* 'personal enrichment', 'understanding the history of colonized people', 'openness to the other', 'pleasure in working together for a collective project', 'the coming together of different cultures', 'a militant festival', and 'a festival of high quality at all levels whether it be in regard to the films/material/guest speaker/organizing team/us'. The festival works *towards* 'a festival that is conducive to reflections', 'building common values', 'decentring oneself/ourselves' and 'a festive atmosphere'. It works *against* 'exoticism', 'voyeurism', 'forgetting history', 'elitism' and 'Manichaeism'. The document also highlights exactly who the organizers want to involve, work for ('all types of audiences'), and work with ('the museum, local and territorial resources', 'other networks if a coherence can be maintained').<sup>14</sup> This list is significant because it provides a summary of the heterogeneity and simultaneity of calls to action and actions fulfilled for which the festival provides space. It also brings to light the 'co-operative links and exchanges' and the potential 'conflicts that need to be managed' between people who have divergent interests and investments in this collaborative event.<sup>15</sup> Although the festive atmosphere and activist component, for example, can sometimes seem incompatible, they can coexist during the festival, thanks to the length of the event. The list also suggests that the different levels of action which the festival catalyses can partake in the processes that Linda Tuhiwai Smith has identified as crucial for an indigenous research agenda: decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization.<sup>16</sup> The approach of the organizers to logistics and organization is part of the conditions for participating in these processes.

Since its first year, the Rochefort Pacific festival has received its funding exclusively through public institutions. As an entirely free event—except for the Pacific dinner night—the festival stands out in the cinema festival scene, internationally, and, to some extent, in France. According to Degorce-Dumas, the festival also diversifies its sources of public funding so as to keep its independence. Moreover, the festival publicity material states that the event has neither a jury nor a competition but instead intends to provide the space for dialogue.<sup>17</sup> The deliberate organizational choice of the festival to refuse to accept money from entrants, as well as the expectations and dynamics involved in jury-led competitions, is

<sup>12</sup> By 'transversality', the organizers refer to the notion that some values, such as hospitality, courage, or a sense of duty, are shared by different peoples, whatever their 'temporal, geographical or cultural situation' may be. Degorce-Dumas sees the documentaries *Le Gendarme citron*, by Gilles Dagneau (2008) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw6v6QLEc2E> [accessed 28 March 2012]), and *Retour à Canala*, by Letenneur and Mero (2009), as representing the transversality of values, namely, love and respect for the land, shared by French and Kanak peasants or 'agriculteurs'. Email communication, 28 June 2012.

<sup>13</sup> My essay draws out what the festival is acting 'for', 'against' and 'towards' by sorting through what I saw as major themes from this list. The first two subdivisions ('for' and 'towards') could, however, in some instances be conflated, since most of the goals and principles listed are both enacted and ideals that become actualized at different times depending on individuals.

<sup>14</sup> Festival records, November 2007, Rochefort, Festival Commissaire's holdings. All translations are the author's own.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Hautenne, 'Contribution à une sociologie de l'association', *Pensée plurielle*, 7.1 (2004), p. 12, p. 11. <http://www.cairn.info/revue-pensee-plurielle-2004-1-page-11.htm#citation> [accessed 30 December 2012].

<sup>16</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies — Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1999), pp. 116–17.

<sup>17</sup> Kharinne Charov, 'Une caméra qui donne à réfléchir', *Sud-Ouest*, 22 May 2010, 'Sortir' section.



central to its political agenda, which aims to provide maximum exposure to the cultures and struggles of the Pacific. This choice is significant in the light of current scholarship that has identified festivals as ‘cultural commodities’ that have been changed in their format by the commercialization of today’s arts world and corporate mechanisms (such as advertising), and thus are becoming ‘increasingly market-followers’.<sup>18</sup> The Rochefort festival, in contrast, provides a non-market driven and non-corporate organizational model.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the capacity of the Rochefort festival to contribute financially to the economic livelihood of artists and to pay for guests from the Pacific to participate in the festival is also limited. However, following Bruno Hautenne’s definition of ‘social economy’ with reference to Belgium, namely as being oriented towards the members of an organization or the community rather than towards profit,<sup>20</sup> one may argue that the festival contributes to the social economy of creativity in, and on, the Pacific.

The specific approach of the festival to logistics has also allowed the festival to gain national and international renown while being run on a limited budget (from €7200 in 2007 to €13,600 in 2012).<sup>21</sup> Indeed, guests of the festivals, including filmmakers and guest speakers, are offered two choices with regard to accommodation: the committee either pays their hotel room for one night, or offers them to be hosted ‘chez l’habitant’ for the duration of their stay. By incrementally inviting the Rochefortais to host festival guests, the organizers encourage involvement from the local community and aim to stimulate interest in the Pacific in Rochefort not only in the public realm, but also in the domestic sphere. ‘By this means, the festival enters the town visually and intimately,’ explains Degorce-Dumas.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the long-lasting partnerships that the festival has established with the Rochefort Musée d’art et d’histoire and with the town itself—which provides the festival screening venue for free—a purposeful engagement with the town is also manifest in the invitations sent by the organizers to officials and dignitaries.<sup>23</sup> For example, the festival annually invites military officials from the nearby ‘Commandement des écoles de la gendarmerie nationale’, out of consideration for the role undertaken in the Overseas Territories by this French military force with police duties. The organizers’ hope is that what the *gendarmes* observe and experience at the festival might allow them to better understand the populations of the territories to which they may be sent.<sup>24</sup> This kind of civic education is characteristic of the Rochefort Pacific festival, and permeates the whole range of its content

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin Fox Gotham, ‘Theorizing Urban Spectacles: Festivals, Tourism and the Transformation of Urban Space’, *City*, 9 (2005), 225–46 (pp. 240–42). Stanley Waterman, ‘Carnival for Élités? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 22 (1998), 54–74 (p. 55).

<sup>19</sup> This observation by no means suggests that Pacific Indigenous cultural productions should not be part of economic circuits. The scholar Katerina Teaiwa, for example, discusses the regional push in the Pacific of a ‘commercial rationale for bringing culture into the economic realm’, and ‘how certain leaders and regional organizations in the Pacific have recognized culture as the major tool and resource for Pacific Islanders to participate on the global stage’. See ‘Cultural Policy, Festivals, and the Performing Arts in Oceania’ Lecture <http://www.erenlai.com/index.php/en/focus/2011-focus/mapping-and-unmapping-the-pacific> [accessed 26 April 2012].

<sup>20</sup> Bruno Hautenne, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> In 2012, important funding came from the Fonds Pacifique (€15,200) and the SCAC (Service de coopération et d’action culturelle) (€17,000) of the French Embassy in Suva, Fiji. However, this funding was to be used for particular target projects and not to cover the running costs of the festival.

<sup>22</sup> Degorce-Dumas, personal communication, 2 March 2012. See also Kharinne Charov, ‘Bienvenue à la maison’, *Sud-Ouest*, 21 May 2012. <http://www.sudouest.fr/2012/05/21/bienvenue-a-la-maison-721020-4723.php> [accessed 22 May 2012].

<sup>23</sup> Some of them also participate in debates and roundtables.

<sup>24</sup> Festival records and personal communication with Degorce-Dumas. This is not to suggest that there are no Pacific Islanders in the French army. For a much-remarked-upon performance of their powerful presence in the Overseas military forces, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10pDCgWUM2k> and <http://www.lanouvelrepublique.fr/France-Monde/Actualite/24-Heures/n/Contenus/Articles/2011/07/23/Un-militaire-de-Chateauroux-a-dirige-le-haka> [accessed 26 April 2012].



and activities.

## Educational Programming

As *Sud-Ouest* claimed in 2007 at the time of the first edition of the festival, ‘The spirit that prevails at the festival entails discovery, refuting clichés, and openness to the cultures from the Antipodes.’<sup>25</sup> Since that time, the programme has followed this imperative, by inviting recognized speakers and by featuring documentaries or fictions from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, French Polynesia (including films on Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands), Hawaii, Nauru, New Caledonia/Kanaky, Papua New Guinea, the Trobriand Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The organizers clearly aim to represent the diversity of Oceania, although the large number of films on New Caledonia over the years reveals a particular interest in the still-French territory. Each year, the festival programmes between twenty and thirty films, most of which are documentaries; programme content is to be ‘meaningful, relevant and original’.<sup>26</sup> Over the years, the films have covered dozens of themes—some of which have been suggested by *festivaliers*—that included, among others, colonial history, arts festivals, Kanak customs of forgiving, and environmental concerns. As programme director, Anne-Marie Vernet, affirms: ‘We focus a lot more on content than form’.<sup>27</sup>

The educational and democratic intent is also oriented towards the theme of justice, with a sustained focus on the preoccupations of indigenous Oceanian peoples, in order to ‘support the people who have been colonized, not the colonizers.’<sup>28</sup> The festival has, for example, screened several debut and early works by Kanak filmmakers, such as Elie Peu Ngoni’s *Le Cauchemar de Goro*.<sup>29</sup> This documentary, which was programmed at the 2009 festival, is a collaboration between Elie Peu Ngoni and Rheebeu Nuuu, a militant group that opposed the construction of a mine in the South Province of New Caledonia. This film foregrounded the environmental, as well as the human, social, cultural, economic and financial impact of the mine. This work followed the screening of another documentary, *La Promesse tenue*, about the SMSP, the mining company in the Northern Province of New Caledonia. Commissioned by the company itself, the latter film highlighted the participation of Kanak people in a project that aimed to develop economically the territory. The juxtaposition of films from varying points of view shows the willingness of the festival organizers to highlight different perspectives regarding particular, possibly contentious, issues. In the case of the aforementioned films, the festival invited spectators to reflect on economic and environmental issues from varying opposing points of view in the context of the self-determination of Kanak people, thus revealing the pluralistic intention of the event.

Roundtables have also highlighted this polyvocality and been vital parts of the festival’s offerings. Their topics vary every year and have included: the restitution of Maori heads; the New Caledonian Matignon and Nouméa agreements; climate refugees; and the transmission of indigenous languages. In 2011, a roundtable entitled ‘Les Irradiés de la République’ was dedicated to the subjects of nuclear testing and its consequential victims in Polynesia; as the debate went on, it expanded to include testing and its aftermath in Algeria and in Australia. The roundtable, which was organized in collaboration with the AVEN (Association des Vétérans des Essais Nucléaires), was described during the festival opening

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<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, ‘Un événement pacifique’, *Sud-Ouest*, 23 February 2007, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Anne-Marie Vernet, interview, Rochefort, 1 March 2012; personal communications with Degorce-Dumas, 25–30 February 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Vernet, interview.

<sup>28</sup> Degorce-Dumas, interview.

<sup>29</sup> A version subtitled in English is available at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5196383263934467090> [accessed 27 April 2012].

as an event to which people who 'have been wounded in their flesh' would participate. Two AVEN members, along with prominent indigenous Tahitian writer, Chantal Spitz, and cartoonist, Albert Drandov, took part in the debate, which followed a public discussion with Spitz organized in partnership with the multimedia library of the town. With between eighty and a hundred people coming to the event, the library registered its highest attendance thus far.<sup>30</sup> The two events showed the festival's capacity to mobilize *festivalliers* for events in different venues around the town, and to mobilize different actors from the civil society both around and beyond issues related to the Pacific.

The educational vocation of the festival has also been developed through several outreach programmes and partnerships with local secondary schools. Screenings of Dominique Agniel's film *Molière aux marquises* were, for example, organized in schools.<sup>31</sup> Following the vision of one of the festival's Kanak organizers, Emélie Hweillia, to involve the Collège Pierre Loti in the festival, and allow its pupils to familiarize themselves with the Pacific,<sup>32</sup> students from the high school directed and shot a film on the *Rochefortais* vision of the Pacific. In 2011, the festival also developed a partnership with the town's Conservatoire de musique et de danse. This resulted in a choir of sixty children singing the new New Caledonian anthem at the opening of the festival. In the spirit of communal and educational inclusiveness, prior to the event, the festival commissaire spoke to the children several times about New Caledonia.

The educational programming is therefore evidently part of the rationale of the festival, and allows us to renew an understanding of activism that is counter to widely spread ideas equating it with partisanship and contempt. This alternative view of activism configures it as 'offering elaborate structural solutions and suggestions', 'proactive partnerships that are respectful of differences', and 'a capacity to mobilize against injustice'.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on documentaries is also a factor shaping the audience of the festival as one already, or ready to be, 'sensibilisée'.<sup>34</sup>

## Dialogic Spectatorship

Jorge Perez Falconi has usefully coined the term 'festivalscapes' to describe 'the constellation of contrasting trajectories and flows impelled by local, national, and transnational practices and discourses at a festival'. In developing this concept, he foregrounds 'the impossibility of an event being articulated or experienced in the same way by any two people or groups'.<sup>35</sup> One of the most distinctive aspects of the Rochefort festival is that it not only brings together contrasting trajectories, but also makes such trajectories visible by designating the space and the time for dialogue after film screenings and during roundtables. Mindful of the fact that people can always 'misunderstand, distort, or not hear' information, the organizers aim to encourage invited commentators to provide spectators with 'historical or more objective' perspectives on the films.<sup>36</sup> It might be pointed out that people can dismiss or

<sup>30</sup> A documentary on Chantal Spitz was also shot during the festival:

<http://www.francetv.fr/culturebox/rencontre-avec-chantal-spitz-ecrivaine-majeure-de-polynesie-83935> [accessed 1 March 2012].

<sup>31</sup> The documentary uses Molière's play, *L'Avare*, which is performed by the school students and used to explore the subject of the lives and hopes of young people in the Marquesas Islands.

<sup>32</sup> Marie-Christine Babin, organizer, festival audio recordings.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Wallez, 'L'associatif: richesse et désordre', *Pensée plurielle*, 7.1 (2004), p. 145; <http://www.cairn.info/revue-pensee-plurielle-2004-1-page-139.htm> [accessed 30 December 2012].

<sup>34</sup> Festival records, Rochefort, Festival Commissaire's holdings.

<sup>35</sup> Jorge Perez Falconi, 'Space and Festivalscapes', *Platform*, 5.2 (2011), 5–18 (pp. 12–13); <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/documents/pdf/platform/52/4festivalscapes.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2012].

<sup>36</sup> Vernet, interview.

misunderstand even the historical information provided by commentators. What is important, then, is that dialogue gives audience members a chance to test publicly their understanding of issues. As viewers talk together about their reception of the films, in particular, or share their thoughts or experiences more generally, there is opportunity for new opinions to be formed. This is a valuable entry point for the social intervention of artists (for example) who wish to communicate their political and ethical concerns.

By facilitating dialogue between ordinary spectators and the group of scholars, institutional representatives and activists that serve as commentators, the discussion space allows scholars, as bearers of one kind of knowledge, to encounter other kinds of knowledge holders. These encounters enable the kind of direct communication, exchange and intellectual interchange that can be fruitful for both academics and non-academics, for both militants and non-militants, if both sides so intend. Divergent points of view on sensitive topics, such as environmental concerns in New Caledonia, domestic violence in Tahiti, or the issue of representation of indigenous people, have also led to heated debates at the festival: discussions often continue in the corridors of the screening venue and in town. Unsettled spectators sometimes raise disturbing or unresolved issues in subsequent public sessions; such discourse can be viewed as evidence of the successful work of the festival in establishing a positive dialogic environment. The festival thus engenders a potential space to recalibrate the relationship between discordant knowledges in a heterotopia of contact and comparison.

The experience of spectators is therefore one of being both listeners and commentators in their own right, both learners and teachers. Spectators have expressed each year how much they learnt from the festival.<sup>37</sup> An example of spectator-as-commentator occurred in 2008 after the screening of the documentary *Retour à Canala* by Antoine Letenneur and Jean-Noël Mero (2009). A woman whose family was in New Caledonia expressed her hope that the film, which she had found moving and therapeutic, would help to advocate world peace and forgiveness at the same time as encouraging interest in Kanak customs. In response, chair of the discussion, Jean-François Merle, conseiller d'Etat, added that the movie delivered a formidable lesson of civilization and humanity, a lesson that Oceanian peoples were teaching the whole planet.

Christian Biet and Christophe Triaou have written about the theatre critique and practice which have 'delegated the making of meaning to the spectator—hence thought not only as an addressee but as "co-author" of the spectacle—[...] and in so doing have sought to think and configure something akin to *sharing*'. They assert that 'this particular notion of the spectator verifies the evidence that the spectacular event can only be fulfilled through the spectators' appropriation of the spectacle, and through the confrontation of the proposed spectacle with their imaginary'.<sup>38</sup> By inviting spectators to confront the issues and content delivered through the film medium, the Rochefort festival thus provides an alternative consumption ritual to the setting of mainstream cinema, where critical receptivity and sharing are not fostered.

The idea of sharing resonates with the perspectives of Pacific people, as Fany Edwin, a painter of Kanak and Vanuatu descent, explains in her description of 'transversalities' at the festival:

*Transversalities* for me do not only refer to the connections between different disciplines. The mixity of the arts that took place at the festival resulted into a sort of unification. The process of 'sharing' [*l'échange et le partage*] results partly from this transversality; transversality is a word that also evokes movement... 'I

<sup>37</sup> Data sources include festival audio recordings, responses to questionnaires, comments in the festival guest book, emails sent to the organizers and discussions with *festivaliers*. See also the short film on the 2010 festival: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKWa56xiTRw> [accessed 25 May 2012].

<sup>38</sup> Christian Biet and Christophe Triaou, 'La comparution théâtrale: Pour une définition esthétique et politique de la séance', *Tangence* 88 (2008), 29–43 (p. 38).

give you, you give me, or I pass on to you, you pass on to me'. It is a sort of back and forth from one to the other. Transversality also consists in going towards the other, and vice versa.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, French filmmaker, Mehdi Lallaoui, highlighted the importance of the festival as a space where suffering and joy can be shared, before answering questions on his documentary, *Retour sur Ouvéa*, a film celebrated by Kanak speakers at the festival. The festival films, he said,

made us cry, made us laugh, moved us, kept us angry, keep our eyes open. [...] Thank you for trying to make us a bit more intelligent and for trying to keep us together. Difficult films have been shown, but it is not only the beautiful moments that we must share. We must also share all this suffering, because in a certain number of countries, in New Caledonia, it is also in our names that things are done.<sup>40</sup>

Such testimonies lead us to think also about the emotionality of the dialogue as part of the way of working of the festival. Jill Dolan has argued that performances can offer audiences glimpses of hope, 'new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other', and the possibility to articulate a more equitable common future, therefore constituting, if not political, at least emotional transformational experiences.<sup>41</sup> The same reasoning applies at the Rochefort festival, where the dialogue not only provides an opportunity for personal contact and exchanges of knowledge, but also allows for the enactment of a kind of community therapy and of the renewal of a discourse on responsibility. The given examples therefore invite us to see affective or emotional exchange as a performative conductor and current for the flow of dialogue. The points of views and experiences shared by the two artists illustrate how the dialogue and activities around the films consolidate the diverse actions of the festival and of the artists.

### Conclusion: Mobilization, Dissemination, Ramifications

In 2009, journalist and president of the FIFOC (Festival international du Film Océanien), Walles Kotra, reflected upon insularity, which he characterized as a kind of double attachment to one's roots and to the horizons, as well as upon the need for Pacific islanders to reformulate who they were in an increasingly globalizing world. Anne-Marie Vernet added that the Rochefort festival had also wanted to examine the maritime relations that the town had once had with the Pacific while seeking to help in creating 'other kinds of relationships' in future. She expressed the hope that new relationships could be created through partnerships, and that the festival would reverberate in Nouméa and in the Pacific islands, and encourage further dialogue to take place. In 2012, she confidently stated that one of the strengths of the festival lies in its partners.<sup>42</sup> As this article has demonstrated, the Rochefort festival functions simultaneously as a site for potential interventions and as an intervention.

Three examples of the festival's ramifications in the context of other festivals illustrate that what might be seen as a medium-scale event—with a limited budget and attendance (even if this has grown from 1077 spectators in 2007 to 3000 in 2011)—can have far-reaching and long-lasting local, national and international impacts. First, the Rochefort festival established a collaboration with the Australian and New Zealand Film Festival director, Bernard Bories, who was inspired to develop a New Caledonian component at his festival

<sup>39</sup> Fany Edwin, email communication, 30 May 2012. For her artwork, see <http://edwinfany.jimdo.com/> [accessed 30 May 2012].

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTM28oR3qD4&list=UUYMojxDFiGR83FXz6-AjEYA&feature=plcp> [accessed 17 April 2012].

<sup>41</sup> Jill Dolan, 'Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative"', *Theatre Journal*, 53 (2001), 455–79 (pp. 455–56).

<sup>42</sup> Vernet, interview.

after a viewing at Rochefort of Gilles Dagneau's documentary, *Tjibaou, le pardon*. The documentary retraces the path towards a customary ceremony of reconciliation between the family of Kanak independentist leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the family of Tjibaou's assassin, Djubelly Wéa, an Ouvéa militant. Bernard Bories explained that the documentary's resonance with the 'problematics of the "sorry" in Australia' and its depiction of 'a spirit of generosity and sharing' that also characterizes Aboriginal people motivated him to show the documentary at his festival in 2007.<sup>43</sup> The second example concerns Basile Citré, the Mayor of Maré (New Caledonia), who was inspired both to develop a festival in his town after attending the Rochefort festival in 2009 and also to discuss the possibilities of such events with FIFO president, Walles Kotra.<sup>44</sup> This discussion prompted Mayor Citré to attend the FIFO in Tahiti in 2010 before organizing a 'FIFO hors-les-murs' in Maré later that year. The final example of the Rochefort festival's international reach is provided by the Fonds Pacifique and the Suva Service de coopération et d'action culturelle, who have asked Michel Degorce-Dumas to pilot the creation of a festival including Francophone films about Oceania in Fiji, a project that is scheduled to take place in April 2013.

Considering the dialogic engagement and the opportunities for intellectual and political interchange discussed above, along with the *festivaliers'* discussions each year about the urgent need for self-determination and social justice for indigenous people, as well as their inalienable right to independence,<sup>45</sup> it can be concluded that the Rochefort festival is a space in France wherein French and Kanak people, in addition to other peoples from the Pacific, can participate in the causes of indigenous peoples. The examples analysed in this article support the thesis that dialogue as a means of exchange and of engagement is crucial for the work of movements associated with the fight for independence, work that some would call radicalism.<sup>46</sup> I am here making an argument for a kind of radicalism related to the etymology of the term. This, one might say, is a different kind of anti-colonial radicalism to the more militant varieties (for example), though it shares with these the idea of fundamental change for a more just society, and in particular, for a 'new performative cultural politics' involving a 'democratic imagination that redefines the concept of civic participation and public citizenship'.<sup>47</sup> Etymologically speaking, the term 'radicalism' is derived from Latin, meaning 'of or having roots'; the Rochefort festival certainly qualifies as a place of synergy where dialogic and civic creativity emerges from the ground up.

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<sup>43</sup> Bernard Bories, interview, Saint-Tropez, 17 October 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Basile Citré was invited to participate at a roundtable on Mélanésie 2000 as he had played the main role in the 1975 festival's theatrical performance.

<sup>45</sup> Data sources include festival audio recordings, for example the roundtable on 'Melanesia 2000 and Jean-Marie Tjibaou' in 2009, as well as discussions with *festivaliers*.

<sup>46</sup> These are broad issues which certain key festival participants bring into the community feeling. The ideas do not necessarily inform the worldviews or experience of all members of the heterogeneous festival community.

<sup>47</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardina, 'Politics of Possibility: Toward a New Performative Cultural Politics ↔ Acts of Activism', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 11 (2011), 319–27 (p. 322).

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Women's Self-Narrative Across the Francophone World: Women in French Studies Special Issue, 2011.* Edited by NATALIE EDWARDS, CHRISTOPHER HOGARTH, AMY L. HUBBELL, and BENDI BENSON SCHRAMBACH. Texas: University of Texas, 2011. 164 pp. Pb \$14. ISSN: 1077-825X

Like an exhibit in an excellent, but small museum, the editors of the special issue on 'Women's Self-Narrative Across the Francophone World' were obliged to select from the 2010 Women in French conference at Wagner College in New York City only the pieces that succinctly, but forcefully, would offer their readership a new perspective on 'self-narrative' written by women writers in French. Together the four editors have curated a stunning volume that offers a *clin d'œil* into two circumstances related to 'women in French Studies': on the one hand, how women writers are writing themselves and/or womanhood in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and, on the other hand, the state of critical and/or theoretical scholarship on 'women's self-narrative' at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The explicit critical intervention of the editors is minimal, only a short preface and introduction, leaving it up to the peruser of the volume to create his or her experience of the condition and status of women's self-narration in French over the past nine centuries.

One of the important decisions that the editors made, but to which they do not draw the reader's attention, is the fact that they have organized the essays in chronological order according to the births and/or texts of the women writers discussed. As such, in addition to the dynamic array of texts and theoretical considerations surveyed in the articles, the volume showcases both the dominant trends in women's writing and the corpus of academic criticism, which emerges around this writing. In a sense, the volume asks: why do women, "'pseudo'-women' (p. 22), fictional women, and 'auto-fiction[al]' (p. 79) women write?

The first four articles, which span almost eight hundred years of women's self-narrative point to how the autobiographical form is used mostly as a rhetorical device to dissimulate, guide, or reshape the perception that others have of the women in question. Karen J. Taylor, Sarah Nelson, Annabelle M. Rea, and Tama Lea Engelking write superb articles addressing, respectively, the works of Marie de France, married noblewomen behaving as courtesans in the late seventeenth century, 'autobiographies' by peasants and proletarians in the nineteenth century, and the recreation of Renée Vivien by the publishing and academic milieu in the twentieth century. This first set of articles seems to suggest that women wrote to defend themselves, sometimes using writing as a decoy that would preserve their self-image and thus their societal and economical standing.

The remaining six articles engage with a completely different set of problems. Instead of addressing how self-narrative helps a writer to defend herself to an accusing public, the analysis delves into the more intimate narratives of women revealing—either directly or in more suppressed ways—their most intimate biographical details, and the fears, desires, and vulgarities associated with them. In addition, this second set of articles devoted to twentieth- and twenty-first-century texts overwhelmingly shows that women write as a mode of self-expression, as a means of thinking through, revealing, or healing. Martine Fernandes looks at the relationship between a writer's first novel and rage in Bernadette Ferreira's *Sur un air de Fado* (2005) and Annie Ernaux's *Les Armoires vides* (1974); Adrienne Angelo identifies how the verbal is capable of expressing the sufferings of the body in Nina Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005); Eloise Brezault engages the polemical dialogue generated around both the alleged fact and trope of cannibalism as regards the English translation of Léonora Miano's novel *L'Intérieur de la nuit* (2005); Renée Larrier argues that



Fabienne Kanor's work in *Humus* (2006) responds to the lack of 'representations of enslaved women by their descendants' (p. 104); Anna Rocca discusses the relationship between 'self-love' (p. 117) and the narration of 'truth' in Assia Djebar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007); and finally, Karen McPherson's article examines the desire to no longer be oneself, translation, and another's language in Nicole Brossard's *La Capture du sombre* (2007). The last text is an interview between Thérèse Moreau and Christine Reno, which underscores how writing, translation, and politics interface to transfer culturally the lived experiences of women.

It is in the apparent schism between the first set of articles and the second that the volume itself performs its implicit curatorial intention. It silently confronts its reader with a conundrum, one that revolves around two editorial circumstances. First, in the second set of articles that deals with mostly recent publications, all but one of the writers discussed are what the publishing industry and most readers consider to be alternatively or simultaneously Francophone, postcolonial, or immigrant writers. Second, the volume includes no article dedicated to the work of writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, or Hélène Cixous, although a couple of articles do briefly mention their work. What are we to make of the overwhelming presence of writers whose work contributes to the body identified as postcolonial literature, and emerging from 'across the Francophone world', as the title of the volume suggests? What are we to read into the absence of critical discussions devoted to the work of the canonical writers of French feminist literary and theoretical considerations? Are these two circumstances related?

One may wonder, then, if the absence of articles on writers such as Cixous has to do with the fact that formally the self-narrative of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has almost literally incorporated 'écriture féminine'. The interest is less in capturing the alternative modes of embodied pleasure associated with a non-masculine form of writing, but rather re-directing such narrative towards the articulation of extreme suffering. In other words, what is primarily at stake in the first set of articles is the protection of self, while the present-day voices (both writerly and scholarly), regardless of whether or not they are associated with a 'Francophone' voice, reflect the expression of self, and at times the healing of self. Annie Ernaux's response (*Le Monde*, 10 September 2012) to Richard Millet's most recent publication on the interface between literature and mass-murderous real-life events, invites reflection. Has the work of women writers and feminist and/or post/colonial scholars in the past decades operated a veritable intervention as regards more general literary production in French? Faced with what seems the onslaught of contemporary modernity's struggle to process heavily mediatized violence, the literary self-narratives of women focus on how self-narration works through what it means, using McPherson's commentary on Brossard's work, to have 'internalized the darkness' (p. 131). In the *Women in French* volume, self-narrative starts as a decoy that shields; in its more recent iterations it serves as a thread that traces a person into and back out of the labyrinth of the self's suffering. Given the current polemics around Millet's essay and Ernaux's response, might we then again see a return to feminine 'life-writing' (p. 23) as defence?

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*Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema.* By FLORENCE MARTIN. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 271 pp. Pb £16.99. ISBN: 978-0-253-35668-0

In this noteworthy exploration of Maghrebi women's cinematography in the postcolonial era, Florence Martin sheds light on previously under-examined film directors, detailing in particular the specific 'novelty of [their] cinema' (p. 36) and 'how [they] have developed original, innovative filmic languages' (p. 1). With a focus on 'women-made images of women' (p. 2), Martin limits her filmic corpus to lesser-known directors and films, including Raja Amari (Tunisia), Nadia El Fani (Tunisia), and Yasmine Kassari (Morocco), with the notable exception of cinematic pioneers Assia Djebar (Algeria) and Farida Benlyazid (Morocco). While acknowledging the ambiguity surrounding the terms Maghreb and Maghrebi, the author insists upon the region's shared transnational affiliations (linguistic, historical, religious, and geographical), arguing that the transcultural positioning of the film directors in question enables them to forge new and unique modes of challenging two dominant patriarchal frameworks: 'a global one derived from Hollywood and the traditional regional male one' (p. 2). Martin's research thus analyses Maghrebi women's cinema from a transnational feminist perspective, with particular recourse to Maghrebi feminists such as Marnia Lazreg and Fatima Mernissi, and she highlights her research aims as follows: first, to consider Maghrebi women's cinema 'as a cohesive yet diverse body of work'; second, to learn from their art rather than doggedly applying a Western theoretical template to their films; and, finally, to showcase Maghrebi cinema to the world (p. 2).

The study succeeds in meeting its objectives, eliciting via an approximately chronological structure the innovative features—what Martin terms the 'accented' aspects (p. 20)—of little-known Maghrebi films, thus opening them up to a wider cinematographic audience. The written text is accompanied by still images from films such as Yasmine Kassari's *L'Enfant endormi* (2004) and Selma Baccar's *Fleur d'oubli* (2005) as well as a table charting the political and cinematic chronology of the Maghreb. Indeed, where the monograph excels is perhaps in its ability to provide a lucid and detailed socio-historical and political overview of women's cinematographic production from independence to the present day. Such a thorough synopsis, while not aiming to be exhaustive, is a welcome addition to an under-developed area of study, especially as Maghrebi women's cinema continues to develop apace. Martin's filmic analyses are likewise consistently thought-provoking, providing in-depth descriptions of scenes that reveal the myriad 'screens' at stake in their production and reception. In particular, she builds upon Marcos Novak's notion of 'transvergence' (p. 22), itself linked to Novak's key concept of 'transmodernity' (p. 15), in order to reveal the nuances and aporias inherent to Maghrebi women's cinematic enterprise. If, for Novak, transvergence speaks to 'projects that no longer progress along expected lines of development, but that are instead jumping across diverse and initially mutually alien territories' (p. 23), then Martin reveals her filmic corpus to be part of a wider cinema of transvergence.

Echoing the transvergent characteristics of the films, Martin's own theoretical approach follows a 'necessarily meandering critical path' (p. 12) that is at times, perhaps, a little too meandering. The introduction is replete with methodological caveats to the extent that it sometimes feels overloaded with theoretical frameworks despite the author's best intentions to circumvent prescriptive methodologies. From Novak to Foucault through to Bhabha and Shahrazad, the reader is at times left with a sense of disorientation that hampers rather than encourages an engagement with the films. Certain caveats return to by now well-rehearsed arguments (for instance, that the prefix in the term postcolonial risks obfuscating the colonial past), and Martin's criticism of postcolonial and poststructuralist theory—what she terms 'poco' and 'pomo' (p. 12)—can seem outdated or undeserved. Following her criticism of the Anglophone framework of postcolonialism and the Francophone insistence upon indigenous cultural production, for example, both of which are said to 'wedge the critic

in an unsustainable discursive practice that revolves, seemingly interminably, around a persistent “colonial” ghost’ (p. 12), Martin then turns to Bhabha’s concept of ‘liminality’ as a way out of the ‘hierarchies of discourse (European, Northern American, religious, political, or otherwise)’ (p. 14). Such an approach disregards the fact that liminality has long been a significant component of postcolonial theory, rather than a solution to its perceived shortcomings, as well as overlooking the fact that liminality has itself been the subject of critique in recent years. In other words, Bhabha’s model does not necessarily offer an unproblematic solution to the theoretical binds that Martin rightly lays bare.

Nonetheless, despite what can appear at times as a destabilizing foray into the domain of transvergent theory, Martin’s monograph is a fascinating and valuable contribution to Maghrebi women’s cinema. Consistently well-researched and detail-oriented, it will be of interest to students and academics working in the fields of cultural studies, cinematography, and Francophone postcolonial studies.

LUCY BRISLEY  
THE QUEEN’S COLLEGE, OXFORD

*Psychoanalysis in French and Francophone Literature and Film*. Edited by JAMES DAY. French Literature Series vol. XXXVIII. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. 256 pp. Pb €58. ISBN: 978-94-012-0759-1

This is a collection of papers from the 2010 French Literature Conference held at the University of South Carolina, which explores the questions of whether there is a distinctively French form of psychoanalysis, whether psychoanalysis is necessarily committed to a universal model of the human psyche (i.e. whether it is relevant to non-metropolitan Francophone societies), whether it has a future as a means of illuminating literature and film, and how it relates to discourses of science, ethnography, and religion. The fourteen articles, which are clearly summarized in Paul Allen Miller’s useful Introduction, therefore cover an extremely wide range of topics (wider than the volume title suggests) including five literary texts, of which two are by Calixthe Beyala; there are two further pieces on Fanon and ‘ethnopsychanalyse’.

It is no doubt symptomatic of the uncertain status of psychoanalysis in critical discourse, after the heyday of Lacanianism, that the level of intellectual sophistication of the fourteen articles varies considerably. The volume opens with a magisterial piece by analyst and artist Bracha Ettinger, which proceeds not by argument but by a sequence of quasi-incantatory assertions and exhortations, followed by a brilliant discussion of Lacan’s topologies and reading of Duras’s *Moderato Cantabile* by veteran Lacanian Ellie Ragland. Thereafter the standard is somewhat uneven. Of the four pieces on Francophone subjects, the first, and worst, is Jack Taylor’s discussion of the relation between phenomenology and psychoanalysis in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*; this is an important and complex question, and Taylor rightly points to the tendency in existing criticism of Fanon to concentrate either on one or the other. But he fails to engage with the issues in any depth and his conclusion—that Fanon’s originality with regard to both Sartre and Freud is to introduce the racial dimension—is itself highly unoriginal. He ignores not only all French-language work on Fanon, but also most of the considerable body of English-language analysis of the status of psychoanalysis in Fanon’s thought (for example, Bhabha, Gates, Macey, Vergès, McCulloch,

myself). There are some useful comments on Merleau-Ponty, but otherwise this is a disappointing treatment—simplistic, ineptly expressed and sloppily presented—of one of the key figures of postcolonial psychoanalysis.

Roxanna Curto's reading of Beyala's *Femme nue, femme noire* as a political attack on patriarchy is lucid and cogent, but it does not have a great deal to do with psychoanalysis. Apart from identifying Senghor as the narrator's symbolic father, and a rather reductive use of the family romance (which Curto does not appear to understand fully), the use of psychoanalysis here consists merely in equating Freudianism with patriarchy. The descriptions of sexuality, for instance, make no reference to the unconscious. The validity of the Freudian model of patriarchy for African societies is also simply assumed. However, if one edits out the attempts to make it relevant to psychoanalysis, this is a very well-argued presentation of the novel as not simply pornographic but a radical construction of female sexuality outside the norms of patriarchy.

Donald R. Wehrs's article is also on Beyala—*Tu t'appelleras Tango*—but, in contrast, mobilizes an extremely high-powered theoretical framework for its reading of the novel. He starts with Kristeva's reworking of the Lacanian symbolic to produce her concept of the semiotic, and later brings in Melanie Klein's 'bad breast' and, briefly, Žižek on subject-formation and fantasy. The resulting psychoanalytic construction is juxtaposed with Levinas's ethical conception of the Other and, as though that were not enough, with recent developments in neuroscience. The result of all this is to overcome—potentially—the separation between language and the body, and between affectivity and ethics. It is a powerful argument, and it generates an eloquent reading of the novel. It does, however, make considerable demands on the reader, since it relies a great deal on footnote references to the theoretical work in question rather than explicating it fully in the text.

Esfandiar Esfandi's study of ethnopsychanalysis in France gives a historical account of its emergence via a debate with orthodox Freudianism over the status of culture in psychology, followed by a description of the therapeutic practice of the first centre for ethnopsychiatry at the Avicenne hospital in Bobigny, which consists mainly in enlarging the one-to-one relationship of therapist and patient to include interpreters and members of the patient's community.

These four articles clearly do not provide a representative picture of work in Francophone postcolonial psychoanalytic discourse as a whole, but one can hardly expect that to come out of a conference covering such an eclectic range of topics. Apart from the two papers on Beyala it has nothing to offer specifically on Francophone literature, but the book as a whole provides a useful overview of current psychoanalytic approaches to French literature, film and culture.

CELIA BRITTON  
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*Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form*. Edited by PATRICK CROWLEY and JANE HIDDLESTON. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011 (Francophone Postcolonial Studies, New Series, Vol. 2). 279 pp. Hb £65. ISBN: 978-1-84631-745-3

Postcolonial theory is known for its focus on the ideological meaning of literary works. Texts are often read as testimonies or political statements and interpreted as the products of a given socio-historical context while their literary qualities and aesthetic assessment remain

largely neglected. The volume edited by Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston aims to fill this gap by drawing critical attention to the form of postcolonial texts which play a crucial role not only in the creation of a novel aesthetics but also in the subtle ways in which postcolonial writers engage with the political. The authors promote a shift from the thematic and politic approaches which currently prevail in the study of postcolonial literatures to an exploration of aesthetic perspectives which may offer several advantages. For example, a focus on the form rather than on the political message would take into account individual literary work which is too often misinterpreted for the expression of a wider community. Exploring the strategies of writers who borrow from Western genres, return to traditional oral forms or create new genres would allow a better appreciation of the great diversity of postcolonial poetic practices and literary techniques. The eclecticism of the essays contained in the volume may echo this variety; however, the contributors share a common interest in the specific ways of literature to engage with the world.

Divided into three parts, the volume maintains a consistent focus on the literary character of postcolonial texts, a focus which acts as a guiding principle and provides a coherent framework for the essays. The first part, 'Literary Form and the Politics of Interpretation', includes contributions by Françoise Lionnet, Matthias Zach, Nicholas Harrison, and Eva Sansavior whose essays address the issue of interpretative challenge linked to the use of specific literary forms in the works of authors as diverse as Évariste Parny, Ananda Devi, Goethe, Edward Said, Conrad, and Maryse Condé. The second section, 'Writing Subjectivity, Crossing Borders', is composed of five contributions by Bart Moore-Gilbert, Clarisse Zimra, Patrick Crowley, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Louise Hardwick who focus on writers' experimentation with various literary forms such as the autobiography, life writing, the 'feminine voice', and the childhood narrative. They tackle the ways in which writers including Assia Djebar, Kateb Yacine, Chamoiseau and Confiant play with the conventions of genres in order to express a postcolonial subjectivity and escape determination. Finally, part three is dedicated to 'Reinventing the Legacies of Genre'. Martin Mégevand, Elleke Boehmer, Andy Stafford, and Zoë Norridge explore the manipulation of established genres such as the Greek and French tragedy reshaped by Césaire and Yacine, the realist novel adopted by Coetzee, the short story reinterpreted by Camus and Dib, and a range of themes and structures used in Rwandan genocide narratives.

The striking heterogeneity of the approaches and themes, genres and authors discussed in the volume are representative of the variety that characterizes postcolonial poetics. While the reader may feel that the three categories proposed to divide the volume are somewhat random or overlapping, the contributors are successful in their attempt to promote a nuanced understanding of different types of postcolonial writing strategies. As Dominique Combe points out in his preface, the aim of the authors to reconcile postcolonial criticism with a reflection about genre and style creates ineluctably new links between postcolonialism and postmodernism, two movements which originate in the 'décomposition des grands Récits' (Lyotard) and share an aesthetic based on blurring or transgressing generic boundaries. Yet the volume's main strength resides in its ability to explore postcolonial literatures in French and English side by side, avoiding the pitfall of a rigid, strictly comparative perspective which would perpetrate former colonial divides and flatten important specificities.

CHRISTINA HORVATH  
OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

*The Fiction of J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Postcolonial Reading.* By BRONWEN MARTIN. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012. 193 pp. Pb £35. ISBN: 978-3-0343-0162-6

Positioning himself squarely within the tradition of 'la littérature engagée', J.M.G. Le Clézio distances himself from forms of writing that eschew, in his terms, 'la communication ouverte' (p. 29) and thereby 'refuse the world'. His most recent manifestation of this will to assert the ethical function of literature came with his trenchant dismissal of Richard Millet's controversial 'Eloge littéraire d'Anders Breivik' in the summer of 2012.

In her carefully researched monograph, Bronwen Martin documents the emergence of the writer-radical, from his experience as an observer of bloody social conflict in Mexico (1967–68), through to his endorsement of the manifesto 'Pour une littérature-monde en français' (2007) and his co-founding of the 'Fondation pour l'interculturel et la paix' (Mauritius, 2009). Le Clézio's engagement with his century is inseparable from excavation of the West's colonial past. The twinning effect produced is deftly explored by Martin in the close textual reading of *Révolutions* (2003) which forms the core of her timely monograph. For Le Clézio, reflecting in a *Magazine Littéraire* interview of the same year, it is 'impossible de concevoir la réalité de notre temps sans cette profondeur que donne le passé' (p. 83). Thus the discovery of Amerindian texts during his stay in Mexico, for example, profoundly influenced his cultural perspective.

*Révolutions* offers a complex textual matrix in which are imbricated family memory of a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century colonial narrative centred on Mauritius, and a duty to register twentieth-century French colonial expropriation, specifically in relation to Algeria. If to see with ancestors' eyes—'mes ancêtres m'habitaient' (p. 175), Le Clézio senses—is central to his endeavour to read the present, Martin attends meticulously to reconstructing the historical contexts that Le Clézio sees as constituting an intolerable Western legacy. 'Vomir ce qu'on a avalé au cours des siècles' (p. 34), one of his protagonists protests, while Le Clézio himself wrestles with the avatars of Western normativity: anthropocentrism; a humanism characterised by narrow ethnocentrism; and, in the specific case of French literature, an overly long 'pacte exclusif avec la nation' (p. 158), to borrow from the terminology used in 'Pour une littérature-monde en français'. More broadly, as Le Clézio complains, contemporary society stands as 'la plus conformiste que l'homme ait jamais connue' (p. 117).

Martin constructs a range of suggestive contexts within which to assess and understand Le Clézio's project. Her inclusion of instructive borrowings from Nancy, Coetzee, Memmi, and Ricoeur, among others, helps draw out its resonance. Sartre, Césaire, and Glissant feature centrally in Martin's argument, nowhere more tellingly than in the observation made by the last of these figures that, in pursuit not of charity or compassion but of 'une lucidité nouvelle', 'chacun de nous a besoin de la mémoire de l'autre' (p. 135). If the Glissantian notion of the rhizomatic character of relationality is pivotal to Martin's argument, it finds exemplification in the textual imbrications that make up *Révolutions*. Such cultural interwovenness is fundamental, Martin suggests, to Le Clézio's articulation of a utopian vision. Relationality, moreover, also works beyond the human, as Le Clézio's celebration of the interconnectedness of the mineral, vegetal, and animal worlds (present, typically, in oral Mauritian Creole culture) demonstrates.

Martin draws out Le Clézio's disaffection with French republican values: historically, these are exposed for their narrowness, in the continuing legitimization of slavery in the First Republic, in the defence of the colonial mission in subsequent Republics, and in his characterization of 1950s Nice as 'cette ville bourgeoise et xénophobe' (p. 94). The critique of the Western legacy extends to the evocation of life for immigrant populations in 1960s London which is also woven into *Révolutions*.

While *Révolutions* provides secure underpinning for the postcolonial inflection of

Martin's enquiry, the judicious choice of earlier texts in Part I of her monograph (*Le Procès-Verbal*, *Le Livre des fuites*, *Désert*, and *Poisson d'or*) allows Martin to demonstrate how issues of cultural identity point to what she characterizes as the utopian strand in her author's work. More generally, *The Fiction of J.M.G. Le Clézio* conveys the energetic, restless questing of a novelist which is defiantly captured in his memorable exhortation in *Les Géants* (1973): 'Libérez-vous! Cessez d'être étudiés! Nul n'a droit de connaître l'homme' (p. 131).

EDWARD J. HUGHES  
QUEEN MARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

*Screening Integration: Recasting Maghrebi Immigration in Contemporary France.* Edited by SYLVIE DURMELAT and VINAY SWAMY. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. 250 pp. Pb £23.99. ISBN: 978-0-8032-2825-2

Referencing an impressive range of films, this collection of twelve essays deals with a number of diverse topics related to the depiction of Maghrebi immigration in contemporary cinema and are brought together in this edited volume to present a fascinating and coherent whole. As the editors point out in their well-argued and richly illustrated introduction, the very title of the volume hints at the complexities of meaning that must be considered in relation to this topic. Accordingly the authors consider the screen as censure, as depiction, as source for re-evaluation, as a means of inclusion and exclusion, but also in terms of ideology. A particularly persuasive part of this discussion—and one which resonates across a number of the essays—is not simply restricted to the ways in which Maghrebi-French filmmaking seeks to question or undermine mainstream or French Republican ideology, but also considers the very ways in which this cinema ends up rehearsing certain fixed positions.

Of course, it is impossible to speak of Maghrebi-French filmmaking or the experiences of immigration that are depicted without discussing the terms at stake: how to name and how to classify both the films and populations involved remains a source of debate. In addition to the introduction's useful synthesis of current opinions, the opening chapter by Alec Hargreaves proposes a different means of approaching the corpus. Advocating the 'glocal' (p. 27), Hargreaves examines the way in which the films reunite both local spaces and global influences, thereby moving beyond questions of the national, and avoiding the restrictions of the France-Maghreb binary. Michel Cadé's essay on the representation of Islam on screen explores another complexity of the France-Maghreb polarity, arguing that the relative scarcity of images of Islam is a direct consequence of a desire for integration and the director's perception of what is required. Will Higbee and Hakim Abderrezak each similarly problematize the unidirectionality of the French-Maghrebi relationship through their discussions of journeys, belonging and return, enabling cross-cultural movement, and overturning the clichéd imagery and discourses that are often associated with it.

Not only are such forms unpicked by the essays in this volume but the very processes by which they are constituted are also brought to the fore. The interventions by Sylvie Durmelat and Mireille Rosello interrogate the connections between film and memory, exploring how films may contribute to national or historical narratives and how, indeed, they may actually come to create new memories or expose the practice by which these very memories are formed. The essays written by Carrie Tarr and Geneviève Sellier focus on questions related to nation building and the construction of national identity as seen and explored through the lens of the education system. Drawing upon *Entre les murs* (2008) and *La*

*Journée de la jupe* (2009) respectively, Tarr and Sellier each suggest in which ways the classroom may act as a privileged site in which to consider questions of universalism and integration and to bring them into dialogue with each other. Sites and spaces form the focus for the contributions offered by Patricia Geesey and Darren Waldron. Geesey discusses gendered space whereas Waldron opens up this discussion to consider the transgender and what is produced through the queering of questions of ethnicity. Depictions of masculinity are at the heart of the essay jointly authored by Murray Pratt and Denis M. Provencher in which depictions of young Maghrebi male characters by the actor Sami Bouajila are seen to offer new readings of the figure of the young Arab male in France. The final contribution also considers how issues surrounding identity formation and integration may be reconfigured. Focusing on the oeuvre of Malik Chibane, Swamy analyses the evolution that the films attest to and how their narratives have become central to the ways in which contemporary France is seen and sees itself.

Examining a wide range of issues related to representations of Islam, education, sexuality, displacement, and space, the essays nonetheless all speak to the volume's overall interest in the difficulties and questions inherent to the films under discussion, and, indeed, to film-making more generally. As such, the volume explores through a variety of contexts the recurrent tensions between commercial, industrial, or national requirements and the desire of filmmakers to transmit or to portray certain ideas or images, as well as raising the issue of the successfulness or otherwise of their projects. The specificities of the individual films and filmmakers engaged with are preserved by the different contributions, but the volume, as well as the individual essays, gesture towards wider conclusions. In a sense, the 21 beautiful black and white stills included in the centre of the book offer us a visual corollary to this. Bringing the filmic images back to the very heart of the discussion, these stills offer the reader a visual synthesis of the diversity of the material, spanning generations, countries, and customs, but also of the resonances that unite them. Durmelat and Swamy's fascinating volume echoes this move, providing us with in-depth and challenging discussions of individual films all while considering the impact of this for contemporary France more widely.

HANNAH KILDUFF  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

*Tours et détours: Le mythe de Babel dans la littérature contemporaine*. By CATHERINE KHORDOC. Ottawa: Les Presses de l'université d'Ottawa, 2012. 272 pp. Pb \$29.95 CAD. ISBN: 978-2-7603-0778-0

*Tours et détours: Le mythe de Babel dans la littérature contemporaine*, is the outcome of a long-term project started in Toronto, built upon in Neuchâtel and Limerick, and completed in Ottawa. Originally a doctoral thesis, no doubt the rich theoretical apparatus and references supporting its analysis and the excellent index owe something to this first avatar, some parts having already been published as articles or chapters in books. It has seen one early exploration, on Raymond Queneau's *Les Fleurs bleues* (1965), fall by the wayside, and a new track picked up: Hédi Bouraoui's *Ainsi parle la tour CN*, published in 1999, the same year as the submission of the original thesis. A nomadic project of long standing, its staging posts, changes of direction, and alterations underscore its very subject.



The meanderings of the book's genesis may owe something to the maze of meanings in which to lose one's bearings, as alluded to in the piece on Semprún (p. 85). Though the labyrinth trope attached to Babel is not explored here, a wealth of other notions is examined in the first chapter which also explains the choice of topic and texts. The book's epigraph (Genesis 11, 1–9) serves as a useful *aide-mémoire* for the numerous interpretations of the myth. The author proceeds to outline these and expand on them: from the various meanings of the word itself, to variations on the topoi of language, stressing the sense of incompleteness surrounding Babel as an interrupted project that invites on-going interpretations and addenda. Khordoc shows how each of the five books under consideration, published within the same decade (1989–99), demonstrates the currency and enduring power of Babel as a 'literary myth', defining the notion after Albouy and White: a *literary* myth going beyond an explicit reference to the original, re-interpretating it, and adding new relevant constructs.

Chapter two focuses on Jorge Semprún's *L'Algarabie* (1981), set in Paris, written in French, its narrator Spanish, and oscillating between Spanish and French references and beyond. Deemed a 'symbole par excellence du post-modernisme' (p. 57), yet another re-working of the myth according to Khordoc, she argues that the book's main topic is translation, a standard Babelian motif. This chapter presents a sensitive and intelligent close reading analysis, systematic in its disentangling of the various components of Babel that are illustrated in the text. In the third chapter, Francine Noël's *Babel, prise deux, ou Nous avons tous découvert l'Amérique* (1990) is referred to under its full original title, understandably, given the chronology of Khordoc's project and the fact that its very title made this novel a self-evident subject for analysis, but it would have been interesting to find out why Noël decided to forego the explicit reference to Babel in later editions. Notwithstanding her focus on the myth, Khordoc's approach is not a reductionist one, revealing rich readings of a complex narrative. The remark by one of Noël's two narrators, 'c'est ma vie: la ville et la quête douloureuse de la parole', is one which the narrators of the other books under consideration might have made themselves. Noël here gives voice to some of the original residents of Babel, as opposed to those who come to it as a refuge which they help build. In Bouraoui's *Ainsi parle la tour CN*, examined in the fourth chapter, it is the Babelian symbol of the tower that broadcasts its observations and conclusions in a variety of registers, albeit in a single language. Endowed with a voice that echoes the recurring verse in the Books of the Prophets in the Bible, 'Thus Spake the Lord', it prophesizes the advent of a new transculturalism—yet another (positive) avatar of Babel. Of all the narratives under scrutiny, Monique Bosco's *Babel Opera* (1989) is the only one that dwells on the thematic of dispersion and exile, as Khordoc points out in her fifth chapter, while demonstrating that the hybridity of the text itself is another characteristic of expressing the transcultural, which in her view redeems the negative aspects of Babel. Finally, Glissant's interpretation of *créolité* as a response to diversities is explored in Ernest Pépin's *Tambour-Babel* (1996), a novel which also fuses genres and offers yet another take on the Babelian theme with its single unifying voice—and language—that of the drum.

Khordoc underlines the fact that the narratives that illustrate her chosen theme are written by authors originating from the four corners of the world (p. 230), French not necessarily their first or sole language. They prove especially apt at making sense of the migrations, constructs, and language shifts that characterize the contemporary world—Canada in particular, especially its metropolises, Khordoc having noted in her Introduction that Babel is intrinsically linked to the building of the city. As she also observes, her chosen topic is neither nationally-bounded, nor need it be language-bounded; nor does it attach to a specific genre or medium. Indeed, the selected texts cross boundaries of genre and/or medium: painting, drawing, music, prayer, historiography, and plurality of narrative voices (p. 226).

This exploration of Babel as a literary myth mirrors the very epistemological shift that

has occurred in the field of 'French' Literary Studies as a whole: not just transnational but also transcultural, aware of the processes of displacement, dislocation, dispersion, and of the interactions that have led to the emergence of new realities. Khordoc had cited Zumthor as an epigraph to her first chapter: 'Babel possède ainsi une double existence: son histoire a été dite, mais elle continue à se faire' (p. 23), a notion that her work richly illustrates. Her last epigraph, quoting Barthes, is an equally fitting match for her Conclusion in which she chooses to dwell on a contemporary reworking of Babel as a utopian representation of transculture, when language confusion is no longer a curse but a blessing, when language cohabitation fosters *jouissance*: 'c'est Babel heureuse' (p. 225).

GABRIELLE PARKER  
MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

*La France noire: Présences et migrations des Afriques, des Amériques et de l'océan Indien en France*. Edited by PASCAL BLANCHARD, SYLVIE CHALAYE, ERIC DEROO, DOMINIC THOMAS and MAHAMET TIMERA. Paris: La Découverte, 2012. 263 pp. Pb €19,50. ISBN: 978-2-7071-7470-3

The latest publication of the Association pour la Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique Contemporaine (ACHAC), *La France noire*, originally appeared as a 360-page glazed-paper *beau-livre* displaying more than 700 images. It was published in 2011, thus coinciding with the ten-year anniversary of the Taubira Law, which recognizes the Atlantic slave trade and slavery as a crime against humanity, and one year after the fifty-year anniversary of the African independences. The 2012 paperback version of *La France noire* comes without the visual illustrations but retains all the written contributions of the original volume.

One might wonder whether there was a need for this book after *Le Paris noir*, published in 2001, and also edited by Pascal Blanchard and Eric Deroo. This richly-illustrated book—which displayed many of the pictures reprinted in *La France noire*—seemed to anticipate Paul Gilroy's reference work *Black Britain*, published six years later. At first sight, the tables of contents of the two French books seem to mirror each other, from the invention of Black 'savagery' in the colonial context to the mobilization of the *force noire* in World War I; from popular Black shows in the 1920s and the rise of the negritude movement, to the *sans-papiers* and the recognition of cultural *métissage* in the late twentieth century. Among the 'classical' remarks regarding the Black presence in France, in *La France noire*, Daniel Soutif and Tyler Stovall recall France's long-lasting contradiction of exceptional liberty (especially for Black Americans) on the one hand and actual colonial oppression on the other, during the inter-war years. More surprising perhaps is the German tolerance towards (non-American) Blacks in Paris under the Occupation, pointed out by Nicolas Bancel.

While *Le Paris noir* was written by only three contributors and, logically, focused solely on the French capital, *La France noire* features more detailed contributions from sixteen major scholars (among whom Achille Mbembe, Elikia M'Bokolo, François Durpaire, and Françoise Vergès). Marcel Dorigny's Introduction on the Black presence in France since 1685 is also a notable addition (*Le Paris noir* started in 1878). What makes *La France noire* unique, however, is its topicality. *Le Paris noir* finished on an optimistic note, hoping that the 'Black-Blanc-Beur' generation of the 1998 world cup victory would announce the end of the Black Paris phenomenon (as an outmoded representation of difference) and the dawn of a mosaic

city open to the world. This was before Jean-Marie Le Pen's accession to the second round of the 2002 Presidential election; the 2005 riots in the *banlieues*; the debate around the Mekachera law on the positive role of French colonization; Sarkozy's presidency with his famous 2007 Dakar speech urging the African man to 'enter history'; and the 'national identity' debate (2009–10), which many used to point out the failing 'integration' of 'foreign' populations in the French Republic. The now losing national football team came to be lampooned as 'Black-Black-Black', leading to the 'quota scandal' of 2011, when a leak exposed that senior members of the French Football Federation suggested the instauration of quotas to limit the number of bi-national players in French training centres (for fear they might eventually choose to play for their second country), especially targeting Black players.

Meanwhile, the academic study of the Black presence in France has evolved on French soil, despite the ongoing ban on ethnic statistics, in the name of a colour-blind French Republic. Pap Ndiaye's groundbreaking work *La Condition noire: essai sur une minorité française*, published in 2008, was the first step towards the foundation of French Black studies. Cleverly avoiding a communitarianist approach, Ndiaye set about studying the French Black 'minority', based on the common social experience of discrimination, rather than a supposedly homogenous Black 'community', bearing in mind that French citizens of Black complexion come from very different cultural backgrounds. Ndiaye contributes the last chapter of *La France noire*, which sums up all the issues that have arisen in the ten-year gap that separates *La France noire* from *Le Paris noir*. It constitutes one of the most interesting sections in the volume, showing the contradiction at the root of the French Republican model: the invisibility of 'visible minorities', required by the French definition of 'laïcité', makes it impossible to study the discriminations that these minorities experience.

On the other hand, Ndiaye remarks that the issue of what he calls a 'double identity' (p. 228)—being French *and* Black—is discussed more today than it has ever been in France. Representative associations are becoming more and more vocal and, even though the national representation of diversity in economical and political realms remains an issue—with the notable exception of the accession to important government positions of Rama Yade (2007) and Christiane Taubira (2012)—the arrival of two West Indian anchors on national TV news programmes (Audrey Pulvar on France 3 in 2004 and Harry Roselmack on TF1 in 2006), and the rise of comedians such as Fabrice Eboué and Thomas N'Gijol (who started in the Jamel Comedy Club and are now regular features on popular TV shows) are testimony to the increasing visibility of 'Black' personalities on the French small screen.

The documentary trilogy *Noirs de France* (2012) by Juan Gelas and Pascal Blanchard, provides a valuable three-hour complement to *La France noire*, together with an itinerant exhibition. They are part of the ACHAC's nationwide pedagogical project towards the reconstruction of France's complex colonial past, two years after the publication—and accompanying exhibitions—of the eight-volume collection *Un siècle d'immigration des Suds en France*. *La France noire* in its paperback version is a concise reference work accessible to both academic and non-specialist readers which gives, in less than three-hundred pages, a detailed picture of France's multicultural past and present.

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*Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature.* By CHANTAL KALISA. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 225 pp. Hb £29.99. ISBN: 978-0-8032-1102-5

Since its publication in 2009, Chantal Kalisa's *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature* has been reviewed only a limited number of times despite its important contribution to literary and Gender and Women's Studies.\* According to Kalisa, gendered violence plays a major role in literary creativity in Francophone African and Caribbean narratives, and women writers in these regions contribute greatly to the exploration of how violence specifically affects women's lives. Focusing on gendered violence in women's writing, Kalisa thoughtfully and critically examines how contemporary women's fiction copes with seemingly ingrained violence resulting from cultural, familial, and political sources.

Using a comparative approach of Francophone African and Caribbean women's literature, Kalisa concentrates on discourses of violence. Her broad definition of gendered violence allows her to investigate the emotional and physical impact of colonial, familial, and linguistic aggression on women. Kalisa highlights a twofold result of reading violence in women's postcolonial literature that brings to light the public/private tensions of violence and resets this tension within the 'violence continuum' (p. 3) of gendered violence, a concept developed by Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson and Jennifer Marchbank in *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance* (2000). The book's five chapters are built around three themes: understanding and challenging Fanon ('Chapter 1: Exclusion as Violence'), feminist responses to Fanon ('Chapter 2: Representing Colonial Violence'), and study of the violence continuum seen in Francophone African and Caribbean women's writing ('Chapter 3: Writing Familial Violence,' 'Chapter 4: Sites of Violence,' 'Chapter 5: War and Political Violence'). Though important in the first two chapters, Fanon's presence tends to fade out before reappearing in the conclusion.

Intellectually tackling Frantz Fanon's ideas is not an easy task. It takes Kalisa the better part of her introduction and first chapter to address and to critique thoroughly Fanon's theories. Kalisa acknowledges Fanon's importance in identifying sources of postcolonialist violence in colonial violence, but argues that his selective and ambivalent treatment of black women excludes them from his theorization of colonialism. Exclusion leads to a lack of voice and memory. Kalisa writes that Fanon 'contributed, perhaps more than any other thinker from Africa or the Caribbean, to the silencing the black woman' (p. 20). A heavy accusation to be sure, but she does not simply dismiss Fanon on the grounds of his ambivalence: his theories prove essential in understanding women's experience of violence during and after colonialism.

In response to Fanon, Kalisa considers how race and gender intersect by using a firm grounding in feminist theory. She first considers the case of the postcolonial black woman in the European *métropole*. Consequently, she sees Michèle Lacroisil's *Cajou* (1961), Ken Bugul's *Le baobab fou* (1984), and Ousmane Sembène's film *La noire de...* (1966) as hypothetical feminist 'responses' to Fanon that expose the situation of the colonized woman in colonial and postcolonial settings. Fanon superficially summarizes the colonized black women's experience as one of hopelessly trying to desert her place in the black community. Respectively, Lacroisil, Bugul, and Sembène reveal the complexity of this experience, which often results in madness, insecurity, and loss of identity. The consequent trauma runs much deeper than a simplistic colonized/colonizer relationship; indeed, a framework of dualities reduces the complexities of the relationship between the main characters and their adopted countries and cultures.

By examining Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972) and Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988), Kalisa weaves together narratives of different

generations with contemporary theories on trauma and domestic and familial violence to uncover how the 'private' is public and political. This theme directly ties into her fourth chapter, which looks at how language and the body is employed in Gisèle Pineau's *L'espérance-macadam* (1995) and Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987). Kalisa posits that the female body in these works is a site of violence where invasion leads to physical and/or psychological deterritorialization. Both Pineau and Beyala examine how spatial, linguistic, and physical violence find their source within the protagonist's own (formerly colonized) society. By acknowledging certain sources of violence within their own civilization, Pineau and Beyala look beyond exterior factors of violence. Refusing to be reduced to victims, their characters overcome physical and verbal abuse by expressing their pain in narrative form.

Kalisa's concluding chapter addresses war and political violence, traditionally considered a masculine subject. 'The postcolonial war story' (p. 152), a theory developed by Miriam Cooke in *Women in War Story* (1996), further discloses how violence is en-gendered. Kalisa points out that women experience war and violence differently from men: women are displaced, forced to emigrate, and raped. She analyses various works by Nadine Bari, Edwidge Danticat, and Monique Ilboudo. While the chapter intertwines with the overarching themes of the book, the chapter proves difficult to read. By working with two to three texts by each of the three authors, the narratives tend to run together, as does Kalisa's analysis and theories. It is hard to decipher exactly where the argument is coming from and where it is headed. One almost needs to map literally which narratives correlate to which theories. Despite the difficulty of this last chapter and its unclear argumentative line, it nonetheless opens up the subject to further study.

*Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature*, while specific in scope, applies to a broad field of study and appeals to a large and diverse audience. For literature scholars, especially in French and Francophone Studies, Kalisa provides a vital feminist framework for looking at narratives that deal with violence as expressed by Caribbean and African women writers. For the same reason, the study proves useful in Gender and Women's Studies. Finally, given the overarching themes of geographies of pain, public versus private, and usage of space in a literary context, the work is valuable for anyone interested in study and use of space, such as geographers and sociologists. No matter the background of the reader, s/he ultimately is implicated in this global experience of violence: the reader becomes part of the collective 'we' evoked in Kalisa's conclusion. We become not only witnesses to but part of the process of violence. However, through active reading and relation of our own narratives, we are also part of the solution.

\* To my knowledge, *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature* has only been reviewed in the academic sphere by Cheikh Thiam in *Research in African Literatures*.

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### SFPS Postgraduate Workshop: Francophone Postcolonial Visual Cultures IGRS, University of London, 26 September 2012

The participants in the 2012 postgraduate workshop of the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS) addressed different aspects of postcolonial visual culture in the Francophone world. In the first panel, Matt Rushton explored the visual ethnographic methods at the centre of Michel Leiris's illustrated travel diary *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934). His co-panelist Charlotte Hammond then addressed the reception by metropolitan and Francophone Caribbean audiences of an Antillean comedy and of a French film both of which challenge common perceptions of gender roles through cross-gender dressing.

Dr Will Higbee, who delivered the first keynote at the workshop, drew on Partha Chatterjee's revisionist theory of nationalism to demonstrate how Férid Boughedir's framing of Tunisian everyday popular culture in his films amounts to a reimagining of the national community through what Chatterjee terms the 'spiritual' domain of anti-colonial nationalism. In the next panel, Mani Sharpe approached space as political praxis in Alain Resnais's *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (1963). He argued that the film's off-screen space is structured by echoes of the Algerian War of Independence and constantly threatens to contaminate on-screen space, which was subject to censorship under the early Fifth Republic. Jamal Bahmad's paper in the same panel looked at the problematic ethics of Laïla Marrakchi's claims to historical truth in her film *Marock* (2005). The paper focused on the silenced others in the film—the urban poor—to show how the exclusionary politics of filmic representation works against Marrakchi's postcolonial project.

In the last panel of the workshop, Gareth McAreavey gave a paper on the prominence of torture in French cultural consciousness in recent years. He contended that the publication of General Paul Aussaresses's *Services spéciaux* (2002) has brought back the debate on torture to the forefront of public discourses about France's colonial past. This was complemented by Claire McLeod Peters's presentation on ekphrasis in Leïla Sebbar's novel *La Seine était rouge* (1999) which argued that the intradiegetic political documentary film informs the three young protagonists' reconstruction of the colonial massacre in Paris on 17 October 1961.

The second keynote of the workshop was given by Professor Guy Austin. Drawing on his recently published book *Algerian National Cinema* (2012), he surveyed the origins of this North African cinema in the flames of anti-colonial struggle and then dwelt at length on the rise and fall of Algerian cinema between the 1960s and the 1970s. Austin focused on the rise of Amazigh (Berber-language) cinema since the release of the late Abderrahmane Bouguermouh's *Tawriat Yetwattun / The Forgotten Hillside* in 1996 after a long struggle with the FLN regime's prohibition of filmmaking in the language. This part of the talk was based on a full chapter in his latest book, which is probably the best survey in the English language of this neo-postcolonial cinema.

JAMAL BAHMAD  
UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

**'Language/Cinema: An Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference'**  
University of Leeds, 7–8 December 2012

Cinema and 'language' are bound by a rich and complex relationship in theory and everyday practice. In her keynote address, Dr Felicia Chan argued that a global discourse of cosmopolitanism emerged with the advent of subtitles and dubbing to market films across international borders in the 1930s. She drew on the Asian experience to show how dubbing and subtitles have translated the cosmopolitan phenomena of exile, displacement, and audience tastes over time. After a comparative exploration of dubbing and subtitles as translational practices, she concluded that despite their proximity to the source language, subtitles constantly draw attention to the untranslatability of the 'foreign film' and thus allow for cosmopolitan encounters with cultural otherness.

In the first paper in the Politics and Language Panel, Alice Farris looked at the translation of British humour and class representations in the Italian subtitling of John and Roy Boulding's *I'm All Right Jack* (1959). The next paper by Kelly Zarins turned to class narratives in the British New Wave film *Room at the Top* (1959). She discussed the film's embodiment of the move to literary adaptations and Neo-realism by postwar cinema for closer inspections of the national psyche. In the last paper of the panel, Jamal Bahmad argued that beneath the smooth surface of the Moroccan-French film *Marock* (2005) lurks the spectre of an Islamic fundamentalism born out of social exclusion and the globalization of radical identities.

The Sound and Language Panel opened with David Lashbrook's paper on musical biopics, which he suggested should be called 'music biopics' because of the complexity of the genre. The next paper by Jennifer O'Meara tackled the intersections of speech's musical qualities and film dialogue in a number of American indie productions. She contended that their incorporation of foreign words and accents encourages the audience to hear familiar words afresh and perhaps see the world anew. Concluding the panel, Alina Secara's technical paper covered recent developments in subtitling technologies. She gave the example of the Gaze Plot software to show how subtitle-makers clinically track the audience gaze on the screen beforehand and factor in other elements such as reading speed and eye focus.

The Text and Form Panel began with Rosie Bainbridge's paper on the revolutionary aesthetics of Soviet filmmakers and their expansion of visual perception. She cited the example of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), the silent film classic notoriously released without the customary intertitles. Raluca Jacob then looked at the Romanian New Wave film *Police, Adjective* (2009). Its long takes and minimalist style frame grammar and film language as living organisms. Finally, James Lavender delivered a paper on sense and sensation in Deleuze's 'logic of the cinema' or the move from sensation to thought in his cinema books. For Deleuze, if cinema is a combination of 'sign' (sensation) and 'problem' (thought), sense is located in the problem.

In the Greek Cinema Panel, Marios Psaras engaged with the linguistic games in *Dogtooth* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2009) and *Attenberg* (Athena Rachel Tsangaris, 2010) as both a demonstration of cinema's capacity to reassess its own mediality and a practice of collective identity questioning in a distraught Greece. Ben Tyrer delivered a Lacanian reading of *Dogtooth's* deconstruction of the tyranny of the paternal metaphor. He focused on phobia and the reduction of the family at the centre of *Dogtooth* into numbers in an oedipal operation.

The Language/Cinema Conference was successful in bringing together a wide range of papers, approaches and people. The discussions were lively and insightful throughout the day.

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## *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*

Contributions on any topic related to Francophone Postcolonial Studies are invited for inclusion in future issues. Authors should submit electronically two copies of their article, 4,000 words maximum, in English or French, to a member of the editorial team. Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA Stylebook*, providing references in footnotes, rather than the author-date system. All articles submitted to the *BFPS* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from the advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked that their manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. Book reviews (between 600 and 1000 words in length) and conference reports (500 words max.) should also be sent to the editorial team.

The deadline for the receipt of articles to be included in the autumn 2013 issue is 15 August 2013.

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