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Writing Exile Against the Grain: The Displaced 'Exiliterature' of Linda Lê

An attempt at grasping the identity of Linda Lê, with the help of a few biographical details, results in an unfaithful portrayal of her as a refugee-turned-author: born in Vietnam in 1963, Lê went into exile in France along with other 'boat people' in 1977, following the reunification of Vietnam under the communist regime, and she has published a large body of both fictional and non-fictional works in Paris. Although her work is often interpreted through the prism of postcolonial identity politics, exilic trauma, psychoanalysis, and gender studies,[1] it is irreducible to readings that exaggerate authorial presence in the textual space and confine the texts to the epistemological dimension of narrative.[2] It is a futile attempt to represent and objectify Lê, one which can be compared to the failure of the journalist-narrator in Lê's novel, *Œuvres vives* (2014), in compiling a truthful biography of the elusive author Antoine Sorel, who commits suicide the day after the narrator discovers his work. Such an attempt to represent the unrepresentable truth of the unknowable Other corresponds to the need to locate the origin of enunciation in an embodied, personal and therefore socially, historically and culturally situated subject. But who is speaking? Who is the 'I'? As Michel Foucault has amply demonstrated in his analyses of the problem of authorship, the authorial figure to which the text points is a somewhat fantasized and discursively constructed presence.[3] Like the fictional author Antoine Sorel in *Œuvres vives*, Lê is not as 'dead' as Roland Barthes famously proclaimed the author to be and is, rather, a haunting spectre, an uncanny voice hovering in between the inside and the outside of the text, an ambivalent figure wearing multiple masks (*persona* in Latin). Yet despite the difficulty in grasping an unstable identity, the work of Lê is classed as French literature, since the author has obtained French nationality, resides in metropolitan France and writes in the French language.[4] The identifiable 'difference' of Lê's work from that of *franco-français* writers—its 'Vietnameseness'—has led scholars of Francophone literature to classify it as 'Franco-Vietnamese literature', 'Vietnamese diasporic writing in French', 'contemporary Francophone immigrant narrative' and 'postcolonial trauma narrative'.[5] Nonetheless, these categorizations are reductionist, for the identity paradigm which they adopt reduces Lê's work to an essence, erases its complexity and ambivalence, emptying it of its otherness.

In this article, I will examine the question of identity and belonging in exile. Moreover, I will explore the poetic interconnection between exile, writing, reading, and becoming in an attempt to rethink exile and literature through the literary essays of Lê—*Le complexe de Caliban* (2005), *Tu écriras sur le Bonheur* (2009), *Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau* (2009) and *Par ailleurs (exils)* (2014)—and their intertextual references to the work of Romanian philosopher E. M. Cioran. How

[1] See, among others, Tess Do, 'Nourriture ou pourriture: une exploration de l'impact post-colonial du patrimoine français parmi les immigrants vietnamiens dans les romans de Linda Lê', *Food and Lifestyles in Oceania*, ed. by Sonia Lacabanne (Noumea: Actes du Colloque CORAIL, 2002), pp. 141–51; Julie Assier, 'L'obsession du père ou l'inscription autobiographique dans *Les Trois Parques* de Linda Lê', *Féminité et Expression de soi,* ed. by Brigitte Riéra (Paris: Éditions Le Manuscrit, 2008), pp. 15–49; Lily V. Chiu, '"An Open Wound on a Smooth Skin": (Post)-Colonialism and the Melancholic Performance of Trauma in the Works of Linda Lê', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 21 (2009), 1–26; and Gillian Ni Cheallaigh, 'Bad Mothers, Mad Sisters and Queer Maternity in the work of Linda Lê', *Solitaires, Solidaires: Conflict and Confluence in Women's Writings in French*, ed. by Elise Hugueny-Léger and Caroline Verdier (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 191–207.

[2] A number of critics have noted the deceptive connection between life and writing in Lê's work. See, for example, Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier, 'Consuming Culture: Linda Lê's Autofiction', *Of Vietnam: Identities in Dialogue*, ed. by Jane Bradley Winston and Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 241–50.

[3] Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur ?', *Dits et Écrits*, n° 69, tome I (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 789–821.

[4] The publisher Christian Bourgois places Linda Lê in the category of 'Littérature française'.

[5] Leslie Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014). Barnes argues that 'her work is clearly conditioned by French colonialism in Southeast Asia' (p. 165).

can exile be redefined, other than as a socio-historical and geopolitical reality? Is it possible for exile to be removed from the identity paradigm, for 'exiled' to be more than a status attributed from the outside and a reductive stigma, for exilic experience to be more than an essentially traumatizing condition? Lastly, how can one refer to a literature that assembles texts relating to exile in the broadest sense of the word, to this inexpressible Other that representation attempts to objectify, if not as the literature *of* exile? In other words, can we talk about literature *and* exile while they remain, as Hélène Cixous puts it, 'étrangissime[s] dans la plus grande proximité'?[6]

Lê's essay 'Littérature déplacée', published in *Tu écriras sur le bonheur* (2009), highlights the problem posed by a restricted conception of 'littérature déplacée' as a literature of exile, that is 'une littérature écrite par une personne qui a dû quitter son pays à la suite d'un changement de régime politique'.[7] Of course, exile is 'unbearably historical', as Edward Said emphasizes in his essay, 'Reflections on Exile' (2000).[8] Nonetheless, the various theories and studies used as critical methods of interpreting texts of exile often overlook the poetic dimension that Lê lends to 'littérature déplacée'. The pathetic register much adopted by these interpretations is absent in Lê's manifesto. If she points out that 'l'expression "littérature déplacée" est souvent entendue dans un sens qui fait appel à l'émotion', it is because pathos is not uncommon in the rhetoric of migration, what Lê refers to as 'paroles d'exil'.[9] This rhetoric mystifies a phenomenon of all places and all times,[10] and perpetuates the dichotomy between the homed and the homeless, between those who belong and those who are different. In Lê's essay, displacement and loss are not interpreted in terms of migration, circumstances and psychological trauma, but in terms of crime committed through rupture, 'deuil originel' of an orphaned homeland that the exile has 'couvé et étouffé, reconnu et dénié'.[11] The native country is not the home that has been tragically lost due to exile, leading to the loss of a sense of belonging, but rather the haunting double with which the exile has formed a 'lien monstrueux' from the very beginning.[12] As Lê explains in her collection of essays, *Le complexe de Caliban* (2005), 'on tue ce que l'on aime, le crime étant l'expression d'un amour extrême de soi qui a échoué à trouver en l'autre l'accomplissement du rêve de fusion'.[13] The exilic pain that marks 'littérature déplacée' is not an 'original diasporic pain' as Leslie Barnes argues, but rather that of an internal exile and an impossible communion with the loved and hated other self, whose murder makes existing as a person in the world only partially possible: an 'être-presque'.[14]

In psychoanalytic terms adopted by literary critics such as Barnes, the two novels of Lê's trilogy on mourning and exile, namely *Voix: Une crise* (1998) and *Lettre morte* (1999), 'approximat[e] a literary manifestation of Freud's "traumatic neurosis"'.[15] From this perspective, the narrators are unable to mourn over the death of their 'vieux moi' constituted by their native country, language and abandoned father, thus clinging to the lost object 'through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis'.[16] Nevertheless, exile is as much a form of suffering as a voluntary, dissident choice. The narrators who wander through the non-place between the adopted country and the native country, the present and the past, this world here below and the world hereafter, the ordinary world ruled by the law and the world of abnormality, choose to become, to borrow the words of the male narrator in Lê's other novel, *Calomnies*, 'âme[s] errante[s]' whose 'racines sont à

[6] Hélène Cixous, *L'Heure de Clarice Lispector* (Paris: des femmes, 1989), p. 157.
[7] Linda Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', *Tu écriras sur le bonheur* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2009), p. 331. *Tu écriras sur le bonheur* is an anthology of prefaces written by Lê for books published in the 'Biblio romans' collection of Livre de Poche.
[8] Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2012; first publ. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 174.
[9] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 331 and p. 332.
[10] James Clifford, 'The Transit Lounge of Culture', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4595, 3 May 1991, p. 7.
[11] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', pp. 331–32.
[12] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 331.
[13] Linda Lê, 'Paris du sphinx obèse', *Le complexe de Caliban* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2005), p. 110.
[14] Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, p. 197; and Lê, 'Paris du sphinx obèse', p. 110.
[15] Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, p. 167.
[16] Lê, 'Le mandarin', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 51; and Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 244.

fleur d'eau'.[17] By estranging themselves from the territory of the self, they destabilize the illusion of the single self while acknowledging the possibility, as Lê posits, of 'écarter le danger schizophrénique en faisant du dépassement de soi une exigence éthique'.[18] Moreover, if we follow the reasoning of Cioran, often cited by Lê in her essays, 'la liberté est un principe *éthique* d'essence *démoniaque* [*sic*]', which is why 'nous portons en nous un bourreau réticent, un criminal irréalisé'.[19] The exile who has murdered the homeland is thus an audacious subject who desires absolute freedom and chooses rupture over the 'quiétude de l'Unité'.[20] Murder, declares Cioran, 'suppose et couronne la révolte' and is therefore irreducible to trauma.[21]

As Lê argues in 'Littérature déplacée', displaced literature serves as a 'tombeau' of the homeland, the sense of belonging, identity, self and being.[22] It marks and claims the illegitimacy of the exile who chooses to break with the authority of both the native country and the 'langue empruntée', and the illegitimacy of the displaced word which, to borrow an oft-cited expression from Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, 'would prefer not to' find its own place.[23] 'Ni d'ailleurs ni d'ici', displaced literature prefers to remain irreducible, 'malvenue, voire inconvenante', as an exiled voice that 's'imposerait dans le champ littéraire comme un hôte, un invité importun'.[24] Indeed, one should refrain from interpreting Lê's assertion through the prism of postcolonial identity politics; hers is not simply a Francophone voice suffering from an internal exile in the French literary establishment, but a deterritorialized voice that 'se veut nomade' and speaks for nobody but itself.[25]

Homelessness and non-belonging, interpreted through the prism of nomadism, become an ethical mode of thinking (rather than simply of 'being'), 'une exigence éthique' of the border-crossing, stateless exile. In line with Cioran's insistence that freedom involves a rupture with all ties including feelings, Lê writes against pathos, emphasizing in a collection of essays, *Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau* (2009), that the exile 'doit se garder d'être le pantin de ses émotions, de confondre liberté et relâchement'.[26] For Cioran, the exile who adopts an attitude of serene defiance in the face of emotional enslavement is epitomized in the nomadic and marginal Jews, 'apatrides-nés, [qui] n'ont jamais été tenté d'abandonner la partie'.[27] Similarly, the displaced author debunks the stereotype of the exile as resigned to his sorrow by becoming 'héroïquement traître',[28] deserting his native country and language and even breaking with himself. Lê considers the displaced author not only as a social traitor, 'deux fois renégat', but also as a literary traitor who betrays illusions and ruins the hopes of the reader by 'l'imprécation et la calomnie'.[29] Lê reintroduces the trope of crime when she describes displaced words of incandescent lucidity and acuity as 'une lame ouverte' that awakens our anguish and our consciousness, transforming despair into an experience 'à savourer jusqu'au bout'.[30] Jewish prophets like Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example, are considered by Cioran as 'poètes du désastre', for they 'vomiss[e]nt des imprécations' against God and are unable 's'attacher à un present rassurant ou à un avenir quelconque'.[31]

Whether in Theodor W. Adorno's sense that distance allows for critical reflection, or in

[17] Linda Lê, *Calomnies* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1993), p. 12.
[18] Lê, 'Migrances du moi', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 146.
[19] E. M. Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, *Œuvres*, coll. 'Quarto' (Paris: Gallimard, 1995; first publ. 1949), p. 629.
[20] E. M. Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, *Œuvres*, coll. 'Quarto' (Paris: Gallimard, 1995; first publ. 1956), p. 828.
[21] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 830.
[22] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 331.
[23] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 333; and Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street* (New York: Melville House, 2004), *passim*.
[24] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 332.
[25] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 338.
[26] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 825; and Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, p. 636, cited by Linda Lê in 'Une porte sans clé, une clé sans porte', *Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2009), p. 130.
[27] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 872.
[28] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, cited by Lê in 'Pour saluer Cioran', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 48.
[29] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 334 and p. 338.
[30] Lê, 'Pour saluer Cioran', p. 48; and Lê, 'Hermann Hesse', *Tu écriras sur le bonheur*, p. 168.
[31] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 877.

Cioran's view that 'thinking against oneself' allows for the questioning of dogmas, it is necessary that this open blade of words is also 'tournée contre soi' in order to attain absolute solitude.[32] In Lê's novel *Calomnies*, the male narrator scorns the female narrator, his niece and double, as a 'métèque écrivant en français' who 'continu[e] à se laisser manger par le fantôme du père […] s'est dotée d'un nouveau père, et […] se retrouve dans le pose de l'abandonnée'.[33] The male narrator's denunciation of re-territorialization into the patriarchal family echoes Lê's own critique of what she calls 'une entreprise de démolition' consisting of the desire to find one's origins, what Édouard Glissant refers to as the 'racine unique'. Glissant opposes the single root, 'celle qui tue autour d'elle', with the 'rhizome', 'la racine qui s'étend à la rencontre d'autres racines', which he uses as a trope for conceptualizing 'une poétique de la relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre'.[34] Indeed, the female narrator cannot free herself from the burden of genealogical essence simply by writing in French and adopting another father(land) and identity. Therefore, to interpret 'l'arme qu'elle dirige contre sa famille, contre le Pays' as specifically the French language is to perpetuate the binary opposition between the French and the Vietnamese, the colonizer and the colonized, and to suppose reintegration after displacement.[35] Instead, the weapon appears to be scepticism itself, embodied in the displaced, nomadic word that raises doubts about the posited importance of anything.[36] It is also in this sense that the narrators are 'âme[s] errante[s]', kept afloat by their metaphysical strangeness and aloofness. Accordingly, the 'immense plaie' inflicted by the blade of words is not simply the 'open wound' displayed by a 'traumatically shattered subject' or the sign of a 'trauma narrative'.[37] Rather, as a wound that the defiant exile has not left to heal, it represents openness and fluidity as opposed to closure and fixity. This corresponds with what Cioran perceives as absolute freedom through deterritorialization and self-reflexive scrutiny, the 'luminous annihilation' of the self which paradoxically equals the affirmation of oneself.[38] As he states:

> Je me détruis, je le veux bien; […] ce plaisir de viser une idée, […] de vous tourner ensuite contre vous-même, […] cette forme de liberté, cette forme de respiration qui est délivrance de soi et de tout. Vous pourrez alors vous engager dans n'importe quoi sans y adhérer.[39]

Indeed, as Cioran suggests, it is the fluidity of the desire of suffering that liberates man, rather than suffering itself, which is a fixed object. Likewise, it is the desire to be detached from the self and even destroy it, rather than disjointed subjectivity itself, that exiles man into the void where he becomes a wandering spectre. Exile, a fluid state of (non-)existence, is an ecstatic experience of absolute freedom, 'un principe *éthique* d'essence *démoniaque*'.[40] As Lê paraphrases Cioran's words in her essay on exile and literature, *Par ailleurs (exils)* (2014):

> L'exil est 'l'extrémité de l'état poétique', il permet d'accéder au vertige, d'atteindre l'ascèse, mais une menace plane sur le poète déraciné: s'il s'accommode de son état, s'il se plaît même à être ce qu'il est, il court le risque de s'engourdir, de laisser se refermer ses plaies, de perdre le bénéfice de son

[32] Cioran, 'Penser contre soi', *La tentation d'exister,* pp. 821–31; and Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 333.
[33] Lê, *Calomnies*, p. 12, p. 34.
[34] Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 59; and Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 23.
[35] Lê, *Calomnies*, p. 12. Ching Selao has argued that the weapon used by Lê is the French language in 'De l'exil à la parole exilée: l'impossible libération dans l'œuvre de Linda Lê', in *La Francophonie: esthétique et dynamique de libération*, ed. by Ibrahim H. Badr (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 135–54 (pp. 136–37).
[36] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, pp. 888–89.
[37] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 336. Barnes argues that Lê's narratives 'voice trauma "*through the wound*," reflecting trauma's meaning as both psychic and corporeal injury. […] As the site of writing, it reflects the trauma of writing'. Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, p. 195.
[38] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 917; and Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, p. 633.
[39] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, pp. 887–88.
[40] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 923.

> splendide isolement en s'établissant dans l'exil, 'Cité du Rien, patrie à rebours'.[41]

The vertigo of exile is the boundless non-place which the ambivalent author inhabits, the nothingness that renders being impossible, the state of constant oscillation in which the exile 'qui élit sa demeure en littérature' is maintained.[42] Exile is an in-betweenness, an unstable state in which the exile is torn not only in the postcolonial or diasporic sense, between two countries, cultures and languages, but more profoundly between 'deux extrêmes: d'une part, le principe d'incomplétude (le deuil original et l'illégitimité revendiquée), d'autre part, la loi de l'outrance (le scandale) […] entre le manque (la langue perdue) et l'excès (la prise de parole véhémente)'.[43] Indeed, as Cioran points out, the sense of tension and instability marks not only the exilic experience but the very subjective experience of existence with its absurd contradictions: 'notre position dans l'existence se situ[e] au croisement de nos supplications et de nos sarcasmes, zone d'impureté où se mélangent soupirs et provocations'.[44] Nonetheless, the tension that constitutes exile is also fed by the unceasing, transgressive desire of the Absolute, which translates into an internal dialectic tension between resignation and resistance, silence and utterance, stasis and rupture. Exile is therefore a liminal condition marked by ambivalence; it is as much a heavy cross to bear as a banner to brandish proudly. The tension which arises from exile is precisely the condition of creation, as Lê notes in *Au fond de l'inconnu*, referring to Louis Calaferte's essay, *La Vie parallèle* (1970): 'le déséquilibre étant peut-être la condition sine qua non de la création, une complète rémission lui serait fatale'.[45] The closing of wounds is the sedentarization of the nomadic poet who 's'accommode de son état, […] se plait même à être ce qu'il est', thus giving in to the temptation of the 'quiétude de l'Unité' and failing to resist the numbing effects of the 'soporifique' that is the 'patrie' or any fixed and stable place.[46] It is therefore both an ethical and a creative requirement to exile oneself in the 'Cité du Rien, patrie à rebours', while defying egocentric, emotional enslavement. As Cioran contends, the poet falls prey to mediocrity when 'les cris dont naguère il était encore fier se sont faits amertumes, et l'amertume ne se fait pas vers'.[47]

Reading and writing the displaced text, in particular, are vertiginous exilic experiences, immersions into the 'immense plaie' which Lê describes as 'un *trou noir et béant* [*sic*], dans lequel le lecteur n'a d'autre choix que de se jeter et de se perdre'.[48] It is the nothingness where the reader is exiled, unable to locate and determine the author whose self is fragmented and mobile, as well as the 'contre-monde' of heretics.[49] Both poison and antidote, the displaced text cannot serve as a refuge (which is a fixed and stable place) from the anguish of existence, for it is the very heart of anguish that frees the reader from all ties and bounds. Indeed, Cioran questions at once the doctrine of salvation and the reliability of words when he asks, 'mais qui croit encore à une littérature qui sauve?'.[50] Here, he casts doubt upon the possibility of finding definitive meanings and determinate answers to existential dilemmas in literature. Moreover, he calls into question the very desirability of salvation that would bring an end to life's unending contradictions and dialectics and consequently to creation.[51] Paradoxically, Lê is saved by Cioran's words of piercing lucidity that negate the possibility of an ultimate refuge made of words: 'Ma faiblesse est de croire au verbe qui ronge, asphyxie, tourne le sang et sauve. […] Les mots de Cioran m'ont sauvée à un moment où je doutais de tout'.[52]

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[41] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 856, paraphrased by Linda Lê in *Par ailleurs (exils)* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2014), p. 95.
[42] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 333.
[43] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 333.
[44] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 827.
[45] Lê, 'Exploser de vie', *Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2009), p. 85.
[46] Cioran, *La tentationd'exister*, p. 878.
[47] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 856.
[48] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 336.
[49] Lê, 'Friedrich Dürrenmatt', *Tu écriras sur le bonheur,* p. 84.
[50] Lê, 'Pour saluer Cioran', p. 49.
[51] Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, p. 604.
[52] Lê, 'Pour saluer Cioran', p. 49.

The experience of reading the displaced text transports the reader, to borrow Charles Baudelaire's phrase taken up by Lê for the title of her book, '*au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau* [*sic*]', or even 'au pays de l'impossible', as Hermann Hesse puts it.[53] This 'trou noir et béant' is an open and boundless space that moves above and beyond binary oppositions and the boundaries of determinism, so it is not an alienating 'outside' excluded from an 'inside', but rather an unhoped-for 'hors-de-soi' that initiates the reader to the foreign and the strange, an Elsewhere that presents itself as an '*endroit habitable* [*sic*]'.[54] This is not a place which can be appropriated, for the entrance into this 'cité des mots' is made, as Lê maintains, not under the sign of 'l'héritage' or 'la propriété', but under that of 'la perte' and 'la dépossession'.[55] The poet who enters the 'Cité du Rien, patrie à rebours' is, according to Maurice Blanchot who is cited by Lê in *Par ailleurs (exils)*, 'hors de lui-même, hors de son lieu natal, appartient à l'étranger, à ce qui est le dehors sans intimité et sans limite'.[56] He or she is not necessarily an exile who chooses 'migrancy' as a nomadic mode of being in the world,[57] but more of what Marina Tsvétaeva refers to as an 'émigré',[58] wandering outside of the self and the fixed categories of knowledge, in what Benjamin Fondane describes as 'le roulis'—'la liberté, l'horreur, l'impossible'.[59] Observing that reading and writing are vertiginous exilic experiences which destabilize the self, Lê declares that 'toute littérature' is 'exilittérature, en ce sens qu'elle vise à l'anéantissement du moi'.[60] In line with what Cioran postulates about the 'luminous annihilation' of the self, Lê suggests that literature is a means of affirming one's absolute freedom.

The displaced author who exiles him- or herself from all forms of community which demarcate an 'inside' and an 'outside' is henceforth in 'exilittérature', which is neither a home nor a utopian community (a finite place of the Same), but a heterogeneous constellation of other–authors. Lê sees intimate siblings and secret doubles in these deterritorialized multiplicities made of words, which are, in Deleuzian terms, 'traversé[es] d'étranges devenirs qui ne sont pas des devenirs-écrivain'.[61] Rather than writers or members of Literature and Culture, they are, to borrow Lê's imagery, birds of passage. According to Lê, the self of these border-crossers is 'un oiseau migrateur' whose words 'volent par-dessus les frontières comme les oiseaux par-dessus les murs'.[62] Thus, they are not egocentric 'littérateurs' who, according to Cioran, are too tied up with aspiring to have 'une âme publique, une âme-affiche', with producing an 'œuvre' and becoming an 'auteur'.[63] Contrary to these 'forçat[s] de la plume',[64] they are conscious of the 'nullité' of words and refuse to 'confess' or divulge their miseries in hope of a therapeutic cure through writing. Nonetheless, they are endowed with a 'fortune d'indicible' that allows them to act against the very foundations of all dogmatic certainties.[65] Their acidic thought 's'insinuerait dans les choses pour les désorganiser, les perforer, les traverser'; their books constitute the 'carnaval et apocalypse des Lettres, ultimatum à la pestilence du Verbe'.[66] Their words are birds flying 'par-dessus les murs' and smoothing out what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call 'espaces striés' which are partitioned, hierarchical spaces of 'choses formées ou perçues'.[67] These spaces are thus transformed into boundless spaces of 'affects' which are intensive becomings through which

[53] Charles Baudelaire, 'Le voyage', *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Garner-Flammarion, 1964), pp. 150–55; and Hermann Hesse, *Magie du livre*, cited in *Par ailleurs (exils)*, p. 60.
[54] Lê, *Par ailleurs (exils)*, p. 48.
[55] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 334.
[56] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, cited in *Par ailleurs (exils)*, p. 137.
[57] See Iain Chambers, 'An Impossible Homecoming', *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–8.
[58] Lê, 'Marina Tsvétaeva', *Tu écriras sur le bonheur*, p. 312.
[59] Lê, *Par ailleurs (exils)*, p. 98.
[60] Lê, 'Migrances du moi', p. 141.
[61] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), pp. 293–94.
[62] Lê, *Par ailleurs (exils),* p. 31.
[63] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, pp. 880–81.
[64] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 884.
[65] Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, p. 624 and p. 626.
[66] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, pp. 883.
[67] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 598.

'perception' becomes 'percept', 'affection' becomes 'affect', and 'opinion' becomes 'blocks of sensations that take the place of language'.[68]

The displaced 'author', like displaced 'literature', is a paradox, an indefinable and aporetic thing for the essentially dualist and static human reason, a spectral multiplicity slipping away from the tyranny of the Unique and its symbolic violence. In her essay, 'Le complexe de Caliban' (published in her collection of essays with the same title), Lê illustrates the predicament and power of being a paradox with the Aesopian fable of the bat who 'découvre devant l'adversité l'ambiguïté de sa position' and the possibility of 'échapper à toute définition', along with the impossibility of *being* oneself and *belonging* to oneself.[69] According to Cioran, one becomes a writer when a 'pacte' with '*l'être*' is impossible, and it is in his 'meilleurs moments' that he can wander across this '*no man's land* qui s'étend entre ces frontiers [de l'être] et celles de la littérature'.[70] Following Cioran's anti-systemic thought, Lê argues that the 'métèque' is 'un personnage de toutes les contradictions, et donc de toutes les possibilités', notably those of *becoming* oneself in becoming 'intimes ombres enchevêtrées'.[71] Writing is a becoming-other-multiplicity through which the Other can be perceived as a multiplicity that delivers one from 'la malédiction d'être uniquement soi', rather than as diametrically opposed to the self, murdered because of an impossible communion, 'comme "autant de messages inachevés du grand Je suis" (l'expression est de Sylvia Plath)', as Lê puts it.[72] Writing is not simply a therapeutic cure against 'trauma', but the means to transcend the limits of the impossible and surpass the self; it allows Lê to ward off 'le danger schizophrénique', '[à] pouvoir écrire tantôt à l'unisson avec [s]on Moi, tantôt en contrepoint, en accord avec [s]on Non-Moi'.[73] Because it is a double ludic movement away from and toward oneself, at once an experience of self-dispossession and self-retrieval, of self-annihilation and self-affirmation, writing undoes binary oppositions of identity and gives rise to the possibility of being and not being, of becoming at once double and an enemy of synthesis or unity. Thanks to writing, 'la chauve-souris […] peut désormais déployer les ailes de son ambiguïté'.[74]

To conclude, 'littérature déplacée' is not a literary category in which displaced texts are classed and displacement is objectified, but rather a *sui generis* literature or a literature against the grain—an improper, other literature that resists, undoes and rewrites literature. It summons the spectre of the inexpressible that underlines the inability of *logos* to grasp the unnameable, de-territorialized space of 'exilittérature', where exile and literature are dislodged from their assigned places and themselves exiled into the unintelligible. Like a bird of passage, Lê's 'parole déplacée' flies over the wall that separates exile and literature so that the latter can be perceived as the exile to an atopic place outside the known world and the former as an affirmation of the freedom of mobility and metamorphosis. The boundary which separates a native language and a 'borrowed language' is also blurred through the 'cré[ation], dans la langue adoptée, [d']une autre langue, orpheline de tout héritage et de toute autorité'[75] which underlines the absolute otherness of language that belongs to no one, as posited by Jacques Derrida in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996). Undermining the question of identity and belonging, Lê argues that the displaced author is both 'un voleur et un donateur', capable of 'exprimer l'innommable dans une langue qui alors sonne comme une langue étrangère'.[76] This language is artistic in the Deleuzian sense; it is 'the language of sensations, or the foreign language within language that summons a people yet to come'.[77] It is this created other language and 'exilittérature' that Lê inhabits, rather than France, the French

[68] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London and New York: Verso, 2003), p. 176.
[69] Lê, 'Le complexe de Caliban', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 103.
[70] Cioran, *La tentation d'exister*, p. 910.
[71] Lê, 'Pour saluer Cioran', p. 48; and Lê, 'Migrances du moi', p. 141.
[72] Lê, 'Migrances du moi', p. 146.
[73] Lê, 'Je me souviens', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 94.
[74] Lê, 'Le complexe de Caliban', p. 105.
[75] Lê, 'Littérature déplacée', p. 337.
[76] Lê, 'Amiel', *Le complexe de Caliban*, p. 41.
[77] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 176.

language or Franco-French literature. As Marina Tsvetaeva reminds us, 'un poète peut écrire en français, il ne peut pas être un poète français. […] on est poète parce qu'on n'est pas français.'[78] Thus, Lê's poetic treatment of literature and exile makes her a poet on the fringes of Literature, whose displaced word revives banal and worn-out words by breaking them away from *property* (as essence, belonging and propriety).

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[78] Lê, *Par ailleurs (exils)*, p. 119.

Community and Communion through Writing: Unheard Voices in Maïssa Bey's *Cette fille-là* (2010) and *Hizya* (2015)

Maïssa Bey (the *nom de plume* of Samia Benameur) is an Algerian writer, educator and activist, who has established herself as a preeminent voice in Algeria and the Francophone world through her violently expositional and candid writing. In an interview with Suzanne Ruta, Bey describes how the escalation of threats and prohibitions in the 1990s paradoxically unleashed her desire to write in order to be read.[1] She adds that she did not deliberately set out to break taboos; rather, she wanted to break free from the silences and compromises in which she had become mired.[2] These writerly intentions of breaking free and breaking silences, as well as voicing the unheard, can be seen in the female narrators of *Cette fille-là* and *Hizya*.[3] In these texts, Bey creates a textual community of women and their testimonies, whose voices come together to create a form of textual communion. This article understands 'communion' as the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings. Benedict Anderson asserts that in any imagined community, such as a nation, 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them'.[4] This limitation of an imagined community applies to the climate in Algeria whereby the experiences of women and their voices are often ignored, leaving them feeling marginalized and powerless. This is the case for the female narrators and characters of both *Cette fille-là* and *Hizya*. Anderson's notion of 'hear[ing] of them' particularly applies to the Algerian imagined community after the War for Independence (1954–1962) as many women deemed to be dangerous were silenced. It also applies to Bey's conscious writerly desire to speak up and reveal experiences of women whose voices have not previously been heard. She forms her own more inclusive (imagined) community in the text. As one of the voices of *Hizya* states: 'les héroïnes sont dans la rue. […] Elles sont des milliers qui avancent. Qui tentent d'avancer'.[5] Bey shines a light on distinct female Algerian voices and enables silences to be broken. This article will explore the textual communities that Bey creates for unheard Algerian women and will investigate the polyphonous communions that occur in the space of the text. In contrast with the physical spaces and contexts that constrain women, the textual community in the space of the text will be analysed in light of its potentially liberating effects. However, the limitations of the textual space will also be expounded particularly since Bey offers distinctly ambiguous endings to both texts.

Cette fille-là is narrated by an orphan called Malika who lives in an *asile*, which is neither a curative institution nor an asylum for the mentally ill. Rather, the asylum seeks to control and contain its marginalized detainees who have been abandoned by their families and by society. Malika transcribes her experiences, and the stories of the other women of the *asile,* to reveal the truth of their lives, 'de lever le voile sur les silences des femmes et de la société'.[6] The use of 'lever le voile' significantly references the traditional, religious turn that Algerian nationalism and national identity took after liberation from French colonial rule. Algerian women were constrained by the new Algerian nationalism and forced to adhere to certain rules, such as wearing the veil, rather than being able to make the choice themselves. Bey is thus challenging what comprises Algerian postcolonial, and post-traumatic, identity by referencing the particularly strict and violent rules that come to define Algerian identity after the War of Independence. The text becomes a tapestry of

[1] Suzanne Ruta, 'Algerian Novelist Maïssa Bey: The Rebel's Daughter', *The Women's Review of Books*, 23 (2006), 16–17.
[2] Ruta, 'Algerian Novelist Maïssa Bey', pp. 16–17.
[3] Maïssa Bey, *Cette fille-là* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2010); and Maïssa Bey, *Hizya* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2015).
[4] Benedict Anderson, 'Imagined Communities', in *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, ed. by Caspar Hirschi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 48–59 (p. 49).
[5] *Hizya,* p. 112.
[6] *Cette fille-là,* p. 9. All subsequent references will follow quotations from the primary texts in the article itself.

different female narratives woven together to form a textual communion between women who have all experienced trauma and abandonment.[7] Malika needs this textual community because she is desperately attempting to form an identity and create a sense of belonging, as she says: 'ce dégoût de moi-même qui me saisit à l'idée de ne pas savoir d'où je viens et qui je suis vraiment' (p. 9).

Hizya is gynocentric and polyphonous, like *Cette fille-là.* Hizya the narrator writes with a candidness usually not accepted in her daily life. Moreover, a mysterious voice—identified by italicized text—comments and criticizes Hizya's behaviour and thoughts. The narrator Hizya is a young woman in Algiers living with her family and working in a local salon. Both *Hizya* and *Cette fille-là* are set in modern-day (post-millennium) Algeria. However, their physical contexts are different. Hizya has a family unit, she belongs in a home, and arguably she has more freedom as she has a university education and a job, but she is still constrained by her circumstances. Her father is lost in his nostalgia for the days of martyrs and heroes of the Algerian War of Independence. He has a mythical attachment to this conflict as despite being born on the very day that the war began, he still claims veteran and resistance status: 'de fait, ses récits commencent toujours par "nous". Il ne dit pas "eux" en parlant des résistants' (p. 55). He runs a dilapidated antiques business, which significantly reflects his retrograde attitudes, while Hizya has to go out to work to contribute financially to the family income. Hizya describes an instance when she asks her father why women were not accorded independence and rights after the War of Independence, especially since many women were fighters and martyrs (p. 57). Her father quickly interrupts, stating that 'la révolution s'arrête là où commence le droit des hommes, c'est-à-dire des individus de sexe masculin' (p. 57). The lack of freedoms accorded to women after independence and the climate of repression against women in Algeria are political undercurrents that colour both of Bey's texts. There is a tension between the reliance of Hizya's family on her income and their treatment of her as an asset to be married off to a suitable man. Hizya gives the impression of subdued servility in her daily life; however, she is secretly frustrated with this life, becoming inspired by Hizya, the romantic heroine of a legendary poem. As she says, simply reading the poem and song 'm'ont donné envie de me projeter au-delà des frontières qui me sont assignées' (p. 52). She is influenced by the link between herself and the poetic heroine, and wants to write, because of 'l'aridité de la vie qui m'attend' (p. 52).

Hizya's relationship with her mother is fraught. Her mother is trying to marry her off to a neighbour called Kamel so that she can take up a traditional domesticated life. Hizya sardonically remarks that her mother, and other Algerian women, form 'un choral bien connu' (p. 51). She is familiar with their opinions, and particularly with the designs of her mother: 'avant qu'elles entament leur litanie, je sais quelles en seront les paroles. J'en connais les refrains' (p. 51). Her mother is suspicious of Hizya, pointing to the importance of modesty and virginity in the family unit and in society. She regularly inspects the bedroom that Hizya shares with her sister for evidence of incriminating behaviour: 'ma mère passe au peigne fin tous les coins et recoins de notre chambre' (p. 45). She also searches everywhere: 'dans les livres et les cahiers, qu'elle secoue pour voir si un papier compromettant, une photo, une adresse, un numéro de téléphone ne s'y cache pas' (p. 45). Hizya's (sexual) behaviour—her (sexual) body—are monitored by her controlling mother. She is forced to keep secrets from her, notably her relationship with Riyad, the messages on her mobile phone, and even her 'dangerous thoughts': 'Dieu, si elle pouvait savoir ce qui me trotte dans la tête!' (p. 46).

Hizya and Malika have been, and continue to be, silenced as women. They have been silenced by societal expectations of modesty and docility while fulfilling traditional roles in domestic spaces as women. Writing their own stories enables them to express themselves and to assert their previously unheard voices. According to Rice, *Cette fille-là* comprises 'telling testimonies

[7] See Siobhán McIlvanney, 'Fighting for Independence: Leila Marouane's *La jeune fille et la mère* and Maïssa Bey's *Cette fille-là*', in *Experiment and Experience: Women's Writing in France 2000–2010*, ed. by Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 59–74 (p. 74)

that seamlessly move from the personal to the plural'.[8] The female narratives become a part of a new nation and identity being constructed by 'paying attention to private lives, to focus on what has been excluded from official version of events, from national archives'.[9] Rice's assertion corresponds to the concept of *her*story coined by author and feminist activist Robin Morgan.[10] This article will now move away from Rice's exploration of literal gynocentric models for (re)constructing the Algerian nation, and will instead consider gynocentric communities within the space of the text, and the implications of textual communities for the women narrators and (women) readers. The concepts of community and communion will be interrogated in light of the act of writing, and of creating a textual space in which these two concepts can flourish. First, the article will analyse certain physical locations and spaces in which the women characters exist, and how these contexts serve to marginalize, constrain, and incarcerate them. Second, it will examine the power of diegetic spaces to allow the women characters to express themselves freely. The article will conclude by questioning the limitations of writing, the diegetic space, and the gynocentric communities created within the two texts.

Physical Spaces

Cette fille-là is set in an unnamed asylum on the outskirts of Oran. The asylum is described as 'une maison enfouie dans un buissonnement de feuilles poussiéreuses' (p. 12): it is out of sight, and is literally shrouded from view due to the trees. Malika guides the reader into the asylum, past 'un portail de fer forgé' (p. 13). This doorway applies strict parameters to the institution from which the detainees cannot escape. The reader is thus being allowed privileged access into the closely controlled and distinctly penal asylum. After guiding the reader towards the main building, Malika says: 'c'est là. Vous y êtes' (p. 13). This instantly places the reader within the physical community of the asylum, but also within the community of the text, becoming part of the narrative through Malika's direct address. The reader is also being invited to participate in the communion between the different female voices of *Cette fille-là*, a process that Faouzia Bendjelid describes as Bey creating 'les traces du lecteur potentiel'.[11]

Bey creates evocative and sensory atmospherics that depict the depressing nature of the asylum. Malika describes a powerful odour that seems to have invaded every part of the asylum. It is 'L'Odeur souveraine' (p. 18), with a capitalized O, as if it is an all-powerful God, a concoction of various smells, which 'imprègne jusqu'aux tréfonds de leur être tous ceux qui vivent là' (p. 18). The patients try 's'accrocher à la chaleur des moindres rayons de soleil' (p. 18). These slivers of sunshine and warmth are the only sources to keep the patients alive. However, the shadow of death is 'sentinelle aux aguets et […] patiemment attend son heure' (p. 19). Bey creates atmospherics of decrepitude, hopelessness and helplessness as the patients slowly wither in the lifeless miasma of the asylum. The text itself is an attempt to create positive relationships and communion between the female detainees. Despite the harsh physical environment, Malika and others are attempting to help each other while she transcribes and narrates their own textual community.

Hizya is also controlled and silenced by her family in the stifling atmosphere of the apartment. Her free expression is hidden from her family often behind silences (p. 46), and her brother—Abdelkader—is also negatively affected by their family unit. He is the 'souffre-douleur' (p. 80) of their father. Hizya can see that he is suffering, 'mais on ne parle pas de ces choses-là en famille' (p. 80). Their family is defined by 'trop de silences. Trop de dissimulations' (p. 80).

[8] Alison Rice, *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pp. 172–73.
[9] Rice, *Polygraphies*, p. 172.
[10] Robin Morgan, 'Goodbye to all that', in *The Word of a Woman: Feminist Dispatches 1968–1992* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2014), pp. 32–43 (p. 33).
[11] Faouzia Bendjelid, 'Énonciation des formes romanesques dans *Cette fille-là* de Maïssa Bey', *Synergies Algérie*, 5 (2009), 227–42 (p. 230).

Moreover, there is a punitive atmosphere to Hizya's family domestic space. Her mother's aforementioned bedroom searches are described by Hizya as 'ses [her mother's] investigations policières' (p. 46). The silences, repressions and controls create a lack of family unity and community. There is certainly no communion because there are restrictions on what the family members can say, and there is no intimacy between them.

Hizya does describe some positive physical spaces, such as the university and the salon where she works. However, they both have limitations. She depicts university as an optimistic space where women and men enjoy the endless bounds of learning together. Yet when she completes her education, she literally buries away her certificates in a box in her wardrobe while figuratively burying her qualifications by taking on a job at the salon, the only place where she is allowed to work, as a woman. The women who work at the salon are as highly qualified as Hizya, but they too have had to take jobs in the salon. Nedja has a master's degree in Social and Economic Sciences but has since got married. Working in the salon and managing the family finances is therefore the only occupation permissible for her. Sonia is qualified in Information Technology but she gives up this career after fighting against the problem of 'piston' (p. 98), a colloquial term for nepotism. She is welcomed and accepted at the salon, like the other highly educated female employees. Both the salon space and Sonia inspire Hizya. Sonia is bold, addressing key contradictions and issues in the way in which Algerian women are policed by patriarchal rules: 'même si tu t'ensevelis sous de grands voiles noirs, ils peuvent toujours imaginer ce qu'il y a dessous!' (p. 104). Hizya is deeply affected by Sonia's words: 'on ne peut pas rester indifférente à ces regards qui vrillent et nous atteignent jusqu'au tréfonds de nous-mêmes' (pp. 104–05). Hizya's visceral reaction shows a form of communion between the two women as she writes Sonia into the narrative, inspired by her words. Bey is creating a nascent textual space of community for women to express their most candid thoughts. The physical space of the salon seems to be a safe gynocentric space where women can talk freely but the safety of the salon and the free speech it allows disappear when the women leave the physical space.

Upon leaving the salon, the women immediately re-enter dangerous territory. Hizya gains a stalker, a former classmate from university, who follows her after work. Sonia suddenly quits her job because her parents have married her off to a man who lives in Canada. The joy of the salon as a free place is limited. It is only the process of writing and transcribing that prove to be truly safe, gynocentric spaces of community for Hizya and Malika, in which they can express their innermost traumatic experiences alongside their bold and dangerous ideas. Semblances of freedom, power and safety, such as the spaces of the university and the salon, are all carefully ordained by patriarchal Algerian society. It is the diegetic space where the voices of women and their testimony can commune in complete freedom.

Writing and the Liberating Diegetic Space

Writing becomes a potent source of inspiration and liberation for the narrators. Kathryn Robson notes that in the case of female experiences and trauma, due to patriarchal control and the insidious trauma of silencing, 'there are no available templates, no formulations in which to give voice to these traumatic experiences'.[12] Siobhán McIlvanney notes how gynocentric scriptotherapy in *Cette fille-là* becomes a 're/writing of Algerian women's history'.[13] Scriptotherapy, a term coined by Suzette Henke,[14] can be seen as a positive way for survivors to write through their trauma in order to appropriate it in their own way, and in their own life narrative. Indeed, McIlvanney theorizes that writing trauma becomes a way of not only (re)writing individual memories and pasts, but also

[12] Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 12.
[13] McIlvanney, p. 61.
[14] Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects, Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

of (re)writing collective history, of putting the voices of women back into action after they 'have been given non-speaking, invisible parts in their own life stories'.[15] The women's voices speaking and writing in Bey's texts also testify to traumatic and violent experiences that have been ignored and buried due to the difficulty of facing such truths. While this may be common in the postcolonial world (Stef Craps and Gert Buelens point out that there is a universal tendency to refuse to listen to 'the traumatic stories of a colonial and postcolonial environment riven by oppression and civil war'[16]), the various female voices, particularly those of the two female narrators, are narrating and writing due to the physical spaces that constrain them, and as a result of the insidious—or very physical—traumas which have impacted them and other women because they are women. Narrating and writing through traumatic experiences means that the textual space becomes a site of collective scriptotherapy for the women. The focus here, however, is the notion of free expression, the creation of accepting communities and the communion of female voices, rather than an exploration of the curative or healing aspect of writing. Indeed, this section will propose that the act of narrating, of bearing witness to the narratives, and of recording these narratives through writing, are the main steps in Bey's attempt to unveil Algerian women and create an Algerian *her*story.

In *Cette fille-là,* Malika weaves together numerous narratives of other women in the asylum. The women recount brutal stories of abandonment, disgrace and physical trauma.[17] Names are also significant in *Cette fille-là.* Chapters are dedicated to the different women whose stories she transcribes, including Yamina, Fatima and Kheira. They are no longer faceless women who have been left in the asylum, but are named and are given a place within Malika's narrative and the gynocentric diegetic space which she has created. Names are also significant for the assertion of self and identity, as they can be chosen by the women themselves. Malika is originally called M'laïkia when she arrives at the asylum but she rejects this name chosen for her by the institution, which controls her, and chooses Malika instead. Aïcha, a female detainee, has also chosen her own name. She reveals to Malika that the name on her old identity card is Jeanne. These two names are distinctly different. Aïcha is an Arabic name while Jeanne is a traditional French name linked with that of the saint and iconic French heroine Jeanne d'Arc. Aïcha's former name instantly places her identity within the powerful grasp of French colonization: the colonizing force has effectively subsumed her under French culture and influence by naming her and categorizing her. Aïcha's former name points to a form of colonial structural oppression, an insidious trauma that sought to undermine Aïcha's national identity and sense of community. Craps uses concepts of insidious and oppression-based trauma, among others, in order to elaborate a new model of responding to postcolonial trauma; in so doing, he aims to resist the spectacularization and sentimentalization of suffering which can occur in trauma culture.[18] Bey's approach corresponds to this ethos of trauma representation by presenting incomplete narratives and refusing to provide readers with a complete traumatic story to consume. Aïcha refuses to tell Malika more private details, revealing only traces of her experience of being colonized. Malika fills in Aïcha's gaps, writing her version of the story behind her former French name. Jane Hiddleston describes how immigrant texts often look back on the War of Independence as 'a set of heterogeneous and incomplete traces'.[19] Bey's female asylum detainees also have testimonies that are incomplete testifying to traces of oppression and

[15] McIlvanney, 'Fighting for Independence', p. 69.
[16] Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, 'Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels', *Studies in the Novel*, 40 (2008), 1–12 (p. 8).
[17] Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996; first publ. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985) similarly deals with silenced women who are testifying to harrowing experiences that are ignored and repressed. Karen Stein explores the lethal danger that faces the narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale* as she dares to write about the repressive state of Gilead; see Karen Stein, 'Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 61 (1992), 269–79. Malika's status relates to that of the dystopian narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale* and can also be seen as a storyteller in the vein of Scheherazade writing to preserve her life. However, in Bey's text Malika is trying to preserve life by asserting her narrative authority and attempting to fight back against silencing through testifying and writing.
[18] Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 4 and p. 7.
[19] Jane Hiddleston, 'Cultural Memory and Amnesia: The Algerian War and 'Second-hand' Generation Immigrant Literature in France', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 3 (2003), pp. 59–71 (p. 61).

trauma. However, Bey's texts are set in contemporary Algeria and thus show that modern-day Algeria is similarly riddled with traumatic lacunae as female voices are ignored and silenced. Hiddleston also adds that 'any communal narrative is likely to mask the highly diverse and heterogeneous perceptions of singular individuals'.[20] Bey's texts are both communal narratives as Malika and Hizya are the dominant narrative voices, but Bey strives to integrate traces in an ethical way through the polyphonic and multiple female experiences recorded. Bey presents multiple voices from different vantage points in the communal narratives. By opening these textual spaces of community and communion, Bey is redefining the communal narrative and attempting to rearticulate it ethically.

Throughout these two texts, names and naming are key pivots of power for the female narrators. Malika and Hizya establish themselves through their names from the beginning of the respective works. Malika states bluntly that 'je m'appelle Malika' (p .20). She thinks about the origins of her name and reflects on the meaning of names, as her name means 'queen' (p. 20). This deep questioning of her name, its origin and its reflection of her sense of self belies a greater search for her identity. Hizya also searches for her sense of self, which she attempts to assert through the adoption of a poetic heroine, Hizya, as her namesake. The text itself is bookended by the poem about Hizya, a tragic romantic heroine. The first lines of the text read as follows:

> 'C'est peut-être en moi que le poème danse.
> Et que dansent les mots de ce poème au nom de femme.
> Hizya*' (p. 11).

The poem's diegetic position in relation to the rest of the text shows its importance in the modern-day story of Hizya the narrator as it starts and ends her narrative. This poetic figure inspires Hizya to write, and to be bolder in her everyday life. Hizya only writes about the poetic figure, and does not tell anyone about her namesake, thus highlighting the importance of the diegetic space for Hizya's nascent emancipation through narrative. Hizya's parents are not aware of the poetic signification of the name Hizya; they simply named their daughter after her paternal grandmother. The poetic truth behind her name seems to drive Hizya and offers her a form of transgressive inspiration: 'auraient-ils opté pour un autre prénom s'ils avaient su que la belle Hizya avait défié toute sa famille, et sa tribu, pour appartenir à un homme? N'y-a-t-il pas là un signe du destin?' (p. 12). Hizya the narrator takes her poetic namesake as an exciting sign of destiny, which gives her the potential to disobey her family. The poetic figure of Hizya inspires the narrator's writing and the creation of the textual community.

Hizya's narrative is interspersed with an italicized voice that comments and criticizes the thoughts of the narrator. The textual community and communion created is different from the polyphonous 'tapestry' of traumatic experiences in *Cette fille-là*.[21] The voice communes with Hizya in order to improve her writing and to question her writerly choices. The identity of the voice is unknown but familiar. The voice refers to Hizya by 'tu' throughout the text, and appears to know her extensively. It is unknown whether the voice is female or male; it could be both, or neither. The voice is critical and harsh, but also brutally honest, forcing Hizya to face the reasons behind her writing project, her attachment to her poetic eponymous heroine, and also her relationships with her family, colleagues and men. Hizya questions herself and her narrative, asking whether her writing project is purely an attempt to rebel against her mother (p. 110). In response, the italicized voice states: 'tu avances, tu avances…' (p. 111). The voice is encouraging Hizya to continue to plunge into her self-reflection: 'on dirait que tu commences enfin à te rendre compte qu'il t'arrive de dérailler' (p. 110). It can be said that the voice is a progressive and feminist force that seeks to push Hizya to speak up more in real life, and not just in her textual world. The italicized voice, meanwhile, points to the benefits of scriptotherapy: as Hizya writes and the voice critiques, Hizya perhaps starts to work through certain issues in her reality. The voice could be a textual therapist.

[20] Hiddleston, 'Cultural Memory and Amnesia', p. 61.
[21] McIlvanney, 'Fighting for Independence', p. 74.

However, the voice also points to the limitations of scriptotherapy as Hizya cannot just write and exist in her textual world, she also needs to make changes in her reality. The last interjection of the italicized voice presents a tough but realistic précis of Hizya: 'tu t'es abreuvée aux mots, comme d'autres filles s'abreuvent aux histoires des feuilletons turcs à la télé' (p. 323). This fancifulness of Hizya and the romantic illusion of liberation are critiques that can be applied to the writing and narrating processes in both texts. There are limitations to writing and to its potentiality to enable liberation and independence.

The Limitations of Writing for Freedom and Independence

Malika often fills the gaps in the narratives of women with her own imagined stories. This invention and imaginative filling of gaps is problematic because Malika is subsuming under her own thoughts the narratives of the women. This appropriation notwithstanding, due to the commonality between Malika and the female detainees of the asylum, and the gynocentric community that is created in the text, it would seem that Malika is an ideal narrator and writer of the testimonies. Indeed, Malika proves to be an ethical transcriber and witness as she stops herself from filling certain lacunae. For example, Fatima, a female detainee, refuses to recount more to her, and Malika ponders: 'je pourrais imaginer, inventer la suite' (p. 128). She realizes the pain that she could cause Fatima, and also the pain that it could cause herself: 'ou la pousser jusqu'au bout du désespoir […]. Mais j'ai peur. J'ai peur de retrouver une autre histoire. De revivre une autre scène. Presque semblable.' (p. 128). This quotation shows links between Malika and the other women. 'Presque semblable' highlights the generality of the traumatic experience, and thus points to systemic violence and trauma inflicted on women. As Algerian women, their experiences are relatable hence why Malika is an ideal transcriber of their stories. It also demonstrates the therapeutic effect of writing the stories of other women, which Malika can use to allude to her own buried traumas that she does not want to relive. Bey shows how past memories and experiences can be relocated and reawakened upon hearing these traumatic stories. Bey is presenting an ideal reader and listener through the characters of Malika and Hizya. Empathy and understanding of the effects of trauma lead to an ethical community of readers and listeners.

The creativity and imagination of both Malika and Hizya can be seen in a positive ethical light in relation to testimony and the writing of traumatic experiences. Ranjana Khanna links fabulation to testimony.[22] Khanna states that the negotiation of postcolonial memory involves forgetting and remembering 'at times a repression, and at other times a new and conscious fabulation, or testimony'.[23] This concept of fabulation can be related to Malika's 'filling in' of lacunae. Her fabulation is necessary because traumatic memories are not integrated in their entirety by survivors. According to psychiatrists Otto van der Hart and Bessel A. Van der Kolk they 'are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences'.[24] The lacunae-ridden memories, such as those of the detained women, must be assimilated and appropriated in a narrative. Henri Raczymow describes how writing the past is a question of filling in gaps and sewing together scraps of memory; this is the task of the writer.[25] This conceptualization of attempting to bring traumatic experiences together through writing corresponds to the notions of community and communion, as in both texts the women narrators add their own experiences to the textual community. Moreover, as scribes for various women narrators, Hizya and Malika help to create gynocentric versions of history and acknowledge unheard voices.

The endings of Bey's two texts both resist categorization and generalization. There are no

[22] Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), *passim*.
[23] Khanna, *Algeria Cuts*, p. 97.
[24] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Otto van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 158–82 (p. 176).
[25] Henri Raczymow, 'Memory Shot Through with Holes', *Yale French Studies*, 85 (1994), 98–105.

clear-cut or satisfying denouements of exalted liberation. Bey opts instead for ambiguity. She does not leave the reader with cured women narrators who have expunged their traumatic pasts through writing, or a cathartic form of scriptotherapy. Rather—in accordance with the perpetual openness of trauma (or the 'traumatic wound'[26])—the texts end on ambiguous terms. The final interjection of the italicized voice of *Hizya* is depressingly realistic about Hizya's progress (or lack thereof) and her attempt to exalt herself: 'tu as fait des études. Pour rien. Ça n'a servi à rien' (p. 323). At the end of the text, Hizya is choosing to get married, following the domesticated path of her mother and her other female antecedents. The last vignette of the text depicts the narrator Hizya listing a series of future statements describing her domestic life with her boyfriend Riyad: 'nous aurons une vie ordinaire. Nous formerons une famille identique' (p. 329). She looks to a domestic, ordinary future that will not change or revolutionize her position as a woman.

Malika's end is similarly ambiguous and depressing. She becomes and accepts the name 'la possédée' (p. 238) at the end of the text. This name was initially given to her when she arrived at the asylum, along with M'laïkia (p. 20). She becomes an object as a woman in patriarchal Algeria with an adjectival phrase to name her. She symbolically dispossesses herself of any semblance of independence by giving in to their categorization when she changes her name to the one afforded to her by the incarcerating institution. She also negates her textual quest to find an identity and a family. She resigns herself to a life in the *asile,* giving up by blending into the controlling space. She becomes a fantastical sylph-like spirit: 'mon corps se dénoue, et mes pieds s'envolent' (p. 239). Malika seems to disappear into fantasy and imagination, and the reader questions whether she falls into a state of madness. McIlvanney notes how there are limited means for women to express themselves as 'independent expression, both linguistic and sexual, in a hyperpatriarchal society may only take place either through exile or transgressive behaviour—including the act of writing—which, in its most extreme form, manifests itself as madness'.[27] The stated hyperpatriarchal society reflects the Algeria presented by Bey. Malika can only truly express herself through madness, just as Hizya only expresses herself through romantic musings and poetic inspiration. Fantasy and fabulation seem to be the only options available for women. Ultimately Malika is consumed by madness, and Hizya abandons her poetic inspiration in favour of conjectures about a domesticated life.

These endings are not definitive, they are ambiguous and open, and lend themselves to untriumphant conclusions for the women narrators. As readers, we have been invited into these polyphonous diegetic spaces to read and listen to these unheard voices and narratives, yet the narrators fall into either dull reality or madness. Writing their experiences, and those of other Algerian women, has enabled them to create a community, albeit temporarily, in the diegetic textual space. These texts also serve as immortalized records and testimonies that can be added to a *her*story of the Algerian nation and identity. The writing and narrativization processes are positive forces for the women narrators, but when the textual communities close and the communion ends, there are no moments of triumphant emancipation for the women narrators. They return to being subsumed and silenced. Bey's position in relation to the textual community and communion created by the narrators is that of an instigator. It is ultimately the author—Bey—who can open up the diegetic space of the text to allow polyphonous female voices to commune together and create a textual community in which to voice unheard experiences and bear witness to traumatic testimonies.

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[26] See Robson, *Writing Wounds*, pp. 11–15.
[27] McIlvanney, 'Fighting for Independence', p. 59.

BOOK REVIEWS

Muslim Women in French Cinema: Voices of Maghrebi Migrants in France. By LESLIE KEALHOFER-KEMP. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015. 240 pp. Hb £75.00. ISBN: 9781781381984

Liverpool University has been at the forefront in publishing some of the most innovative work in Francophone Postcolonial Studies in recent decades, through its 'Francophone Postcolonial Studies' and 'Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures' series. Kealhofer-Kemp's 2015 work is part of the latter, and it focuses on audio-visual representations of first-generation Maghrebi women in France, principally the mothers and wives who moved to France in the 1970s as part of the *regroupement familiale*. Literary and filmic scholarship on the representation of North African migrants in France has tended to lean towards discussion of the experiences of the second- and third-generation migrants, centred in film studies on *beur* and *banlieue* film-making. Kealhofer-Kemp's work addresses this imbalance, providing detailed analyses of both well-known and under-examined moving image works.

The book is structured in four chapters, according to audio-visual genre: documentary, short films, *téléfilms*, and feature-length fiction films. This generic subdivision allows the author to examine formal technique alongside thematic concerns, namely voice, agency, empowerment, mediation, and the use of objects as affective and identificatory aids. Kealhofer-Kemp revitalizes Bill Nichols canonical work on documentary in a thought-provoking critique of Yamina Benguigui's imposed perspective in *Femmes d'Islam* (1994), drawing distinctions between the expository mode of documentary which propounds an argument, documentaries of minimal intervention, and works of mediation that give the appearance of transparency. The chapter on short films, including *Un Dimanche matin à Marseille: Béranger* (Mario Fanfani, 1998) and *Le petit chat est mort* (Fejria Deliba, 1992) raises some fascinating questions about the use of objects (letters, French plays, food, photographs, yarn) as mediators between the women screened and the viewing 'other', the presumed (French) spectator who is at an affective and political distance from her experience. The inclusion of *téléfilms* in the study is, to the mind of this reviewer, a fascinating analysis of both popular and academic perception of a frequently dismissed genre. As the author rightly points out, these works of comparatively less prestige often receive higher audience numbers, are screened nationally at primetime hours, and are often repeated, so they often influence dominant perceptions of their subjects more broadly than feature films. The section on feature films offers new readings of recognizable classics like Benguigui's *Inch Allah Dimanche* (2001) and Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* (1985), while also offering new perspectives on little-examined characters, like Nina in Bourlem Guerdjou's *Vivre au paradis* (1998).

These chapters are preceded by a lengthy introduction, which rather dutifully treads familiar ground in its discussion of Saïd's *Orientalism*, Flaubert's mistress, Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger*, and Spivak's thinking of 'double colonization' and the subaltern. However, for under-graduate and postgraduate students coming into contact with the field, this may be extremely useful. Also valuable to students is the detailed account offered by the author of her research methodology, an appendix with extensive notes and tables on her filmic corpus, and sections on the means of accessing some of the lesser-known works. The author also conducted numerous interviews with many of the directors in question, and this adds to the originality and complexity of the work. Kealhofer-Kemp's study is, by design, extremely broad ranging, which necessarily restricts theoretical and historical contextualization in some cases. However, in spite of the limitations of such an extensive corpus, her close readings are nonetheless thoughtful and multi-faceted and the breath of her documentation of previously unexamined works is extremely impressive. Indeed, this bringing to light of previously unexamined material is one of the great

strengths of this book, and as the author indicates, it opens many rich and diverse channels for further research.

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Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory, and Gender in Algeria 1954–2012. By NATALYA VINCE. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. 274 pp. ISBN: 9780719091070

Natalya Vince's book on women's contribution to the Algerian War of Independence, and on the legacy of their struggle until 2012, offers a ground-breaking view of the history of postcolonial Algeria. The fruit of years of research using archives in Algeria and, most importantly, interviews with women remembering the war and commenting on their position and role in its aftermath, the book covers unprecedented terrain in its revelation of a little-charted history. As Vince herself points out, the history of postcolonial Algeria has itself not received much scholarship, other than James McDougall's notable *History and Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (2006), and certainly there has not been any substantial research into women's lives during this long and turbulent period. Not only does Vince set out to fill this gap, but she does it with meticulous attention to the detail of different women's experiences and with a steadfast resistance to one-sided narratives either championing the newfound agency of women during the war or lamenting their inexorable oppression in its wake. Indeed, Vince gives more nuance and depth to arguments affirming the significance of women's contributions to the war while also critiquing some of the generalizing assumptions that have been made about the postcolonial period: '1960s and 1970s Algeria was a battle between "tradition" and "modernity" hence the origins of an ongoing "identity crisis", women were sent back into the kitchen, contemporary political discourse is obsessed by the past, it was downhill all the way after 1962… Such statements are in fact part of politicised narratives, full of coded meanings, allusions and rumours that all is not what it seems—a way of talking about politics typical of a political system which is neither totalitarian nor entirely democratic. Such narratives need to be deconstructed rather than reproduced' (p. 13).

Vince's early chapters build on the work of Djamila Amrane Minne, whose *Des femmes algériennes dans la guerre d'Algérie* (1994) narrates women's activities during the War of Independence. This includes their participation in the guerrilla movements, including, for example, first of all the provision of food for *maquisards*, but extending soon to the transportation of arms and the planting of bombs. Not only does Vince document activities, however, but she also analyses women's perceptions of their work at the same time, and discovers a range of different and more or less active forms of commitment. Her analysis also extends to relationships between women during this period, and traces instances of division and doubt among female prisoners with different aspirations for the future of independent Algeria. In particular she is keen to dispel the myth that the nationalist movement was 'a monolithic bloc' (p. 66). Moving forward, however, Vince also sets out to debunk stereotypes of the Algerian woman's embodiment of national identity, and her interviews reveal what women went on to do *after* independence in such a way as to demonstrate the diversity of effects that the war had on women's roles. Women were also divided in their responses to the new state created in the wake of decolonization. Some were able to take on public roles, though many struggled to find employment, and it was those who already had significant educational and social capital before independence who achieved the highest status. Furthermore, as Vince's analysis evolves it is clear that the success of women in the post-independence era depended on their degree of complicity with state ideology, though she stresses that the single-party state was more heterogeneous than many existing accounts admit.

The 1980s, however, constituted according to Vince a tipping point in the deterioration of relations between women and the state. The Family Code of 1984 further institutionalized women's inequality, and it became impossible at this point to reconcile nation-building with women's emancipation. Feminist narratives from this period onwards also turn out to be more nuanced than has been assumed, however, as the War of Independence is not heralded as a unique moment of liberation but as part of an ongoing narrative in which women were compelled to struggle against both colonialism and patriarchy across different periods. Above all, this argument, and indeed the book as a whole, seek to resist the temptation to mythologize the War of Independence but to see it rather as an important part of Algerian women's history, and one that affected them in a range of different ways. Vince's argument is sound, perceptive and nuanced, and the narrative she weaves to construct it is sensitive and rigorous. This volume is in this way a highly intelligent and original intervention and should be read not only by historians of Algeria but by anyone with an interest in Algerian culture, literature and politics during and since decolonization.

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The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories. Edited by MARTIN MUNRO. Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2015. 215 pp. Pb £18.50. ISBN: 9789766405519

The first collection of its kind, *The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories*, is an anthology that brings together fifteen works of fiction by preeminent authors from the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean as well as the United States and Canada. Edited by Martin Munro, this eclectic selection of short stories, either written in or translated into English, plays, at times, with elements of Caribbean folktale in an attempt to 'evoke the dead, the undead and the dying' (p. xi). The stories consider both historical and present-day social, political and environmental horrors that plague Caribbean societies.

This work opens with a well-organized and eloquently written introduction by Munro, which provides adequate historical context that sets the stage for the stories. Munro reflects on the various forms of haunting in Caribbean history, beginning with the decimation of the Amerindians by the Europeans and following with the traumas occasioned by slavery and its successor, indentureship. He extends his discussion to the destruction inflicted on the Caribbean landscape, which lost its agricultural diversity due to the cultivation of the sugarcane monoculture market. Munro also specifies modern-day tragedies that torment the Caribbean islands, such as dictatorships in Haiti whose leaders, ironically, nickname their militia men after ghost figures, like the Tontons Macoutes or Chimères, to inflict both physical and psychological terror on their citizens.

Hardly unexpected is the brilliant depiction of quintessential Caribbean folklore characters and symbols evocative of the spectral universe in certain stories in this collection. From the obeahman in Maryse Condé's 'The Obeahman, Obeahed', to zombies, jumbies and even the classic trickster figure, Anansi, in Fred D'Aguiar's story of the same name, these characters add a phantasmal allure to the specific stories, making them an enthralling read. Similarly, Shani Mootoo takes the reader to the emblematic and ever-feared silk cotton tree notorious for housing spirits in her 'The Bonnaire Silk Cotton Tree'. An entertaining tale, to say the least, this story follows Nandita Sharma, an aspiring photographer, who, in dire need of an opportunity to boost her photography career, cuts a deal with a jumbie residing in the vicinity of a silk cotton tree. In this crafty jumbie world creation, Mootoo unearths broader social issues affecting contemporary Trinidadian society. The jumbie complains about the threats to his home due to deforestation and

criticizes the religious authorities for misplacing the attention of the public from said environmental dilemma. Of more significance, though, is the fact that the jumbie and his jumbie counterparts become representative of the criminal injustices that plague Trinidad. Nandita's photographs of the jumbies during carnival celebrations on the well-chosen J'Ouvert morning will then become a memorial for '[t]he defenceless dead, the unfought-for dead' (p. 112) who were senselessly murdered and became victims of the escalating crime rate in Trinidad. Mootoo's story, however, commemorates more than the present-day victims, given that it crosses space and time to memorialize '[e]very person who get killed on this island since the beginning of the first injustice all the way to the present-day wantonness' (p. 113). The lingering historical and personal traumas are likewise evoked in Lawrence Scott's 'The Wedding Photograph' as well as Keith Jardim's 'The Country of Green Mansions', which closes this collection. Similarly, the other authors in this anthology, analogous to Mootoo, use the supernatural element to engage with social concerns. Helen Klonaris's 'Ghost Children' is one such story. It questions religious and social conventions as it explores the notion of female sexuality. Another such story is Alake Pilgrim's 'Blue Crabs', which reveals the horrors of child abuse.

In spite of their incorporation of archetypal Caribbean ghost figures and emblems, the stories in *The Haunted Tropics* seem to be re-appropriating the horror anticipated in ghost stories since they lack in their fright factor. Instead of horror that petrifies its reader, these tales are underpinned by mystery and sardonic humour. Condé's narrative, for instance, replete with tongue-in-cheek remarks, describes a classic case of the application of the karmic law of reciprocity. Carmélien, a practitioner of sorcery, succumbs to the power of the very magic he uses to manipulate the spirit of the dead. Carmélien's satirical zombification seems to be more about moral judgement and regard for the world of the dead than Carmélien's despicable deeds. Equally jocular is Geoffrey Philp's 'Dawn of the Dread', which depicts the transformation of humans to zombies after they smoked chemically enhanced marijuana. Their only hope of returning to their anthropomorphic form is to inhale the smoke of naturally grown marijuana, carefully cultivated by Philp's protagonist, Don-Don. Philp's tale seems, at once, to be lobbying for the legalization of cannabis and against the use of inorganic products. These stories, laced with dark humour, thus, present a distinct approach to the genre of ghost stories.

Evidently, Munro's selection of authors with their distinct writing styles and apt treatment of the notion of the 'haunted tropics' makes this *sui generis* anthology highly deserving of the Best Fiction Anthology prize that it received from the University of West Indies Press. Each story is as riveting as it is revelatory. Beneath their engaging and sometimes facetious surface lies the weight of historical traumas lingering in the present as well as larger social issues plaguing contemporary Caribbean societies. This collection will pique the interest of those who are intrigued with supernatural fiction, Caribbean literature and, more specifically, the Caribbean ghost story genre.

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La circulation des films: Afrique du Nord et Moyen-Orient. Edited by ABDELFETTAH BENCHENNA, PATRICIA CAILLÉ and NOLWENN MINGANT. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016. 352 pp. Pb €30. ISBN: 9782343085968

Shifting the focus of debate within Francophone and world cinema studies from the question of national cinemas to that of the circulation of films within nations and regions may be a rather subtle differentiation, but it is both powerful and necessary, as this new edited volume of articles and interviews so impressively demonstrates. In their introduction, the editors sum up the premise thus: 'pour permettre le développement de cinématographies nationales, ces films doivent circuler et être vus' (p. 13) and, in dealing with both the circulation of films within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the circulation of MENA films globally, this stimulating collection illuminates and critically interrogates the geopolitical structures which govern exactly which films are seen. This overarching theme provides critical depth and coherency to a book that is ambitious and wide-ranging in its geographical, thematic and structural scope. The result is a timely and original contribution which provokes urgent questions about how we understand and theorize film in global contexts and of how we can problematize notions of 'national' cinemas, particularly in the Francophone context.

The book is divided into four sections, and while it is not a work which necessarily has to be read in order, given the diversity of articles and interviews, the first section, 'D'une rive de la méditeranée à l'autre', does provide a grounding for the rest of the book by introducing some of the key themes. The geopolitical inequalities present within the distribution of films between the north and south Mediterranean, for example, are convincingly set out. The influence of France in the cinemas of the Maghreb, not only in financing productions, but also in determining the distribution of films, is demonstrated here: Karine Prévoteau, for example, argues that such co-productions are not just North–South collaborations, but rather unequal partnerships 'du Nord vers le Sud' (p. 106), a trajectory which carries a charged colonial legacy. This point is taken up time and again throughout the book, perhaps most saliently by Morgan Corriou in one of the later articles, which questions the liberating role of cinema in Tunisia during the 1960s and 1970s. This article adds a historical dimension to an otherwise contemporary collection, and offers a clear link from the politics of (de)colonization to the politics of circulation evident in the present day.

The second key consideration is undoubtedly that of 'national' cinemas. In the first section, Patricia Caillé discusses 'la tension entre les dimensions nationales et regionales toujours précaires et instables' (p. 70), and this is emphasized within other contributions in the book. However, it is when considering these individual articles in comparative perspective, which the structure of the book facilitates, that the most striking example of the precarity of national identity arises. This concerns Laïla Marrakchi's 2013 film *Rock the Casbah*, which is cited on numerous occasions by different contributors. In the first section of the book, it is positioned as a film from the Maghreb while also recognizing it as a Moroccan/French co-production (p. 41) and highlighting the further transnational dimension of its cast (p. 78). In the second section, which focuses on international competition in the MENA region, and particularly on the political and economic factors affecting distribution, *Rock the Casbah* surfaces again in an interview with UniFrance's Gilles Renouard and Jean-Cristophe Baubiat, but here, it is mentioned in a discussion of a distribution initiative in Egypt, in which Marrakchi's film is subsumed under French national cinema as one of 'quatre films français […] diffusés l'année dernière' (p. 166). The book is given an extra dimension thanks to these comparative elements, which serve to exemplify the problems encountered when we attempt to essentialize 'national' cinema.

The third main thread of the book is the circulation of films 'à l'ère du multi-écrans' (p. 49), and the reader is presented with topics ranging from the use of Vimeo in Gaza to multiplex cinemas in Morocco and itinerant film festivals in Turkey. A nuanced and fluid conception of cinema and film circulation thus develops throughout the book, particularly within the third and fourth sections, which explore the decline of traditional circuits and the formation of alternative spaces in which films can be circulated. This is a highly relevant discussion for the digital age, and

the interviews with industry professionals in these sections, who are making use of streaming services and digital media for the circulation of films, often in informal circuits, point towards an area of study that demands further research.

Perhaps due to the fact that *La circulation des films* is the result of the expansion of the *Africultures* journal into the book publishing arena, it broadly retains the structure of a journal, lacking both a conclusion and index. The book therefore ends rather suddenly after the final, excellent article by Laura U. Marks on informal and alternative collaborations between filmmakers in the MENA region. While the individual articles are highly accessible, a conclusion by the editors would have been useful in order to draw together some of the key outcomes and implications of this important collection of works. The absence of an index, meanwhile, will be particularly notable for the more specialized reader in search of particular information. These omissions may be regrettable, but they do not detract from the richness and originality of this volume. It is as valuable an addition to Francophone postcolonial studies as it is to film and cultural studies more widely. While being approachable and instructive for the general scholar in any of these fields, there is much here for researchers with particular interests in this area to engage with actively and critically.

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The Algerian War in French-Language Comics: Postcolonial Memory, History, and Subjectivity. By JENNIFER HOWELL. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015. 260 pp. Hb £60.00. ISBN: 1498516068

In the burgeoning field of Bande Dessinée criticism, Jennifer Howell's contribution to its colonial/postcolonial wing is a timely and thought-provoking text. Nonetheless, it is somewhat striking that three of the most interesting thematic prisms through which she views comics on the Algerian War are not better illuminated in the title. Here we have no sense of her intriguing interventions on the didactic potential of comics nor on the effects of paratextual inclusions, and her investigation of postmemory in comics is alluded to (the subtitle includes 'Postcolonial memory') but not clearly emphasized.

Most peculiar of the three titular deficiencies is perhaps the former, for Howell's study takes considerations of French schooling and modes of historical consumption as its springboard for continued discussion and debate about the utility and beauty of la Bande Dessinée. Indeed, chapter one, '"De case en classe": *Teaching the Algerian War*', begins precisely by problematizing the tendency of the textbook industry to manipulate historical material in order to 'disseminate carefully chosen versions of history that align with national metanarratives' (p. 2). Initially inspired by Sam Wineburg's analyses in *Historical Thinking*, Howell goes on to provide close readings of six *terminale*-level textbooks, focusing on their lack of metadiscourse, on their inability to represent historiographical processes and on their privileging of certain historical narratives over others. Chapter two then seeks to address these problems and others by illuminating the potential of comics as a pedagogical tool. The self-referentiality of their multimodal narratives and their concomitant capacity to elucidate and problematize their representational nature, is focused upon with inspiring relish and conviction. Furthermore, Howell begins an outline of the importance of the intimate nature of the narratives of comics, of their ability to highlight personal experience and memory that conflicts with and undermines established tellings of historical events, in this case the Algerian War.

Chapters three and four provide astute analyses of two of the most striking aspects of historical comics and explore their potential to explode the dominance of a singular narrative channel. The inclusion of accompanying texts written by respected historians is focused upon in

chapter three, while chapter four seeks to assess the reproduction and manipulation of photographical material. The latter is particularly fascinating in its demonstration of how the quasi-paratextual recycling of news clippings can be performed such that a cacophonous arrangement of events and their experience is produced, consequently undermining the totalizing impulses within History.

Chapter five, 'Self, Other, and Self-Othering' marks a shift in the book to an analysis of the interaction of the core components of la Bande Dessinée: the text and the drawn image. In particular, the chapter evokes the power of the comic-book medium to generate complex meditations on colonial/postcolonial identity through, for example, the playful exploitation of received cultures of representation. Howell also importantly includes a discussion on the potential for a redeployment of orientalist tropes to reproduce dominant ideological parameters, though she seems loath to criticize artists whose work might be seen as problematic. She disagrees, for example, with Mark McKinney's 2001 assessment of Jacques Ferrandez's *Carnets d'Orient* in which he argues that Ferrandez's work often runs the risk of reigniting a colonial desire to gain access to Algerian women depicted as cloistered and mysterious. Indeed, perhaps one of the few criticisms one might level at Howell's work stems from her own industry and love of her chosen medium for study. This is to say that throughout the book she alludes to the fact that she has conducted numerous interviews with the artists whose work she is discussing. The problem with this is twofold: first, the reader of comics is left craving a fuller reproduction of these interviews that apparently took place, and second, s/he sometimes gains the impression that Howell has perhaps put herself in too close a proximity to her object to be able to then assess it without the interference of personal considerations. Nonetheless, Howell's ability to evoke the artistic contribution of historical comics artists is quite brilliant. Her analysis of the little-known *Pierrot de Bab El Oued*, by Sid Ali Melouah (2003), for example, is particularly intriguing, centring on the subversion and mockery of colonial imagery by the Algerian artist. Chapter six formulates an elegant discussion of how colonial landscapes are manoeuvred and deployed to encourage the reader to think through their function for colonizer, colonized and *pied-noir*. Chapter seven, however, represents the most interesting, timely, and rewarding section of the book. Howell successfully shows how comics constitute a medium which is particularly well equipped for representing and picking apart the processes of Postmemory, the notion recently developed by Mariana Hirsch. Here we note the singular ability of comics to represent both the maintenance of complete fantasy-historical narrative in postcolonial subjects and the resurrection of trauma, of *trous de mémoire* and of conflicting memories which challenge narrativization. Her analysis of Morvandiau's *d'Algérie*, in particular, brings to light the potential for an interplay of text and image to generate meaning in a manner that is unique to comics and particularly productive.

Howell's analyses remain lucid and intriguing throughout, and her love of the medium shines through. Furthermore, owing to Howell's deep love and knowledge of her field, *The Algerian War in French-Language Comics* represents a fantastically useful work in its assembly of a corpus of comics dealing with the Algerian War. Nonetheless, her work also encourages future study through its alluding to important work left to do, for example on comics from Algeria and on the evocation of postmemory in works prior to *Une Éducation Algérienne*, the comic that is understood by some as marking the beginning of representations of the war in long-form comics. The book constitutes a notable milestone in the establishment of French-language comics studies, contributing important work to the field started by critics like Ann Miller and Mark McKinney.

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Branding the 'Beur' Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983–2013. By KATHRYN A. KLEPPINGER. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015. 256 pp. Hb £75.00. ISBN: 9781781381960

Beur novels, or texts written by descendants of North African immigrants which chart the childhood struggles of North African characters living in urban France, have attracted much critical and media attention for the questions they raise about belonging, identity, and immigration. It is this socio-political engagement of *beur* writers which Kathryn A. Kleppinger questions in *Branding the 'Beur' Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983–2013*. Playing on the duality of the verb 'to brand' in the title of the book by referring to the *beur* status of the authors as both a marketing label and as 'an indelible mark they cannot erase even when they try' (p. 16), Kleppinger explores how the mainstream media engages with authors of North African descent who write in French. She seeks to understand why television and radio journalists present this literature as writing which focuses solely on issues of immigration and urban poverty, even if the authors themselves repeatedly reject these claims in interviews, and questions why some *beur* writers have been given more media attention than others. Moreover, she asks what these media appearances tell us more broadly about the marketing of literature in France.

Kleppinger's innovative study combines approaches from literary studies and sociology. She undertakes content analysis of media appearances by the authors, focusing on the texts produced during these interviews as well as the body language of authors, and also offers a new reading of their most canonical works, looking beyond the habitual socio-political focus of study. The book is theoretically underpinned by Stuart Hall's concepts of encoding and decoding and Édouard Glissant's theory of relation. Kleppinger uses these ideas to understand how ideological debates of the time of publication have shaped the perceived significance of the novels. Chapter one offers a sound justification of the methodology of the project, using Gérard Genette's argument that the 'epitext' of a novel anchors it in the real world to explain convincingly why media interviews are useful sites of analysis, because they 'mak[e] the books present' (p. 4). The subsequent chapters follow a chronological approach and examine in detail the *beur* authors which have attracted the most media attention over the last thirty years.

Chapter two explores the emergence of *beur* writing through an analysis of Mehdi Charef's first novel, *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983). This was the first novel written by an author of North African descent to receive significant media attention, which explains the start date of Kleppinger's study. The chapter argues that the novel was presented as an 'ethnic minority' text by the media, and while Charef legitimized this realist reading, he also sought to highlight that his novel draws attention to the humanity of France's inner-city *banlieues,* in addition to their problems. For Kleppinger, it is this combination of tenderness and realism which explains his media popularity. In chapter three, she compares two younger authors who were greatly inspired by Charef: Azouz Begag and Farida Belghoul. Whereas Begag, like Charef, positioned himself as a 'political commentator' (p. 95) in his autobiographical novel *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986), Belghoul refused to reduce *Georgette!* (1986) to socio-political terms, and instead emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of her work.

Chapter four moves on to the 1990s and examines how women writers of North African descent have been received by the media, particularly Soraya Nini and Samira Bellil, 'the two female authors who received the most attention on television in this era' (p. 124). Kleppinger analyses the media reaction to Nini's *Ils disent que je suis une beurette* (1993) and to Bellil's *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* (2002), positing these texts as different forms of autobiographies to the ones previously studied. For Kleppinger, Hall's concept of a 'negotiated approach' to media coverage explains their popularity: Nini and Bellil were willing to engage with journalists about life as a *beurette*, but at the same time they pushed for a more nuanced reading of their work. Chapter five sustains the focus on gender in the study of Rachid Djaïdani's three texts, in which the struggles of young male *beurs* are foregrounded: *Boumkoeur* (1999), *Mon nerf* (2004) and *Viscéral* (2007). The chapter maps out the changes in *beur* writing during the 1990s and 2000s, examining how the focus has shifted from the

beur to the urban environment of the *banlieue* in which he lives. The chapter also charts the changes in Djaïdani's approach to media interest of his writing. As he has become a more established author, he has become more reluctant to discuss themes of immigration and identity, and advocates a universalist approach to his work. Chapter six then returns to the *beurette*, or the female *beur*, and considers, using Hall's terminology of oppositionality, Faïza Guène's interaction with the media as 'forcefully oppositional'.

Kleppinger completes her study with a brief overview of authors of North African descent writing between 2007 and 2013, comparing Sabri Louatah's writing project to the Qui fait la France? Collective in their opinions of the role of literature. She concludes that the *beur* label is tautological and no longer relevant in today's society because there is 'a growing acceptance that these authors are French like any other', and so 'separating them according to their ethnic heritage no longer serves any artistic (or marketing) purpose' (p. 251).

Branding the 'Beur' Author goes beyond previous scholarship of this literature to address *beur* writing in French in all its artistic and thematic richness. By considering the epitext surrounding the novels as well as the texts themselves, Kleppinger does not seek to legitimize, above all others, the interpretations offered by authors of their work, nor does she reduce the opinions of authors about their writing, but instead she adds 'another voice in the consideration of the literary and social stakes of *beur*-authored writing' (p. 27). There could be greater engagement with theoretical frameworks throughout the chapters, rather than simply at the end of a section, and a more detailed contextualization of each author and their literary *œuvre* would be helpful, but overall this is a very stimulating study of the transformation of *beur* writing over the past thirty years.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

SFPS PG Study Day 2016: (Be)Longing in the Francophone World
University of Birmingham, 20 June 2016

The Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies Postgraduate Study Day was held this year at the University of Birmingham and was kindly sponsored by the Univeristy's PGR Development Fund. Following an excellent event last year at Queen's University Belfast, the conference sought to continue to widen postgraduate engagement with SFPS by choosing an accessible location in the centre of the UK. Co-organized by Antonia Wimbush and Rebekah Vince, the event brought together postgraduate researchers from across the country and beyond, both at MA/MSc and PhD level, to showcase their work on identity and belonging in a supportive, friendly environment. The Study Day explored the theme of '(Be)longing in the Francophone World', with papers addressing themes of uprooting and migration (voluntary/forced), nostalgia and inheritance, mediation and the transmission of memory, as well as the inherited guilt of postmemory. A transcultural focus encompassed Mande identity, *pied-noir* heritage, Arab Israeli/Palestinian positioning, nomadism, Mediterranean space, and *Francophonie*.

The event opened with a welcome address by Stephen Forcer (Head of the Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham) who challenged us to think of theory as the object, rather than—or as well as—, the subject of certain texts. This was followed by the first panel, '(Non-)Belonging and Exile', which interrogated the role of women in migration schemes in French Caribbean literature (Antonia Wimbush), explored nostalgia and inheritance in contemporary narratives of *pied-noir* memory (Hugh Hiscock), and investigated longing and non-belonging in the Mediterranean Sea (Beatrice Ivey).

We were delighted to welcome Helen Vassallo (Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Exeter) as the keynote speaker, who presented a fascinating paper entitled 'Exile and (Be)longing in Contemporary Francophone Women's Writing'. Focusing on the different forms of exile in the literary works of Leïla Sebbar and Darina al-Joundi, she spoke compellingly of life writing, community, and narrative representation as activism or compensation across Algeria, Lebanon and France.

The second panel, 'Gender and (Be)longing', covered the representation of women in the struggle for Algerian independence in *The Battle of Algiers* (Aleena Karim), community and communion in Maïssa Bey's novels (Rebecca Rosenberg), and the idea of 'difference' as a new way of seeing the world in Ananda Devi's work (Foara Adhikari). This was followed by an in-sightful talk on academic careers from the perspective of an Early Career Researcher. Catherine Gilbert (Postdoctoral Research Officer, Centre for Postcolonial Studies, School of Advanced Study) spoke about flexibility and interdisciplinarity, publications and teaching.

The final panel, '(Trans-)National Identity, encompassed the construction of Mande ethnic identity in contemporary Francophone West African cinema (Monika Kukolova), the depiction of the Arab Israeli/Palestinian in Yasmina Khadra's work (Rebekah Vince), and the concept of 'exiliterature' as a means to understand the (trans)frontier work of Linda Lê (Dawn Ng). The day concluded with a drinks reception, offering the ideal opportunity to continue to make connections between the various projects undertaken by postgraduate students on Francophone postcolonial identity and belonging.

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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 spring 2017 issue is 15 January 2017.

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The SFPS logo, designed by Caomhán Ó Scolaí, is based on a Téké mask from the Upper Sanga region (Congo-Brazzaville).

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