

FPS

Volume 5, Number 1

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algériennes

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SOCIETY FOR FRANCOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

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Editorial: Why 'Francophone Postcolonial Studies'?

Despite the impact of postcolonial theory on different academic disciplines over recent decades, the insight it can provide with regard to Francophone studies has yet to be fully assessed. Equally, the contribution that French and Francophone studies can make, and indeed have made, to a postcolonial theory largely perceived as Anglophone frequently remains unexplored.

By providing a forum for postcolonial perspectives, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* aims to promote theoretically driven, analytical studies of the Francophone world, which both question and reinvigorate the more established fields of French and postcolonial studies. The privileging of the postcolonial is in no way intended to imply that Francophone cultural production will be approached according to a single theoretical framework. On the contrary, *FPS* acknowledges the different theoretical trends within the multidisciplinary field, and believes that the complexity of postcolonial theory is best served by encouraging a variety of approaches. This theoretical complexity and multidisciplinarity is, in turn, ideally suited to studying Francophone cultural production, which is frequently situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and social phenomena where synthesis is neither desirable nor possible.

As outlined in the first number, *FPS* envisages an approach that highlights a distinctive but reciprocal relationship between Francophone studies and postcolonial studies. We would like to invite contributions on any topic related to Francophone postcolonial studies for inclusion in future issues. Suggestions for themed issues to be co-ordinated by guest editors are also welcome. Authors should submit two copies of their article, of 6,000 words maximum, in English or in French, to a member of the editorial team (full contact details are given below). 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 *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from our advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. The editorial team will endeavour to inform contributors of the decision regarding publication of their articles within 12-15 weeks of receiving the piece. Book reviews, conference reports (700-800 words max.), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

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L'Afrique comme scène du moi

Un voyage africaniste?

Quiconque veut analyser le récit de voyage en Afrique en période coloniale et en territoire colonial doit passer par les thèses d'Edward Said.¹ Une question à laquelle il faut répondre est celle de savoir si et à quel point les récits sur l'Afrique centrale fonctionnent au sein d'un africanisme, qui à l'égard de l'orientalisme saïdien expliquerait leur économie narrative par une dynamique foucaldienne de savoir/pouvoir. Celle-ci lierait, en d'autres mots, les notions, les descriptions et les narrations de l'Afrique à une volonté de contrôle idéologique, disons impérialiste, qui en épouserait tout le sens. Si l'aperçu de l'ouvrage principal de Said est trop limité, il montre tout de même l'enjeu polémique de son intervention. D'une part, il rend le lecteur conscient de l'autre côté de l'impérialisme ou du colonialisme. La mise en scène du passé colonial est et reste sujet à discussion. L'exposition au parc colonial de Tervuren, en Belgique, a par exemple été critiquée parce qu'elle n'aurait pas assez mis l'accent sur l'exploitation parfois meurtrière des Africains par le système colonial.² Exploitation qui est souvent expliquée, rationalisée dans le discours de voyageurs de l'époque sous une étiquette raciale et économique. Si la critique de certains aspects du colonialisme avait déjà commencé avant Said, celui-ci a rassemblé plusieurs optiques et formulé une critique plus systématique de la matrice discursive du colonialisme. Pour Said, l'exploitation coloniale ne

¹ *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

² Le lien [<http://www.congo2005.be/>] offre un aperçu de cette exposition intitulée 'La Mémoire du Congo. Le Temps colonial'. Elle essaie de brosser une image du passé colonial belge. Voir aussi entre autres Bambi Ceuppens, 'Eens kolonisator, altijd kolonisator', *De Standaard* (8 février 2005), p. 18.

doit pas être interprétée comme l'excès accidentel d'un roi ou d'un gouvernement cruels sur arrière fond de développement et de modernisation, mais comme l'incarnation d'une finalité systématique de la pensée occidentale. Pour ce qui est de l'Afrique noire, une telle lecture a été faite par Nederveen ou Miller, qui ont démontré, parfois de façon convaincante, comment des notions comme noir/blanc ou primitif/sauvage/civilisé font partie intégrante d'un imaginaire occidental hégémonisant.³ Ceci dit, de telles analyses ont aussi tendance à uniformiser les narrateurs comme autant de représentants d'une culture impérialiste qui les dépasse. Sans nier l'existence d'une telle idéologie, la lecture des récits de voyage montre qu'une partie des mécanismes d'identification sont trop ambigus, trop contradictoires pour les insérer tels quels dans une lecture saïdienne. Said a lui-même essayé d'ajuster le cadre analytique dans *Culture and Imperialism*, une étude de la culture occidentale moderne qui offre plus d'espace à des lectures moins fermées de Joseph Conrad ou d'Albert Camus et à des voix résistantes dans une culture qualifiée d'impériale. Un tel diagnostic a aussi été établi par Bhabha, qui développe une analyse alternative du corpus colonial basée sur une application consistante des principes freudiens.⁴ Sans suivre la même démarche analytique, nous sommes d'accord avec son point de départ critique quand il affirme que:

The terms in which Said's Orientalism is unified – the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power – also unify the subject of colonial enunciation. This results in Said's inadequate

³ Jan Pieterse Nederveen, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995); Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago University Press, 1985).

⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

attention to a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy (as the scene of desire) in the production of the 'political' effects of discourse.⁵

Ezra s'est aussi inspirée des pistes avancées par Bhabha pour affirmer l'existence d'un subconscient colonial, qui expliquerait les représentations culturelles, des clichés et des stéréotypes bien connus. Son livre,⁶ au titre évocateur de *The Political Unconscious* de Jameson, trace, comme le fait Bhabha, les manifestations visibles mais aussi beaucoup plus cachées du référent colonial dans la culture française de l'entre-deux-guerres, la culture de masse (roman d'aventures, cinéma) aussi bien que la culture élitaire (Raymond Roussel, Paul Morand). Elles forment la base d'un imaginaire culturel qui perdure jusqu'aujourd'hui et continue à déformer les représentations de l'Autre. Si de telles analyses sont convaincantes, elles risquent toutefois de perdre de vue l'agencement visible au profit d'un subconscient estimé omniprésent. Pour Bhabha, l'identité énonciative du discours colonial est par définition hybride et affirme son contraire dès qu'elle s'énonce. Quant à nous, nous avons essayé de chercher une clef de lecture qui permette de respecter la pluralité identitaire manifeste, déjà visible au niveau de l'identité narrative affirmée et qui ne nécessite pas de recourir *a priori* à un répertoire psychanalytique qui veuille opposer surface et profondeur énonciatives.

Sérialiser le voyage

Les récits de voyage en Afrique centrale ont aussi été analysés dans une optique opposée qui évacue le questionnement idéologique au profit d'une analyse temporelle du genre. Les

⁵ Bhabha, p. 125.

⁶ Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

exemples foisonnent: Wolfzettel et Guentner ont par exemple retracé l'évolution du récit de voyage du dix-huitième siècle, sous les exigences du classicisme, au dix-neuvième siècle lorsqu'il émerge au sein du champ littéraire par la porte du romantisme.⁷ Cogez, pour sa part, utilise la notion d'écrivain-voyageur pour mieux cerner les interactions entre voyage et écriture littéraire au cours du vingtième siècle.⁸ S'ils analysent des périodes différentes et arrivent à des conclusions différentes, le choix de base de ces auteurs reste le même: les récits de voyage en Afrique centrale, et surtout les récits modernes d'auteurs reconnus comme ceux d'un Paul Morand, d'un André Gide ou d'un Michel Leiris s'y trouvent replacés dans l'esquisse globale de la fortune d'un genre. Celui-ci connaît son apogée quantitative et qualitative dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle suivi d'un combat pour la reconnaissance littéraire qui continue jusqu'aujourd'hui. La logique interprétative du genre découle donc de sa (recherche de) position au sein du champ littéraire. De l'approche strictement littéraire qui retrace l'évolution d'un genre se rapprochent des études plutôt sociohistoriques qui entendent dévoiler la naissance et l'évolution de notions comme celles d'aventure, de voyage ou de tourisme dans la culture francophone du dix-neuvième au vingtième siècle. Ainsi Urbain retrace-t-il l'apparition progressive du touriste de sa naissance au dix-neuvième siècle à son identité paradoxale (décriée mais omniprésente) aujourd'hui.⁹ Venayre, pour sa part, analyse la fortune culturelle de la notion d'aventure, qui émerge dans le sillage du romantisme et connaîtra sa période

de gloire en plein colonialisme.¹⁰ L'entre-deux-guerres marquera une érosion progressive du mythe culturel de l'aventurier. Si les deux types d'études – générico-littéraire et sociohistorique – éclairent certains aspects de récits de voyage en Afrique, elles ne permettent cependant pas de cerner la pluralité énonciative des récits de voyage en question, dans la mesure où le récit de voyage dépasse les logiques génériques littéraires et est plus qu'un répertoire de thèmes socioculturels. Il combine différentes logiques de représentation et rend aussi compte d'une expérience des plus personnelles. C'est pourquoi nous avons dû aller à la recherche d'une approche permettant de combiner une analyse temporelle, qui veut cerner des évolutions, des ruptures, des changements avec le respect de la pluralité des récits de voyage – une pluralité qu'il ne faut pas interpréter comme la richesse traditionnelle caractéristique des chefs-d'œuvre littéraires mais plutôt comme un carrefour intergénérique. Notre recherche doctorale, qui est à la base de cet article, a eu pour but de brosser un aperçu de la variabilité du regard sur l'Afrique à travers le voyage au cours de la période coloniale, non pas par le biais d'une analyse psychanalytique axée sur les catégories de Bhabha, mais à l'aide d'une exploitation des catégories d'analyse énonciatives.¹¹

La scénographie du voyage

Dans l'optique que nous venons d'esquisser, le concept de scénographie développé par Dominique Maingueneau¹² offre une richesse et une cohérence analytique indéniables. Maingueneau l'a

⁷ Friedrich Wolfzettel, *Le Discours du voyageur: pour une histoire littéraire du récit de voyage en France, du Moyen Age au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1996); Wendelin Guentner, *Esquisses littéraires: rhétoriques du spontané et récit de voyage au XIX^e siècle* (Saint-Genouph: Nizet, 1997).

⁸ Gérard Cogez, *Les Écrivains voyageurs au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, coll. 'Points Essai', 2004).

⁹ Jean-Didier Urbain, *L'Idiot du voyage: histoires de touristes* (Paris: Plon, 1991).

¹⁰ Sylvain Venayre, *La Gloire de l'aventure: genèse d'une mystique moderne, 1840-1850* (Paris: Aubier, 'Collection Historique', 2002).

¹¹ Voir: Alex Demeulenaere, 'Le récit de voyage français en Afrique noire, 1830-1931. Essai de scénographie', thèse non publiée (Leuven: K.U.L., 2007).

¹² *Le Discours littéraire: paratopie et scène d'énonciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

développé pour analyser l'interaction de texte et contexte en adoptant une optique analytique discursive. Il estime que:

Il n'y pas d'un côté un univers de choses et d'activités muettes, de l'autre des représentations littéraires détachées de lui qui en seraient une image. La littérature constitue elle aussi une activité [...] Au lieu de mettre les œuvres en relation avec des instances fort éloignées de la littérature (classes sociales, mentalités, événements historiques, psychologie individuelle...), réfléchir en termes de discours nous oblige à porter notre attention sur les abords immédiats du texte (ses rites d'écriture, ses supports matériels, sa scène d'énonciation [...]).¹³

Maingueneau propose la scénographie comme jonction entre une approche sociologique de type bourdieusien et une approche textuelle qui s'arrête plutôt à des conventions génériques ou stylistiques. Une jonction qui combine théâtre et écriture:

Une scénographie s'identifie sur la base d'indices variés repérables dans le texte ou le paratexte, mais elle n'est pas tenue de se désigner: elle se montre, par définition en excès de toute scène de parole qui serait dite dans le texte. À la théâtralité de la 'scène', le terme de 'scénographie' ajoute la dimension de la graphie. Cette -graphie ne renvoie pas à une opposition empirique entre support oral et support graphique, mais à un processus fondateur, à l'inscription légitimante d'un texte, dans le

double rapport à la mémoire d'une énonciation qui se place dans la filiation d'autres et prétend à un certain type de réemploi.¹⁴

Une telle notion se prête à plusieurs emplois. Ainsi, D'hulst l'utilise pour rendre compte des différentes logiques de légitimation qui sont à l'œuvre dans le roman caraïbe de langue française, qui doit se positionner sur une scène domestique et sur une scène 'parisienne', ce qui implique parfois des ruptures dans les identités et les procédés narratifs.¹⁵ Il sera clair qu'une telle approche permet aussi une formalisation des logiques parfois contradictoires, parfois parallèles qui caractérisent les récits de voyage et constitue en outre un outil heuristique capable de tracer les changements historiques d'un agencement initial. Moureau est du même avis puisqu'il a lui aussi utilisé la notion pour son étude du récit de voyage du dix-huitième siècle.¹⁶ À la base de l'étude se trouve une question, qui, pour l'âge classique, ne peut être qu'abordée par la métaphore théâtrale:

Pourquoi la découverte de l'Autre suscita-t-elle plus de rejet que d'ouverture, de jugements hautains que de délicieuses rencontres, de diabolisation que d'humaine sollicitude? Le monde est un théâtre aux scènes multiples dont les acteurs s'ignorent. Chaque troupe a ses

¹⁴ Maingueneau, p. 192.

¹⁵ Lieven D'hulst, 'Analyse discursive et scénographie de l'espace dans deux romans de Glissant', in Schmeling, Manfred & Monika Schmitz-Emans (eds.), *Das Paradigma der Landschaft in Moderne und Postmoderne / (Post-)Modernist Terrains: Landscapes-Settings-Spaces* (Saarbrücke: Königshausen/Neuman, 2007).

¹⁶ François Moureau, *Le Théâtre des voyages: une scénographie de l'Âge classique* (Paris: PUPS, 2005).

¹³ Maingueneau., p. 35.

auteurs favoris, ses décors de prédilection, sa tradition de jeu et d'interprétation. Il n'est guère recommandé de perturber le déroulement et le rituel de la tragi-comédie sociale. Le voyageur est un empêcheur de penser en rond. Nous avons tenté de mettre en évidence à travers cette construction théâtrale le croisement des regards qui s'indiffèrent et se jaugent, chacun faisant de l'autre son propre spectacle.¹⁷

Nous avons continué ce travail en nous concentrant sur le récit de voyage de langue française en Afrique centrale dans les siècles qui suivent. Le récit de voyage y fait son apparition sur plusieurs théâtres de légitimation parfois opposés, parfois complémentaires. Leurs rapports de force changeront au fur et à mesure que le siècle, ses découvertes, sa politique et ses valeurs évolueront. Une lecture de deux auteurs aux frontières du colonialisme entend en donner un bel exemple. Elle a pour but de démontrer comment les principes interprétatifs développés peuvent être appliqués. Dans ce qui suit, nous développerons les mises en scène du voyage à deux extrêmes temporels du spectre du colonialisme. D'une part dans le *Voyage à Tombouctou* de René Caillié, d'autre part dans *L'Africain* de Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio. Du fait que ces deux récits semblent tellement éloignés l'un de l'autre, une lecture attentive permet de détecter des réagencements scénographiques.

L'Afrique comme lieu d'aventures: René Caillié

Le voyageur qui incarne le mieux la physionomie naissante du voyageur en Afrique centrale est René Caillié, voyageur peu connu dont le récit contient pourtant de nombreux éléments exploités ultérieurement. Après un premier voyage en Afrique aux côtés de

William Gray qui se termine en 1821, Caillié, jeune homme d'une vingtaine d'années d'extraction modeste, retourne en 1824 pour aller à la recherche de la mythique cité africaine de Tombouctou, qu'il atteindra après un périple d'une vingtaine de mois. Sans aucun soutien officiel et dans un environnement hostile au voyageur européen, il doit trouver des subterfuges pour faire le voyage. Il prendra les habits locaux des tribus bédouines et des Touareg qui dominent la région à cette période pour atteindre la cité en tant que premier Européen. Dès le début du voyage, la fiction fait son entrée puisque Caillié se présente aux Africains comme un des leurs enlevé dès son plus jeune âge par les Français à Alexandrie. Son voyage serait ainsi un retour aux origines que l'enlèvement lui avait ôtées. L'ambition réelle du voyage apparaît cependant dès les premières pages de son récit de voyage de 1830:

Ayant eu, dès ma plus tendre enfance, un goût prononcé pour la carrière des voyages, j'ai toujours saisi avec empressement les occasions qui pouvaient me faciliter les moyens d'acquérir de l'instruction; [...] je ne renonçai donc pas un seul instant à l'espoir d'explorer quelque pays inconnu de l'Afrique; et par la suite la ville de Tombouctou devint l'objet continual de toutes mes pensées, le but de tous mes efforts; ma résolution fut prise de l'atteindre ou de périr.¹⁸

Malgré la teneur romantico-héroïque de cette ambition, à laquelle nous reviendrons plus loin, Caillié se présente clairement dans la lignée du dix-huitième siècle. Comme Wolfzettel et d'autres l'ont montré, l'âge classique est marqué par une exigence d'objectivité qui exclut toute mise en scène du moi dans le récit de

¹⁸ *Voyage à Tombouctou* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996), l'intitulé courant de son *Journal d'un voyage à Tombouctou et à Jenné, dans l'Afrique centrale*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Moureau, p. 3.

voyage.¹⁹ Aussi Caillié cherche-t-il à développer une scénographie scientifique où son récit de voyage lui permettrait d'acquérir une légitimité au sein des sociétés de géographie naissantes.

Quant au progrès que les sciences géographiques et naturelles peuvent devoir à mon voyage, il ne m'appartient pas davantage de les apprécier; j'en dois abandonner le jugement à ceux qui les représentent si dignement dans la capitale du monde civilisé, et dont il m'eût été si doux, si utile surtout de posséder les lumières et les talents lorsque seul et livré à mes faibles moyens, je me trouvais chaque jour sur le théâtre d'un monde inconnu et vierge encore des regards de la curieuse et scientifique Europe.²⁰

C'est pourquoi le récit constitue en premier lieu un rapport ethnographique détaillé et approfondi de certaines régions de l'Afrique sub-saharienne qui n'avaient pas encore été décrites. La raison même du voyage découle d'ailleurs du développement des sciences (géographie, ethnographie, anthropologie) dans le sillage des découvertes de nouveaux mondes puisque Caillié espère décrocher le prix de la Société de géographie pour le premier Européen qui arrive à découvrir la légendaire cité africaine de Tombouctou. Il y arrivera, mais son voyage et le récit qui s'en suivra sombreront dans l'anonymat et ne lui vaudront pas la notoriété scientifique espérée. Mais au fur et à mesure que le colonialisme se développe, son récit de voyage sera lu comme un exemple d'héroïsme individuel. Dans un premier temps, cette relecture cadre dans une optique nationaliste, qui fait après coup de Caillié le premier colonisateur français. Dans son ouvrage sur la

littérature coloniale, Lebel en fait un exemple.²¹ Les anniversaires de son voyage et de sa mort sont aussi autant de moments de ré-interprétation idéologique du voyage. Dans sa biographie de 1930, Briault affirme ainsi que:

Il se trouve, en 1928, que tout son itinéraire est aujourd'hui une terre française. Son magnifique exemple a revalu à la France un empire colonial nouveau et un esprit d'expansion qui, cette fois, ne le laissera plus aliéner par une coupable indifférence.²²

Ceci dit, si le récit est repris et republié aujourd'hui, c'est parce qu'il est à la base d'un paradigme romantique du voyage et de l'exploration de l'Afrique. Caillié redevient une figure intéressante suite au renouveau d'intérêt que connaît le récit de voyage. Il incarne une modernité étonnante par le nomadisme et la solitude de son voyage et entre donc dans une optique critique littéraire, qui dépasse le but scientifique initial. En témoigne l'extrait suivant, qui raconte l'histoire de Caillié dans un aperçu du récit de voyage actuel, où il est replacé dans une série qui comprend aussi Bruce Chatwin, Victor Segalen ou Michel Leiris:

C'est de nos peurs personnelles et collectives dont il parle, d'une de nos grandes hantises – mêlée au sentiment inconscient d'un plaisir secret et interdit: celle d'être étranger. Avec ces très modernes récits de René Caillié, c'est bel et bien

²¹ Lebel, Roland, *L'Afrique occidentale dans la littérature française (depuis 1870)* (Paris: Larose, 1925).

²² Maurice Briault. *La Prodigieuse Vie de René Caillié* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1930), pp. 140-41.

¹⁹ Friedrich Wolfzettel, *Le Discours du voyageur*.

²⁰ Caillié, p. 39.

la dépossession de soi qui est en jeu au cours du voyage: sujet éminemment romanesque.²³

Le récit de Caillié marque à bien des égards l'émergence du romantisme. En premier lieu, le voyageur se présente comme un individu, comme un solitaire. Jusque dans ses habits, jusque dans son identité, il doit se réfugier au plus profond de lui-même. Face à ce narrateur solitaire se dresse une réalité africaine menaçante. Seul dans un pays étranger, confronté à de grands dangers, déguisé, Caillié met en scène ce qui deviendra, avec Lord Byron, une forte matrice identitaire dans la période romantique.

Le second aspect qui rend le récit de Caillié hautement romantique est le but de son voyage. Tombouctou a longtemps hanté l'imaginaire occidental comme une cité légendaire au centre de l'Afrique. Les récits des marchands d'esclaves arabes en avaient fait une cité mythique, au même égard que les pyramides d'Egypte. Les civilisations perdues ou les cités imaginaires font partie intégrante de l'imaginaire des voyageurs au dix-neuvième siècle. Selon Fottorino, Tombouctou en fait aussi partie:

Tombouctou. Plus qu'une ville, plus qu'un nom sur la rose des anciennes cartes d'Afrique. Un mythe qui charrie avec les siècles ses hommes drapés de toile indigo, ses caravanes de sel, ses légendaires rues pavées de d'or et ses manuscrits enfouis dans les dunes: une cité intellectuelle qui compta au XV^e siècle quelque vingt-cinq mille étudiants férus de théologie, de droit ou de grammaire.²⁴

²³ Cédric Fabre, *Écrivains-voyageurs* (Paris: ADPF, 2003), p. 12.

²⁴ Eric Fottorino, 'La Chute de Tombouctou. À l'assaut de la cité mythique', in Sivry, Sophie de (éd.), *Aventuriers du monde. Les Grands Explorateurs français au temps des premiers photographes* (Paris: L'Iconoclaste, 2003), p. 116.

Jusque dans la désillusion, Caillié reste d'ailleurs fidèle au modèle romantique puisqu'en arrivant à Tombouctou, il sera fort déçu et ne trouvera pas la ville légendaire qu'il avait espéré découvrir. Au contraire, il n'y éprouve aucune sensation esthétique particulière.

Finalement, l'écriture elle-même se coule aussi dans la logique romantique du danger et de la solitude qui en fait une mission héroïque. A maintes reprises, Caillié raconte comment le fait même d'écrire risquerait de compromettre son identité fictionnelle puisqu'il serait conçu comme symptôme de l'Occident. Caillié doit se cacher pour écrire, à l'opposé de ce qui se passera dans la période coloniale.

En conclusion, l'analyse scénographique permet de déceler les deux dynamiques de légitimation qui orientent l'œuvre, l'une assumée mais non reconnue – la scientifique –, l'autre déniée mais apparemment présente – la romantique. D'une part la mise en scène d'un moi, d'un aventurier sera exploitée par des écrivains comme Jules Verne ou Louis Noir pour des romans d'aventures vers la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et répétée par des voyageurs légendaires comme Elle Maillart ou, en plus connu mais dans un domaine plutôt orientaliste, le colonel Lawrence. La période coloniale connaîtra aussi ses explorateurs légendaires, comme Brazza ou Stanley, mais dans une constellation différente. Les voyageurs y seront beaucoup plus perçus comme les représentants de tout un peuple, et contribueront à la création d'une communauté nationale imaginaire. Leurs récits seront en effet suivis au jour le jour par un public avide de gloire nationale.

D'autre part, le voyage de Caillié témoigne de l'ambition de nommer, de maîtriser, de conquérir l'Afrique, de marquer l'empreinte européenne sur le continent. A cet égard, il est aussi le précurseur d'une véritable course scientifique en Afrique qui trouvera son apogée à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et mènera à la colonisation.

L'Afrique comme lieu de mémoire: J.M.G. Le Clézio

À la base des récits de voyages aventureux en Afrique se trouve donc une position d'énonciation ambiguë, avec d'une part un moi qui se sent attiré par la machine d'écriture collective du colonialisme mais n'y accède pas et d'autre part son récit aventureux qui lui vaudra l'attention ultérieure. On retrouve la tension entre une scénographie coloniale et son autre, entre le nous et le moi, d'une façon différente à l'autre bout du spectre colonial, plus particulièrement dans *L'Africain*, roman/récit de voyage de J.M.G. Le Clézio, paru chez Mercure de France en 2004. Ayant passé son enfance en partie en Afrique dans le contexte d'un colonialisme touchant à sa fin, Le Clézio entreprend le voyage en Afrique sur les traces de son père. Il en rend compte dans *L'Africain*, récit qui se base sur un voyage en partie réel, en partie imaginaire mais qui se présente aussi comme une autobiographie. Un constat qui est d'autant plus intéressant pour l'analyse scénographique.

Il est évident qu'aujourd'hui, un récit comme celui de Caillié est à peine pensable: il n'y a plus de cité mythique comme Tombouctou ni de déguisements et si le voyage se fait à pied, c'est délibérément. Après la fameuse fin des voyages proclamée dans *Tristes Tropiques* de Claude Lévi-Strauss, la possibilité même d'un (récit de) voyage authentique est sujette à caution.²⁵ Pourtant, c'est le côté aventureux de la vie et des récits d'un auteur comme Le Clézio qui, dans la lignée de Caillié, attire toujours les lecteurs. Dans mainte critique de l'œuvre, c'est l'aspect individualiste, solitaire, aventureux du narrateur qui fascine toujours. Pour eux, *L'Africain* constitue une suite logique dans l'œuvre de l'homme aux semelles de vent qui veut échapper au cantonnement trop étroit des sociétés bourgeoises. Ainsi peut-on lire dans ces critiques des passages semblables à celui-ci:

²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: UGE, 1955).

Encore que l'on trouve dans ce livre le dépaysement, l'exotisme, voire l'errance. Et des allusions à une vie qui ressemblait à un voyage: 'Le souvenir que je garde de ce temps pourrait être celui passé à bord d'un bateau, entre deux mondes'. Il s'agit donc de souvenirs d'enfance, anciens, comme les belles photos couleur sépia qui illustrent le récit. Et plus précisément, de la recherche du père.²⁶

Peut-on conclure qu'il en découle une narration limpide où le voyage en Afrique se raconte d'une façon simple avec le compte rendu des émotions, des sensations d'un individu au contact de la terre africaine? Le Clézio incarnerait-il un exotisme qui peut se permettre d'aller à la recherche de couleurs et de sensations personnelles sans se soucier d'un (post)colonialisme déjà loin? Le voyage redevient-il la scène d'une aventure personnelle dans un décor somptueux et sauvage; un *Out of Africa* sur papier? Les questions sont d'autant plus importantes qu'une telle mise en scène de l'Afrique redevient possible aujourd'hui – pensons par exemple au boom que connaît ce genre de récits sur le marché de l'édition ou même à la télévision.²⁷ Pourtant, le récit est plus complexe, par son écriture mais aussi par sa structure. La confrontation d'un individu avec une Afrique dangereuse, menaçante et fascinante se double d'un retour en arrière sous forme d'effort de mémoire qui constitue un dialogue ou même une confrontation avec la période coloniale. Si dans le récit de Caillié la tension narrative se manifeste dans l'effort de mettre à l'arrière de la scène un individu qui reste omniprésent, elle évolue chez Le Clézio vers une tension

²⁶ Compte rendu anonyme, qui pourra être consulté sur le site internet suivant: http://mapage.noos.fr/sacados/lectures/lectures94.htm#leclezio_africain
²⁷ Le lien www.vt4.be/html/stanley_home.htm présente le scénario de la série télévisée *Stanley's Route*.

entre le récit personnel et l'histoire du père. Cette tension se manifeste dès les premières pages du récit, lorsque Le Clézio s'arrête à la motivation de l'écriture.

J'ai longtemps rêvé que ma mère était noire. Je m'étais inventé une histoire, un passé, pour fuir la réalité à mon retour d'Afrique, dans ce pays, dans cette ville où je ne connaissais personne, où j'étais devenu un étranger. Puis j'ai découvert, lorsque mon père, à l'âge de la retraite, est revenu vivre avec nous en France, que c'était lui l'Africain. Cela a été difficile à admettre. Il m'a fallu retourner en arrière, recommencer, essayer de comprendre. En souvenir de cela, j'ai écrit ce petit livre.²⁸

La mémoire devient ainsi un principe de plurivocalité énonciative dans le récit et le voyage spatial en Afrique aussi une exploration du passé familial. Le récit de voyage ne frôle plus le rapport ethnographique mais plutôt la biographie et l'autobiographie. Le résultat est le même: un récit qui oscille entre la description de l'altérité absolue que constitue une confrontation avec l'Afrique et la recherche de l'individualité la plus profonde qu'elle implique.

Cela équivaut-il à dire que Le Clézio fait preuve d'une certaine nostalgie des récits de voyage coloniaux? Aucunement, puisqu'à plusieurs instants l'auteur se distancie des récits de voyage qui esquisSENT une image traditionnelle et exotique de la vie coloniale. Les commentaires qui considèrent *L'Africain* comme exotique se heurtent au fait que Le Clézio refuse d'assimiler son effort de mémoire autobiographique au retour à une enfance africaine pas encore souillée par la civilisation. Ainsi affirme-t-il

Je ne veux pas parler d'exotisme: les enfants sont absolument étrangers à ce vice. Non parce qu'ils voient à travers les êtres et les choses, mais justement parce qu'ils ne voient qu'eux...²⁹

Au contraire, *L'Africain* met en scène un narrateur à la recherche du lien qui a pu exister entre lui, son père et l'Afrique. Le colonialisme, qui a permis ou même obligé son père à devenir médecin en Afrique, ne mène donc pas à un récit de voyage mélancolique d'un grand passé, mais devient le cadre collectif d'une recherche de passé individuel qui éclairent un présent tout aussi individuel. La logique d'une telle scénographie est condensée dans un extrait comme le suivant:

L'Afrique était puissante. Pour l'enfant que j'étais, la violence était générale, indiscutable. Elle donnait de l'enthousiasme. Il est difficile d'en parler aujourd'hui, après tant de catastrophes et d'abandon. Peu d'Européens ont connu ce sentiment. Le travail que faisait mon père au Cameroun d'abord, puis au Nigeria, créait une situation exceptionnelle. La plupart des Anglais en poste dans la colonie exerçaient des fonctions administratives. Ils étaient militaires, juges, district officers (ces DO dont les initiales, prononcées à l'anglaise, Di-O, m'avaient fait penser à un nom religieux comme une variation sur le Deo gratias de la messe que ma mère célébrait sous la varangue chaque dimanche matin). Mon père était l'unique médecin dans un rayon de soixante kilomètres. Mais cette dimension que je donne n'a aucun

²⁸ J.M.G. Le Clézio, *L'Africain*, p. 5.

²⁹ Le Clézio, p. 34.

sens: la première ville administrative était Abakaliki, à quatre heures de route, et pour y arriver il fallait traverser la rivière Aiya en bac, puis une épaisse forêt.³⁰

Le Clézio témoigne ainsi d'une façon de voir et d'écrire l'Afrique qui ne se limite pas seulement à lui. L'interaction entre expérience de voyage et devoir de mémoire collective et individuelle qui se manifeste dans *L'Africain* apparaît par exemple aussi dans *Terug naar Congo* de l'écrivain belge Lieve Joris (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 1985). Elle y décrit le voyage fait dans le Zaïre de Mobutu sur les traces de son oncle, un ancien missionnaire. Le compte rendu journalistique d'un présent s'enrichit ainsi d'une profondeur narrative qui rend la narration d'autant plus attrayante.

Le récit de voyage en Afrique: perspectives

La tentation existe ou peut exister de lire un récit de voyage de l'époque moderne dans l'optique foucaldienne savoir/pouvoir. Sans nier l'existence indéniable d'une telle dimension, il semble nécessaire d'aborder des récits de voyage anciens ou présents d'une façon qui en articule plus la richesse énonciative et développe la tension que provoque la confrontation avec l'Afrique sur un individu narrateur. Il n'est pas dit qu'une telle narration soit et doive être unifiée par une clef de voûte impériale ou coloniale. L'analyse de deux cas concrets montre comment le récit de voyage peut trouver son dynamisme, et même sa force, dans un dialogue entre les scénographies collectives du colonialisme, de l'ethnographie, de la science et celles du moi, qu'il soit aventurier, voyageur ou témoin.

³⁰ Le Clézio, p. 45.

Chez Caillié, le récit témoigne d'une grande difficulté de trouver un positionnement légitime pour le moi. Le narrateur essaie de se doter d'un ethos scientifique de géographe, mais son récit est trop atypique pour être pleinement reconnu par l'institution géographique. Les caractéristiques secondaires du moi, comme le déguisement face aux dangers, valent à Caillié une reconnaissance nationale et plus récemment littéraire qui n'était pas visée *ab initio* dans la scénographie. La lecture héroïsante de Caillié, qu'elle soit coloniale ou littéraire, est donc problématique par rapport au positionnement initial du récit. A l'inverse, lire les récits de voyage de Le Clézio comme des exemples d'un exotisme postcolonial définitivement libéré du cadre de référence colonial passerait outre le double positionnement énonciatif d'un récit comme *L'Africain*. Le Clézio y développe un dialogue tendu mais riche entre une expérience sensorielle actuelle de l'Afrique et un effort de mémoire, ou plutôt de souvenir, de la période coloniale de l'enfance. Il en découle une réapparition spectrale du colonialisme à travers le récit tout à fait individuel d'un voyageur moderne. Une telle mise en scène apparaît d'ailleurs aussi dans *Terug naar Congo*. Elle témoigne des narrations toujours complexes du colonialisme dans le récit de voyage moderne.

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Language and Haitian Revolutionary Universalism in Émile Ollivier's 'La Supplique d'Élie Magnan'

The issue of language is one of the most emotively charged questions in Francophone Postcolonial Studies. The idea that language is a fundamental site of power and alienation, that to speak is to 'exister absolument pour l'autre' is inscribed from the opening pages of perhaps the most influential founding work of francophone postcolonial theory, Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*.¹ For Fanon, to use a language is more than to employ a certain syntax and morphology, it is above all, 'assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation.' The black Antillean, he goes on to argue, will be all the more white, the more he has made his own the French language. He who possesses language, Fanon says, 'possède par contrecoup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage', for there is finally 'dans la possession du langage une extraordinaire puissance'.²

In effect, the idea that it is possible to possess language was one of the most potent means of expanding empire, in that it permitted the implantation of imperial culture through the imposition of the language of the coloniser. By simultaneously fetishising imperial idioms and denigrating indigenous languages, colonial powers ensured that their cultures would be elevated in the colonial imagination to the highest level, and would retain their heady status long after colonialism's putative demise. Indeed, some of the few places where the concept of the 'Queen's English' still has currency are in the 'British West Indies', where a colonial ideal continues to inform ideas of correct language use, and where the striving for the right register, vocabulary and accent – for example on television, the radio, and in political and legal debates – often

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), p. 13.

² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

results in a curiously excessive, over-elaborate idiom, the counterpoint to Fanon's black Caribbeans' lack of language. Glissant presents similar instances of Caribbean characters overflowing with imperial language in his novel *Malemort*. The exaggerated eloquence and overly convoluted speech of the figures Lannec, Québec, and Bellem – all, significantly, schoolmasters – is one manifestation of what Glissant sees as the 'verbal delirium' that is born ultimately of the historical imposition of the language of the Other.³ What is said in Glissant's novel about these bourgeois linguistic pedants can perhaps be applied to similar figures across the Caribbean, and indeed in any region or nation where history has ruptured a 'natural' connection between language and national identity. These figures, Glissant says, are those 'qui pas un instant n'ont douté de leur phrase', those 'qui crurent jusqu'au-delà de la folie qu'ils étaient ce qu'on leur disait être, qu'ils parlaient cette langue comme il sied convenablement, qu'ils connaissaient ce que du monde il faut connaître, qu'ils participaient de ce qui mérite de durer, l'Empire l'Union'.⁴ The idea of Empire persists among such postcolonial figures, therefore, and is perpetuated through adherence to a fetishised imperial language.

In Postcolonial Studies – and to a certain extent in Glissant's work – language and identity have typically been seen as areas of Manichaean conflict between colonial and anti-colonial discourses, where resistance often inheres in an attempt to *reverse* or subvert that which the 'master' has imposed on the colonised subject. Derek Walcott identifies the tendency for New World poets to see 'history as language', whereby 'The tone of the past becomes an unbearable burden, for they must abuse the master in his own

³ On these characters' verbal delirium, see Celia Britton, *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1999), pp. 99-103.

⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Malemort* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 162; 170.

language, and this implies self-deceit'.⁵ In the francophone domain, and even before Fanon's very similar theorisations, Sartre's 1948 essay 'Orphée noir' declared that the use of French language in 'black literature' inevitably compromises the expression of anti-colonial revolt. Because 'les mots sont des idées', Sartre says, 'quand le nègre déclare en français qu'il rejette la culture française, il prend d'une main ce qu'il repousse de l'autre, il installe en lui [...] l'appareil-penser de l'ennemi'.⁶ A similar fundamental belief that French language is an impediment to the expression of anti-colonial revolt and to the assertion of cultural difference underpins the Créolité movement, and their stated mission to eschew 'une expression mimétique' by creating 'les conditions d'une expression authentique', and through infusing French language with the creole rhythms, intonations and accents of the French Caribbean.⁷ Also, and although he emphatically rejects any simple language/identity equation, 'the language of the white Other' to Glissant is a 'constant and negative reference point',⁸ and he does pursue his own particular ongoing investigation into the complexities of (post) colonial language relations, stressing the need to 'relativiser' French language, and to see it pass into 'la relation multiple au monde', for to accept this relation, 'c'est ouvrir le possible sans imposer la fixité tyrannique'.⁹

Even if there is undoubtedly some validity in this kind of postcolonial thinking on language, I do not want in this essay to pursue further this line of argument. Indeed, I want to retrace my

⁵ Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 38-39.

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Orphée noir', *Situations II* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976 [1948]), pp. 229-85 (pp. 243-44).

⁷ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993 [1989]), pp. 15; 23.

⁸ Britton, p. 83.

⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1997 [1981]), pp. 554-55.

steps somewhat and take a neglected Caribbean path, one that is often forgotten by Postcolonial Theory in general and by Caribbeanist criticism in particular. Haiti is perhaps not so much a viable alternative path as a disquieting dark alley, a political and historical dead-end that offers a radical counternarrative to the general celebratory thrust of contemporary Caribbeanist theory, which tends to see the region as a privileged site in the planet's much-discussed movement into a state of hyperrelationality.

I have chosen not to follow Glissant's seductive path, nor any of the other dominant Francophone Caribbean theoretical routes too slavishly, as there are certain underlying assumptions about language and identity in their thinking that I want to call into question, and most importantly, the commonly held belief that the language of the 'master' is inevitably and irrevocably a kind of existential and cultural prison. It seems to me that the history of postcolonial Haiti complicates the various, related models of language-centred anti-colonial resistance. Haitian literature's relationship with its colonial language, French, has evolved in ways that do not comply with any of these diverse models, and which upset many of the suppositions that underpin the Caribbean postcolonial theories of Fanon, Glissant and the Creolists, among others. As far as I can in a short essay, I want to strip back the language/identity equation and ask the following very basic, general questions: to what extent does a language define and circumscribe an individual's identity? Does it go without saying that those who "control" a language are also in control of their own identity, and that of those who are subjugated to them? Indeed, in what sense can any group or individual be said to be in control of a language?

Haiti and French language

Given the nation's iconic status in black history, and the general perception of it as the most 'African' of all Caribbean spaces, one

might expect to find in Haiti's literature examples similar to the anti-colonial linguistic resistance of Fanon, Glissant and the Creolists. Indeed, perhaps one of the best-known poems of Caribbean cultural and linguistic alienation was written by the Haitian Léon Laleau:

Ce cœur obsédant qui ne correspond
Pas avec mon langage et mes costumes,
Et sur lequel mordent, comme un crampon,
Des sentiments d'emprunt et des coutumes
D'Europe, sentez-vous cette souffrance
Et ce désespoir à nul autre égal
D'apprioyer, avec des mots de France,
Ce cœur qui m'est venu du Sénégal?¹⁰

Laleau's idea that to use a European language is to fundamentally betray one's African heart prefigures the general consensus in postcolonial studies that to use the other's language is always, inevitably, to distance oneself from one's authenticity. However, far from being the norm in Haitian literature, instances of this kind of anti-French linguistic and cultural revolt are relatively rare. Writing from Haiti has largely *not* been characterised by the kinds of elaborate linguistic self-investigation and careful re-integration of 'authentic' (often Creole) languages that have preoccupied many other postcolonial literatures. Chamoiseau and Confiant discuss this apparent paradox in *Lettres créoles*,¹¹ and remark that in spite of Haiti's independence, a literature in Creole has been relatively slow to develop there, while in the French departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyana, there have been texts in

Creole since the mid-nineteenth century. Even if Haitian Creole (or *Kreyòl*) 'predates independence by decades' and is 'the essential instrument of national life', a literary tradition in the language has been slow to assert itself, notably because of the debilitating effects of ongoing exile and migration from the island.¹² An important linguistic landmark in Haiti came in 1975 with the publication of Frankétienne's *Dézafi*, the first novel written in *Kreyòl*, and an inspiration for a new generation of authors including J. Célestin-Mégie, Carrié Paultre, and Jean-Baptiste Pauris, who have finally sought to establish a corpus of literary texts in Creole. And yet, French language persists as the mode of expression in the work of many other emerging Haitian authors, such as Yanick Lahens, Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Évelyne Trouillot and Gary Victor. There is therefore a kind of imperfect fit between the classic postcolonial idea that language is always, irrevocably, a primary site of oppression and resistance, and the reality of Haitian literature.

This is only a paradox however if one adheres to the quasi-mythical view of Haiti as a New World repository of an anti-colonial, pre-modern, Africanised culture and ethos. In truth, before its notorious, tortured decline, early post-revolutionary Haiti was not conceived of by its leaders as an isolated, culturally-introverted nation but as a modern, socially-progressive state. Popular images of Haiti as a place of untamed Africanness or, as in Césaire's classic formulation, the place where 'la négritude se mit debout pour la première fois',¹³ have tended to obscure the reality that the revolution envisioned a state that would resist 'atavistic longings for a racial past', and where 'the impulse was toward the

¹⁰ Léon Laleau, 'Trahison', in Maurice A. Lubin, *L'Afrique dans la poésie africaine* (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Panorama, 1965), p. 49.

¹¹ Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 117.

¹² George Lang, 'A Primer of Haitian Literature in *Kreyòl*', *Research in African Literatures*, 35.2 (summer 2004), 128-40 (p. 136).

¹³ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983 [1939]), p. 24.

future and not dwelling in mythical origins'.¹⁴ As Eugene Genovese rightly says, Haiti's revolution called for the 'Europeanisation' of Haiti, just as it sought to compel Europeans to acknowledge the strikingly modern aspirations to freedom and democracy of colonial peoples. As such, Toussaint's revolution envisioned full 'participation in the mainstream of world history rather than away from it'.¹⁵ As the post-revolutionary period developed, and the United States became the major threat to Haitian independence, Haiti's intellectuals often aligned themselves culturally and socially with the former colonial power, and drew a contrast between the 'refinement and generosity' of France (and the French language) and the perceived vulgarity of the 'grasping and coarse' United States.¹⁶

One of the most dramatic manifestations of Haitian authors' attachment to French language occurred in 1915, in the first year of the American occupation, when the poet Edmond Laforest, outraged at encroaching Anglo-Saxon vulgarity, committed suicide, by jumping into a swimming pool while clutching close to his heart a copy of the Larousse dictionary.¹⁷ Even during the early

¹⁴ J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998), pp. 44-45.

¹⁵ Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1981) p. 92.

¹⁶ J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1988), p. 16. For an extended discussion of Haitian literature's relationship with French language and the particular case of Edwidge Danticat, see Martin Munro, 'Langue, identité, et postcolonialisme dans la littérature haïtienne: le cas d'Edwidge Danticat', *Critique* 711-712 (août-septembre 2006), 694-707.

¹⁷ Simon Gikandi seems to have misinterpreted this episode as an act of anti-French resistance: 'In its most dramatic form, the problem of self-representation in an alienating language is exemplified by the suicide of the Haitian poet Edmond Laforest, who tied a Larousse dictionary around his neck before he

to mid-twentieth-century indigenist period – generally viewed as a time of nationalist and racial reaffirmation – many authors reaffirmed their attachment to French culture and language. In 1927, in the first issue of *La Revue indigène*, Normil G. Sylvain states that 'in this Spanish and English America, we [Haiti], Canada, and the French Antilles have the glorious destiny of upholding French language and traditions'.¹⁸ With its firm foundations in the elite schools of Port-au-Prince, French language, as the work of Alexis, Roumain, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, and many more besides shows, has remained the primary mode of expression for Haitian authors, particularly those in exile, who in many cases view French as a kind of refuge. For example, and in a striking inversion of the conventional postcolonial order of things, René Depestre proclaims that, 'French language for me is more than a tool to work with; *it is a kind of homeland, of citizenship; I am a citizen of the French language, before and above being a French citizen*'.¹⁹

In another sense however, French language has been used in Haiti as a means of perpetuating class hierarchies. In his critique of Duvalierist Haiti,²⁰ Laënnec Hurbon evokes the long-standing division between official (French) culture and the more Africanised culture of the masses, and argues that the former functions as a means of ideological control, a powerful tool that

drowned himself to protest the hegemony of the colonial library', *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 19. See also Léon-François Hoffmann, *Essays on Haitian Literature* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 38, and Leah D. Hewitt, 'La Créolité "Haitian Style"', in Condé, Maryse and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (eds.), *Penser la créolité* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), pp. 237-49.

¹⁸ Normil G. Sylvain, 'Chronique-Programme', *La Revue indigène*, 1 (1927), 1-10 (p. 5).

¹⁹ Interview with author, 28 May 1999, emphasis added.

²⁰ *Culture et dictature en Haïti: l'imagination sous contrôle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979).

removes from the people ‘toute possibilité de prise de parole’.²¹ Hurbon reads this official culture as a multi-faceted code that incorporates Haiti’s education, religious, legal, health, matrimonial, artistic, and linguistic systems. The promotion of the French language is thus one part of a complex hegemonic cultural code, the primary purpose of which is to maintain and institutionalise existing social divisions. The education system is particularly effective in perpetuating these divisions in that French is commonly the language of instruction, even if it is only spoken by two to five per cent of the population. The fundamental aim of all learning in Haitian (elite) schools, says Hurbon, is the acquisition of French language, which in turn permits access ‘à la reconnaissance sociale, au pouvoir de la parole et au pouvoir tout court’.²² Hurbon identifies in the history of post-independence Haitian literature similar urges to fetishise French language, and to use literary culture as a means of proving how civilised Haiti is. Movements such as indigenism, which sought putatively to rehabilitate Haitian popular culture, in effect only reinforced, ‘en le masquant’, the bond between the literary elite and French language.²³ Hurbon finds proof of the *noiristes*’ continued attachment to French language in a Duvalier minister’s denunciation of a plan to teach Creole in schools: ‘Une grande nuit tomberait sur le pays’, the minister says, ‘L’installation d’Haïti dans le créole constituerait un recul d’une proportion jamais enregistrée dans l’histoire de l’humanité.’ In other words, according to the Duvalier minister’s logic, to encourage literacy in Creole would be to go against the entire history of Haiti, for as Hurbon restates, the sole aim of successive Haitian elites has been

to prove how blacks can become civilised through appropriating French language and culture.²⁴

The long attachment of Haiti’s authors to French language is therefore potentially also a complicit acceptance of elitist cultural hegemony. In effect, their persistent use of French inevitably raises the question of how they are finally any different to Glissant’s delirious schoolteachers, or to the tongue-tripping British Caribbean politician. Are they not in their own way perpetuating the mimetic impulses that have characterised Caribbean cultures for centuries? Perhaps, to some extent, some Haitian authors are; Haitian writing is not after all homogeneous, and a multiplicity of positions can be traced. But there is a fundamental difference even in the most derivative of Haitian literature, in that the question of *resistance* is far less pressing for Haitian authors: the cathartic violence of the revolution largely purged the colonially-imposed inferiority complex (so fundamental to Fanon’s theories), and to a large extent removed the need to reject, politically and culturally, the colonial master. Moreover, most *contemporary* francophone Haitian authors, in contrast to many of their predecessors, use French language without perpetuating the tradition of cloying francophilia. In this sense, the language is almost neutered, or deterritorialised, cut loose from any associations of cultural mimicry. These authors realise that certain strands of Haitian literature have already travelled as far as they can down the dark alley of national cultural authenticity and seen that it leads only to another dead end. To illustrate this point, I now want to discuss Émile Ollivier’s short story ‘La Supplique d’Élie Magnan’,²⁵ published in 2001, shortly before Ollivier’s death, and which is a

²¹ Hurbon, p. 70.

²² Ibid., p. 76.

²³ Ibid., p. 77.

²⁴ Hurbon., p. 80.

²⁵ Émile Ollivier, ‘La Supplique d’Élie Magnan’, in *Regarde, regarde les lions* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), pp. 111-27. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

quite brilliant parable of the dangers of tying language to cultural authenticity, and as such constitutes a contemporary reaffirmation of Haiti's earliest expressions of cultural openness. Because the short story was published five years after the end of the Duvalier era, it seems that Ollivier's critique is directed less at the Duvaliers than at the *neo-noiriste* discourse of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas party, or even at some imagined combination of Aristide and Duvalier. As Aristide affirms in his 'ninth commandment of democracy', fidelity to Haitian culture is a fundamental tenet of Lavalas. Moreover, as Aristide says 'To live, and to live fully, also means nourishing oneself at the sources of one's culture; it means plunging the roots of one's being into those sources.' The aim of Lavalas is, Aristide says, 'to validate our cultural identity', for 'No truly deep change can be accomplished democratically without an articulation of the indigenous values that are closely linked with any genuine socio-cultural fabric.'²⁶ Therefore, although to some extent his project is laudable in that it foresees an end to elite, francophile culture in Haiti, Aristide also ushers in the old spectres of indigenous black essentialism and authenticity, and of a strategically-introverted national culture. It is these spectres that Ollivier's story seeks to exorcise.

In Haitian literature, everyday reality is rarely presented in direct, realist style. Instead, various modes of indirection are often employed: from Alexis's magical realism in *Les Arbres musiciens* (1957) through Frankétienne's quasi-surreal spiralism in *Ultravocal* (1972), Depestre's allegorical satire in *Le Mât de cocagne* (1980) and Laferrière's ludic vodou adventure in *Pays sans chapeau* (1997), Haitian authors have often effected a turning away from everyday reality, as if the everyday in Haiti were itself so bizarre and unrepresentable that only non-realist modes could express it. Interestingly, some of the most convincingly realist

²⁶ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *An Autobiography* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 200-01.

representations have come from women authors; for example Marie Chauvet's *Amour* (1968) and Yanick Lahens's *Dans la maison du père* (2000).²⁷ In 'La Supplique d'Élie Magnan', Ollivier uses allegory and parody to reflect on language and national identity; symbolic figures and situations take precedence over 'real' representation, and the critique of Haitian cultural nationalism is carried out indirectly through Ollivier's ironic, detached narrative. His central figure, something like Depestre's Postel in *Le Mât de cocagne*, is an outsider, one whose perspective is at odds with the ultra-nationalist, culturally insular impulses of the political administration. Élie Magnan arrives in the unnamed capital city of 'La République' and immediately feels ill at ease in the heat and noise of the 'zone la plus polluée du monde' (p. 111). His own origins remain deliberately vague: he comes 'de très loin', from the other side of the forest, where he lives among the soft, translucent mist of his 'hauteurs glacées' (p. 111). Emerging from the ethereal mountain mists, Magnan, whose name seems to suggest magnanimity, loftiness of spirit, is a teacher of mathematics, 'cette science où on ne sait pas de quoi on parle ni si ce que l'on dit est vrai' (p. 113), and thus has something of the air of a Greek sage descending into the teeming, chaotic metropolis and dispensing his wisdom, whether or not it is asked for. Again much like Depestre's Postel figure, stubbornness and pragmatism are Magnan's characteristic traits, as is his aversion to myth and falsehood: he grounds himself only 'sur du solide,' and 'ne croyait viable que ce qui reposait sur les matériaux robustes de la réalité' (p. 113). If he is detached from the urban chaos spatially, it is also suggested that he exists in a separate temporal sphere: he lives with his own load of history and memory 'un peu comme si le

²⁷ A notable exception to this tendency is Lyonel Trouillot, and in particular his direct, powerful account of the build-up to the year 2004 in *Bicentenaire* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2004).

monde d'aujourd'hui ne le concernait pas, son esprit éparpillé parmi les âges et les époques qu'il avait traversés' (p. 113).

The reason for Magnan's descent into town is the recent law that has regulated the use of language and prohibited the use of words 'qui n'appartenaient pas au terroir, qui n'avaient pas poussé avec "nos racines"' (p. 114). As a consequence of the new law, Magnan is 'en panne de mots', as is the rest of the population, which finds it impossible to sustain any kind of coherent communication. The entire nation is isolated from the rest of the world, but the authorities declare themselves proud to be finally masters of their destiny (p. 114). In the linguistic and communicative void, individuals rush to invent new terms, becoming chroniclers, peddlers of words, and this, far from unifying the people, radically weakens their previous, reassuring togetherness, and each day brings closer the possibility of 'la répétition de la catastrophe de Babel' (p. 115). The sudden flood of new words destabilises time and opens up the way for 'toutes sortes de mystifications' (p. 116). Alarmed by the unexpected consequences of their legislation, the authorities set up a Bureau to regulate the circulation of words and to create new terms where necessary, on the condition that they are 'conformes à la morale et à l'identité de la nation' (p. 117). Estimating that a stock of two thousand eight hundred words would be enough to teach arithmetic and geometry, but realising that it would take at least ten years to amass such a number, Magnan has come down from his ethereal mountain home to request exemption from the regulations.

The Bureau meets in a strange house, or rather a room in which Magnan cannot be sure if he is inside or outside (p. 119). His senses distorted by his hunger – an allusion to the effects of deprivation on the broader population – Magnan first sees a man with a long, cottony, white beard that seems to date from the last century. The man has the air of a patriarch orchestrating a sacred ceremony; and, filled with the 'froideur d'une dignitaire ecclésiastique', he dictates the new, approved words, which the

audience greets with ecstatic fervour (p. 120). Rising from his chair, the man stamps his foot three times, and chants unintelligibly as if he were confiding a secret to a being from the hereafter. The effect of these acts on Magnan is to further destabilise his sense of time and reality: he feels 'plongé hors du temps', and cannot tell if what he is seeing is real or a dream (p. 121). The bearded man proceeds to harangue the audience, stating how much he regrets not being present at the beginning of language, when all the animals and objects were being named, and affirming that he would never have allowed the adoption of these 'vocables cosmopolites, abscons qui bouffent comme un chancré le langage courant' (p. 122). At this point, Magnan demands the right to speak, and delivers his own lecture on language and how it lives and dies:

À vous entendre [...] on croirait que la langue est un objet artificiel et non une chose naturelle, vivante. Elle ne s'élabore pas par décret, en conclave. Ce sont les citoyens qui font vivre une langue, qui la maintiennent en santé, en forgeant des mots, en empruntant aux autres langues quand il leur en manque pour traduire leur réalité. En mettant notre langue sous coupe réglée comme vous voulez le faire, elle risque de perdre son aisance ainsi que cette divine et joyeuse liberté qui l'a caractérisée jusqu'ici. (p. 122)

Arguing further that language is not the sole determining factor in national identity, and that it is the relationship with the land, life, history, dreams and aspirations that creates the people, Magnan finally produces his request for exemption, which is met by a vicious tirade from the bearded man, and jeers and threats from the audience. Defiantly, Magnan shouts that life is inexhaustible and

that this official muzzle on language is nothing but an ‘œuvre de mort’ (p. 123). To the approval of the audience, Magnan (again like Depestre’s Postel) is tried as one of those ‘faux intellectuels qui ne servaient à rien’, and sentenced to be deported to a prison camp (pp. 123-24). Outside the Bureau, the society sinks into language-induced chaos, and apocalyptic images of fires and great winds, and of a mass exodus across the border and on the seas suggest a new social breakdown. Together, these images constitute a return to the ‘interminable enfer’ of Haitian history, and Magnan, like many of Ollivier’s fictional characters, reflects bitterly on the ‘minces avancées et perpétuels reculs’ that have shaped his nation’s history (p. 125). From this point in the story, Magnan falls into fatalistic despair, and in his prison cell, he hears on his radio the announcement of the definitive prohibition of all words that ‘n’appartenaient pas au terroir, qui n’avaient pas poussé avec “nos racines”’ (p. 127).

Notwithstanding the sense of resignation and hopelessness with which the story ends, Ollivier reasserts the cultural openness and the commitment to progressive modernity that has characterised Haitian literature from its earliest days. Eschewing the trap of introverted cultural nationalism, Ollivier effectively restates the values of revolutionary universalism that are the true legacies of Haitian history. As the bicentenary of Haitian independence has reminded us, the revolt in St Domingue inscribed indelibly in the minds of the slaves the notion of revolutionary universalism: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were not ‘white’ concepts, but colourblind values to which every individual had a right. As Dash has argued, by the end of the eighteenth century, ‘in its appropriation of this universalist discourse, the Caribbean had become one of the explosive borders of enlightened modernity’.²⁸

²⁸ J. Michael Dash, ‘*Haiti chimère*: Revolutionary Universalism and its Caribbean Context’, in Munro, Martin and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw (eds.), *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks* (Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), pp. 9-19 (p. 10).

In exposing the limitations and hypocrisies of French universal values and in asserting a model of true human equality, the Haitian Revolution was at once ‘a foundational moment in French universalist thought and a point of origin for postcolonial Caribbean societies, one that privileged global interaction and transcended ethnocentric models of nation, race and identity’.²⁹

If Haiti and other Caribbean states have stuttered and fallen since this ‘foundational moment’, it is in large part because they have retreated from the essential truth that the revolution asserted: that they are irrevocably part of what Susan Buck-Morss has termed the ‘world-historical’ scheme, and that in being prone to the seductive allure of discrete, self-contained racial and ethnic identities, they only turn back from and betray the radical possibilities that the revolution prised open.³⁰ In terms of language, the retreat from revolutionary universalism into racial and nationalist mythologies has led to the valorization of various Creole tongues as unquestionably and incontrovertibly authentic idioms that reflect and communicate ‘naturally’ the totality of the lived experience of Caribbean peoples. While it cannot be denied that Creole languages have evolved out of the historical experience of Caribbean peoples, and in this sense are more intimately connected to lived reality than standard metropolitan languages are, there is a very real and all too seductive risk of fetishising Creole languages, in closing down their frames of reference, and thereby, as in Ollivier’s story, imprisoning the people in an idiom and a perspective on the world that is restricted and inward-looking. In short, the exclusive promotion of Creole languages carries with it an ideological prescriptiveness that, again as in

Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), pp. 9-19 (p. 10).

²⁹ Dash, ‘*Haiti chimère*’, p. 11.

³⁰ Susan Buck-Morss, ‘Hegel and Haiti’, *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (summer 2000), 821-65 (pp. 835-36).

Ollivier's story, effectively re-colonises the imagination of the people. What Ollivier and other authors of the great universalist tradition in Haitian writing stress is the 'natural' need for languages to evolve, change, borrow and adapt. Ironically, it seems that 'the people', in whose name the standardization and promotion of Creoles are usually carried out, often care little about the name and classification of the language they speak; what is more apparently important than the identity and origin of the words used is the ability to express oneself as widely and fully as possible. In this sense, paradoxically, language can have no true meaning and relevance unless it has no 'true' meaning and relevance. Populations are usually in general ambivalent about what particular language they speak, and thus seem implicitly aware that all established, official languages are colonial in that they often lay claim to a territory and a people out of a less fixed, more free and floating linguistic and political situation.

Rather than turn endlessly in historical-linguistic-cultural circles, as Haiti does in Ollivier's story, Caribbean linguists and authors might consider some of the ideas of Derrida's *Le Monolingisme de l'autre*, a relatively short volume that is informed by a deep suspicion of the direct bond between language and identity, and which takes apart the idea that a language, any language, can be the property of any nation, people, class, or group. Because language is never truly anyone's property, Derrida (playing on the dual meanings of 'propriété') argues that the 'master' in truth possesses nothing and, as in Ollivier's story, it is only through political mystifications that the illusion of possessing language can be effected and perpetuated:

Contrairement à ce qu'on est le plus souvent tenté de croire, le maître n'est rien. Et il n'a rien en propre. Parce que le maître ne possède pas en propre, *naturellement*, ce qu'il appelle pourtant sa langue; parce que, quoi qu'il veuille ou fasse,

il ne peut entretenir avec elle des rapports de propriété ou d'identité naturels, nationaux, congénitaux, ontologiques; parce qu'il ne peut accréditer et dire cette appropriation qu'au cours d'un procès non-naturel de constructions politico-phantasmatiques; parce que la langue n'est pas son bien naturel, par cela même il peut historiquement, à travers le viol d'une usurpation culturelle, c'est-à-dire toujours d'essence coloniale, feindre de se l'approprier pour l'imposer comme la sienne.³¹

It follows that any attempt to definitively appropriate, to finally *master* the language of the Other will be futile for, as Derrida says 'il n'y a jamais d'appropriation ou de réappropriation absolue. Parce qu'il n'y a pas de propriété naturelle de la langue'.³² In refuting any simple language-identity equation, Derrida, echoing the great revolutionary universalist Haitian tradition, implicitly challenges the particular thread of the anti-colonial critical tradition, which since *Orphée Noir* and *Peau noire, masques blancs* has framed the language question in terms of colonial imposition and, conversely, of resistance through appropriation and subversion. Such dichotomous, black/white conceptions of identity and language dissolve both in the face of Haiti's revolutionary universalist history of attachment to French, and of Derrida's arguments that, in any case, language can never truly coincide with a fixed national or personal identity. Haitian authors, as Joël Des Rosiers says 'have come to the end of coincidences between language, culture, and identity. For us any language is tainted, and our poetical art attempts to put a check on any kind of

³¹ Derrida, *Le Monolingisme de l'autre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), p. 45.

³² Ibid., p. 46.

principle of deep-rooting'.³³ The political annexing of Creole language and the harnessing of it to closed ideas of nation, race and culture – so adeptly allegorised in Ollivier's story – must ultimately be interpreted as a prime example of postcolonial 'apocalyptic' thought, as an illustrative case of the seductive and finally insidious allure of decisive truths, the mythical keys to an authentic Caribbean being.³⁴

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'Une histoire sérieuse de nègres'? Humour and the Refiguring of the Republic in Pascal Légitimus's *Antilles-sur-Seine*

The riots of autumn 2005, that swept from the Parisian *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois across the deprived suburbs of France, served once more to highlight the nation's worsening social problems, and to refocus both political and cultural debate on issues of equality, exclusion and integration. A few months earlier, in June 2005, Azouz Begag had been named 'ministre délégué à la promotion de l'égalité des chances' by Dominique de Villepin and, in March 2006, in large part as a response to the riots, a new 'loi pour l'égalité des chances' was introduced by the minister for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing, Jean-Louis Borloo. According to the ministry's website:

Promouvoir l'égalité des chances c'est donner à chaque citoyen la possibilité de faire valoir ses mérites et d'apporter ses compétences à une société plus solidaire et plus fraternelle. Promouvoir l'égalité des chances, c'est également retrouver confiance en la République. La cohésion sociale est à ce prix.¹

'L'égalité des chances' was also declared 'la grande cause nationale' for 2006 and a series of 'journées interrégionales' was arranged, in which Begag travelled to five cities across France to participate in events designed to address various issues of diversity and equality of opportunity and culminating in a one-day conference in Paris in June. At this conference he also spoke of the

³³ Joël Des Rosiers, 'Joël Des Rosiers', tr. Suzanne Houyoux, *Callaloo*, 15.2 (1992), 427-30 (p. 428).

³⁴ On apocalyptic thought, see J. Michael Dash, 'Postcolonial Eccentricities: Francophone Caribbean Literature and the *fin de siècle*', in Aub-Buscher, Gertrud and Beverley Ormerod-Noakes, *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, Culture* (Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 33-44.

¹ [<http://www.cohesionsociale.gouvfr/eclairage/fiche-20-rencontres-equalite-chances-780.html?recalc=oui>], accessed 13.12.06.

importance of re-establishing ‘la confiance républicaine’ just as, in his speech at the final *journée interrégionale* in Bordeaux – a day whose theme was ‘l’engagement collectif et citoyen’ – he had also emphasised the centrality of Republican values to the attempts of both his ministry and the government to promote social diversity. For Begag, in this speech, finding ways in which to ‘[faire] vivre, tous ensemble, notre société républicaine’ and to allow everyone to ‘vivre pleinement leur citoyenneté’ are key. Importantly, too:

L’égalité des chances, ça n’est pas l’intégration des nouveaux arrivants, c’est assumer pleinement les valeurs de la République, en passant d’une égalité de principe à une égalité des chances réelle pour des Français discriminés, relégués, qu’ils soient issus de l’immigration, ou non.²

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these speeches echo the work of Begag before he became a government minister, and especially in their emphasis on re-imagining the notion of integration, on finding ways of bringing white and non-white French communities together and on doing so in manifestly Republican language. In 2001, for example, he published an article in a special issue of the journal *Écarts d’identité: Revue trimestrielle sur l’intégration*. The special issue was entitled ‘Immigration, mon humour’ and, in his piece, ‘L’Humour comme distance dans l’espace interculturel’, Begag speaks primarily as a *beur* writer and addresses literary and cultural aspects of immigration. In particular, he discusses the way in which, over the last fifteen years, writers, theatre directors and filmmakers of immigrant origin have begun to employ new strategies in their representation of immigration and related issues. They have tended to move away, he says, from their traditional preoccupations with ‘la contestation et [le] misérabilisme’ towards

the use of humour, and particularly irony and autoderision.³ For Begag, humour is an attempt by young French people of immigrant origin to find new ways of imagining – or, in his words, ‘de mettre en scène’ – a relationship with France which is no longer that of exiled and exploited economic migrant to host country, but which is characterised, instead, by the biculturality, or ‘double appartenance’, of the children and grandchildren of those first generation immigrants. Humour, he feels, can be used to create common ground between communities, to attenuate mutual feelings of distrust, fear or insecurity and to open a space in which identification and interaction begin to become possible: ‘rire des agissements de l’autre, c’est déjà l’accepter en son sein, lui donner une place en soi-même, l’accueillir’. Indeed, he goes as far as to call humour ‘la forme ultime de ce qu’on appelle... l’intégration’.⁴

As he does so, however, his use of the term *intégration* is hesitant. He claims to employ it ‘avec beaucoup de réserve – tant il est devenu obsolète’ and, a few paragraphs later, he is more specific, adding: ‘l’humour témoigne d’une bonne intégration des populations les unes aux autres, vue non pas comme un mouvement unilatéral (les étrangers doivent s’intégrer chez nous) mais comme un véritable échange’.⁵ More specifically still, and in an endnote to his original, hesitant use of the term, he comments: ‘on peut remarquer qu’il a été remplacé par le mot « citoyenneté » plus rassembleur et républicain’.⁶ As in his speech in Bordeaux, Begag is here searching for a term that would allow the conceptualisation of a wider, less immediately racialised, sense of integration as social inclusion, and he is once again doing so in manifestly Republican terms. The concept of ‘citoyenneté’ is more

³ Azouz Begag, ‘L’Humour comme distance dans l’espace interculturel’, *Écarts d’identité*, 97 (2001), 3-6 (p. 3).

⁴ Begag, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Begag, p. 6.

² www.egalitedeschances.gouv.fr/article.php3?id_article=47, accessed 13.12.06.

'rassembleur' because, while it certainly implies within it the notion of integration, it does not immediately have the colonialist connotations associated with that word.⁷ Rather, it allows the notions of race and ethnicity that are so antithetical to the French Republican tradition to be glossed over and evokes, instead, the ideal of equality, of a Republic which may be diverse but which is also, primarily, 'une et indivisible'. For Begag, humour – with its capacity to 'emporte[r] l'adhésion du public dans sa diversité'⁸ – has, itself, 'quelque chose de familier avec les notions de citoyenneté et de République devenues courantes dans l'action politique en direction des jeunes de banlieues'.⁹

For Begag, then, both as a politician and as a writer, what is important is finding ways in which to bring disparate communities together in a manner that will crystallise and revitalise the Republican project of unity and inclusivity. Humour, for him, is a means of effecting this at the level of popular culture, and he sees visual media like television and the cinema, in particular, as powerful vehicles for the types of 'représentations de l'Autre' necessary to such a project. He cites Maghrebi actor-comedians like Smaïn as examples of the way in which, along with sport (and his comparison is with 'la figure mythique [de]... Zinadine Zidane'), humour has become 'un puissant diluant de l'immigration dans ce que les anglo-saxons appellent le "mainstream" de la société'.¹⁰

⁷According to the *Documentation française* website 'Vie publique': 'la citoyenneté est... un élément important d'intégration. Intégration d'abord pour des étrangers résidant sur le sol national depuis un certain nombre d'années [...] [mais] intégration aussi pour des personnes exclues par leur faible niveau de revenus, ou par des problèmes médicaux ou familiaux': www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte_instit/citoyen/citoyen_1_2_1_q6.htm, accessed 10.8.06.

⁸ Begag, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

It is in the light of these comments by Begag that I propose to examine the film *Antilles-sur-Seine* (2000), a popular comedy that is the directorial début of actor and comedian (and long-time colleague of Smaïn) Pascal Légitimus. Born in Paris and of Guadeloupean and Armenian origin, Légitimus is best known, alongside Bernard Campan and Didier Bourdon, as a member of 'Les Inconnus', one of France's leading comedy acts during the 1980s and 1990s.¹¹ He has appeared in a number of white-directed, popular films in which issues of race and immigration have indeed been brought into the mainstream as Begag suggests, although in ultimately unthreatening and non-contentious ways.¹²

Antilles-sur-Seine is also a mainstream comedy and, set amongst the Antillean community in Paris, it, too, deals with issues of race and migration. Although not involved directly in political action, Légitimus sees himself very much as a socially engaged actor and filmmaker and has expressed his pride that his first full-length feature film was made with an almost entirely black cast.¹³ He is certainly committed, like Begag, to using

¹¹ Originally a five-man act also featuring Smaïn and Seymour Brussel, the group was formed in 1984 after the comedians had met on Antenne 2's sketch-show 'Petit Théâtre de Bouvard'. Smaïn left the group in 1985, after the release of their first film *Le Téléphone sonne toujours deux fois!*, as did Brussel a year later. Their humour is based on parody and derision and, in 1995, the remaining three members made *Les Trois Frères*, a hugely successful mainstream film.

¹² As well as starring for several years in France Télévision's *Crimes en série*, Légitimus also appeared in Thomas Gilou's surprise box-office hit *Black Mic Mac* (1985), and co-starred with Smaïn in Serge Meynard's *L'Œil au beur(re) noir* (1987), which won a César for best first film and for which Légitimus was also nominated as best male newcomer.

¹³ In the interview on the DVD, Légitimus discusses the lack of roles, especially mainstream ones, for black actors in France and claims that he was told by several distributors that he approached: 'un film avec des noirs ne marchera jamais', which meant that he encountered enormous difficulties in securing funding and finding a producer. In the end, it was funded by TF1 and Légitimus's own production company Marie-Galante Productions, after Claude

humour as a means of promoting greater understanding between communities and, in the interview included on the DVD version of the film, he echoes many of Begag's points. He claims of Antilleans, for example: 'on veut s'intégrer, on veut que les gens nous aiment' and that, to this end, he set out to make a film about the Antillean community in Paris that would avoid 'le côté banlieues, rappeurs, méchants blacks' – what Begag might call 'le misérabilisme' – and which, instead, would enable a white audience to feel that 'grâce à eux [les noirs antillais], on peut aussi s'amuser'. Above all, he claims, he wanted white French audience members to leave the cinema and notice, perhaps for the first time, the sheer number of Antilleans around them, and to feel that 'ces gens-là, il faut les respecter, ils sont là'. What is more, as the film develops, and as we shall see, this desire to promote mutual respect and tolerance comes to be articulated in precisely the Republican language that characterises Begag's work. What I propose to examine here, is whether his own attempt to address serious issues about racism and immigration in a mainstream comedy works: is it possible, as Begag suggests, to use humour to imagine ways of realising the Republican project of equality and unity in diversity? In addition, how do the specifically Caribbean issues inevitably raised – and, in particular, those to do with the memory of slavery – impact upon and interact with this project as it is articulated in the film?

Like most popular comedies, *Antilles-sur-Seine* is a film steeped in cliché and stereotype. From the beginning, it works hard to emphasise an exoticised Caribbean setting, despite the vast majority of the film being set in Paris. In fact, this begins before the film itself, with the pre-release posters, the subsequent

Zidi agreed to co-produce it with Légitimus and Chantal Lauby, who plays the main female character, Herman. Légitimus has a long-standing commitment to the promotion of black actors in France and has been involved with Casting Sud, a casting and production company that shares this commitment, and which he used for this film.

packaging of the DVD, and the title sequence. Even before the title sequence, the usual information about the film's production and funding is given against background scenes which, together with a short home-movie style clip inserted just before the closing credits, of three light-skinned little girls waving to camera on a Caribbean beach, are entirely extra-diegetic and perform no other function than to emphasise the film's Caribbeanness. In these scenes we see a shot of a long road lined with palm trees down which, first, two women in traditional Caribbean dress carry baskets on their heads and, second, a man wearing a *bakoua* struggles with his cows. In each, it is only the new tarmac and white lines on the road that suggest a present day setting: the rest of the *mise-en-scène* works to confirm Western stereotypes about the Caribbean, depicting it as slow-paced and unchanging. As the film's title then appears – the words apparently constructed out of small pieces of sugarcane – the *zouk* music that will become ubiquitous begins and a subtitle appears, set against a shot, this time, of a beach lined with palm trees, informing us that this is 'un film tropicalisé par Pascal Légitimus'. This wording echoes that of the film's poster and eventual DVD packaging where, in a move apparently calculated to appeal largely to a white audience, it is billed as 'le film qui va vous tropicaliser'.

The opening scenes of the film, which are set in Marie-Galante at the birthday party of Horace Sainte-Rose, the local mayor, continue to be packed with stereotyped representations of black Antilleans. From the middle-aged Caribbean 'mamma' figures to the men of all ages shown cheating on their girlfriends or chatting up beautiful, light-skinned young women we see, in abundance, precisely the auto-derision to which Begag refers – auto-derision that enables a white audience to 'rire des agissements de l'autre' in a way that is sanctioned by those very 'others' themselves. What is more, it also serves as a counterpoint to the characterisation of the film's central figures: Horace Sainte-Rose, his wife Lucia and their two sons Manuel and Freddy, who, from the outset, are established

as the epitome of bourgeois respectability. It is with these characters, as we shall see, that Begag's space for identification and interaction opens up – a point which becomes crucial when Lucia is kidnapped the following evening from her Paris hotel room and the film follows Horace and his two sons to Paris. Here, their encounter with white French people (in the shape of the police handling the kidnapping investigation) relies for its effect on the audience's burgeoning sense of identification with them.

By the time of the family's arrival in Paris, we have already been introduced to Inspector Herman and her lieutenant, Henry, who are in charge of the investigation. They, too, have been subjected to stereotyping and gentle ridicule and, as Horace Sainte-Rose and his sons enter Herman's office for the first time, they find her reminiscing to Henry about a holiday she once had in the French Caribbean and engaged in an exaggerated impression of the smiling, docile Antillean *doudou* of tourist promotions. The scene is filmed in a series of rapid shot-reverse shots between Herman, who has her back to the door, and an increasingly uncomfortable Henry, facing the door, inter-cut with shots of the three Sainte-Rose men approaching down the corridor. The effect is one of mounting tension since we, like Henry, know that they are approaching and, like him, await the revelation of Herman's racism with increasing discomfort and embarrassment.

As Herman retreats to stand with Henry, facing the Sainte-Rose family, black and white are clearly set in opposition and we expect some kind of angry, or at least shocked, confrontation. Instead, as the detectives appear increasingly bungling and incompetent, the Sainte-Rose family remains polite and measured throughout. Any tension is therefore defused: the audience, like Henry and Herman, is able to breathe a collective sigh of relief. That the Sainte-Rose men do not react, and behave much more courteously than the white police' officers, serves both to confound other stereotypes about black men (that they are violent, angry, oversensitive about racism: the 'méchants blacks' image to which Légitimus refers)

and to increase the potential for audience identification with them. What is more, when Herman then receives a phone call from her son, who is ill, Manuel steps forward and offers her both his card and his services as an anaesthetist at La Salpêtrière. When he hands over the card, it is shown in close-up, with his black hand on one side and her white hand on the other. In these scenes, threatening or uncomfortable differences are therefore swept away into reassuring, respectable sameness. In terms of its effect on the audience, then, the film does indeed appear to use humour as a means of opening up the space for identification and interaction described by Begag and, as Légitimus had apparently desired, becomes a force for integration by enabling a white audience to identify with black characters and thereby reassuring them that black Antilleans are, after all, just like them.

Herman does, in a subsequent scene, take Manuel up on his offer to help her son and, after assisting with a successful appendectomy, Manuel invites Herman to have coffee with him and we see hints, repeated throughout the film, of a romantic liaison between them.¹⁴ Although the romantic plot is never developed, their relationship becomes crucial to the representation of cross-cultural identification on-screen. Importantly, it is with this cross-cultural identification between characters, rather than between audience and characters, that the relationship between white France and its migrant others begins to be imagined in more complex ways. The two of them come to stand for that section of each community whose openness to the Other enables integration

¹⁴ As Carrie Tarr has pointed out, comedy is a genre in which the possibility of interracial relationships may be imagined in an unthreatening way, although *beur* and black males are rarely part of such scenarios. Her examples include Serreau's *Romuald et Juliette* (1985) as well as *Black Mic Mac* and *L'Œil au beur(re) noir* – two of the films in which, as detailed in note 12 above, Légitimus has been involved; see Carrie Tarr, 'French Cinema and Postcolonial Minorities', in Hargreaves, Alec and Mark McKinney (eds.), *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 59-83 (p. 68).

as exchange to take place, articulated, moreover in precisely the Republican language that is so important in the work of Begag.

This Republican language is first evidenced shortly after the Sainte-Rose family leaves their dispiriting encounter with the French police. As they stand outside the police station discussing the incompetent police handling of their case, they are approached by Gertrude Boisec, an Antillean newspaper-seller in a nearby kiosk whom they have never met before, but who immediately offers his support. He tells them that he is connected to an underground network of Antilleans and other 'domiens' who are ready to help them solve the kidnapping. They are initially surprised by this offer of help from a stranger and ask him: 'pourquoi faites-vous tout ça pour nous?', to which he replies: 'Trois mots: liberté, fraternité... et solidarité'. This evocation, and modification, of the Republican *devise* is significant in a number of ways. First, it is part of a long tradition of debate, from the first use of the *devise* in 1793 to its inclusion in the 1848 constitution, to its adoption as official motto in 1880, about which Republican values should be included in it, which should be privileged, how they should be interpreted and how they should be seen in relation to each other.¹⁵ In addition, the choice of 'solidarité' as a substitute

¹⁵ See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 65–96, for a fuller discussion of this (and in particular pp. 80–89). The Vichy régime, of course, replaced the *devise* with 'travail, famille, patrie' and, more recently, it has been subject to modification in a variety of arenas: during the feminist debates about 'parité' in the 1990s; see, for example, Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, Anne LeGall, *Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); in formal 'propositions de loi' such as that of the UMP député Franck Marlin who, in the wake of the most recent 'headscarf affairs', proposed on 13 January 2004 that the *devise* should become 'liberté, égalité, fraternité, laïcité': see www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/propositions/pion1343.asp, accessed 28.7.06); or in more informal sloganising such as the 'liberté, égalité, impunité' provoked by Chirac's presidential immunity in the RPR-financing scandal of 2004: see, for example, <http://pluriel.free/impunité.rtf>, accessed 10.1.07.

term also has a long history and is itself a good example of the way in which such debates and conflicts between different republican groups – between what Sudhir Hazareesingh calls the 'forces of order' on the Right and the 'forces of movement' on the Left – that the institutions and wider values of the French Republic grew. In his 1896 text *La Solidarité*, for example, Léon Bourgeois – Radical Prime Minister and whom Hazareesingh terms a Republican of 'movement' – proposed the doctrine of 'solidarisme'. Convinced that classical, Republican social philosophy had been too exclusively focused on the protection of individual rights – that they had focused too exclusively on the core value of (individual) 'liberté' – Bourgeois proposed a switch in emphasis to the values of 'égalité' and 'fraternité' and insisted that an element of state intervention was necessary to promote such concepts. For him, Hazareesingh argues, the Republic should be seen as 'the instrument of moral and social progress, a permanent means of reducing inequality and increasing solidarity between men'.¹⁶

The notion of solidarity has therefore always been part of the Republic's evolving sense of its core values. More importantly, it remains so and – as evidenced in my opening quotation from the Ministry for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing website – is most often placed alongside the notion of 'citoyenneté' in contemporary efforts to promote a sense of the Republic as unified, but also diverse and inclusive. Indeed, according to one of the websites run by La Documentation française (and therefore also under government direction), solidarity is one of the three key values attached to the notion of citizenship itself, together with 'la civilité' and 'le civisme'. All three values are characterised by respect for other citizens, mutual recognition and a sense of one's duty towards society as a whole. Solidarity, however, is defined as the most directly linked to the notion of citizenship and is based on

¹⁶ Hazareesingh, pp. 88–89.

the assumption that citizens ‘ne sont pas de simples individus juxtaposés, mais un ensemble d’hommes et de femmes attachés à un projet commun’. More than this, and once again echoing Begag on humour, solidarity is linked to citizenship because ‘elle correspond à une attitude d’ouverture aux autres’.¹⁷

One of the places that this contemporary Republican discourse of solidarity and citizenship is most evident is in the mission statements of the myriad of grassroots, community-based ‘associations’ who work with people, often young people, who are excluded or disadvantaged in some way. ‘Agir pour la citoyenneté’ (APC), for example, was founded in January 2001 by Karim Zeribi, ex-footballer and former advisor to Jean-Pierre Chevènement, precisely in order to foster a sense of inclusion and political empowerment amongst young people living in the *banlieues* of France’s major cities. Zeribi has claimed that ‘le modèle républicain n’a jamais été mis en place’;¹⁸ and, as well as placing the notion of citizenship at the centre of its work, APC claims that it was founded ‘par des hommes et des femmes désireux de défendre les valeurs d’égalité, de solidarité et de fraternité’.¹⁹ One of its central achievements has been the creation of a ‘Parlement National des Banlieues’, whose meetings bring together politicians, local activists and residents of the *banlieues* and formulate concrete proposals to be sent for debate in the real French parliament. It has become politically very influential and,

in the wake of the 2005 riots and in the run-up to the 2007 presidential elections, Zeribi and APC are being courted by both the Left and Right. Ségolène Royal attended its eighth ‘Parlement de banlieue’ in November 2006 and launched her ‘projet pour les banlieues’, known as ‘le pacte de Bondy’, the establishment of workshops to facilitate the creation of businesses by qualified young people living in the *banlieues*.²⁰ These are precisely the kinds of community-based initiatives, usually undertaken by much smaller associations with much less political weight, that both the ‘égalité des chances’ law and the wider ‘cause nationale’ claim they aim to strengthen and celebrate. To this end, Begag announced early in 2006 that a collective of 18 representative associations would lead the ‘égalité des chances’ initiative. From larger organisations such as SOS Racisme to smaller ones like CAPDIV, Casodom and Paris Village, these associations see their role as also promoting precisely solidarity and citizenship – values that they too see as solidly Republican.²¹

All of this is much closer to the concerns of *Antilles-sur-Seine* than might at first appear, for it was just such an association, ‘La Solidarité antillaise’, that Légitimus’s grandfather, Victor Étienne Légitimus, founded in Paris in 1956,²² and it is this that is clearly evoked both in Gertrude Boisec’s version of the Republican *devise* and in his reference to an underground community of Antilleans to which he gradually introduces Horace Sainte-Rose – and therefore also the audience. The first of the meetings that he organises to this end takes place in a disused theatre, where Horace is positioned in

¹⁷ www.vie-publique.fr/découverte_instit/citoyen/citoyen_1_2_1_q3.htm, accessed 10.8.06.

¹⁸ Karim Zérabi: ‘On a un problème avec les Arabes’, interview with Grégory Protche, <http://forum.subversiv.com/index.php?id=134160>, accessed 20.12.06.

¹⁹ See <http://agirpourlacitoyennete.net>, accessed 20/05/06. See also Alain Lafarge, ‘Solidarité’, 4^e élément de la devise républicaine’, *Solidaires*, 17 (2004), www.lespep.org, accessed 20.7.06. Here, and on behalf of *Les Pupilles de l’enseignement public*, an association committed to aiding socially excluded youth, he explicitly evokes Bourgeois and, like him, sees solidarity as an extension of the republican duty to promote equality between its citizens.

²⁰ See, for example, www.segoleneroyal2007.net/article-4676254.html, accessed 20.12.06.

²¹ For a list of the associations involved and links to their websites, see www.egalitedeschances.gouv.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=14, accessed 13.12.06.

²² A journalist, Étienne Légitimus also helped to found the antiracist organisations MRAP and LICRA (see www.legitimus.com).

the auditorium to watch Gertrude and three other Antilleans – a France Telecom worker, a policeman and a GDF-EDF worker playing cards on stage. In a gesture that serves to reference the theatrical origins of both Légitimus's own career and that of his famous grandmother,²³ what we see, here, is what might be called 'Antilles-sur-scène'. That is, a staging – a literal *mise en scène* (or even *mise en abyme*) – of the size and diversity of the Antillean community in Paris, its crucial role in the very functioning of the city and, most of all, its solidarity. By the end of their 'play' we have realised, along with Sainte-Rose, that, 'si tous ces gens-là arrêtent de travailler, la France est bloquée, on ne pense jamais à ça'. Gertrude finishes by reassuring him: 'la bataille est maintenant la nôtre', and that there are '800 000 cousins'²⁴ ready to help him find his wife.

It is after this revelation that Gertrude takes the Sainte-Rose family to a bar which is itself called 'Antilles-sur-Seine', a meeting to which Manuel invites Herman, since he has discovered that her apparent lack of interest in their case is in fact because her superior, Marin, has warned her off it as 'politically sensitive' (a point to which we shall return later). This scene is pivotal, for it is here that integration as exchange between, and solidarity across, communities begins actually to be imagined. When the Sainte-Rose family enters the bar, they are greeted by a music-filled, welcoming scene that makes Horace, from whose perspective we

²³ Pascal's grandmother was Darling Légitimus, one of the French Caribbean's most famous actresses, who began her career in Josephine Baker's *La Revue nègre*, went on to found Paris's first black theatre group, *Les Griots* (with whom Roger Blin famously staged Jean Genet's *Les Nègres* in 1959) and then starred in Euzhan Palcy's *La Rue cases-nègres* in 1983. Her son, Pascal's father Théo, is also an actor and plays Théo in *Antilles-sur-Seine* (see www.legitimus.com).

²⁴ This is Gertrude's estimate of the number of Antilleans resident in Paris. Sainte-Rose had put the figure at 200,000, while the actual figure is around 400,000 – roughly the same as the population of Guadeloupe or Martinique, and which is why Paris is often referred to as 'la troisième île'.

see the scene, breathe a sigh of relief and exclaim: 'aah... solidarité'. Each shot is crowded with black Antilleans talking, dancing and laughing, but when Herman enters on her own a few minutes later and surveys the same scene, the bar immediately falls silent and the camera moves from showing us the full, now hostile bar to showing her, standing alone at the door. In this shot, which lasts for a full twenty-seven seconds, we see her embarrassment from the perspective of the people inside the bar: not for the first – or last – time, the camera is positioned in such a way as to encourage audience identification with black, rather than white, characters. Just as she is about to leave, Gertrude stands up and says: 'Elle est avec moi' and then welcomes her to their table with the words, 'faites comme chez vous'. This is the beginning of the plot to rescue Lucia, during the course of which Herman will become more and more integrated into the Antillean community, as she acts in solidarity with them and they do so with her.

Herman's first act of solidarity is to disguise herself as an Antillean cleaner in order to infiltrate Marin's office. Wearing a tropical-print dress and *madras*, her breasts, hips and bottom padded in an exaggerated way and her face blacked up, Herman becomes a grotesque version of the women shown in the pre-title sequence, and also acts out a version of her own earlier stereotype. Following this scene, when she is once again in her usual clothes, Manuel notices that she still has 'un peu de cirage' on her face: she thus literally moves towards blackness in the way that Manuel, as a pale-skinned, assimilated 'négropolitain' has in some senses moved towards whiteness.²⁵ After she helps to raid the kidnapper's den and rescue Lucia only to find that her son has now been

²⁵ When they first go to have coffee together, after her son's operation, Herman and Manuel have an exchange precisely about their respective skin colours. Herman jokes, 'c'est pas tous les jours que je bois un petit crème avec un grand noir', and then is immediately worried that she may have caused offence, and tells him: 'vous n'êtes pas noir, noir, noir', to which he responds: 'je vous trouve plutôt pâle, pâle, pâle'.

kidnapped, her own acts of solidarity are repaid when the DJ of community radio station Tropikal FM mobilises his fellow Antilleans in order to rescue him. It is for her that Paris is brought to a standstill as Horace had foreseen might be possible and, by the end of the film, she and Henry are shown, with the Sainte-Rose family, Gertrude and various other Antilleans, at a party which is both similar to, and different from, that of the opening scene. In Paris rather than Marie-Galante this party, crucially, signals the acceptance of the two white French police officers into the Antillean community. When Horace announces to the assembled crowd: ‘Mesdames, messieurs, citoyens, citoyennes, vous êtes ici chez vous, et la fête continue’, the clear implication is that we are being presented with a vision of the solidarity possible amongst the racially and culturally diverse citizens of the French Republic.

To stop at such an overview of the plot and resolution, however, would be to offer a somewhat optimistic reading of the film. *Antilles-sur-Seine* was not, it appears, a success – either at the box office²⁶ or, according to Légitimus himself, amongst Antillean audiences. Although, as we have seen, there is much both within and outside the film to suggest that a white audience was Légitimus’s primary concern, the fact that ‘les Antillais ne se sont pas reconnus dans ce film’ was, he says, his greatest regret about its generally lukewarm reception.²⁷ Humour, as Begag points out, always entails a risk, since it might be taken as ridicule, affront, simplification or caricature.²⁸ For many reviewers of the film, these were precisely the problems that prevented its success.

²⁶ According to the Internet Movie Database, *Antilles-sur-Seine* registered 379,121 box-office entries in its first month, compared with other popular comedies such as *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995) which registered 3,790,381 in a similar period, or with *Les Visiteurs* (Poiré, 1993) which registered 13,661,000 (see www.imdb.com).

²⁷ <http://guadeloupe.rfo.fr/article12.html>, accessed 23.5.06.

²⁸ Begag, pp. 4-5.

For Guillaume Branquart, for example, in *Le Quotidien du cinéma*, ‘[le] propos plutôt intéressant [du film] est vite noyé sous une avalanche de gags plus souvent ridicules que drôles’.²⁹ For Soeuf Elbadawi, it is precisely Légitimus’s use of caricature that is at issue. He names it as ‘la caricature du nègre par lui-même, sous couvert de bons sentiments’, a technique which he says is usually used to create ‘de nouveaux stéréotypes dits à tendance positive’ but which, at least in this case he feels, does not work:

Du début à la fin, on a du mal [à] suivre les acteurs. Souvent sous forme de raccourcis vendeurs, leurs répliques sentent la facilité sur un sujet sérieux: la solidarité. [...] Un bon credo de départ mais Légitimus pousse ses comédiens à trop en faire [...]. On grossit le trait, on inscrit les personnages dans le ridicule et on se nourrit de grotesque à tout va. La recette a porté avec les *Inconnus*, mais pour des histoires sérieuses de nègres, l’abus de rhum planteur, l’accent appuyé du créole pays, la convivialité assumée, le côté *doudou j’aime la fête...* ne suffisent pas. Mal utilisés, ces artifices affaiblissent la portée du message. [...] Au fond, à force de surjouer des tropicalités supposées du créole, son film finit par sentir l’exotisme racoleur.³⁰

A key problem, it would seem, is that while the genre demands the use of stereotype and cliché, this particular ‘*histoire sérieuse de*

²⁹ www.lequotidienducinema.com/critiques/antillesurseine_critique/critique_antilles_sur_seine.htm

³⁰ Elbadawi, ‘*Antilles-sur-Seine* de Pascal Légitimus (France)’, *Africultures*, 34 (2001); www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=article&no=1340, accessed 10.7.06.

nègres' also demands something more, a movement beyond rather than an entrapment within, stereotype. Here, for the most part, stereotypes are all that there is and, as they become more and more overblown, they frequently cease to be amusing and, instead, begin to become offensive.

Herman's racial cross-dressing, for example, rather than suggesting the fluidity of racial boundaries and identifications as it might if sensitively handled,³¹ is so grossly over-exaggerated that it suggests, rather, the tradition of blackface minstrelsy. This, too, is the effect of her two fellow cleaners who are played by Bernard and Campan, and whose physical appearance and mannerisms are even more exaggerated to take account of the gender, as well as racial cross-dressing involved. In fact, as we saw with the opening scenes, middle-aged black women are particular targets for such stereotyping and, later, Légitimus himself plays a similarly exaggerated role as one of two overweight, lazy, gossiping black female post office workers alongside fellow comedian Anthony Kavanagh. Significantly, however, even Manuel is not allowed straightforwardly to embody black, middle-class respectability. Rather, in the scene in which he attends Herman's son's appendectomy, he is shown using acupuncture instead of anaesthetic, to which the boy is apparently allergic. He is therefore not permitted simply to belong to the medical establishment in France, but can only do so as a sort of contemporary 'witchdoctor', using magical, alternative means to treat his patients. This is picked up on in a number of subsequent scenes, and in fact becomes an important plot point, not least when Marin ends up in the hospital with burns to his penis and is threatened with torture

³¹ Along the same lines, for example, as is suggested in the growing body of work on cross-dressing in comedy as a means of figuring the subversion of gender boundaries and identifications; for a recent example, see Darren Waldron, 'New Clothes for Temporary Transvestites? Sexuality, Cross-Dressing and Passing in the Contemporary French Film Comedy', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 14.3 (2006), 347-61.

by nurses brandishing needles and by Manuel's disembodied head and voice which appear, as if supernaturally, above him. The film then relies for its *dénouement* entirely on the magic, witchcraft and voodoo connoted by the acupuncture needles, in a final scene that, for Elbadawi, is so ridiculous that the entire film 'se termine malheureusement en épisode de série télé [...]'³²

In this scene, and with the help of his new Antillean friends and the police, Horace Sainte-Rose finally gets his revenge on the Sauveurs, a white Guadeloupean mother and son whose desire to force the mayor to let them build on land situated in his *commune* led them to mastermind the kidnapping of Lucia. As the film draws to a close, we see them in their grand Parisian residence, unaware that their hired thugs have been arrested and Lucia rescued, and awaiting the arrival of Horace, whom they expect to sign the papers releasing his land in return for his wife. When he arrives, however, he refuses and tells them instead that their actions have forced him to have recourse to 'les grands moyens... la force du quimbois, la puissance du vaudou'. He holds out two voodoo dolls, which he claims represent each of them, and then a huge cast of Antilleans arrives, many of whom we recognise from earlier parts of the film, and stage a mock-voodoo ceremony. Three men dressed as slaves, accompanied by the *gwo-ka* drummers from the metro scene, dance around the Sauveurs and cut off pieces of their clothing before one of Gertrude's friends, Naomi, appears dressed as a voodoo priestess and carrying a bubbling cauldron from which Lucia appears as if by magic. Throughout, the Sauveurs are manifestly aware that Horace is ridiculing them, yet they comply with his requests, no matter how absurd and, especially in the case of Mme Sauveur, are at times obviously afraid. They are, of course, vastly outnumbered by the black Antilleans who have appeared, uninvited, in their home, a fact which itself points to the real explanation for their compliance.

³² Elbadawi, *loc. cit.*

The Sauveurs are descended from slave-owners, and they therefore have a fear of, and ignorance about, black Antilleans that might be described as ancestral, and it is this shared memory of slavery that Horace knowingly exploits.

This evocation of the memory of slavery, in a film that is for the most part about the contemporary reality of life for Antilleans in France, is significant in a number of ways. Not least, it serves to reinforce Elbadawi's contention that *Antilles-sur-Seine* deals, fundamentally, with 'des histoires sérieuses de nègres' for which the type of humour used is simply not effective. What is more, the evocation of this memory is also – as I shall show in the final part of this article – central to the wider Republican project that we have been examining here and, more than this, it is the point at which that project, both in this film and more generally, can be seen to be fundamentally flawed.

According to the same Documentation française website cited earlier (*supra*, pp. 55-56), 'la citoyenneté va de pair avec la construction de la mémoire d'épisodes marquants d'une histoire nationale'.³³ The examples given are the Revolution, the Occupation and the Resistance but, particularly since the 150th anniversary of abolition in 1998, calls for the memory of slavery to be made central to the construction of a national memory became more and more urgent until, in 2001, slavery was recognised by the French government as a crime against humanity. Then, on 10 May 2006, and under pressure from organisations such as the 'Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage', President Chirac marked metropolitan France's 'première journée commémorative du souvenir de l'esclavage et de son abolition' with an address in the Jardin de Luxembourg, future site of a monument to the slave trade, slavery and abolition.

³³ www.vie-publique.fr/découverte-institutions/citoyen/citoyenneté/definition/definir/quoi-citoyenneté-est-elle-manifestation-identité-commune.html

For Chirac, echoing the La Documentation française website, 'regarder tout notre passé en face, c'est une des clés de notre cohésion nationale'. The memory of slavery, in particular, he feels, is crucial to maintaining the core, Republican sense of itself as 'une et indivisible', as his own use of the *devise* implies:

Quelle que soit notre origine, nous sommes tous réunis par une identité majeure: l'amour de la France, la fierté de vivre ici, le sentiment de la communauté nationale, le respect des lois de la République. Le combat de la République pour l'égalité, l'unité, la fraternité, la liberté, c'est un combat plus que jamais actuel... Pour que vive la République, il nous faut lutter sans relâche contre tout ce qui peut l'empoisonner. Les discriminations font perdre la foi républicaine à ceux qui en sont victimes.³⁴

Remembering slavery, for the President, enables the celebration of 'la diversité française', but only – and here he evokes also the motto of the European Union – in so far as it is '*une* diversité, ferment d'unité',³⁵ a means of preventing old wounds from fostering contemporary divisions.

In *Antilles-sur-Seine*, this is precisely what is at stake in the evocation of the slave past, for the Sauveurs, as *blancs créoles*, come to stand for these old wounds themselves – and in a way which, as we shall see, speaks of a certain desperation to figure the contemporary Republic, and the relationships between its culturally different communities, in a positive way. The film's

³⁴ 'Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, à l'occasion de la première journée commémorative en métropole du souvenir de l'esclavage et de son abolition'; www.comite-memoire-esclavage.fr/, accessed 20.7.06.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; my emphasis added.

final scene is not the first time that we have met the Sauveurs – in fact, it explicitly mirrors one of the film’s earliest scenes, in which the audience first encounters them. Together, these scenes ensure that the memory of slavery is central to the film – indeed, it frames the entire narrative. In this early scene, we are introduced to the Sauveurs not simply as rich and scheming entrepreneurs but, more specifically, as entrepreneurs whose greed and self-interest are a direct result of their slave-owning ancestry. Thus we first see them in their plantation house in Guadeloupe. The camera moves from a long, establishing shot of the house to an extreme close-up of a sugar bowl, itself in the shape of a colonial-style house, as if to make the connection between the production of sugar and the existence of the house and its inhabitants absolutely clear. The sugar bowl is on a tray, and the scene is initially shot from the perspective of the person carrying the tray, with whom we enter the room and behind whom we see a small statue on the floor. As the shot is reversed, we simultaneously see that the person carrying the tray is a black, male servant and that the statue, from the front, is of a female house slave, wearing a traditional madras and also carrying a tray. The face of the statue is positioned in the centre of the frame and, as the servant bends to pour tea for the son, his face is positioned directly above it, thus drawing a parallel between the colonial and postcolonial relationship between white and black Antilleans. Little, it seems, has changed, a point that is emphasised in the next shot when the son spits out his tea and the black servant is ordered to take the tea tray out of the room.

As the servant leaves the room, he has his back to his employers, but we are able to see the way in which he seems literally to grit his teeth in order to contain his anger. This anger later manifests itself much more overtly when, after serving the son champagne on their private jet, he is dismissed by him with a click of the fingers. Once again, we see the look of resigned anger on his face that his employers do not and we then follow him into the plane’s toilet, where he sits on the toilet seat, sighs heavily and,

on the point of pouring himself a glass of champagne, rethinks and takes a long swig directly from the bottle, in a clear moment of what we might call, after Homi Bhabha, ‘sly civility’.³⁶ What is significant, of course, is that, in each case, the audience is invited to view the behaviour of the white Guadeloupeans from the perspective of the black servant, thus once again predisposing it to solidarity with black, rather than white, characters from the start – as is also the case later when identification with the Sainte-Rose family is encouraged before we see them meet the white police officers. Unlike Herman and Henry, however, the *blancs créoles* are never redeemed in the eyes of the audience, and remain stereotyped ‘baddies’ throughout. Instead, a clear distinction is made between white French people, who are seen as capable of opening themselves to the other, and white Guadeloupeans, who are not. Thus, in the final scene, when Herman and Henry arrive to arrest the Sauveurs, Mme Sauveur’s initial relief, and assumed complicity with the police – she orders Henry: ‘vire-moi tous ces nègres de mon salon’ – is shown to be entirely misplaced. As the film ends with the party scene already described, the Sauveurs are literally excluded from the multicultural crowd of ‘citoyens [et] citoyennes’ addressed by the mayor.

This tendency, in the French Caribbean, to set up an opposition between the *blancs créoles* and the metropolitan French is not new. As Mary Gallagher points out, in *Taxco* Patrick Chamoiseau describes at some length the way in which the middle-class, mulatto population of Martinique has long clung to ‘an idealised image of metropolitan France viewed as utterly benign in contrast

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, ‘Sly Civility’, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 93–101; in fact, this secret gesture of defiance, dissimulated within the daily performance of servility, is clearly another reference to slavery, since it echoes the hidden acts of subversion practised by plantation and house slaves themselves: see H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 210.

to... “la férocité békée”.³⁷ Of course, few would dispute that slave-owners were exploitative, racist, even cruel, albeit as products of their time, nor can it be denied that many of their descendants still harbour at least the vestiges of their forbears’ world view. For this reason, like all of the stereotyped representations employed in the film, that of the Sauveurs is not wholly inaccurate, and it would not seem necessarily desirable that they be integrated into the multicultural Republic that is imagined at the end. What is more significant, however, is that, here and more widely, the French openness to the Other is seen to be a function of the shared, Republican values that ultimately unite them with black Antilleans, while the outdated, colonial attitudes to which the white Guadeloupeans still cling are figured as those of a distinctly pre-revolutionary *ancien régime*. Thus, historically, when slavery was first abolished in 1794, this was itself presented as a positive effect of revolutionary calls for liberty, equality and fraternity rather than as a more cynical means of drafting vast numbers of black soldiers into an army that could defeat the British invaders.³⁸ When Napoleon I subsequently re-imposed slavery in 1802, this was generally perceived not as France betraying its revolutionary spirit, but as the fault primarily of Napoleon’s wife, Joséphine de Beauharnais, a Martinican *békée* whose family’s plantation was losing money without slaves to work it. Similarly, when Victor Schoelcher went to the Caribbean in 1848 to announce slavery’s definitive abolition, he himself came to be seen as the representative of the new France, and its revolutionary impulse, with the proclamation of the Second Republic, to rescue Antilleans from both servitude in general and from the *ancien régime* attitudes embodied by the *békés* in

³⁷ Mary Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950: The Shock of Space and Time* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 220.

³⁸ See Lucien-René Abenon, *Petite Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), pp. 90–91.

particular. What these distinctions between the *blancs créoles* and the French have therefore enabled over the years, is not only the displacement of any blame for slavery or the colonial past that might be apportioned entirely onto the white planter class, but also the formation of a corresponding distinction between the nation that imposed slavery and the one that abolished it. France’s role in slavery has therefore been covered over with her role in its abolition, each action being seen as that of a fundamentally different nation. Even more significantly, and particularly for the purposes of our discussion here, such clear-cut distinctions continue to inform contemporary efforts to remember slavery, as evidenced in the speech made by President Chirac we examined earlier (*supra*, p. 65).

While acknowledging the importance of remembering the horrors of slavery and France’s part in them, Chirac does so by immediately reassuring his audience that it is possible to undertake such an act of memory ‘sans rougir’: ‘car la République est née avec le combat contre l’esclavage. 1794, 1848: la République, c’est l’abolition. Nous sommes les héritiers de ces républicains. Nous pouvons être fiers de leur combat pour les droits de l’homme’.³⁹ He then claims that, ‘face à l’infamie de l’esclavage, la France a été au rendez-vous la première’, thereby glossing over the details and temporary nature of the 1794 abolition (as, too, does Hazareesingh⁴⁰), since Britain abolished slavery definitively in 1838. His claim, in the same speech, that slavery must be remembered because ‘l’Outre-Mer a partie liée avec la République et participe à la nature même de notre identité française’ is therefore telling. The particular memory of slavery that has been,

³⁹ Chirac, ‘Allocution’, www.comite-memoire-esclavage.fr/

⁴⁰ In the ‘Chronology’ provided at the end of Hazareesingh’s chapter on ‘The Republican Tradition’, 1794 is the only date given for the proclamation of the abolition of slavery in French colonies. Neither its reinstatement nor its definitive abolition in 1848 is listed; see Hazareesingh, p. 97.

and continues to be, encouraged, is one that shores up France's self-image as the nation that led Europe, and the rest of the world, towards Enlightenment and democracy, 'qu'elle occupe dans le monde une place singulière'. While he does acknowledge that the practice of slavery arose from, and gave rise to, racist ideas that were 'en contradiction absolue avec les idées des Lumières', what is nonetheless repeatedly elided, here and elsewhere, is that slavery persisted long after 'La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen' in 1789, and that it continued to be practised even as the notion of citizenship was elaborated or the precise wording of the devise debated. It has thus always haunted, and continues to haunt, the very values that are central to the figuring of the French Republic and it is for reasons such as this that Zéribi can claim, as we saw earlier, that: 'le modèle républicain n'a jamais été mis en place'.⁴¹

This, I would suggest, and not simply the excessive, overblown comic techniques employed, is why *Antilles-sur-Seine* ultimately fails either to entertain or to address serious issues. Not only because the comedy, to quote Elbadawi once more, is inappropriately 'grotesque' and 'surjoué' for 'l'histoire sérieuse' of slavery, but also because of fundamental flaws in the manifestly Republican discourse employed throughout. For Légitimus, as for Begag, there is a clear connection between the way in which both humour and contemporary notions of citizenship or solidarity can be made to function as a means of opening up a space for identification and interaction between communities. However, if, as in this film, they are used simply to gloss over the realities of France's historical and contemporary relationship with its immigrant others, in this case Antilleans, then such a space can only ever be temporary. The notion of an inclusive Republic made up of diverse, yet equal, citizens cannot, it would seem, as yet be

imagined, for the memories – and, in particular, the colonial memories – upon which it is based continue to be evoked only in order simultaneously to be denied.⁴²

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⁴¹ Of course, for other immigrant groups, notably the *beur* community on which Begag bases most of his work, there are different, but no less pressing, problems with colonial memory. For Tahar Ben Jelloun, it is the repressed guilt and trauma of the Algerian war that has overdetermined the subsequent relationship between the French and not only Algerians but, by extension, other North Africans; see Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française: racisme et immigration maghrébine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997 [1984]), p. 16). For Zéribi, too, France 'a un problème avec les arabes' because of the particular colonial legacy that informs their relationship, and also because of its relative historical proximity: 'il y a quand même une histoire coloniale qui est fraîche. On ne peut pas non plus l'évacuer... L'Algérie, c'est hier'; see Karim Zéribi, 'On a un problème avec les Arabes'.

⁴¹ Karim Zéribi: 'On a un problème avec les Arabes', interview with Grégory Protche, <http://forum.subversiv.com/index.php?id=134160>, accessed 20.12.06.

Haunting Memories of the Mother in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*

The theme of memory is present throughout Djebar's corpus. The motif has been a constant feature of her writing since her first novel, *La Soif*, and continues to occupy a central position in her literary poetics, as exemplified by her most recent work *La Disparition de la langue française*. The subject of this article is the relationship between memory and the phenomenon of haunting in *La Femme sans sépulture*.¹ In this novel, Djebar pursues her exploration of the connection between individual or collective memory and identity in the Algerian context by focusing on the tragic story of Zoulikha, a young mother who was killed by the French army during the Algerian war of independence. Djebar discovered the true story of Zoulikha's life while conducting interviews with women from her native town of Cherchell to gather material for her film project *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*. Zoulikha's story is recounted against the backdrop of the current situation of civil unrest in Algeria. The action, however, is divided between the years of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and the late 1970s. The narrative takes the form of the story of Zoulikha's life, which is related by various family members and friends, with the occasional intervention of an omniscient narrator. The inclusion of four 'monologues' by the deceased heroine lends a novel aspect to Djebar's narrative technique.

The mythical aura surrounding Zoulikha becomes evident when, early in the novel, one local woman refers to her as 'La mère des maquisards' (p. 14). It is noteworthy that Zoulikha's story is narrated entirely by women: Hania and Mina (Zoulikha's

daughters), her friend Dame LIONNE (or Lla Lbia in Arabic), and Zohra Oudai, Zoulikha's sister-in-law. As the title suggests, Zoulikha haunts the novel as a spectral figure. While on one level Zoulikha's spectral presence acts as a permanent reminder of her traumatic death, on another level Zoulikha's ghost symbolises the repressed or hidden elements of Algeria's history.

This exploration of *La Femme sans sépulture* will focus on Zoulikha's ghostly presence both as a metaphor for Algeria's occulted history, and as a phenomenon that is experienced on a personal and familial level. Storytelling occupies a pivotal role in the novel as it is the means by which the characters perpetuate their individual and collective memories of Zoulikha: Zoulikha is not an actual 'ghost'; rather she is a memory that lingers in the collective psyche as a symbol of a deeply traumatic event, namely the Algerian war of independence.

The focal point of this study of the novel will be the relationship between Zoulikha and her two daughters, Hania and Mina. While the cases of Hania and Mina will be explored separately, they are similar in that both women perceive Zoulikha as a ghostly presence. The objective is to reveal how the women's perception of their deceased mother as a spectral presence is largely the result of their repressed memories of her. This reading of the novel is based in part on a theoretical framework drawn from a psychoanalytic study into the phenomenon of haunting. The source of this paradigm is a work by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok entitled *L'Écorce et le noyau*.² The authors, drawing on Freud's work on the subject of mourning and melancholia, explain

¹ *La Femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002). All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the body of the text.

² Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le Noyau* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978). See parts four and six, respectively entitled 'La Crypte au sein du moi: nouvelles perspectives métapsychologiques' (pp. 229-321), and 'Le Travail du fantôme dans l'inconscient et la loi de la nescience' (pp. 393-474). In subsequent references to this edition, the title will be shortened to *EN*, and page numbers will be given after quotations in the text.

the phenomenon of haunting in psychoanalytic terms. One particular idea developed in their work, which is important to this interpretation of Hania's situation in *La Femme sans sépulture*, is the notion of 'identification endocryptique'. Abraham and Torok describe this mental phenomenon in the following way:

Ce mécanisme qui consiste à échanger sa propre identité contre une identification fantasmatique à la 'vie' d'outre-tombe de l'objet, perdu par effet d'un traumatisme métapsychologique, ce mécanisme tout à fait spécifique, nous l'avons dénommé [...] *identification endocryptique*. (EN, p. 298)

The authors, who were both practising psychoanalysts, describe a phenomenon present in some patients whereby the person in question has a guilty secret which is unspeakable, and which, for this reason, is repressed. The existence of this repressed memory in the subject's unconscious is destined to return, but the path taken by its return is not at all straightforward. In such cases, the repressed memory engenders the experience of haunting:

[L'image du fantôme] désigne [...] pour le patient, l'occasion du tourment, un souvenir qu'il avait enterré, *sans sépulture légale*, souvenir d'une idylle vécue avec un objet prestigieux, d'une idylle qui, pour une raison, est devenue inavouable, souvenir enfoui dès lors en lieu sûr, en attendant sa résurrection. (EN, pp. 296-97)

The authors go on to describe how the memory of the subject's shameful desire is temporarily forgotten, along with the trauma of the loss of the object of desire. By virtue of the fact that the

subject's desire is unspeakable, it eludes the normal mourning process that usually follows the loss of an object:

C'est cet élément de Réalité si douloureusement vécu, mais échappant, de par sa nature indicible, à tout travail de deuil, qui a imprimé à tout le psychisme une modification occulte [...] Une telle conjoncture aboutit à l'installation au sein du Moi d'un lieu clos, d'une véritable crypte, et cela comme conséquence d'un mécanisme autonome [...] comparable à la formation d'un cocon autour de la chrysalide et que nous avons nommé: *inclusion*. (EN, p. 297)

According to Abraham and Torok, the memory of the object and the desire attached to it comes back to haunt the subject through a process whereby the subject incorporates the object into its Ego:

Or 'l'ombre de l'objet' ne cesse d'errer autour de la crypte jusqu'à se réincarner dans la personne même du sujet [...] 'l'objet' porte le Moi pour le masque. (EN, p. 298)

This idea is crucial to an understanding of Hania's plight in *La Femme sans sépulture*. It is revealed that Hania's melancholic state is exacerbated by the fact that Zoulikha's body was never found; indeed, she often dreams about finding her mother's grave: 'plusieurs fois je vis, dans un rêve, une sépulture: illuminé, isolé, un monument superbe, et je pleurais sans fin devant ce mausolée' (p. 58).

In one of her monologues, Hania tells us that she stopped menstruating as a result of her failure to find her mother's grave. This could be read as an over-identification with Zoulikha, the lost object of her desire. In other words, Hania symbolically identifies

with her dead mother through the cessation of her menstrual cycle. According to Abraham and Torok, this psychosomatic symptom is a common reaction to the subject's inability to mourn the lost object of its affections.³ Moreover, Hania suffers badly from insomnia, which is another sign that a process of mourning has been thwarted. The fact that Hania thinks she is possessed by the ghost of her mother is revealed in the omniscient narrator's explanation of her bouts of insomnia:

Ainsi, une parole menue, basse, envahit la fille aînée de Zoulikha, dans l'étiirement de son insomnie [...] Quêteur sans fin sa mère, ou plutôt, se dit-elle, *c'est la mère en la fille, par les pores de celle-ci, la mère, oui, qui sue et s'exhale. Un jour, c'est sûr, tenace comme une sourde-muette, la mère en elle, entêtée, soudain murmurante, la guidera jusqu'à la forêt et à la sépulture cachée.* (pp. 60-61; my italics)

Hania—whose menstruation has been replaced by ‘une sorte d’hémorragie sonore’ (p. 61)—considers the cessation of her menstruation as a sign that she is possessed by the spirit of her mother:

Elle n'eut plus jamais de menstrues, précisément depuis ce jour de sa recherche en forêt [...] Hania sait. Être habitée: d'autres femmes, autrefois, disait-on, étaient ‘peuplées’, ‘habitées’ [...] mais il s'agissait à l'époque d'un djinn, bon ou mauvais esprit avec lesquels ces malheureuses devaient composer, ou se soumettre en silence,

quelquefois tout au long de leur vie. Une sorte d'amant invisible, maléfique, les dominant, les harcelant de l'intérieur. (p. 62)

Hania distinguishes herself from these women by virtue of the fact that it is the spirit, or rather, the memory of her mother that is haunting her. In reality, Hania's situation is similar to that of the ‘possessed’ women as she too appears to be hiding a guilty secret. It seems that, on Zoulikha's death, Hania experienced a sort of ‘jouissance’. According to Torok, the loss of a loved-one often provokes an increase in libido which is hidden as a shameful secret: it is the repression of this secret in the unconscious which ultimately leads to melancholia, or to what Torok calls ‘la maladie du deuil’.⁴

Hania's idea that she is possessed by the spirit of her mother is a fantasy, or to borrow the term used by Abraham and Torok, a ‘cryptophantasme’, a fantasy which is a consequence of endocryptic identification. Abraham and Torok developed the term to describe the mental state that is characteristic of melancholia:

Les plaintes du mélancolique traduisent un fantasme: la souffrance, imaginaire, de l'objet endocryptique, fantasme qui ne fait que masquer la vraie souffrance, inavouée celle-là, d'une plaie, que le sujet ne sait comment cicatriser. (EN, p. 299)

It seems that Hania's belief that she is possessed by Zoulikha, and the psychosomatic symptoms which arise from this, is simply a defence mechanism whose function is to delay the pain of the

³ See EN, p. 316.

⁴ See EN, pp. 231-32. For the authors, the term ‘jouissance’ refers not only to sexual desire and is used to describe any surge in psychic energy.

mourning process by denying the reality of schematic change.⁵ Through her endocryptic identification, and the resultant melancholia and psychosomatic symptoms, Hania has created a symbolic tomb for Zoulikha.

The situation of endocryptic identification or ‘inclusion’ is usually resolved when the subject’s psyche moves from a state of inclusion to one of ‘introduction’: in other words, when it progresses from a state of melancholia to one of mourning.⁶ In a clinical setting, this change comes about through the interaction between patient and analyst: ‘*a la faveur de cette traduction en paroles, la maladie de soi à soi peut donc connaître un certain répit*’ (*EN*, p. 316).

In a similar way, the symptoms of Hania’s neurosis are eased by telling the story of Zoulikha’s life and death. In both cases, then, taking, and in the process, sharing secrets, is the means by which healing occurs:

Hania semble enfin en accord avec son nom: apaisée [...] dans une précipitation visible, elle s’instaure chroniqueuse. Ni avec le calme factice de la première interview, ni dans la vulnérabilité de ses précédents aveux, apaisée vraiment et désireuse de faire un effort de fidélité. (p. 87)

In her monologues, Zoulikha addresses both Hania and Mina. It may be that Zoulikha’s monologues are a dimension of the melancholic fantasy experienced by her daughters. While in Hania’s case, the melancholic fantasy was thwarted, resulting in

⁵ See *EN*, p. 298. According to the authors, endocryptic identification functions as a means of preserving the Ego from the suffering associated with the mourning process by denying that any loss (and thus, any change in the psychical schema) has occurred.

⁶ See *EN*, p. 315.

psychosomatic symptoms, Mina’s experience is a more straightforward case of endocryptic identification. For Mina, Zoulikha represents what Abraham and Torok call the ‘mort-qui-mène-le-deuil’.⁷ In this sense, Mina imagines that Zoulikha is mourning the loss of her daughter, rather than the other way around. The idea that Mina is experiencing a melancholic fantasy is illustrated when she says: ‘*le souvenir de ma mère, je le porte comme un cercle fermé sur lui-même, moi au centre [...] me mirant parfois et parfois, moi, m’obscurcissant à mon tour*’ (p. 184). Thus, in Mina’s psyche, Mina-as-subject was sometimes eclipsed by Zoulikha-as-subject. Mina goes on to refer explicitly to her experience of the phenomenon of endocryptic identification: ‘*l’on ne peut se souvenir contre une bouche d’ombre ... Je ne réveille pas les morts, je les porte vivants, peut-être tout au plus embaumés à l’égyptienne, puis se dépliant peu à peu dans la pénombre*’ (p. 184). The reference to the ‘bouche d’ombre’ can be read as a metaphor for Mina’s ‘cryptophantasme’ or imaginary mental crypt, while the image of the dead as mummified corpses is clearly a reference to Zoulikha, who, as the object of Mina’s melancholic fantasy, is the inhabitant of her imaginary crypt.

On examination of Zoulikha’s monologues it becomes clear that it is indeed Zoulikha (the object) who is mourning the loss of Mina (the subject). It may be that Zoulikha’s ‘monologues’ are in fact imaginary reconstructions of her last days, an element of the melancholic fantasy experienced by her daughters. Mina’s melancholic fantasy not only illustrates the phenomenon of the ‘mort-qui-mène-le-deuil’, but also corresponds to the phenomenon of the ‘fantôme’ as described by Abraham and Torok:

⁷ See *EN*, p. 319. The authors explain this concept by illustrating the effects of melancholia: ‘*Quand je suis mélancolique je mets en scène, pour en faire reconnaître l’ampleur, le deuil de l’objet de m’avoir perdu*’ (p. 274).

Le fantôme est le travail dans l'inconscient du secret inavouable d'un autre (inceste, crime, bâtarde, etc.) Sa loi est l'obligation de hantise. Sa manifestation, la hantise, est le retour du fantôme dans des paroles et actes bizarres, dans des symptômes (phobiques, obsessionnels, etc.) L'univers du fantôme peut s'objectiver par exemple dans des récits fantastiques. On vit alors un affect particulier que Freud a décrit comme 'inquiétante étrangeté'. (EN, p. 389)

Zoulikha's monologues addressing Mina appear to be a figment of Mina's imagination, or an example of 'récits fantastiques'. Mina lends weight to this assertion when she questions the reality of Zoulikha's ghostly presence: 'nos souvenirs, à propos de Zoulikha, ne peuvent que tanguer, que nous rendre soudain presque schizophrènes, comme si nous n'étions pas si sûres qu'elle, la Dame sans sépulture, veuille s'exprimer à travers nous!' (p. 87). This claim is reinforced on examination of Zoulikha's first monologue, which may be an interior monologue taking place in Mina's fractured consciousness. The following extract from Zoulikha's monologue—which consists of an account of Zoulikha's capture by the French army—suggests that this is indeed the case; Zoulikha expresses her wish to see Mina before she is taken away by the army: 'te regarder, mon foie [...] Toi, ô ma Mina, absente et présente, je t'imagine dans notre courette ! Un jour, tu bondiras jusqu'à ici, jusque sur les lieux d'où ils vont m'emporter!' (pp. 64-66). This extract illustrates the unsettling effect of Mina's fantasy on her mental health, and reinforces the idea that she is in denial about Zoulikha's death. Indeed, during one of her conversations with the narrator, Mina admits that she has not recovered from the trauma of losing her mother: 'jamais je n'ai pu la pleurer, un nœud me reste là' (p. 95).

Abraham's ideas on the mental circumstances which create an atmosphere propitious to the phenomenon of 'haunting' shed light on Mina's experiences:

Tous les morts peuvent revenir, certes, mais il en est qui sont prédestinés à la hantise. Tels sont les défunts qui, de leur vivant, ont été frappés de quelque infamie ou qui auraient emporté dans la tombe d'inavouables secrets [...] Un fait est certain: le 'fantôme' est bien l'invention des vivants. Une invention [...] dans le sens où elle doit objectiver, fût-ce sur le mode hallucinatoire, individuel ou collectif, la lacune qu'a créée en nous l'occultation d'une partie de la vie d'un objet aimé. Le fantôme est donc, aussi, un fait métapsychologique. C'est dire que ce ne sont pas les trépassés qui viennent hanter, mais les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres. (EN, pp. 426-27)

Zoulikha appears to have brought an unspeakable secret to the grave. It will be argued that Zoulikha's secret involves a *pied-noir* policeman named Costa. In her second 'monologue', which again may be read as a phantasmagorical scene in Mina's unconscious mind, Zoulikha reveals her fear of being raped by Costa, an overzealous policeman who continually harassed her before she left to join the *maquis*. The entire chapter is devoted to narrating Zoulikha's encounters with Costa. The fear induced by the policeman's harassment had clear psychological effects on Zoulikha:

J'arpentais, unique silhouette de femme voilée et droite, ces artères de la peur [...] Toi, ma Mina, je ne te disais pas que je me rendais aux

convocations du commissaire Costa. *Mais tu savais qu'il y avait secret*, tu sentais que le danger approchait. (pp. 118-19; my italics)

Mina's fear of physical contact may have been caused by an unconscious knowledge of her mother's fear of being raped by Costa. The passage of secrets from the unconscious of one person to that of another is described in detail by Abraham in his exposé on the subject of haunting. Drawing on work undertaken by Freud into phobias, Abraham elucidates his ideas on the means by which fear felt by a parent somehow makes its way into the mind of a child: 'on pourrait dire que l'enfant phobique ne fait qu'énoncer dans son symptôme une *histoire de peur*, peur dont ses parents sont victimes (*EN*, p. 438). Extending his argument, Abraham emphasises the link between phobias and haunting:

Le caractère étranger du fantôme n'est pas sans rappeler le caractère indirect du symptôme phobique [...] Or un *fantôme de phobie* présente ce caractère particulier qu'il vient hanter pour inciter à dénoncer une peur parentale occulte et jamais formulée. (*EN*, pp. 439-40)

Abraham employs the term 'nescience' to describe unconscious knowledge inherited by a child from his or her parents:

Pour peu qu'il ait des parents 'à secrets', des parents dont le dire n'est pas strictement complémentaire à leur non-dire refoulé, ceux-ci lui transmettront une lacune dans l'inconscient même, un savoir non su, une *nescience*, objet d'un 'refoulement' avant la lettre. (*EN*, p. 297)

Throughout the monologue, Zoulikha stresses the fear that she felt during her meetings with Costa. Starting with the assumption that Zoulikha's fear of being violated by Costa was, through an unconscious process, transferred to her daughter Mina as a form of 'nescience' or 'unknown known', the reason for Mina's fear of physical contact becomes evident. When Mina becomes comfortable with the narrator, who is described variously as 'l'étrangère' and 'la visiteuse', she tells her about a failed love affair with a man called Rachid. The narrator guesses the reason for Mina's reluctance to relate the story of her failed relationship:

Dans sa réticence à reprendre le fil, l'orpheline semble désireuse [...] de conserver fierté secrète, ou orgueil: orgueil en tant que 'fille de l'héroïne'? Peut-être n'est-ce qu'une histoire d'inhibition, de pruderie, de timidité affolée. Ces jeunes filles [...] ne savent comment [...] vivre des histoires d'amour [...] Des histoires de sentiments [...] de désir insatisfait, de peur ou d'effroi devant le danger [...] celui des frôlements – longeant de si près la violence et, parfois, le simple désir de rut. (p. 97)

Mina confirms the narrator's suspicions when she reveals the nature of her relationship with Rachid:

Après tout, j'avais vingt-trois ans et je restais vierge [...] je n'avais jusque-là pas accepté le moindre baiser! [...] Était-ce ma façon à moi de continuer l'héroïsme de ma mère? Elle était si brave, si fière: moi, tout en orgueil et en refus, je cherche à être pareille, mais pour de petits [...] problèmes. (p. 98)

For both Hania and Mina, the repression of memories of their mother's death caused a mental trauma. For Hania, the repressed memory is of the 'jouissance', which she felt on her mother's death. It was the unspeakable nature of this experience that led to its repression and to the consequent endocryptic identification with Zoulakha. Thus, Hania's identity or sense of self was altered by the traumatic change in her psychic schema. In Mina's case, her problems arose out of the knowledge she unconsciously inherited from her mother. This poisoned gift, the knowledge of Zoulakha's fear of being violated, metamorphosed into an excessive prudishness on Mina's part. Both Hania and Mina perpetuate their mother's fate by inadvertently inflicting pain on themselves through inadequate coping mechanisms. While the reality is that their experience of Zoulakha's death profoundly changed their psychic schema, this is a truth that they will never recognise, as everything relating to this change took place on an unconscious level. While Hania and Mina are subject to the universal law of the return of the repressed, in their case this return is a partial one, which expresses itself through the women's experiences of haunting, psychosomatic illness, and frigidity.

Along with Hania and Mina, Dame LIONNE (or Lla Lbia), is another of the main sources of information on Zoulakha's life. Dame LIONNE is almost a surrogate mother to Mina, who often stays with her during her visits to Cherchell. Dame LIONNE represents Tradition: she is a metaphor for all those Algerian women of an earlier generation who contributed to their country's struggle for independence from French rule. Although she did not participate directly in the anti-colonial struggle, she nevertheless provided invaluable support to Zoulakha when she was forced to go into hiding. Dame LIONNE, who used to be a fortune-teller, is now only interested in the past. In her new role as storyteller, she symbolises the traditional role of memory in Algerian society. Indeed, she is a tangible link between Mina and her deceased mother. Likewise, Mina's presence is comforting to Dame LIONNE,

who ceased reading cards after a pilgrimage to Mecca. Dame LIONNE expresses her preoccupation with the past: 'le passé, les jours partagés entre ta mère et moi dans leurs poids et leur lumière, ce passé, ô doux Envoyé de Dieu, me suffit désormais!' (p. 26).

While, at the beginning, Dame LIONNE's memories of her mother caused Mina pain, in the end she comes to recognise the important role that Dame LIONNE plays in perpetuating Zoulakha's memory. When Mina first returns from Algiers to meet '*la visiteuse*', she prays that Dame LIONNE will not talk about her mother: 'qu'elle ne me parle pas aujourd'hui ... de ma mère! se dit-elle, puis un refus intérieur l'emplit. Je ne veux plus trembler, ni souffrir!' (p. 27).

While initially Mina considers reliving the past as opening up old wounds, she eventually realises that such wounds have to be revisited if they are to heal. It becomes evident that Mina has learned a valuable lesson from Dame LIONNE, when, near the end of the novel, she finds solace in sharing her memories with '*la visiteuse*':

Mina trouve un plaisir inattendu et intense à ce que des événements auxquels plus personne ne pensait (excepté, pense-t-elle, Dame LIONNE quand on la sollicite, moi naturellement, et désormais cette étrangère!), à deux, en tout cas, elles vont en prolonger l'écho. Elle ressent comme une fébrilité, mais aussi la sensation aiguë et étrange que Dame LIONNE, dont le métier autrefois était de pressentir [...] l'avenir, Dame LIONNE n'a pas son pareil pour, au contraire, désormais faire revivre le passé! Le menu et concret passé de ces femmes, la plupart invisible aux autres, au monde. (p. 151)

The importance of storytelling as a means of preserving memories cannot be overstated. While Dame LIONNE fulfils the role of perpetuating memories of Zoulikha, she also inspires others to become storytellers themselves. In this way, storytelling produces a chain of memories that is passed from one generation to the next. Mina ultimately pays homage to Dame LIONNE by recognising that she is the keeper of the town's memories, the voice of collective memory:

Elle revoit les épisodes de cette histoire de la ville chaque matin [...] dans ce qu'elle appelle ses 'méditations' d'avant la prière: elle revit ce temps dans sa minutie, sa musique, sa durée réelle et des deux côtés [...] elle enjambe les temps, elle est mémoire pure. (p. 152)

Through Dame LIONNE's testimonies, the narrator, who has been living abroad for many years, renews her links with her native town. 'La visiteuse' assumes her role as a chronicler of local history: by relating the story of Zoulikha's last night in Caesarea—which she learned from Dame LIONNE—to Mina, she becomes a link in the chain of memories.

For Djebbar, the theme of memory is inseparable from the theme of forgetting. Throughout the novel, the emphasis is placed on people's propensity to forget. Significantly, it appears as though men are more prone to forgetting than women. The narrator alludes to the attraction which obliviousness exerts over men by invoking a mosaic in the town's museum, which depicts a scene from Homer's *Odyssey*. The scene in question is the famous episode which involves Ulysses and his companions' attempts to elude the sirens. Just as Ulysses's companions plugged their ears with wax to escape being bewitched by the mysterious creatures, Algerian men ignore the stories of the past, which are kept alive by women. In particular, they are most deaf to stories that recall the

crucial roles occupied by women during the independence struggle. The sirens of the mosaic, which are depicted as bird-like creatures, symbolise the women of Algeria who are trying to awaken the memories of those Algerian men who have chosen to forget women's participation in the war. Dame LIONNE's question 'Ce sont nos femmes d'aujourd'hui, ces oiseaux de la mosaïque?' (p. 108) prompts the narrator to explain the relevance of the mosaic today:

L'une des trois femmes-oiseaux a un corps à demi effacé [...] je me disais [...] elles vont s'envoler, c'est sûr, ces femmes de la ville: avec leur chant et leur légèreté! [...] la torpeur, depuis 1962, s'est réinstallée, écrasante: on la sent dans les rues, dans les patios, mais pas là-haut, ni dans les montagnes, ni dans les collines où flotte comme une réserve désabusée des gens, une poussière de cendres en suspens, après le feu d'autrefois! [...] Une seule femme s'est vraiment envolée: c'est ta mère, ô Mina, c'est Zoulikha. (pp. 108-109)

The reference to the mountains is an allusion to the Islamic fundamentalist groups fighting for the advent of an Islamic state in Algeria. The authorial voice can be detected in these words, which serve as a timely warning: if women's contribution to the War of Independence is forgotten, the Islamic fundamentalist cause is bolstered. If, however, women's participation in the independence struggle were to be celebrated, a more egalitarian society could be on the horizon.

The theme of collective memory is counterbalanced by the theme of collective amnesia. The perception of Zoulikha as a spectral presence is a form of collective memory: it is not just Zoulikha's daughters who experience her spectral presence. All of

the female characters in the novel share similar experiences: Dame LIONNE, Zohra OUDAI, and even the narrator herself. This collective haunting or hallucination is a consequence of the trauma inflicted by the War of Independence, during which each character lost at least one family member. The narrator stresses the link between haunting, memory, and storytelling when she describes the latter as a means of making painful memories bearable:

N'est-ce pas une stratégie inconsciente pour, au bout de la chaîne, nous qui écoutons [...] nous découvrir ... libérées? De quoi, sinon de l'ombre même du passé muet, immobile, une falaise au-dessus de notre tête ... Une façon de ruser avec cette mémoire [...]. La mémoire de Césarée, déployée en mosaïques: couleurs pâlies, mais présence ineffacée, même si nous la ressortons brisée, émiettée, de chacune de nos ruines.
(p. 129)

Each character has personal memories which, when added to the memories of others, together form a mosaic of the town's history. In this way, individual memory is a facet of collective memory. Zoulikha is the figure who binds this mosaic of collective memory.

Mina expresses the sense of solace brought about by collective remembering: 'chacune des femmes [...] éprouve le besoin de s'alléger. S'alléger? Parler de Zoulikha, faire qu'elle se meuve, ombre écorchée puis dépliée ... Ô langes du souvenir!' (p. 88). She also makes the connection between haunting and storytelling: by sharing memories of her mother she is symbolically brought to life. Referring to the situation in Caesarea, Mina expresses her disgust at the widespread tendency to forget the past in Algerian society:

Tout cet espace au-dessus de nous, en chacune de nous (je parle des femmes, parce que les hommes, yeux et mémoire crevés, ils sont!), cet air translucide, léger, est plein! Plein à exploser! D'un passé qui ne s'est ni asséché ni tari. Hélas, ce plein est invisible à la plupart des regards.
(p. 88)

Djebar's works are textual 'lieux de mémoire' which transmit memories of the independence struggle to those who were born after Algeria secured its independence in 1962.⁸ In *La Femme sans sépulture*, Dame LIONNE is the corner stone of a large edifice of memory: each character adds her own memories to the edifice, and by so doing, together they build a living monument to the memory of Zoulikha. The narrator's quest demonstrates the collective nature of memory: she will build her own monument to Zoulikha by building on the foundational memories related to her by the various characters. This is exemplified when the narrator asks Mina to expand on a story that Dame LIONNE has told her:

—Mina, toi qui sais tout sur l'odyssée de ta mère, j'ai besoin, à partir du récit de Dame LIONNE, de faire défiler les péripéties, au moins dans la manière si précise, et parfois si détaillé, de Lla Lbia! Peux-tu m'aider? (p. 151)

⁸ I have borrowed the term from the historian Pierre Nora. See *Les Lieux de mémoire, I: La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Nora defines 'lieux de mémoire' as places – both physical and symbolic in nature – which act as matrices of national memory. In his preface, he reveals the motivation behind his project: 'La disparition rapide de notre mémoire nationale m'avait semblé appeler un inventaire des lieux où elle s'est électivement incarnée et qui, par la volonté des hommes ou le travail des siècles, en sont restés comme les plus éclatants symboles: fêtes, emblèmes, monuments et commémorations, mais aussi éloges, dictionnaires et musées' ('Présentation', pp. vii-xiii [p. viii]).

As was the case with the prologue, the author's voice adopts a central position in the novel's epilogue. Adding her voice to Mina's laments, Djebab criticises those who choose to forget the past. Alluding to the mosaic depicting Ulysses's encounter with the sirens, Djebab invokes Zoulikha as a metaphor for all those Algerian women whose heroic acts have been forgotten: 'dans ma ville, les gens vivent, presque tous, la cire dans les oreilles: pour ne pas entendre la vibration qui persiste du feu d'hier. Pour couler plus aisément dans leur tranquille petite vie, ayant choisi l'amnésie' (p. 214). The author decries the Algerian people's dismissive attitude towards memory, in particular their willingness to forget women's heroic participation in the War of Independence, by invoking the crisis of memory which plagues her home town: 'les pierres seules sont sa mémoire à vif, tandis que des ruines s'effondrent sans fin dans la tête de ses habitants' (p. 215).

The theme of haunting reappears in the epilogue: this time, however, the author adapts it to describe the desperation of those compatriots whose lives have no clear purpose:

Je commence à percevoir combien les êtres ici, hommes faits et garçons oisifs, s'oublient eux-mêmes et qu'il faut sans doute les oublier. Ils persistent là, ombres à peine mouvantes; ils hantent cette cité dont la majesté est trop ample pour eux [...] je les vois flotter en ombres qui n'entendent aucun chant perdu. [...] Rien, pas même la voix des fous, des désespérés ou des frénétiques s'accrochant aujourd'hui à ces montagnes. (p. 217)

Djebab laments the Algerian people's apathetic attitude toward the violent acts committed by Islamists in her homeland since the late

1980s. Underlying the author's plaints is the unspoken question of who will bear witness to the new generation of victims:

Des milliers d'innocents sont portés disparus, à leur tour, parfois sans sépulture. À l'image de Zoulikha dont Hania a cherché, dans la forêt, la tombe, tant de victimes effacées dans l'ombre, la confusion, l'épouvante. (p. 218)

On the final page, Djebab reveals that her objective in writing the novel was to create a lasting monument to Zoulikha:

L'image de Zoulikha, certes, disparaît à demi de la mosaïque. Mais sa voix subsiste, en souffle vivace: elle n'est pas magie, mais vérité nue, d'un éclat aussi pur que tel ou tel marbre de déesse, ressorti hors des ruines. (p. 220)

By remaining loyal to Zoulikha's memory in her account of her life, Djebab symbolically resurrects her and perpetuates her memory. While *La Femme sans sépulture* stands as a monument to Zoulikha and women like her, it also fulfils a wider role as an aide-mémoire for those Algerians who are lured by oblivion. Djebab's novel is a reminder that repressed memories inevitably return to haunt the present: the current climate of fratricidal violence in Algeria bears witness to this tragic reality.

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Book Reviews

HOUSE, JIM and NEIL MACMASTER

Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory

Oxford University Press, 2006. xi + 375 pp. £60.

ISBN: 978-0-1992-4725-7.

The release, in 2005, of two markedly different films – *Nuit noire* and *Caché* – brought once again to public attention, in France and abroad, the massacre by French police of FLN demonstrators in Paris on 17 October 1961. Alain Tasma's TV film, although perhaps restricted by its genre (using limited characterisation, for instance, for openly didactic purposes), explores the historical complexity of the events commonly known as 'la Bataille de Paris'. (That this was a self-justificatory description coined by Maurice Papon himself is often forgotten, and scholars would be well advised to use the phrase more self-consciously than is often the case at present.) Focusing on the organisation of the FLN, and on tensions between factions within the Algerian nationalist movement, *Nuit noire* began to present viewers with the historiographic complexity that many fictional accounts of 17 October have obscured. The emphasis in Michael Haneke's *Caché* on the aftermath of the massacre as it is evident in the lives of characters in contemporary France encourages instead reflection on guilt, postcolonial memory and the sublimation of the past. The two films are nevertheless to be seen as complementary works, representing the twin motivations of those interested in exploring the 17 October and its repercussions, i.e. seeking, on the one hand, the recovery of a historical event, whilst, on the other, assessing – through the study of literature, film, journalism, *témoignages* and other accounts – that event's memorial afterlives.

It is these two aims that underpin and structure Jim House and Neil MacMaster's *Paris 1961*. A richly documented and meticulously argued account of the final stages of the Algerian

War in France, the study explores the reasons for and reactions to French state terror, and discusses the ways in which historical events often have complex ideological and memorial afterlives. Since the 1980s, the historiography of October 1961 has evolved progressively, with the 1997–1998 trial of Maurice Papon (and his subsequent libel action against the historian Jean-Luc Einaudi) triggering heightened awareness of the massacre and leading to the partial opening of archives to which access had previously been denied.¹ French historians' accounts have tended towards the partisan, with the anti-Nazi emphases of Jean-Luc Einaudi's pioneering history counterbalanced by Jean-Paul Brunet's establishment version of events, almost wholly dependent on police archives as opposed to any FLN sources.² Joshua Cole was one of the first to highlight the instrumentalisation of October 1961 in an Algerian context, showing the reasons for which historiographic silencing occurred on both sides of the Mediterranean.³ House and MacMaster's volume – part, one might argue, of the wider 'paxtonisation' of French colonial history to which the editors of *Culture post-coloniale* (p. 26) have referred – represents essential progress in this engagement with the historiography of the massacre.⁴ *Paris 1961* eschews the obsession with statistics (dubbed by House and MacMaster the 'numbers battle', p. 161) characterising a number of other accounts, favouring close archival work and new fieldwork among those involved in the events (as well as their descendants).

¹ Einaudi, Jean-Luc, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); *Octobre 1961: un massacre à Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

² Brunet, Jean-Paul, *Police contre FLN: le drame d'octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

³ Cole, Joshua, 'Remembering the Battle of Paris: 17 October 1961 in French and Algerian Memory', *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 21.3 (2003), 21–50.

⁴ Blanchard, Pascal, and Nicolas Bancel (eds), *Culture post-coloniale 1961–2006* (Paris: Autrement, 2006).

The volume has two principal sections: the first explores the longer history of October 1961, placing it in a context of colonial violence and state terror dating back – in this particular case – at least to 1958; the second tracks the afterlives of the massacres, revealing the ways in which the apparent silencing of the past in fact disguises uneven and complex processes of instrumentalisation, in which October 1961 has itself become an ideological battleground. These two parts, foregrounding history and then memory, are an exemplary intervention in a rapidly expanding field of enquiry, emphasising each term's necessary distinctiveness whilst underlining their increasing interdependence. Whilst House and MacMaster rightly present 17 October 1961 as 'the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history' (p. 1), their aim is to avoid reification of a single date and to present the massacre of that night as the logical culmination of increasingly violent and systematic French state repression in the final years of the Algerian War. (Exhaustive archival work permits, for instance, an account of the role of the Moroccan crisis (1954-1955) in the development by the French of repressive tactics soon imported to the metropole.) House and MacMaster's account reveals the ambiguities of de Gaulle's policies on Algeria (characterised by deepening repression rather than growing negotiation), explores the ambivalent and expedient manoeuvring of the PCF at this time, and foregrounds the fragmentation of Algerian interests made clear in the massacre itself (FLN vs. *harkis*; FLN vs. MNA, etc.). Their aim is to move from a historiography of the single event to one that emphasises process, and it is this widening perspective that leads to an integration of the memorial afterlife of this state repression into the historical account of October 1961.

By drawing on a plurality of representations, French and Algerian (as well as Franco-Algerian), historical and contemporary, House and MacMaster reveal the complex layering of the memories of the massacre, suggesting the ways in which

recollection operates as a means of contestation as well as suppression. Although their initial focus is on official remembrance and amnesia, presenting the ideological impact of the meanings of October 1961, attention is paid equally to private and semi-public memories, with emphasis given to the multi-generational transformation of historical events into communal narratives, and into intertwining accounts of war and migration. Again, the authors' emphasis is on wider contextualisation, exploring the implication of memories of October 1961 in wider Algerian narratives of war and migration as well as (particularly in the case of Charonne) in French metropolitan memory itself. It is the analysis of immediate reactions on the left, adopting what the authors dub an 'anti-fascist paradigm' (p. 226), that is particularly striking, for such instrumentalisation may be seen to characterise the re-visiting of the events by authors such as Didier Daeninckx in the 1980s. Such an approach, presenting the attacked demonstrators as victims as opposed to agents, is challenged by *Paris 1961*, not least in its exploration of 'underground' memories amongst Algerians in France of the police repression. The study's conclusion underlines the perpetual lack of consensus surrounding the events, presenting accordingly the symbolic force of '17 October' as a means of assessing the relationship of the post-colonial present to the colonial past. 'Perhaps,' claim the authors, 'the memories of 17 October are best understood in this sense, as a continual reconfiguration of the past, continually losing and adding elements and symbolic meanings as the decades progress, reflecting the evolving symbolic investments of the different individuals and groups carrying such memories, and the way these memories may be mobilised politically' (p. 334).

For those engaged in research on colonial history and memory, *Paris 1961* is an exemplary illustration of the need to engage with multiple sites and perspectives, to draw on and cross-correlate a variety of evidence, official and unofficial, oral and written, past and present. At the same time, it demonstrates the continued

indebtedness of Francophone postcolonial studies to those scholars willing and able to explore and assess the archives of colonialism, sensitive to the incompleteness of these resources and the distortions latent in the material they contain.

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SERRANO, RICHARD
Against the Postcolonial: 'Francophone' Writers at the Ends of French Empire
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. 181 pp. Hb ISBN 978-0-7391-1071-3: \$60.00; Pb ISBN 978-0-7391-2029-8: \$25.95.

Books do not always end up where the author expected at the outset, as Gide memorably pointed out in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. His *Voyage au Congo* was to develop gradually into a horrified exposure of colonial mismanagement and oppression. *Against the Postcolonial* moves in the opposite direction, from denunciation to exotic discovery, as Richard Serrano recognises in his concluding chapter, 'Postface as Palinode – Almost'. Not only have his studies of individual Francophone authors taken him along unexpected paths, but on reading Forsdick and Murphy's *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* after his own book was virtually complete, he has discovered, to his surprise, that there are scholars whose approach to Postcolonial Studies is both as rigorous and as undocinaire as he could wish. That rather takes the wind out of his sails, since his main argument throughout the book is that Postcolonial Studies is an intellectual fraud, consisting essentially of applying a one-size-fits-all racial grid to texts whose specificities are thereby obscured ('at worst an immoral and self-promoting enterprise and at best myopic and self-deluding', p. 6). It is true that the focus of his attack seems to be North American anglophone postcolonialists, and he may well have a point. A pity,

then, that he expends so much energy on negative polemic, when he could more profitably ally himself with the (largely British-led) movement in favour of a richer understanding of Post/colonial Studies, informed not only by Francophone Studies but by precisely the kind of wider appreciation of cultural, historical and geographical difference that he is advocating. Nicholas Harrison's *Postcolonial Criticism*, for instance, appeared at about the same time as *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, and should convince Serrano that the discipline is not after all entirely corrupt. Conversely, post/colonial scholars will find much that is valuable in Serrano's book if they can see beyond the uncompromising title and the largely negative tone of the Introduction.

The chapter on *Le Devoir de violence* as a text that seems to be 'in tune with the postmodern aesthetics of contemporary West Africa' (p. 34) engages usefully with a range of critical opinion on plagiarism, though of course the book was published before Roger Little's 'Reflections on a Triangular Trade in Borrowing and Stealing' (*Research in African Literatures* 37.1 [2006]). The Malagasy poet Rabearivelo is seen provocatively as someone who 'writes himself into the literary tradition of the center and then writes himself out of it' (p. 49), while the case of the Cambodian poet and novelist Makhali-Phal, who inscribes her *métissage* at the 'epicenter' of the modern world, Hiroshima (p. 139), is used to challenge Françoise Lionnet's (mis)appropriation of the term. Amrouche is hailed not as a 'precursor and patriarch of modern Algerian literature' (p. 100) but as a worthy heir of Baudelaire, re-imagining his native Kabylia in a French that rises 'above the chains of the French language' (p. 88); whereas Damas is shown to be a writer of contradictory and decidedly non-PC richness. Some good stuff here if you can take the polemic.

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KESTELOOT, LYLIAN

Césaire et Senghor: un pont sur l'Atlantique.

Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006. 198 pp. 15,5€.

ISBN: 978-2-296-01000-0.

Lylian Kesteloot demeure indubitablement une des plus grandes pionnières des études en littérature africaine et antillaise. C'est à l'occasion de l'année Senghor (2006) qu'elle vient de publier chez L'Harmattan *Césaire et Senghor: un pont sur l'Atlantique*. Le titre est bien choisi puisque, effectivement, les deux co-fondateurs ont construit ce pont entre les Antilles et l'Afrique noire, par leur amitié de longue date, mais surtout, et ceci est une conséquence directe de leur ‘connivence’, par leurs écritures respectives, tant poétique qu’essayiste.

Lylian Kesteloot, ayant consacré sa thèse aux auteurs ‘négro-africains’ à l’Université libre de Bruxelles en 1963, reprend ici trois types de contributions de ce duo tout à fait remarquable: d'une part, des entretiens, par exemple celui qu'eut le Martiniquais Césaire avec Michel Télu, à l'Université de Montréal à Laval, et l'entretien mené par Lylian avec Senghor, dans ses années de présidence sénégalaise. Un deuxième, des essais de type thématique, favorisent davantage Senghor: ‘Senghor et la religion’ (p. 155-59); ‘Senghor, la femme, l’amour’ (p. 161-66), et consacrent aussi l’interface entre la carrière politique et poétique du Martiniquais dans ‘Césaire, le poète et le politique’ (p. 63-67), ‘Césaire et l’Afrique en poésie’ (p. 87-92). Elle évalue ailleurs le mouvement de la Négritude dans le temps ‘La négritude, hier et aujourd’hui’, p. 121-25) et conclut avec ‘Problématique des littératures africaines nationales en Afrique’ (p. 181-95).

Il s’agit en fait de republications d’articles parus dans diverses revues (*Europe, Research in African Literatures*) ou dans des Actes de colloque. L’on peut regretter la structure binôme de l’essai dans la mesure où une fois de plus, la Négritude y est présentée comme césairienne ou senghorienne, sans tenir compte

de Léon Damas. Certes brièvement évoqué dans son ‘Avertissement’, Kesteloot prête pour ainsi dire pas attention à celui qui fut moins rhétoricien et moins bon conférencier que ses deux confrères, mais qui tonitrua contre les simplifications et les réductions quant à la naissance et surtout à la nature de ce premier mouvement contestataire postcolonial. Il m'est tout à fait à propos que Damas rappelle à V.Y. Mudimbé dans une interview à Howard University (*Carnets d’Amérique*, 1976):

Nous subissions alors l’influence de Freud, de Marx, [...] mais pour percevoir notre identité, il fallait nous tourner aussi vers l’anthropologie, l’archéologie, l’histoire, les sciences exactes. Quand on parle de la Négritude, on parle de Césaire, de Senghor, ou de Damas. Comme on simplifie les choses! Dans toutes les branches, nous avions des nôtres. (Damas à Mudimbé)

Bien qu’elle intitule un de ses articles ‘Image, mythe et surréalisme dans la poésie de Césaire’, l'auteure revient très peu sur le Guyanais toujours à l’ombre de ses confrères, surtout dans cette année commémorative à l’honneur de Senghor et de Césaire.

L’on peut aussi déplorer que Kesteloot n’ait pas pris le temps d’actualiser le vocabulaire et de remplacer ainsi le vieux ‘négro-africain’ par un lexique plus actuel. Toutefois, cette collection d’articles se révèle un précieux outil pour tous les chercheurs intéressés à revoir de l’un ou l’autre côté de l’Atlantique noir les raccords et les ressemblances entre deux monuments de la pensée intellectuelle de la diaspora africaine.

**Kathleen Gyssels,
University of Antwerp**

RICE, ALISON

Time Signatures: Contextualising Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing from the Maghreb
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006. 346 pp. £19.99.
ISBN: 978-0-7391-1290-8.

Francophone studies has seen an increasing interest in the question of autobiography, perhaps because francophone writers are at times preoccupied with identity and origin in response to the inevitable sense of displacement and alienation caused by the colonial presence. Debra Kelly's book on North African writing, *Autobiography and Independence*—reviewed in *FPS*, 4.1, 121–22—intelligently theorises the transgressive nature of the upsurge in autobiographical writing in the context of a culture that is at once francophone, and Arabic and Islamic. Kelly's astute discussion of the implications of first-person narrative in a culture that foregrounds community adds focus and nuance, however, to a critical domain that has at other times become repetitive. It can be rather too easy to lament the disorientation caused by a lack of rootedness while losing a sense of individual writers' creativity in moving away from the desire for a clear and monologic origin. Alison Rice's imaginative study of the autobiographical writing of Djebbar, Cixous and Khatibi avoids falling into a terminology of defeat and loss by conceptualising their work more constructively according to the use of musical patterns and analogies. *Time Signatures* refers at once to these writers' use of rhythm and style, and to related explorations of temporality, naming, and the creation of a structure of meaning. An introductory section on the ambivalent associations of the term 'francophonie' (here translated as 'francophony' in an effort to expose the problems of legitimisation that the term brings with it) is followed by an exposition of each writer's troubling of the signature of the autobiography. Subsequent chapters loosely link Djebbar, Cixous and Khatibi's investigation of their cultural heritage to various

musical figures and in so doing creatively emphasise connections between their works and in particular between their playful uses of language and form. The Djebbar section, for example, uses the trope of *religio* to explore Djebbar's opening up of religion to suggest linking rather than strict or static doctrine. This is supplemented by a reflection on writing on the off-beat, or against accepted structures of History, which is in turn juxtaposed with an examination of rhythm, orality and repetition in Cixous. Finally, Rice analyses the link between the motif of travel and structures of textual transportation in Khatibi's work, and finishes the study by according space also to silence. The structuring tropes of Rice's work are no doubt original and thought-provoking, and the focus on form, together with the exposure of creative and constructive patterns in the works discussed intriguingly escapes the usual recourse to a discourse of lament. Nevertheless, at times one cannot help but suspect that some of her concepts are attractive metaphors that do not add a lot to our understanding of the works in themselves. The study is a creative narrative but does not serve to alter our perception of Djebbar, Cixous or Khatibi's founding theoretical concepts.

Jane Hiddleston,
Exeter College, Oxford

SILVERMAN, MAX (ed..)

Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks : New Interdisciplinary Essays

Manchester University Press, 2005. xii + 184 pp. £47.50.
ISBN: 978-07190-6448-7.

'In the same way that Fanon describes the black body as an over-determined phobic object in a white world', notes Max Silverman in his introduction to this important new collection, 'so *Peau noire* might itself be seen as an overdetermined text, proposing divergent

meanings which arise inevitably from the multi-layered intellectual and existential enterprise undertaken' (p. 4). One of the key merits of this volume, which brings together many of the most important Fanon scholars in the US and the UK, is that it reflects, but also challenges, some of these divergent readings.

The collection opens with a useful chronology, after which the Introduction traces some of the various afterlives of Fanon: Third World champion, icon of the Black Power movement, and latterly a key thinker informing the textual politics of postcolonial critics. The first essay, by David Macey, 'Adieu foulard. Adieu madras' is a fascinating account of the Martinican specificities of *Peau noire*. Macey shows how local resonances have been erased or sidelined by dominant 'postcolonial' readings of the text, and makes an impassioned case for the essay's enduring contemporary relevance for the Antilles. In 'Where to begin? "Le commencement" in *Peau noire, masques blancs* and in creolization', Françoise Vergès suggests that Fanon's conception of time (as having been forged through violent rupture with the past, and oriented towards the future) diverges from the 'long and short temporalities' of the *créolité* writers. In a scrupulously researched piece, 'Colonial racisms in the "métropole": reading *Peau noire, masques blancs* in context' Jim House shows how Fanon radically challenged the mythologisation of a non-racist France in the post-War years. The three subsequent essays specifically explore Fanon's engagement with Sartre. Bryan Cheyette, in 'Frantz Fanon and the Black-Jewish imaginary' reads *Peau noire* alongside Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*. While Sartre tended to elide the differences between these two oppressed peoples, emphasising instead their common history of suffering and persecution, Cheyette shows how Fanon's work resists such universalising gestures. Robert Bernasconi's 'The European knows and does not know: Fanon's response to Sartre' discusses *Peau noire* and Sartre's 'Orphée noir' and argues against the over-hasty appropriation of Fanon by white philosophers. Max Silverman's 'Reflections on the human

question' is a wide-ranging and authoritative essay, which situates Fanon's essay in the context of post-Holocaust explorations of the human condition, and notably in relation to Antelme, Lévi-Strauss and Sartre. Vicky Lebeau, in 'Children of violence', astutely highlights the sexualised nature of the negrophobic response, and criticises Fanon's instrumentalisation of female sexuality to explain the white child's fear. Finally, David Mariott's 'En moi: Frantz Fanon and René Maran' is a convincing analysis of history, race and the psyche in the writing of both authors, which shows how mourning for the lost object is at the heart of both Fanon's essay and Maran's *Un homme pareil aux autres*.

The focus on *Peau noire, masques blancs*, rather than on Fanon's output more generally, is consistent with the aims of Manchester University Press's 'Texts in Culture' series; hence this is the first major collection devoted entirely to the 1952 essay. Each essay marks a major contribution to our understanding of a work which is at once a familiar staple of the postcolonial canon, and an under-read text, too often reduced to a number of set pieces or to a few reductive quotations. Moreover, in addition to the innovative perspectives it provides on the text in question, the volume gives a very full sense of the intellectual and political context in which Fanon was writing. Finally, the quality of the scholarship is matched by high production values and by scrupulous editorial work, so that for researchers working in postcolonial studies in the broadest sense, the volume will be required reading, and a handsome addition to the shelves.

Maeve McCusker,
Queen's University Belfast

Conference report

Camus et les lettres algériennes: l'espace de l'inter discours Symposium international, Alger-Tipasa, 24-28 avril 2006.

This slightly pompously titled conference on Albert Camus held in Algeria recently was in fact the first in Algiers since the War, that is, ever. Not surprisingly, then, the conference was well covered in the Algerian press. Organised by Afifa Bererhi and the Université d'Alger, this international event benefited also from a French input (notably from Christiane Chaulet-Achour, and from the Université de Montpellier).

As well as locating Camus firmly in his Algerian roots – Agnès Spiquel spoke on ‘le jeune Camus et le quartier pauvre’, Bouba Tabti on *L'Envers et l'Endroit* as ‘une écriture orpheline’, Ismael Abdoun on Camus’s ‘Algerian’ text *Noces*, Guy Basset on Camus’s friendship with Fréminville, Marie-Thérèse Blondeau on the ‘royaume retrouvé’, Youcef Immuoune on ‘relations intersubjectives’, Karima Aït Dahmane on political tensions, Zohra Siagh Bouchentouf on Camus’s ‘inconscient colonial’ in ‘Le Minotaure ou la halte d’Oran’ and François Chavannes on Camus’s last writings on Algeria in *Le Premier Homme* –, the conference also insisted on the Mediterranean roots of Camusian writing (Hélène Rufat on Spanish anarchism, Paul Siblot on ‘silence’, Boniface Mongo-M'Boussa on *Le Premier Homme* read alongside Azouz Begag’s *Gone du Chaâba*). The conference also welcomed writers such as Noureddine Saadi, Jean Claude Xuereb, as well as family friends of Camus’s, such as Pierre Benisti.

The proceedings began at Tipasa – place of Roman ruins, wonderful gardens and Camus’s youthful wanderings –, and then moved to Algiers, where a more postcolonial and dialoguing Camus was presented. Thus Deborah Hess reread *La Chute* as an anti-colonial novel, and Charles Bonn placed Camus within the

‘tragedy’ of Algerian literature. An important aim of the conference was to show Camus’s presence in, and influence on, Algerian literature, especially that written in French – Christiane Chaulet-Achour on Pélégri, Feraoun and Lacheraf, Jean Pierre Castellani on Maïssa Bey, Andrew Stafford on Mohammed Dib and Camus as short-story writers, Nathalie Drouglazet on silence in Camus and Dib, and both Goucем Khodja and Mustapha Trabelsi considered Malek Haddad. Hervé Sanson then connected Camus with Assia Djebar, Sylvie Brodziak with Aziz Chouaki, Ieme van der Poel with Malika Mokeddem, Martine Job with Salim Bachir, Allen Diet with Nina Bouraoui and Pierre Masson with Abdelkader Djemaï.

A final thread was to see Camus as a world writer, dialoguing with Cervantes (Marcelle Mahasela), with Dostoievski (Marta Marchetti), with Jim Coetzee (Benaouda Labdaï) and finally with Edward Said (Amina Bekkat); finally a round table presented younger Algerian writers working in both Arabic and French who have been influenced by Camus. Guy Mercadier had the difficult task of providing a resume of the proceedings.

Delegates were treated also to a very contemporary performance of *Les Justes*, which focused the mind on current debates over political actions such as terrorism; and were lucky enough to hear readings of Hélène Cixous’s work, by herself and by Daniel Mesguich. Despite the wonderful *accueil*, I have to say that there reigned at this conference a certain *méfiance* towards the term post(-)colonial, and the nub of it may well be in the difference between the two spellings. The unhyphenated version is (perceived as) a crass, Americanised (therefore anglo-saxonised) ignorance of the realities of today’s colonial exploits by the U.S.A. and the U.K. by many of the delegates and students present; the hyphenated, a pale attempt to disengage the theory from the (seemingly opposite) practice with a vivid but ultimately vain

attempt to recover History.¹ It is precisely this type of constituency to whom the journal *FPS* needs to reach out (i.e., Francophone, sufficiently sceptical of the French Republican ‘gains’ made in Algeria): the gap seems wide between us, but it may be one of pure terminology...

Andy Stafford,
University of Leeds

Appel à communications

Kathleen Gyssels, Université d’Anvers, vice-présidente,
groupe de recherche en littératures postcoloniales

La *SoCaRe* (Société de Recherche Caribéenne), une association interdisciplinaire regroupant des chercheurs sur la Caraïbe (historique, littéraire, anthropologique, artistique...) tiendra son dixième colloque international à Montego Bay du 5 au 8 décembre 2007. Cet événement a lieu en association avec la *Jamaica Bicentenary Committee*. En effet, cette année 2007 marque le Bicentenaire de l’Abolition de l’esclavage aux Antilles britanniques et c’est à cette occasion que l’Appel à Communications invite à des papiers sur:

Discours de résistance, Culture, liberté et réconciliation.

Les sujets abordés pourraient, entre autres, traiter de:

- 1807, la signification de l’Abolition
- Cultures caribéennes
- La traite négrière
- Les demandes de réparation
- Les lois mémorielles
- Les marrons et le marronnage (le colloque prévoit une excursion dans le village Accompong à St Elizabeth)
- Genre, liberté, résistance
- Honte et honneur, réflexions sur le Bicentenaire

Les résumés des communications, accompagnés d’une notice bio-bibliographique (une page max.) doivent nous arriver avant le 31 mai 2007 et par document joint à: jbpc007@yahoo.com

Veuillez indiquer si vous souhaitez que votre communication soit publiée (en ligne sur le site de *SoCaRe*) ou non.

Pour plus d’infos, consultez le site web:
<http://www.univie.ac.at/caribbeanconference/>

¹ A radically different perspective on the semantic implications of hyphenation versus non-hyphenation is offered by Patrick Corcoran, in ‘Le Postcolonialisme, la francophonie et le fait littéraire’, *FPS*, 4.2 (autumn/winter 2006), 58-70 (pp. 62-63, n. 8). This issue is devoted exclusively to essays on the ‘notion de postcolonial’.

SPECIAL OFFER!

ASCALF Publications Back Catalogue Only £60

In November 2002, the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) officially changed its name to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS). As part of this realignment of our activities, SFPS decided to rationalise its publications policy, with the *ASCALF Yearbook* and *ASCALF Bulletin* making way for a new, twice-yearly journal, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*.

However, as we move towards a new future, we are also keen to make our back catalogue of work available to both individual scholars and university libraries: 25 issues of the *ASCALF Bulletin* (the first 3 issues are no longer available) and 5 issues of the *ASCALF Yearbook* (issues 1 and 2 are no longer available) were published. These publications include articles by prominent scholars in the field as well as interviews with writers such as Tanella Boni, Azouz Begag and Ahmadou Kourouma.

Individual issues of both *Bulletin* and *Yearbook* can be purchased, and their prices are listed below. However, we are also proposing a special offer price of £60 (inc. p&p) for individuals and libraries purchasing the entire back catalogue (21 *Bulletins* and 3 *Yearbooks*). Cheques, made payable to 'Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', should be sent to: Dr David Murphy, School of Modern Languages, French Section, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland.

ASCALF Bulletin
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