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'Youssouf, tu vas ouvrir les portes à toutes les obscurantismes': A Conversation with Youssouf Elalamy

Morocco, lying at the intersection of Europe and Africa, is a linguistically and culturally diverse country in which five main languages: Moroccan Arabic (*darija*), Modern Standard Arabic (*fusha*), Amazigh languages, French and Spanish coexist, in a context which Moha Ennaji defines as possessing both 'sociocultural plurality and language tension and conflict,' and the question of language choice is a significant issue which continues to spark controversy.[1] Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has been the official language of Morocco since independence. MSA exists alongside *darija*; a dialect of MSA and the mother tongue of the 89% of the Moroccan population.[2] Amazigh (Berber) languages were officially recognised in 2011. 28% of the population speak an Amazigh dialect and 50% of Amazigh speakers speak *darija* as a second language.[3] French exists as a lasting influence of the Protectorate, and is still used in business, government and further education. 66% of literate people can read and write French.[4] Spanish is also spoken, principally in the northern regions, by around 5 million speakers.[5] Although *darija* is a dialectal variant of MSA, MSA and *darija* differ significantly, and MSA is effectively a foreign language for speakers of *darija. Darija* is heavily influenced by Berber, French and Spanish, and differs greatly in grammatical structure, pronunciation and syntax.[6]

This linguistic landscape has created what Fouad Laroui describes as 'la malédiction de l'écrivain marocain': for many Moroccan writers, beginning to write is not simply a question of putting pen to paper; they must first decide in which language to do so.[7] Although 89% of the population speak *darija* as their mother tongue, *darija* is neither widely written down, nor recognized as a national language. The official languages of Morocco are MSA and Amazigh; *darija* has no place in official dialogue or the education system, despite the linguistic diglossia which renders MSA inaccessible to a large majority of the population.[8] Moroccan writers are therefore often faced with the challenge of writing in a language other than their mother tongue: French or MSA. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in the quantity of written and published material in *darija*, including the publication of *Khbar Bladna*, the first *darija* newspaper, and the increasing use of *darija* in written advertising.

Literature written in *darija* has sparked great debate. Proponents of *darija* literature see it as offering a form of truly national literature, written in the mother tongue of Moroccans. Furthermore, a literature written in *darija* may also make literature more accessible to the 64.3% of the population who did not buy a single book in 2016.[9] On the other hand, there are those who consider *darija* to be a corrupted form of MSA, and fear that promoting *darija* may isolate Morocco from the rest of the Arab world, since Modern Standard Arabic is considered the lingua franca of all Arabs. In addition, *darija* literature still faces challenges such as the fact that *darija* is not transcribed on a wide scale, and the lack of consensus regarding whether to use an Arabic or Latin alphabet.

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[1] Moha Ennaji, *Multilingualism, Cultural Identity and Education in Morocco* (New York: Springer 2005), p. 2.
[2] Youssef Maaroufi, 'Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat 2014', 2004 <www.rgph2014.hcp.ma> [last accessed 27 February 2019].
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Leyre Gil Perdomingo and Jaime Otero Roth, "Enseñanza y uso de la lengua española en el Sáhara Occidental," *Analysis of the Real Instituto Elcano,* N.116 (2008) p. 135.
[6] Fouad Laroui, *Le Drame Linguistique Marocain* (Léchelle: Zellige, 2011) p. 11.
[7] Laroui, p. 164.
[8] Maaroufi, n.p.
[9] Aicha Nouri and Mohamed Sammouni, *Les pratiques culturelles des Marocains* (Casablanca: SIEL, 2017) p. 14.

Rabat Megamall, Morocco, Tuesday 18 July 2017

Youssouf Amine Elalamy is a Moroccan writer and Professor of English at Ibn Tofail University in Kénitra, Morocco. He received the prize for best travel account from the British Council International for his novel *Un Marocain à New York* and the Grand Prix Atlas 2001 for his novel Les Clandestins. His collection of short stories, *Tqarqib Ennab* (2004), is the first book entirely written in *darija*. I met Youssouf Elalamy in Rabat in July 2017 whilst carrying out research in Morocco for a Laidlaw Internship in Research and Leadership. Youssouf is trilingual in French, *darija* and English and we carried out the interview in English.

ELLA WILLIAMS: To start off, I'd like to ask you some questions about your childhood and how you came to know the different languages which you speak today. Could you tell me a bit about your first relationships with *fusha*, with *darija* and with French: when you first learnt the languages and also maybe a bit about your education and the languages in the classroom there?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: I actually grew up in a family where my mother was 100% arabized. So, she speaks Arabic. She is not Berber, she speaks just Arabic.[10] She went to school for only a few years but acquired a reasonable command of Arabic.

ELLA WILLIAMS: By Arabic, do you mean *fusha* or *darija*?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: *Fusha*, I mean. Because at school, you only learn *fusha*, you don't learn *darija*.

She only studied for a few years, but she can read literature in Arabic. She reads and understands the Quran, and that's difficult. Of course, she also speaks French because we used to speak it with my dad. The situation with my dad is a bit different. He was a real Moroccan bilingual. So again, he was not Berber; he was an Arab. He was very good in both French and Arabic. He could write both, he could speak both, he could read both, and understand everything. And actually, he used to write. My dad has written three novels himself in Arabic. In *fusha*, of course. But he could also write beautiful French and the reason for that is he got his high school degree the year Morocco got its independence, which is 1956. And at the time there were very, very few Moroccans who had any education. He was one of the very few. He was born and he grew up in the city of Marrakesh. But at the time there was only one university and it was in Rabat, so he came to the School of Law here.

He started studying law for a couple of years. And then, like many people from his generation, when the French left, Morocco was in need of people to run the country, and they picked up the few people that had some education. So, he was immediately taken from university and offered a high position in the police. He was already a police officer, in charge of a whole city, at the age of twenty-two.

ELLA WILLIAMS: When your dad went to university, was the system still entirely in French?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. But even when he went to school, in Marrakech, he went to a school that was called *Lycée Mont Jacques*, and he went through a French system. The school was a third French pupils, a third Moroccan Jews and a third Moroccan Muslims.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So, when you were growing up, you spoke a mixture of French and Arabic in your house?

[10] Half of Amazigh (Berber) native speakers speak *darija* as a second language.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yes. There's three of us, three boys, and we were put in the French school here, the *Lycée Descartes.* I also went to a French primary school. But my Arabic is not bad for the simple reason that my father was bilingual, so we always had Arabic tutors at home.[11] Even my book in *darija,* I wrote it in Arabic characters.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But if you didn't have bilingual parents and tutors do you think that maybe you would have finished school and not been able to speak Arabic to a high level?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. And maybe not even be able to read it. I have some former classmates who can hardly read Arabic. Which is not my case, and not the case of my brothers either. We were very lucky in a sense.

ELLA WILLIAMS: And in school, were you introduced to Arabic texts, or was absolutely everything French?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: We had only a course of Arabic language.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Like a second language, or a foreign language?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. But that's it. All the other subjects were in French, all of them, with no exception.

ELLA WILLIAMS: And nowadays, you consider yourself fully bilingual? As in, both French and Arabic feel like a native language to you?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Maybe trilingual. I still feel more comfortable in French than in Arabic, definitely. I mean I can read Arabic, but I don't think I can write fiction in it…. Well actually, I'm sure I cannot. I don't have the standard to be creative in Arabic. I can in *darija*, that's different.

ELLA WILLIAMS: How about French vs. *darija*? Do you think you can express yourself as well in French?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Oh my. My mother tongue is *darija.* Until the age of six… I only actually went to school at the age of six. And I was put in the French school and I remember… imagine…because my mother is a housewife, so I stayed basically with my mum at home whilst my dad was working outside. And I remember my first classes in primary school. I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying. She was speaking French, and my classmates. Of course, there were many French people with me at the time, and also, some had been to school earlier, some had started at four or five, and I only went at the age of six. But I managed to catch up. When you're young you learn very fast.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So nowadays, when you're really angry, or sad, you would always speak in *darija*?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: I don't get angry.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Well if you're really emotional, what's the language which comes to you first?
YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yeah it could be *darija.* It's possible.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Or a bit of both?

[11] Many of those educated in French do not have a command of MSA. Youssouf's family were unusual in the sense that his father was educated entirely in French under the Protectorate, but was bilingual in MSA and French, meaning that they used both languages at home.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yeah, it could come out in French as well. I think both. I can, I can definitely say that I'm almost a native of French, let's put it that way. I don't even know if I should say 'almost.' Because I get to meet with French people, and it's their language, but I can correct them. In their writing, even when they speak. On French television, when people speak, they make mistakes and I go like: 'Oh no, that's wrong. That's how you should say it.' I don't think of myself switching to a foreign language. It comes naturally. And when I speak *darija*, it also comes naturally.

ELLA WILLIAMS: I guess that your linguistic upbringing was quite unusual in the fact that you spoke French and Arabic at home?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But for the average Moroccan, nowadays, would you say that reading in French is more accessible than reading in Arabic?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Oh no, not at all. Oh no. For those from Moroccan schools. I didn't go to the Moroccan school. The Moroccan school has been arabized. And now, now they're reverting back, do you know? Now they're going back to teaching the scientific subjects in French again, and they are also introducing more English. Which is not bad.

ELLA WILLIAMS: For someone who was Moroccan, and my age, reading in Arabic would be easier for them than reading in French?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yes. But still, I don't think that their Arabic is excellent. They still have huge problems with Arabic. Even if they go to the Moroccan school.[12]

ELLA WILLIAMS: And in terms of your own writing, when you were younger, did you always write in French? Or would you ever write in *fusha*?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: No, always in French.

ELLA WILLIAMS: In terms of your audience as a writer, do you think that by writing in French you can reach a larger audience than if you wrote in Arabic? In Morocco, and also internationally?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. Well if you think of the whole world, if I did not publish in French, I don't think I would have been translated firstly, and certainly not into as many languages, that's for sure. It's thanks to the French that I've been translated into other languages, but I know many, many Moroccan writers who write and publish in Arabic, and they hardly get translated into any language. And if ever they will get translated into French, but not other languages.

ELLA WILLIAMS: And do you think that as well as your own childhood and education, that the actual language itself plays a role? Some people argue that the syntax and the grammar of *fusha* is so strict that it's difficult to express yourself freely in *fusha.*

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: I disagree with that. I fully disagree with that. This is demagogical. This is not scientific at all. Because a language is, remains, a vehicle. For me language is a tool.

It's exactly what happens with *darija.* When I had this first experience people have always claimed that *darija* was not a language and that it could never express anything and that it cannot be used

[12] This is mainly due to the failure of Arabization in the education system. In a 2002 survey of university students at the Institute of Technology in Fes, Moha Ennaji found that only 27% of students thought they could write MSA well (cf. Ennaji, p. 192).

for literature. And when I tried that out, it's nonsense. Because the language, you take it where you want. You can make of the language, you can make the language say what you want it to say. And I disagree with that completely, completely.

[*Pause*]

Well, I think I would agree with that assumption if you said that when people are writing in *fusha*, they find it more difficult to express themselves freely. Not because of any elements that are inherent to the language, but because of what the Arabic language refers to, mainly religion, the Quran, the sacred.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So almost that it's hard to adapt to an everyday situation? Because people don't use *fusha* in their everyday lives?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Never, they never do.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So therefore, it's hard to write an everyday novel in *fusha*?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yes, yes for sure. I'm also talking about, for example an erotic scene in a novel. When you're writing in *fusha,* I think people think 'I better not include that scene because this language has a very very strong religious connotation.' It's like you cannot spoil or ruin it. Which I believe is stupid. I really think that. There are words in *fusha* for every single thing, and you describe whatever you want.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Would you disagree with people who don't think that *fusha* should be altered or changed in any way? For example, new words coming in from other languages?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yes, you're talking about the purists, who don't want it changed because they want to keep the language of the Quran. That's… think of English. And this is actually one of the reasons behind the success of English, it's been able to adapt and to change. Imagine if we were still using the Shakespearian English today.

ELLA WILLIAMS: I watched your video on YouTube where you talk about writing your first novel in *darija*.[13] What made you decide to write a novel in *darija* after having written in French for so long and why that moment in particular?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: It was actually a couple of things. One thing is that it was a challenge, and writers and artists need to be challenged, and very often they challenge themselves. So that was one thing: could I write something in *darija*? And I didn't have the answer to my question before I started.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So, it was an experiment?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yeah, it really was an experiment. But I discovered that it came naturally. It was very easy, it's my mother tongue.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Do you think that what you write in *darija* is perceived differently in Morocco? For example, do you think people perceive it differently to what you've written in French? Is it considered more of a national literature? In the past there was certain controversy over some literary prizes going to writers who published their works in French, as some said their works were not truly Moroccan.

[13] Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqslUHCxj0I> (2013).

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: I got some of these prizes so… ha ha! I didn't know about this controversy, now I know. But the controversy I had when I published that book in *darija*, I don't think I talk about that in that video, do I?

ELLA WILLIAMS: There's a part when you say that some people think that it's just not a language suitable for literature.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. I've been told that, in book presentations. I remember that I was at the Casablanca Book Fair and there was a huge auditorium and we were a panel of five writers. I had just published my book in *darija* and I was talking about it and one the panellists, who is also a poet and writer, told me:

'Youssouf, I fully disagree with you.'

It's funny because he's Francophone. I would have expected that from someone who writes in *fusha*. I will tell you what he said because he said it in French. I'm just quoting okay, just quoting. He told me: '*Youssouf, tu vas ouvrir les portes à toutes les obscurantismes*.'

You know when you say *obscurantismes*, you are really referring to radicalism, terrorism, Islamism…these sort of things, which I personally don't associate with *darija*. I would maybe associate them with *fusha*, I would associate it with the Quran, but not *darija*.

ELLA WILLIAMS: What do you think can be done in Morocco to raise the status of *darija* in general and people's attitudes towards it?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Well it's doing better. I published that book in 2005, so it's been more than 10 years now, and I remember at the time there was no *darija*, no news in *darija* for example. Now there is news in *darija* on all the independent radio stations. They introduced that, which was not the case at the time. I had people, I mean I was attacked at that meeting at the Casablanca Book Fair in 2005.

I had just published that book and then in the audience there was this guy that raised his hand to ask a question and he said, in a very ironic tone:

'Oh, I understand that Mr Elalamy has just discovered *darija*, now that he is back from New York.'

Well first, I came back in '93, from New York, and I only stayed from 91–93. I was born here, I always lived here, I just went for a PhD that's it. So anyway, people think this because they know *Un Marocain à New York*. I've published many books since then, but when I present books at events people always come up to me and say: 'Oh, welcome back.' They think I just came from New York, that I live in New York.

So anyway, that was an attitude. But I also had very very positive reactions also and responses, mainly from, as you can imagine, more liberal media and newspapers, like *Tel Quel*. At the time there was something called *Le Journal*, but it was banned after that. I was really supported by the liberal press[14] and I was supported also by *Le Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens*, which is a music festival.

They started in a couple of very small theatres in Casablanca, it become so popular that they ended up having the festival in a rugby ground in Casa. So, they have this one-day heavy metal festival,

[14] Despite the negative reaction Youssouf faced at the Casablanca Book Fair, the liberal press such as *Tel Quel* published a number of positive articles regarding the *darija* question.

full of Moroccan bands, and people that you've never seen, I've never seen ever and I live in Morocco. In the crowd you see these Moroccans: punks, Moroccan punks! But not just one or two punks. You see girls with skinheads, Moroccans rastas… It would be unusual in the UK, but in Morocco….

They have a day for rappers and hiphop, and these people invited me, as a writer, on stage, imagine …on stage! And my book was sold alongside their CDs, can you imagine?

So that's one thing. I went to a book fair in the North, it's in Tangier-Tetouan. The book had only just been printed. And they said: can you go to Larache? (Because I was born there.) I took a few copies, because only a few had been printed. I went to the high school, and these pupils were told that I was from Larache, and I started talking about my writing. The room was huge and packed.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Do you think that literature in *darija* brings literature to the young people, and helps it to enter more into popular culture?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: This is why I'm telling you this story. I was talking about the book and then I said, let me read you a few excerpts. And I started reading, and obviously it's kind of humorous, it's a form of social critique using a lot of sarcasm. And so, I read a couple of passages and then the director of the school said: okay does anyone want a copy? I remember, we brought seventy copies. The copies were on top of the table and he told them if anyone wants a copy, go ahead. And for the first time and last time in my life I saw those students running.

ELLA WILLIAMS: High-school students running to buy a novel?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: And *Moroccan* high school students, not British. And I saw them, running, and those piles of books went like this … like in a cartoon … whoosh! And I had a number of students looking at me and saying, and where is my copy? And we promised to send them a copy.

Imagine. I've never seen this, and never since actually. I mean, I'd never published anything in *darija*. But to me, I was like, something has occurred.[15]

ELLA WILLIAMS: And what is your opinion on the debate about the language of education in Morocco? Do you think that maybe the education system here would improve by introducing *darija?*

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: I believe that there is definitely a problem with this diglossic situation with *darija*. Because until the age of 6, you learn a form of Arabic which is *darija.* For example, your mother tells you that… for example, window, they would tell you 'sharjm'. And then you go to school and the teacher says: what is this? You're proud and you say 'sharjm'. And then you are being told by your teacher that it's wrong, it's 'nafida'. Can you imagine the impact on a child? On a six-year-old child? Being told that your language is wrong. Not only your language, but the language of your parents. Which means, first, they lose their authority, because then you come back to your family and you say no, no, it's the teacher who knows, you don't know. And that's problematic.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But do you think that it also impedes learning because you're trying to absorb this *fusha*, at the same time as trying to learn to read and write?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. And this is why many people have a negative image of *darija*, of their own mother tongue. Because they were, at a very early age, corrected. They have been told

[15] This is especially surprising considering that 64.3% of the population did not buy a single book in 2016.

that their mother tongue is wrong, can you imagine? Your mother tongue is *wrong*. You live with the idea that it's almost like some kind of linguistic original sin that you were born with. We're born sinners: 'oh my God, I'm doing something wrong.'

ELLA WILLIAMS: And that's a strong feeling, for a Moroccan?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Definitely, oh definitely. It's a traumatic experience. And one of the reasons why Moroccans have problems with languages, I'm not saying… many Moroccans have good language skills and abilities, it's true. But the thing is, on television for example, if there's an event, or a piece of news, and then they will hand a microphone to a passer-by and say: 'What do you think?' And no one can speak. It's very strange and the reason is, you don't know which language you can use. When you ask a French person in the street, there is no hesitation. You know if you give a French person a microphone and say: 'what do you think about the increase of taxes?', they'll say: 'I disagree.' They will use their language. When you give it to an English person, they speak English. But if you give it to Moroccan … and sometimes the situation is even worse because what we didn't mention was that at least half the population has also *amazigh*. And *amazigh* people will speak *amazigh*, and *darija* also, but it doesn't work the other way around. Because people who speak *darija*, and are Arabs, don't speak *amazigh*. But imagine, it's so complex.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Is part of that because they think that they shouldn't be speaking *darija* on television?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Absolutely. Television has a somewhat formal connotation, so actually what they do is they start mixing. They use *darija*, but they try and improve the standard, and it's even worse. Because in my view it's much better to just speak good *darija*.

ELLA WILLIAMS: I've noticed that Moroccans have quite a negative attitude in general towards mixing languages? You know, speaking a bit of *darija*, and a bit of French.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yeah, and I don't think it's easy for you either because, if people speak to you in French, they never speak 100% in French.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But why do you think Moroccans see that as a negative thing, to mix the languages? Is the idea that you haven't mastered one, so you mix the two?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: The reason that they get stuck on television is because they don't want to mix, but they're used to mixing in normal life.[16] And on TV, you're not supposed to start mixing languages. When this is what you've been doing your whole life, mixing languages, that's really problematic.

Going back to your question on the education system, I wouldn't disagree with the use of *darija* in the very early years of education, as a transitional phase. Just to make that passage from home language to school language softer.

ELLA WILLIAMS: So currently there is no transitional stage in school, nothing at all?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: No, there is nothing. You will go to school for the very first time in your life, having always spoken *darija* at home, you go to school, and they speak to you in *fusha*, which is not your language. Your parents have never spoken it, you've never read it because you don't read yet. How can you possibly… it's so traumatic.

[16] Code-switching is a part of everyday speech for Moroccans, but many Moroccans hold strongly negative attitudes towards this linguistic practice.

Some people have suggested, and I support this idea, that in school there should be a transitional phase in which the teachers who teach very very young students, four- and five-year olds, I would go to probably seven or eight, why not, use *darija.* It doesn't mean exclusively in *darija.* It would be speaking in *darija* and introducing some *fusha*, and then more *fusha* than *darija*, and after a while, when you feel that people can use that, then you can drop *darija.*

ELLA WILLIAMS: And since 2005, has there been an increase in literature in *darija*? Maybe not just in novels, but in terms of plays etc. also?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: There has always been plays. But not in a written form, there were just scripts for the actors, but they were not published. We have a very rich theatre in *darija*, and it's been the case for a while. But I've definitely noticed a few narratives in *darija*, but it's always underground. You will not find them in bookstores. But you find them, you know, on the street, those people who sell books on the street.

ELLA WILLIAMS: Why is that? Is it hard to get published?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Oh yeah.

ELLA WILLIAMS: You were obviously well known when you wrote your *darija* novel, but if you came into the literary world now?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: No publisher in Morocco would publish you in *darija.* Oh no.

ELLA WILLIAMS: And was your *darija* novel published here in Morocco?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: It was published here, but by an American publisher who lives in Tangier. Her name is Elena Prentice. She launched a weekly newspaper, called *Khbar Bladna* ('The News of Our Nation') and it was the first newspaper exclusively in *darija.*

ELLA WILLIAMS: But it took an American to do that? That's a shame.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Of course. What she did is she financed the project, came with the idea, and then it was the Moroccans who were writing.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But then, if the demand is there, if people want to buy the novels, then why will no one publish them?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: She started a publishing house and has since published other things in *darija.* Otherwise Moroccan publishers no, I don't know any Moroccan publisher who has published anything in *darija.*

ELLA WILLIAMS: Do you ever see literature written in *darija* overtaking French literature in Morocco? Or do you think that the coexistence is good?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Why not? But, not in my life. Ha ha. I don't think it will happen in my life, because, we're talking about 2005, and we are already in 2017.[17] In the span of twelve years, I really thought that would like….

ELLA WILLIAMS: Set the ball rolling?

[17] Since my interview with Youssouf, the status of *darija* literature has not changed, although there has been more debate in the public sphere about the use of *darija* in education.

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: Yes. But no. And one of the reasons is because publishers don't publish it. The books that I find in *darija*, I find them on the floor. And people paid the printer, they self-published.

ELLA WILLIAMS: But it's not sustainable?

YOUSSOUF ELALAMY: No, you can do it once. You do it because you want to please yourself, because it's a challenge. But why and how could you possibly get back your money? You don't get anything back.

Final comment:

You cannot think, cannot even imagine that a people has got a native language that is not used in writing, and not used in literature. It is a kind of schizophrenia. And no wonder so many Moroccans are schizophrenic. It comes from language.

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Tangible Landscapes of Memory: Re-Spatialising the 17th of October Massacre in Raspouteam's *17.10.61* and Kader Attia's *La Colonie*

On the 17th October 2018, President Emmanuel Macron took to Twitter to formally apologise for the massacre of hundreds of Algerians at the hands of French police in 1961.[18] Leading on from his predecessor François Hollande, Macron's carefully worded statement adopted a reconciliatory tone.[19] He described the events of the 1961 massacre as 'une répression violente de manifestants algériens', that was part of France's still burning past.[20] Coming to terms with the legacy of that past, he suggested, was the 'la condition d'un avenir apaisé avec l'Algérie et avec nos compatriotes d'origine algérienne'.[21]

This statement came at a particularly significant time in Franco-Algerian relations. Just four days before, Emmanuel Macron (accompanied by a team of thirteen cameramen and an entourage of journalists) travelled to meet with Josette Audin in her apartment in Bagnolet, a suburb just east of Paris. He had come to ask for an official pardon for the torture and murder of her widow, Maurice Audin, who Josette Audin had last seen being dragged from their home by armed militia almost sixty years ago.

Benjamin Stora has described Macron's visit to Josette Audin as a 'historic turning point for the history of France'.[22] It was, he argued, 'much bigger than the case of Maurice Audin', and touched instead on 'the whole history of colonization'.[23] Although Stora is correct to highlight the historical significance of Macron's gestures, the Republic's steps towards a peaceful future with Algeria do not account for the gap between Emmanuel Macron's favourable political rhetoric and the day-to-day experience of descendants of the 17th of October massacre. Nor do they actively acknowledge the experience of passers-by who walk through the sites across Paris where the 1961 massacre took place with no visual or spatial indication as to what happened.

Indeed, despite this undeniable progress in France's political landscape, the spatial legacy of the 17th of October 1961 massacre continues to be overshadowed by, and reduced to, a single plaque on the Pont St Michel.[24] The small square is placed high up on a wall and makes no reference to the role played by police, law enforces or members of the prefecture de police (located just mere metres away from the bridge). This lack of clarity (whether deliberate or not) is symbolic of much of the Republic's enduring unease surrounding its colonial past, as well as its unwillingness to fully address the legacy of, or recognise its complicity in colonial crimes overseas and within the borders of metropolitan France.

By re-situating the 17th of October within a wider postcolonial context, this article will suggest that it is ultimately possible to re-frame our understanding of present-day Paris and its spatial politics. By making a conscious effort to examine how the historical traces of the 17th of October massacre (both memorial and affective) are being worked through in city space by creative practices, we might move closer to Rebecca Solnit 's vision of a 'tangible landscape of memory'

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[18] This article is not intended to give a historical account of the events. For more detailed descriptions please see: Jim House and Neil McMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La bataille de Paris:17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

[19] I am referring to Hollande's 2011 speech during his mandate as a PS candidate when he formally recognised the 'sanglante' repression of Algerian protesters on the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre.

[20] In the original French 'ce passé récent et encore brûlant'.

[21] As part of this work, Macron launched a site called '1000 autres' calling for testimony and accounts for the 'thousand other Maurice Audins' who had been subjected to torture at the hands of the French army. See Algerie 360, 17 October 2018, '17 October 1961: Le Tweet de Macron'; <http://m.algerie360.com/17-octobre-1961-le-tweet-de-macron/ > [accessed 24 February 2019]

[22] I am paraphrasing the original French which can be view in the article Benjamin Stora, 'Mort de Maurice Audin : "Cette déclaration laissera une trace ineffaçable", selon Benjamin Stora', *Le Monde*, 13th October 2018; <https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/09/13/maurice-audin-cette-declaration-laissera-une-trace-ineffacable_5354410_3232.html> [accessed 25 February 2019]

[23] Ibid.

[24] Another, more detailed and descriptive plaque was inaugurated by the Mairie de St Denis in 2011.

through these new sites of commemoration.[25] In doing, we can come to better understand the weight that memories, material sites, and landmarks associated with the violence of October 1961 massacre hold, as well as the creative, inherently spatial responses that they continue to solicit in the present.

I will begin by examining the work anonymous street-art collective Raspouteam, whose 2011 multi-media installation project (and web documentary) *17.10.61* used online videos and street-level projections in the weeks leading up to the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre to tell new stories of witnesses present on the day itself. I will then move on to discuss Kader Attia's more recent 'lieu de savoir-faire et de faire savoir': *La Colonie* (barée) located on Rue La Fayette close to the Gare du Nord.[26] I will look specifically at the space's commemoration of the 1961 massacre on the night of the 17th of October 2018, whilst also referring to Samia Henni's temporary exhibition 'Discreet Violence: L'architecture et la guerre française en Algérie' that addressed the spatial legacies of the 17th October 1961, as well as France's colonial architectural projects in Algeria.[27]

Through their traces of absent places, people, and memories, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* can help bind together invisible gaps and unheard voices in the spaces where commemorative gestures are still absent, and in the places where state-sanctioned plaques do little to convey any form of historical truth. In moving towards Solnit's vision of 'tangible landscapes of memory'[28] that act both of sites of reflexion and innovative cultural practice, allowing both for a radical re-framing of spatial politics and the ways we go about engaging with (and representing) the memory of the 17th of October 1961 massacre.[29]

Assessing the spatial legacy of the 17th October massacre

France currently has only one official monument dedicated to the events of the 17th of October in central Paris, which is located on the side of the Pont St Michel.[30] This deliberate containment of this legacy within on a fading plaque on the border between the 5th and 6th arrondissements arguably serves as a poignant reminder of France's longstanding efforts to confine its former colonial subjects to rigidly assigned spaces or locations within the city. This desire for containment has been more sharply thrown into relief by the steep rise in repressive spatial measures authorised by Ministère de l'intérieur in the months following the November 2015 Paris attacks (including up to 3,342 house searches without warrant, 500 assigned residence orders and the forced closure of mosques and businesses).[31]

The emergency measures granted by the état d'urgence (first enacted in 1955 during the Algerian War of Independence, and prolonged over six times by the Hollande administration between 2015 and 2017), have been the subject of a series of damning reports issued by Amnesty International. Findings in a 2016 report on the prolongation of the state of emergency notably highlighted a marked increase in 'imposed house searches and assigned residence orders' applied 'arbitrarily, and [conducted] in a discriminatory manner against individuals considered to be "radicalized" because of their religion beliefs and practice.'[32]

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[25] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 10.
[26] The building was inaugurated by Attia, his partner and their families on the fifty-sixth anniversary of the October 17th massacre.
[27] This was hosted at the *Colonie* from 19 June–14 July 2018.
[28] Solnit, p. 10.
[29] Solnit, p. 10.
[30] There is another more detailed plaque in the suburb of Seine-St Denis, twenty-four kilometres north of the Pont St Michel.
[31] Amnesty International, 'France Vos Droits En Danger', 2016 <https://www.amnesty.fr/actualites/rapport-france> [accessed 14 July 2018].
[32] Amnesty International, 'Upturned Lives: The Impact of France's State of Emergency', 2016; <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2133642016ENGLISH.pdf> [accessed 12 July 2018].

The repeated prolongations of the state of emergency, which was crystallized into common law in November 2017 by the Macron administration, has solicited much debate about the disproportionate use of violence towards Franco-Muslim communities, as well as the uncomfortable assumptions that are being made about French citizens on the basis of the spaces they frequent or inhabit. In his discussion of spatial responses to the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Edward Welch suggests that what was particularly striking in the subsequent weeks was the way the events had revealed:

> An effect of triangulation, whereby different locations are brought into relation in a way that maps out and reveals the history of France's socio-economic development in the postwar period; the forces which shaped it and the spaces they produced; and the diverse pressures to which the country finds itself subjected in the present day.[33]

By viewing the events of the 17th October in the context of Welch's vision of Republican spatial politics, I suggest that it becomes possible to re-frame our understanding of present-day Paris. By making a conscious effort to examine how these 'triangulating' lines of history are being worked through or reworked into city space by cultural artefacts and manifestations, we might move towards a more nuanced understanding of how unresolved legacies of violence play out in day-to-day engagements with the public sphere.[34]

To do so, I argue, requires us to re-activate associative links: between different forms of cultural representation, as well as different locations and phases of recent history, including the Algerian War of Independence, the January and November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, and recent outbreaks of violence in Cannes and Paris in May 2017 and April 2018. It is only by viewing these events as tied together by shared spaces, places or acts of violence, that they can eventually lay claim to memorial and physical space in the present.

By viewing *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* together, I hope to come to a more nuanced understanding of the ways the legacy of the 17th of October 1961 continues to be worked through, and re-worked, in different locations and using different forms of space. Indeed, by moving between an online web documentary and physical landmarks in *17.10.61* and a single building (with multiple community and social networks) in the case of *La Colonie*, these artefacts are a reminder of a need for multi-platform commemorative models that directly engage with nuances of France's colonial past and the ways their traces spill out in to urban space. By shifting audience's attention beyond the city's centre (and France's territorial borders) through an ongoing movement between different landmarks and modes of representation, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* invite reflection on a much wider story. They can offer a vital challenge to a 67-year long culture of silence, or inadequate memorialization, which does little to address the ways spaces have, and continue to be, used as a vehicle of violent discrimination.

I will argue that *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* represent an open and creative form of memory work that is diametrically opposed to current state-authorised cultural expression. By virtue of their very existence, they expose the fundamental limitations of the republican models of inclusion, where institutions such as the Institut des Cultures d'Islam or the Institut du Monde Arabe are hailed as tangible emblems of French tolerance and 'vivre-ensemble'.[35] These centralised celebrations of acceptable models of 'Islamic' cultural production do far too little to address the violence and social exclusion being directed at the communities these institutions claim to speak

[33] Edward Welch and John Perivolaris, 'The Place of the Republic: Space, Territory and Identity around and after *Charlie Hebdo*', *French Cultural Studies* 2.3 (2016): pp. 279–292 (p. 286).
[34] Welch, p. 280.
[35] I would like to stress that institutions, such as the Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration nationale (founded in 2007), as well as collectives like Au Nom de La Memoire have done excellent work in documenting experiences of Algerian and migrant families in Paris and do excellent respective outreach and dissemination work to allow stories to be told. However, this community-based approach is not common, and is currently only being adopted by isolated institutions or social pressure groups and is not part of any unified, government-backed or top-down approach.

for, or the fragmentation engendered by France's colonial architectural projects in Paris and beyond. By giving space to the socio-historical fractures which continue to stretch out into the everyday makeup of Paris, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* are emblematic of the sort of points we can return to, figureheads on a new tangible landscape of memory that correct the historical imbalance of which stories get to be told, in what place and by whom.

In her own discussion of the inadequate memorialisation of the 17th of October massacre, Lia Brozgal leads on from Marianne Hirsch, citing the importance of the literary text, and material cultural artefacts, 'in representing that which cannot be seen or experienced, and in producing a new form of archive, one that slips the bounds of state control.'[36] This article will argue that the invisible traces of the 17th of October 1961 move even further beyond the slippage that Brozgal envisaged, permeating different modes of cultural representation alongside different phases of history. They come, instead, to mirror Edward Welch's vision of 'triangulating lines', which bring together different forms of artistic representation and diverse geographical landmarks, demanding a more nuanced engagement with tangible places and spaces.[37] In moving towards Solnit's vision of tangible memory landscapes that act both of sites of reflexion and innovative cultural practice, *17.10.61 and La Colonie* ultimately allow for a radical re-framing of spatial politics and the ways we go about engaging with (and representing) its legacies.

17.10.61

Figure 1. Screenshot from the homepage of the *17.10.61* web documentary.

Positioned at an interface between online and physical space, *17.10.61* provides an important example of how memories are being creatively re-worked in the urban space through the use of smartphone technology. Between the 1st and the 17th of October 2011, the underground street-art collective Raspouteam developed a multi-platform installation and online web documentary to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 massacre.[38]

By juxtaposing the site of the centralised official plaque with a wide range of different locations from across the east and west side of the city, *17.10.61* at once exposes the narrow scope of this official memorial and offers up a series of interconnecting lines and voices to fill the gaps it leaves behind.

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[36] Lia Brozgal, 'In the Absence of the Archive (Paris, October 17, 1961)', *South Central Review* 31 (2014): pp. 34–54 (p. 35).

[37] Welch, p. 86.

[38] In the weeks leading up to the 17th, the group placed a series of QR codes printed on to tiles in some of the lesser known locations with historical links to the massacre, which included Pont de Neuilly, Pont de Clichy, Etoile, Grands Boulevards, Palais de Sport, Montreuil and St Michel. Each QR code corresponded to a red dot on the black and grey interactive map, where a user would be re-directed to a video and hear the (scripted and performed) story of a character present at that location on the night of the 17th of October 1961.

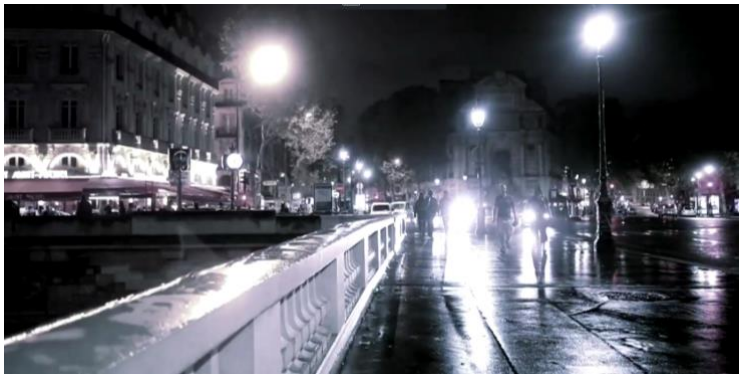

Figure 2. A still from 'Salah, Point de Neuilly' in *17.10.61*.

Through the use of fictional protagonists (represented in the form of ghostly faces as holograms suspended above the bright red outline of the Seine), *17.10.61* mirrors Hirsch's vision of layers and textures, which are presented like folds of skin or veins. The project's sustained emphasis on surfaces and depth serve as a visual reminder of the project of memory's multi-dimensional quality, of the ways in which it is inscribed into space. Furthermore, the group's use of site-specific installations included in many of the testimonies available on the web documentary, underlines the material and tangible quality of much of their work. By including projections of archive footage and images of collective members painting graffiti on the Pont St Germain, Pont Neuilly and the Pont St Michel in the week prior to the fiftieth anniversary, *17.10.61* creates a double-inscription of the events in digital and urban space.[39] This process, in turn, acts as a reminder of the varied and multifarious ways in which memory can live and be represented within the city.[40] In an interview for *Poisson Rouge*, anonymous representatives from Raspouteam commented: 'Paris s'invente une histoire officielle bien propre sur elle. Pour nous Paris c'est un lieu de luttes, de révolutions, de grandes répressions… Un lieu qui a un sens politique. C'est cet héritage qu'on cherche à inscrire dans l'espace public.'[41]

Figure 3. Footage taken from Mohammed's account in *17.10.61*.

This conscious inscription of archival footage into Paris's present-day public space, both in the run up to the launch of the web documentary, and in the testimonies of each 'character', reinforces the absence of a concrete state-endorsed memorial presence in the city. Through their use of liquid,

[39] Many of these can be accessed via <http://Ina.fr>.
[40] David Dufresne, 'La Commune de Paris', *Owni*, 23 March 2011 <http://owni.fr/2011/03/19/la-communedeparis/index.html> [accessed 14 July 2018].
[41] Collectif Poisson Rouge, 'Octobre noir raconté par Raspouteam' 4 November 2011, <http://www.poisson-rouge.info/2011/11/04/octobre-noir-raconte-par-raspouteam> [accessed 17 October 2018].

looping images that deliberately take up space on screens and stones, *17.10.61* implicate passers-by in the palimpsest of collective and subjective memory. As Pierre Nora reminds us: 'Ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory: how can we fail to read, in the shards of the past, the will to make the history we are reconstructing equal to the history we have lived?'[42] Nora's words seem to implicitly echo Peter Adey's vision of spectral presences in city spaces, which prompts him to consider 'the complex ways [we] can continue to animate silenced agencies and forgotten voices'.[43] In this respect, *17.10.61* is a testament to the power of the visual and visceral qualities of memory in the digital age, as well as to its potential to weave this memory between digital and physical space. By underlining this viscerally intrusive quality of memory in their re-mapping of the city, *17.10.61* paradoxically serves as a reminder of prevailing silence and empty gaps: of the absence of sanctioned spaces and state-endorsed memorial narratives in present-day Paris. By allowing traces of absent victims to spill out from smartphones, screens, and sides of buildings, *17.10.61* ensures that they are both re-actualised and re-spatialised as a distinct layer in the city's 'palimpsestic memory', to use Max Silverman's term.[44]

Drawing on the example of this fluid, artistic re-valorisation of memory, Emilie Chabal suggests that Raspouteam's creative response 'produces a more nuanced answer to the problem of a contemporary society's collective responsibility'.[45] Leading on from Chabal, I believe that *17.10.61*'s conscious attempt to broaden the spatial understanding of (and engagement with) the events of the 17th of October 1961 can be seen in its displacement of Paris's spatio-temporal borders, returning to sites that are no longer physically present in the current makeup of the city, notably the former bidonvilles in Nanterre, which housed the majority of the French-Algerian population from the 1930s onwards.[46]

Figure 4. Archival photo of Nanterre featured in 'Salah's' testimony in *17.10.61*.

In 'Figures de l'immigré à Nanterre: d'un habitat stigmatisé à l'autre', Anne Steiner makes reference to the 'éradication progressive des bidonvilles, suivie du relogement de leurs habitants' which took place throughout the 1980s.[47] Although keen to highlight the social fractures that the bidonvilles

[42] Pierre Nora. 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations* 26 (1989): pp. 7– 24 (p. 17).
[43] Jo Frances Madden and Peter Adey, 'Editorial: Spectro-Geographies', *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008): pp. 291–295 (p. 293).
[44] Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 18.
[45] Emilie Chabal, *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 27.
[46] Cf. Anne Steiner, 'Figures de l'immigré à Nanterre: d'un habitat stigmatisé à l'autre', in Anne Gotman (ed.), *Villes et hospitalité, les municipalités et leurs 'étrangers'* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2004) : pp. 331–353 (p. 331).
[47] Ibid., p. 45.

represented, she is careful to point out that 'le bidonville est revendiqué comme part du patrimoine historique de la commune.'[48] By resurrecting the images of spaces steeped in history and subject to intrusive spatial violence (including the most recent searches and closures that are once again being experienced under the état d'urgence), *17.10.61* is able to extend our engagement with Paris beyond its centre and the designated plaque in St Michel. We see a clear example of this in the case of 'Mohammed at Montreuil', where images of dissolving faces of victims are repeatedly projected in a slow, looping fashion onto the doors and windows of a house, as 'Mohammed' recounts how the protestors were forced to march from the bidonvilles on the outskirts of the city into the centre.

Figure 5. Still from 'Mohammed's' testimony in *17.10.61*.

In aligning itself with this vision of an immersive, sensory approach to commemoration, *17.10.61* adds an affective dimension to Welch's triangulating lines that transport us from central and peripheral locations and back, whilst reminding us on the ongoing (and politically pressing) legacies of spatial injustice that continue to dictate who can move through Paris, by what means and at what time over sixty years after the events of the 17th of October 1961.

La Colonie

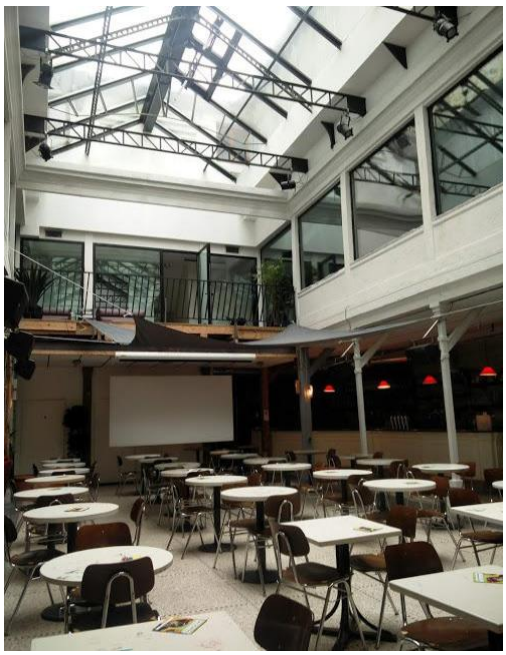

Figure 6. Photo taken inside *La Colonie* (author's own).

[48] Ibid.

The sense of a displacement of Paris's memorial horizons, and a re-framing of focus on the 17th of October 1961 beyond the controls of a municipality, resonates across, and within, Kader Attia's *La Colonie*.[49] The function and use of the space prelude any easy categorisation: it is at once a venue for academic seminars, talks, art exhibitions and a series of well-frequented club nights. At the time of writing this article, there is no indication on the outside of the building or in the environs as to the type of work or events being carried out in the building, creating an air of secrecy. This is arguably exacerbated by *La Colonie*'s almost exclusive use of social media to promote events and diffusing information, allowing it the possibility (like *17.10.61*) to self-manage and determine its own agenda, content and target demographic.[50]

Whilst *La Colonie*'s engagement with the events of the 17th of October initially feel less direct than *17.10.61*, the memorial traces of the massacre nonetheless lie at the very heart of its inception. In an interview with the magazine *Socialite Family* prior to the building's inauguration, Kadia Attia and his partner Zico Selloum spoke of their desire to use the legacy of the 17th of October 1961[51] as an impetus to secure 'la décolonisation des peuples comme celle des savoirs, des comportements et des pratiques.'[52] Similarly, whilst the building itself is commonly used, to quote the *Colonie*'s own website, as a 'lieu de debats ainsi qu'un lieu de fêtes', Attia's mission statement deliberately situates the project within what he sees a culture of a noticeable social fracture within Paris. He writes that

> [i]ci comme un peu partout ailleurs, les fractures se démultiplient dans un silence criant, avec une violence accrue. *La Colonie* est une expérience de dé-fragmentation, de dé-morcellement, de réparations dans laquelle tout le monde est le bienvenu.[53]

Through this process of what Attia calls 'dé-morcellement', *La Colonie* situates itself as being at direct odds to official or intellectual responses to the 17th of October. Attia states that '[c]e projet entend permettre aux savoirs universitaires de sortir des arcanes du pouvoir institutionnel et élitiste en leur permettant de se confronter à d'autres formes de transmissions.'[54] However, although Attia's commitment to inclusivity is laudable, it is important to state that the majority of the events related to the 17th of October that I have attended in the past year (On June 19th,20th and 21st 2018 and 17th October 18) have been predominantly frequented by scholars, academics or researchers. Whilst these types of scholarly events are undeniably important, the lack of inclusivity feels striking when compared to the types of public engagement work done by other creative local projects in neighbouring quartiers, and across the city as a whole. Indeed, *La Colonie* is a short walk from the open-access multi-media exhibition space, gallery and training academy Centre Quatre in the 19th arrondissement, which also reserves a proportion of its building as office space for start-ups and social enterprises.[55]

However, as with *17.10.61*, *La Colonie's* conscious undoing and re-scattering of memory is undeniably both an act of defiance and one of care. This was particularly evident in the detailed and meticulous structuring of the space during the screening of Yasmina Audi's documentary 'Ici on noie les Algeriens' (2010). Although no direct reference was made to either *17.10.61* or Leila Sebbar's widely read 2009 novel *La Seinte était rouge*, the room was bathed in red light from a tinted

[49] *La Colonie* is located on the Rue La Fayette just behind the Gare du Nord in the 10th arrondissement.
[50] I am not suggesting that this stance is without limitations, and I believe one of the major drawbacks of the current set up of the space is the lack of inclusivity (and invariable 'exclusivity') that this strategy creates. Concerning their social media following, *La Colonie* currently has 34,588 followers on Facebook and 3,188 on Instagram.
[51] Kader Attia's parents were also present on the night of the massacre.
[52] The Socialite Family, 'La Colonie, l'agora de Kader Attia', 10 October 2018 <https://www.thesocialitefamily.com/journal/la-colonie-paris-kader-attia> [accessed 19 July 2018].
[53] Taken from the mission statement of *La Colonie*, <http://www.lacolonie.paris> [accessed 10 September 2018].
[54] Ibid.
[55] The building is the site of a former funeral home and was officially reopened in June 2008. Similarly, the 14th arrondissement has recently hosted the Les Grands Voisins, an association-lead project that has re-purposed the formerly abandoned Hôpital Saint-Vincent-de-Paul as a shared creative space and temporary accommodation for the neighbourhood's homeless population.

red overhead projector, each table was adorned with a red candle, and red fabric hung from the mezzanine.[56] This sense of precise attention to detail and use of space was directly mirrored in a temporary exhibition hosted by *La Colonie* in 2018, entitled 'Discreet Violence: L'architecture et la guerre française en Algérie'.[57]

To mark the start of the exhibition, Attia and curator Samia Henni projected images of Algerian protesters and armed police officers onto the wall at various points in the discussion, which the audience were invited to view on the floor above to view the main part of the exhibition. Set against a black backdrop and magnified well beyond their original size, their visual impact mirroring the multi-sensory, visceral quality of the *17.10.6*. They remained present throughout: a reminder of their absence from so much of Paris's material space and cultural imagination. As the main exhibition panel stated: 'L'exposition dévoile les relations intrinsèques entre l'architecture, les mesures militaires, les politiques coloniales et la production et la distribution planifiées d'enregistrements visuels.'[58]

Figure 7. Picture taken of a PowerPoint presentation shown at the opening of the 'Discreet Violence' exhibition at *La Colonie*, 19 June 2018 (author's own).

This sense of unveiling or 'dévoilement' evoked in Henni's mission statement was directly reflected in the structure of the exhibition space on the floor above. Strategic placement of the glass cases and television screens drew an implicit vertical line between the exhibition pieces and a window at the far end of the room. From the entrance to the exhibition, and via the refracted and reflected images documenting traces of France's colonial control in Algeria, the visitor's gaze is drawn to a window at the far end of the room, where the external sign for the Centre Communitaire de Paris is clearly visible. At the same time, the spectators' eyes were drawn to headlines documenting the death of thousands of Algerians in internment camps, mirroring the displacement and refiguring the critical observations on France and Algeria that framed the introductory round table.

[56] The motive of the Seine and the colour red is repeatedly deployed across Sebbar's text as unifying motif that binds together characters' accounts of the 17th of October massacre. This stylistic choice seemed to be imperceptibly mirrored in the choice of red decor and accessories on the night of the documentary projection.
[57] This exhibition was presented by Henni in Zurich, Rotterdam, Berlin and Johannesburg prior to its inauguration at *La Colonie*.
[58] Taken from the 'Agenda' section for 'Discreet Violence: L'architecture et la guerre française en Algérie' on *La Colonie*'s homepage <http://www.lacolonie.paris/agenda/discreet-violence-larchitecture-et-la-guerre-francaise-en-algerie > [accessed 27 February 2019]

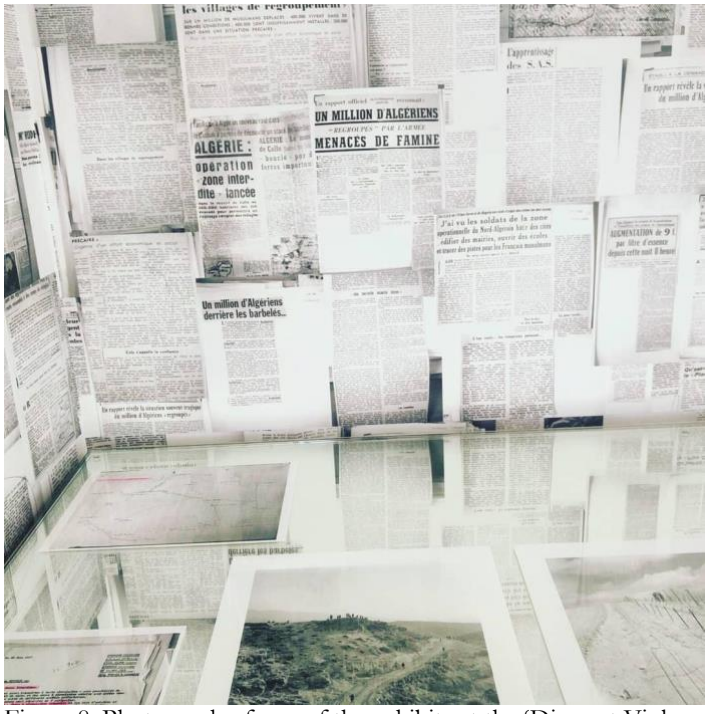

Figure 8. Photograph of one of the exhibits at the 'Discreet Violence' exhibition (author's own).

The placement of documents and photographs on to walls and material surfaces in the building were amplified through the creative use of glass and reflective surfaces. The liquid quality of fragments of building and written text corresponded with the fluid movement of the footage used in *17.10.61*. When looking down at exhibits such as photographs of groups of Algerian camp inmates (see Fig. 8), the mirror reflection of the newspaper headlines added an extra visual layer to the objects on display, demanding a more concentrated engagement on behalf of the spectator. This visual disruption was further exacerbated by the sense of continual oscillation between the present-day Parisian exhibition space and images of colonised Algeria. Henni's use of six continually looping television screens, showing early televised recordings taken in settlement camps or building sites, played a particularly effective role in distorting any sense of fixed time or place. Through its re-purposing of space and cultural artefacts, its seamlessly fluid movements from Paris to Algeria and back again, this exhibition provided a nuanced creative response to the absence of state-sanctioned memorials or commemoration of France's colonial activity. Indeed, Alan Rice has argued that memorials created outside the boundaries of official state cultural agendas can invoke 'a complete rewriting of the imperial cityscape' in ways that are multivalent and multifarious.[59] He suggests that

> Dialogising history with other forms, such as biography, folklore, memorials and artistic representation, helps to fill that contested and empirically dry history with the memories and experiences it needs to reflect a more accurate and human face.[60]

Through their individual artistic responses to the 17th October 1961 massacre, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie*, give a 'human face' to the contested history of the 17th of October 1961 massacre. By making space for human voices and stories lost to the narrative of colonial rule, they ultimately help us to read Paris's memorial and physical geography anew. By dispersing the traces of the 17th of October across different municipalities within Paris, by continually displacing our gaze to and from Algeria and back to metropolitan France, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* contribute to a creation of a radically different memorial landscape. Whilst their presence alone can do little to account for

[59] Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 22.
[60] Ibid.

half a century of state-lead denial surrounding the 17th of October massacre, *17.10.61* and *La Colonie* are ultimately emblematic of the sorts of grass-roots cultural initiatives that are still needed to guide the forms of memory work needed to honour Emmanuel Macron's commitment to acknowledging France's recent past. They are a poignant reminder of the gaps that remain of the memorial traces that, despite the Republic's bold calls for truth and reconciliation, still urgently require spatial and cultural recognition.

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BOOK REVIEWS

France, Algeria and the Moving Image: Screening Histories of Violence 1963-2010. By MARIA FLOOD. Oxford: Legenda, 2018. 162pp. Hb £75. ISBN: 9781781886922.

Maria Flood's book, *France, Algeria and the Moving Image: Screening Histories of Violence 1963-2010*, provides a timely investigation into the legacies of colonial and political violence and their relationship to moving images. Flood starts by arguing that the political and the aesthetic are profoundly intertwined, and that a book-length study that examines historical and political violence in French and Algerian cinemas since decolonisation is needed. Her book responds to this need by interrogating how French and Algerian films interact with particular historical and cultural moments and engage with the legacies of colonial and political violence. It is structured around five chapters, each of which focuses on the ways in which one film visualises or invokes a specific historical moment that has been subject to controversy and/or historical or memorial obfuscation. Flood eschews a strictly chronological approach and instead divides her book up into three neat sections. This tripartite structure foregrounds: 1) French films that challenge the omission of colonial histories, 2) Algerian films that reiterate lost voices and histories, and 3) a film that is both French and Algerian and reveals the complex interconnections between French and Algerian political and cultural histories.

The first chapter examines Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), arguing that it uses devices, such as spectatorial identification and mise-en-scène, to visualise social differentiation and to make the spectator feel uncomfortable with the lack of empathy allocated to certain postcolonial subjects. In doing so, writes Flood, *Caché* shows how discourses of hate and violence inherited from the colonial era continue to permeate present-day France. The second chapter argues that Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1963) adopts aesthetic and formal strategies, including sound-image disjunctions, to reference the suppression of both the Algerian War (1954–1962) and allegations of torture in France in the 1960s. Chapter Three considers Assia Djebar's commemoration of the role of rural Algerian women during the Algerian War in *La Nouba des femmes de Mont Chenoua* (1978). In contrast to most studies of Djebar's corpus, Flood argues that it is the filmmaker's distance from — rather than proximity to — the women she represents that allows her to challenge dominant gendered and historical narratives of the Algerian War. The semi-realist, semi-fantastical vision of Algiers constructed in Nadir Moknèche's *Viva Laldjérie* (2004) forms the focus of Chapter Four. Flood argues that the film offers a heterotopic vision of Algiers that displaces the terrorism and violence of the Algerian Civil War (1992–2010) to the margins and focuses instead of everyday acts of resistance by Algerian women. The final chapter posits that Xavier Beauvois's *Des hommes et des dieux* (2010) uses the devices of the heritage film to mobilise a form of colonial nostalgia and to communicate its French republican politics. Perhaps the strongest in the book, this chapter makes a compelling argument for reading Beauvois's film against the grain of its intended meaning, in order to show how its universalist and nostalgic vision speaks to contemporary anxieties in France about the country's relationship with its former colonies and its postcolonial subjects.

The book's carefully selected films are read against the backdrop of historical events and structures and are interpreted in the light of political and aesthetic theories, ranging from the work of canonical white male philosophers like Michel Foucault to the writings of the Algerian feminist thinker Marnia Lazreg. Flood takes care throughout to take into productive consideration work by critics and thinkers from Algeria in order to avoid imposing Western concepts onto a non-Western, formerly colonial, space. Each of the films studied is analysed in relation to a wider cinematic and cultural geography and to historical sources. However, Flood is clear that *France, Algeria and the Moving Image* is not concerned with assessing the accuracy or historical verisimilitude of the films analysed. Rather, in her words, the book seeks to 'illuminate the intersections between the historical, the political and the aesthetic in the works in question, in order to highlight the significance of particular representational choices' (p. 2). Flood therefore offers close readings of

films that belong to different genres, movements and styles, but for the most part does not focus on explicitly 'historical' films — like Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* (1966), for instance. She is more interested in uncovering what cannot be explicitly stated, or what can be revealed if a film is read against the grain. To this end, Flood is able to show 'how films that are not explicitly "historical" treat the question of history, and how films that purport to represent history can become vehicles for a particular ideology' (p. 4).

Upon receiving my review copy of this book, I tweeted about my eagerness to start reading it, and one follower expressed some dismay that France was prioritised in the book's title. After having read the book, I can say with certainty that the text does not privilege France or adopt a Franco-centric perspective. Instead, Flood engages critically with France's past and de-centres the country's hegemonic position in historical and cultural investigations of the Franco-Algerian context by showing the profound interdependency of both countries and cultures. The book offers cogent and informed readings of the works investigated, which will be of interest to scholars and students working across the intersecting fields of French and Francophone studies, film, postcolonial and gender studies. Flood makes an original contribution to knowledge in these fields by offering novel analyses of well- and lesser-known films, and by showing that their images can become a sort of 'historical event, generating aesthetic, political, and cultural meaning for different groups at diverse temporal moments' (p. 6).

In our contemporary political climate, books like this one, which interrogate the relationship between colonial and political history, violence and moving image culture, are invaluable in helping us to understand the legacies of colonial and political violence in the present day, and the importance of film as a socio-political and cultural product. Flood's beautifully written and meticulously researched book (which will be released as a paperback in September) adds valuable new perspectives to research on the Franco-Algerian audio-visual context specifically, and to the relationship between film, aesthetics and history more broadly.

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From Surviving to Living: Voice, Trauma and Witness in Rwandan Women's Writing. By CATHERINE GILBERT. Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerannée, 2018. 295 pp. Pb. 27€. ISBN: 9782367812687.

This book opens by reminding us of the 'trauma turn' in literary criticism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which a newly-established culture of testimony led to what Leigh Gilmore describes as 'trauma's centrality to contemporary self-representation' (qtd. on p. 21). Nevertheless, some traumatic events have received significantly more coverage than others. A 2014 report by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust found that more than half of British over-16s and eight out of ten 16- to 24-year-olds could not name a single act of genocide since the Second World War.[1] Among these 'forgotten' events are those that took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994, in which around 800,000 people were killed, most of whom belonged to the Tutsi 'ethnicity' (the questionable nature and colonial legacy of which is usefully outlined by Gilbert). The reluctance of the French government, whose troops were involved in these events, to discuss the contested past surrounding them has been outlined by critics such as Tony Chafer and Catherine Coquio. In 1998, ten African authors (only two of whom were Rwandan) visited Rwanda and subsequently produced works about the genocide. However, as Gilbert notes, few more than twenty people who could be described as survivors of this genocide have published testimonies to date, and very

[1] Cf. John Bingham, 'Towie Generation have never heard of Rwandan Genocide – Holocaust Memorial Day Study', 24 January 2014, *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10592347/Towie-generation-have-never-heard-of-Rwandan-genocide-Holocaust-Memorial-Day-study.html> [accessed 24 February 2019].

few have received academic attention. This work makes an admirable effort to draw attention to what the author rightly calls 'a growing corpus' (p. 29).

Gilbert's arguments are as well-signposted as they are compelling. Each chapter (there are seven in total besides the introduction and conclusion) is broken down into sub-sections of varying length but never more then ten pages, which makes this book very accessible. Unfortunately, this work does not contain an index, which is inconvenient for readers seeking to find the many references Gilbert mentions.

The impressive introductory chapter situates the representation of the Rwandan genocide and the consequent tales of those bearing witness to it as a delicate business fraught with doubt. Gilbert notes that while trauma theory is now a well-established academic field, it can be problematic to apply such theory universally. Thus, her work, like the works it analyses, draws comparisons with other genocidal experiences, such as the Shoah and *testimonios* of South-American genocide experiences, whilst insisting on the individuality of the experiences of these specific writer-witnesses (the problematic nature of calling all of these women 'writers' is also discussed in depth). Similarly, the many different ways of witnessing, a variety of which is discussed in the works analysed here, are outlined in this work's first chapter, which examines the many categories of what we call 'witness'. Here Gilbert clarifies ideas over levels of witnessing, the activity of gathering the stories of others by the writers analysed, notions of hierarchies of suffering and the specific mental condition of 'survivor guilt'. The second chapter outlines the difficult position of the individual in expressing her suffering (all writers analysed here are women, as are most Rwandan genocide survivor authors) whilst also undertaking the duty to tell a story for a collective.

Gilbert's impressive list of critical references mixes the classic and the contemporary, with Shoshana Felman and Paul Ricœur's ideas juxtaposed with those of José Kagabo and Phil Clark. Although she mentions the work of Boubacar Boris Diop and his involvement in the 'FestAfrica' project, his fictionalization of the problem of mediating the Rwandan genocide, particularly his emphasis on the figure of the 'passeur' in his novel *Le Cavalier et son ombre* (1997) and the politics of collective remembering in *Les Tambours de la mémoire* (1987) is curiously absent, although these are two key recurring themes throughout this study.

Chapter Three tackles important issues of editorial involvement and the nature and extent of collaborations with figures from the West on the part of Rwandan testimonial writers. Similarly, the book discusses the problematic nature of testimony and issues of authorial credibility, which can be linked to Majok Tulba, whose story is based on an account of 'what might have happened to him'. The tendency of Rwandan writers to seek publication in the West leads to many amendments to works, both by witnesses and collaborators, who seek to 'translate' this culturally specific trauma. Here Gilbert's work recalls that of Madeleine Hron, whose *Translating Pain* (2009) takes a wider range of works as its object of study, but to which Gilbert acknowledges a debt. The collaboration experience is generally described as felicitous, although Gilbert is careful to state that many testimonies 'fall at varying points' along the continuum of ethical literary collaboration established by Thomas Couser (p. 140). The endorsement provided by prominent intellectual figures in the West to these already well-educated Rwandan women is, Gilbert argues, a vital component in helping propagate as well as come to terms with their own stories through telling them to 'the empathetic listener she needs' (p. 160).

The stakes of the works examined here are outlined especially in the final two chapters, where Gilbert examines the many modes of silence and silencing adopted in the narration of the genocide. Few authors choose to recount their experiences of sexual violence, for example, while others worry about being received as 'unbelievable' (p. 199). As Gilbert also points out, the Hutu majority, as well as many Tutsi survivors, regard witnesses as a 'disturbing presence' whilst the wider international community are uncomfortable at hearing their stories of atrocity (pp. 177–178),

even after the rekindling of *gacaca*, 'community courts', which gave them a forum in which to tell them.

The book finishes on a salutary note, however, discussing the work of 'living' as opposed to just 'surviving', which gives this book its title. Having ensured that readers hear Rwandan witnesses' voices through her extensive citations of their works (more than is usual in works of literary analysis), Gilbert turns to an examination of the careers of these women as writers, academics and public figures following the publication of their testimonies. Although many continue to rely on sponsorship and live outside of Rwanda, Gilbert argues for the development of a 'Community of Testimony' (p. 252) which will force us to reassess our understanding of the commemoration, repercussions and survival of the 1994 genocide.

This is the latest in a series entitled PoCo pages, published by Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, at the University of Montpellier. Gilbert's work is a welcome, fresh change to their list and something of a coup for this press.

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Memory Across Borders: Nabokov, Perec, Chamoiseau. By SARA-LOUISE COOPER. Oxford: Legenda, 2016. 174 pp. Hb £75. ISBN: 9781910887080.

Sara-Louise Cooper's eloquent monograph offers an illuminating study of autobiographical works by Vladimir Nabokov, Georges Perec and Patrick Chamoiseau. The author traces a comparative reading of these three apparently disparate texts, bringing them into productive and meaningful dialogue in an analysis 'based on the belief that modes of comparison are possible where respect is retained for irreducible difference' (p. 10). Cooper investigates the complex and incommensurable historical and personal trauma at the heart of each text while insisting on the complex and irreducible differences between them. For Nabokov, the trauma stems from his family's flight from Russia following the October Revolution, and, two decades later, his escape to America with his Jewish wife following the outbreak of World War II, while for Perec, it is the loss of both parents during the same period, his experiences of displacement, and the legacy of (his survival of) the Holocaust. Central to Chamoiseau's work is the more temporally distant yet enduring intergenerational trauma of imperialism and enslavement, manifested, for instance, in the Martinican child's alienating encounter with the French language and the colonial school system. Cooper relies on a comparative approach and draws on an eclectic range of theoretical frameworks, including memory studies, trauma theory, translation theory, mobility and migration theory, theories of childhood consciousness, as well as studies of autobiography and the domestic space, and Russian formalist literary theory, in combination with incisive close readings of the texts themselves. Drawing connections among writers with diverse histories, linguistic backgrounds and life experiences, she aims to 'bring out the various ways in which voices and histories lived outside France and French might be spoken through an engagement with the French literary tradition' (p. 13). Cooper explores how, by inflecting their work with their own histories of mobility, migration and multilingualism beyond the borders of the Hexagon, the three authors challenge fixed notions of national borders, call into question the linguistic, geographical and cultural boundaries of the French literary canon, and draw attention to the complex histories that have shaped the French nation.

The first half of the monograph examines elements of the three autobiographies which explore the link between the French language and literary community, while the second half deals with the 'risks and rewards' of a comparative approach to these authors and texts (p.13). Across four chapters, Cooper addresses four key areas of enquiry: in Chapter One, she analyses the portrayals of childhood homes in the texts, how these are affected by the multiple border crossings that have shaped the lives of the authors and how these depictions of home encompass multiple languages, histories, and cultures. In the second chapter, she studies the ways in which multilingualism and language conflict are explored in each text, and the extent to which these are

influenced by the complex intertwining of the French language, nation and literary tradition. Chapter Three draws on trauma theory to identify resonances in portrayals of traumatic experience in the three texts while remaining attentive to the incommensurability of the historical contexts – notably, the Holocaust and slavery – in which the autobiographies are rooted. Cooper examines the extent to which these narrations of trauma conform to, but also challenge, key assumptions of trauma theory, and explores how the three authors inscribe the impossibility of articulating traumatic events at a textual level, through devices such as silence, omission, dissociation, repetition and fragmentation. In the final chapter, Cooper outlines the ways in which the authors use ludic references in these works to situate themselves both within and outside the French literary canon.

Cooper's monograph offers a valuable model for the comparative study of disparate authors and texts, and points to the insights gained by drawing on an eclectic array of theoretical frameworks. The conclusion makes a convincing argument for a translinguistic, transcultural and transnational approach to literature, which, much like the three autobiographical works under study, moves beyond labels and borders. Cooper compellingly argues that narratives of migration and mobility beyond the borders of hexagonal France, such as those lived and articulated by Nabokov, Perec and Chamoiseau, are integral to a decentred model of French literature and offer a crucial framework for engaging with the complex and at times uncomfortable history that has formed contemporary France and Francophone culture. Overall, this work makes an important contribution to memory studies, trauma studies, comparative literary criticism, transnational and translingual studies. While the study employs a complex and rigorous theoretical framework, it remains an accessible text which will undoubtedly be of use to students and scholars working on the three authors, but also to those working across the discipline of French and Francophone studies and beyond.

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Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies

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

The deadline for the receipt of articles to be included in the autumn 2019 issue is 16 August 2019.

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