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Haunting in the Undead Empire

Le 2 février 2017, je suis mort. En manifestation les gens écrivaient Zyed, Bouna, Théo, Adama. Ma famille va continuer à avoir un mort-vivant à la maison.¹
– Théodore Luhaka.

Righting wrongs is so rare. Justice is so fleeting. And there are crimes that are too wrong to right.²
– Eve Tuck and C Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*.

Abstract: This article explores postcolonial haunting in contemporary France. Through a reading of Diaty Diallo’s 2022 *Deux secondes d’air qui brûle* novel, I argue that colonial forgetting acts not only on the past but also on the present to obfuscate the systematic state violence against non-white postcolonial citizens. This violence and subsequent forgetting produces haunting, and in this article I analyse how this haunting structures the lives of black and arab postcolonial citizens within the Republic, before exploring the ways that, by enacting solidarity with the dead and caring for each other in myriad ways, the living attend to this haunting.

Keywords: haunting, coloniality, France, police violence, racism, resistance

Introduction

Ghosts of the French Empire haunt our times. A plethora of recent aesthetic works have explored how French colonialism and its aftermaths produced and continue to produce haunting, in the Atlantic (Mati Diop’s 2019 *Atlantique*), the Sahara and the Mediterranean (Matteo Garrone’s 2023 *Io Capitano*), or off the coasts of Mauritius (Simon Moutairou’s 2024 *Ni chaînes ni maîtres*). That the Hexagon’s present is haunted by France’s colonial past is also clear. During the 2024 Olympic Games’ opening ceremony, the Algerian delegation threw red roses in the Seine to honour the victims of the 17 October 1961 massacre, which occurred during the Algerian War of Independence.³ In fact, the figure of the undead can be mobilized to shed light on the coloniality⁴ at work in the contemporary Republic; *‘l’empire qui ne veut pas mourir.’*⁵ But what about the ghosts of the Hexagon’s postcolonial present? In this essay, thinking with Diaty Diallo’s 2022 novel *Deux secondes d’air qui brûle*, I want to reckon with haunting produced in the present by the state’s systematic violence (through police harassment, maiming and killing) against black and arab men, and with its ghosts.⁶

¹ Camille Polloni, ‘Théodore Luhaka à la barre: “Je suis devenu un truc, une agression,”’ *Médiapart*, 16 January 2022. <<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/160124/theodore-luhaka-la-barre-je-suis-devenu-un-truc-une-agression>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

² Eve Tuck and C Ree, ‘A Glossary of Haunting,’ in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis (Left Coast Press, 2013), pp. 639–58 (p. 654).

³ Mia Pérou, ‘JO 2024. La délégation algérienne rend un vibrant hommage aux noyés de 1961 lors de la cérémonie,’ *Ouest France* 26 July 2024. <<https://www.ouest-france.fr/jeux-olympiques/jo-2024-la-delegation-algerienne-rend-un-vibrant-hommage-aux-noyes-de-1961-lors-de-la-ceremonie-70eb1d0a-4b86-11ef-a622-0126aa35ae01>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

⁴ Coloniality refers to ‘long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.’ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ‘On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,’ *Cultural Studies*, 21.2–3 (2007), pp. 240–70, doi:10.1080/09502380601162548. p. 243

⁵ *L’Empire Qui Ne Veut Pas Mourir: Une Histoire de La Françafrique*, ed. by Thomas Borrel and others (Seuil, 2021). The phrase is borrowed from this book title.

⁶ Diaty Diallo, *Deux Secondes d’air Qui Brûle* (Le Seuil, 2022). I do not capitalize the word black in order to emphasise blackness as an unfixed category, always being constructed and re-constructed. I do not capitalise arab, after Trica

The sociologist Avery Gordon defined haunting as an ‘emergent’ phenomenon.⁷ It ‘registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or being done in the present’ and simultaneously ‘produc[es] a something-to-be-done.’⁸ Haunting arises unexpectedly and shows no sign of stopping. In fact, ‘haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop.’⁹ This relentlessness contributes to its time-twisting powers: haunting signals that the past is not past, that it leaks into the present and into the future. In doing so, it undermines hegemonic attempts at neatly dividing time so that certain violences can be assigned to the past, or buried in the present, and allegedly forgotten. This form of active, selective and repressive ‘colonial forgetting’ is an essential feature of Republican universalism.¹⁰ Taking the Fifth Republic’s characteristic coloniality of power into account, I propose an understanding of colonial forgetting as applying not only to France’s relationship to its past, but also to the management of its racist present. Actively produced and actively productive, colonial forgetting is inseparable from haunting. And this haunting produces the ghosts, the living-dead, and the mad figures attended to by contemporary literary fictions by French postcolonial citizens.¹¹ Following the ghostly presences in *Deux secondes*, I first explore how this haunting structures the lives of black and arab postcolonial citizens within the Republic. Having established who our ghosts are, I then explore the ways through which, enacting solidarity with the dead, postcolonial citizens attend to this haunting.

Faites fonctionner l’oublioir !

In November 2017, during a speech delivered at the university of Ouagadougou, Emmanuel Macron definitively consigned the Empire to the past by saying: ‘Je suis, comme vous, d’une génération qui n’a jamais connu l’Afrique comme un continent colonisé.’¹² In a textbook illustration of the way colonial forgetting operates, this statement both foreclosed the possibility of past events affecting the present in any way (selectively and vaguely acknowledging past events in order to consign them to the past), and actively erased France’s colonial present (as of 2026, two of France’s 13 remaining overseas territories are located on the African continent).

In defining colonial forgetting, Abdelmajid Hannoum examines the production of a certain regime of remembrance established by dominant institutions. This regime ‘minimiz[es] colonialism and its political and political legacy in the present, but also – through the invocation of highly selective themes of colonialism [...] – creat[es] the climate of a just remembrance, and thus a just

Keaton, to emphasise the use of the category as a ‘racialized and amalgamated identity discourse’ rather than an accurate descriptor for the people of North African descent united under this category in contemporary France, even though they/we might still use the term. For more on lowercase blackness see La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Duke University Press, 2021). For more on lowercase arabness in the French context, see Trica Danielle Keaton, *#You Know You’re Black in France When...: The Fact of Everyday Antiracism* (MIT Press, 2023).

⁷ Avery F Gordon, ‘Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity’, *Borderlands E-Journal*, 2011. p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹ Tuck and Ree, ‘A Glossary of Haunting,’ p. 642.

¹⁰ Abdelmajid Hannoum, ‘Memory at the Surface: Colonial Forgetting in Postcolonial France’, *Interventions*, 21.3 (2019), pp. 367–91, doi:10.1080/1369801X.2019.1585905. p.368.

¹¹ Beyond *Deux secondes*, these themes recur in literature (Seynabou Sonko’s *Djinns*, Raphaëlle Red’s *Adikou*, Alice Zéniter’s *Frapper l’épopée*) in cinema (Alice Diop’s *Saint-Omer*) and in performance (Rébecca Chaillon’s *Carte Noire Nommée Désir*).

¹² Emmanuel Macron, ‘Discours d’Emmanuel Macron à l’université de Ouagadougou.’ (Université Ouaga 1, 28 November 2017) <<https://www.clysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/11/28/discours-demmanuel-macron-a-luniversite-de-ouagadougou>> [accessed 16 February 2026].

representation, and thus a fulfilment of justice'.¹³ This regime 'is also, always, made up of a regime of forgetting', which involves 'a corpus of knowledge, an ensemble of statements, of images, that a nation keeps repressed, unauthorised and prohibited in and through its institutions'.¹⁴ Here, repression operates through official discourses, the management of archives, or the history curriculum. But it also shapes affective regimes of belonging in contemporary France. This management of memory plays a crucial role in the construction of national identity, in producing 'the illusion of national cohesion'.¹⁵ In that sense, it is an essential tool in the upholding of universalist hegemony, which depends on the fictions of equality and colourblindness that the regime of colonial forgetting enables.

Hannoum contends that the ruling regime of memory is 'dominant, [but] not hegemonic, since it is faced with subaltern memories resistant to it and undigested by it',¹⁶ implying that hegemony as a framework is only relevant when all challenges to it have been overcome. This distinction, however, is based on a misapprehension of the concept of hegemony, which erases some of its most productive features. Indeed, Stuart Hall's reading of Gramsci reminds us of the inherent processuality of hegemony, which 'requires an extensive cultural and ideological struggle to bring about or effect the intellectual and ethical unity which is essential to [its] forging'.¹⁷ As such, 'the hegemonic moment is [not] conceptualised as a moment of simple unity, but as a process of unification (*never totally achieved*) founded on strategic alliances between different sectors'.¹⁸ This insistence on active and open-ended construction, never totally fixed or achieved, highlights the inherent fragility of hegemony, its susceptibility to change. The continued construction of the regime of colonial forgetting, *against* the counter-hegemonic discourses challenging it, is therefore a process which contributes to the 'active [construction] and positive [maintenance] of hegemony'.¹⁹ To return to Hannoum, then, the 'dominant regime of memory' is only dominant because it is involved in a broader struggle over hegemony, within which it perpetually tries, but never fully succeeds in, producing the unity it is pursuing.

Most studies of colonial forgetting focus on the articulation between the colonial past and the (post)colonial present, on the way that misremembered or partially remembered past events constitute the fictions of the present, and on how counter-hegemonic discourses of remembrance threaten the very fabric of this present. Here, I want to offer that 'l'oublioir', the forgetting machine, does not only work on the past to shape the present, but also actively suppresses present events that threaten to expose its workings on the past.²⁰ In other words, coloniality operates not just by severing present oppressions from past structures, but also by actively erasing present violence. Hegemonic discourses always actively 'forget' the continuous prevalence of police brutality, until *something* (a testimony, a video circulating on the Internet, a counter-investigation, an uprising) threatens to force remembrance, at which point the struggle for hegemony and the constructedness of forgetting become evident. Haunting is what forces a reckoning.

For Avery Gordon, 'haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or

¹³ Hannoum, 'Memory at the Surface,' p.370.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.369.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 371.

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 295–328, p. 318.

¹⁸ Ibid., emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 309.

²⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (Présence Africaine, 1955), p. 35.

what is happening'.²¹ Acknowledging haunting as 'a constituent element of modern social life,' Gordon turns to aesthetic works (specifically literary fiction) to help 'conjure up social life' *as a sociologist*.²² Similarly, here, I am interested in working with *Deux secondes* to better understand what the contemporary French Republic has rendered ghostly. Colonial forgetting mediates violence, and the haunting it produces indexes 'abusive systems of power' that are both 'supposedly over and done with' (the French colonial enterprise) and whose 'oppressive nature is continuously denied' (policing within the Republic).²³ Following the ghosts of the Fifth Republic conjured up by Diallo's novel enables us to attend not just to the effects of the French state's violence but, and this is the crucial part, to what those subjected to this violence *do* about it. This perspectival shift is a reminder that those at the receiving end of structural violence are not entirely annihilated by it. Instead, they resist.

Est-ce que tu peux encore penser ?

Deux secondes d'air qui brûle moves in liminal spaces, shifting between *le dessous* and *le dessus*, dusk and dawn, private and public spaces. Written in an incisive and poetic language, the novel is punctuated by rap citations and references to music, so much so that it is better understood as a multimedia assemblage made up of the text itself, the soundtrack created by the nearly forty musical references 'joué[e]s, chanté[e]s, dans[é]es' throughout the novel, and the resources evoked in Diallo's acknowledgements, including documentaries, now-demolished public monuments, academic essays and children's literature.²⁴ The soundtrack, a mix of contemporary French rap, Detroit techno and American pop is united by ghostly chorals, whispers, echoes, hypnotic loops, reverb and the minor key, (re)producing the haunted structures of feelings Diallo attends to in her text.

The novel is set in an unnamed *quartier* in Paris or its banlieue. Narrated by a young man called Astor, it is divided into three parts. The first occurs over a single night, in three different locations (a car park turned nightclub, a square turned backyard, the *quartier's* streets). It is an ordinary summer's evening, joyful, almost boring. But the police arrive, harass young men, and one of the younger brothers, Samy, is chased, shot and killed. From then on, *Deux secondes* becomes a novel about grief, anger, and haunting. The second act is introduced by two lines from 13 Block's song 'S.W.P.V': 'On s'resemble tous avec une cagoule,/Sapés tout en noir dans la ville'.²⁵ It follows the novel's cast of characters as they devise ways of dealing with their grief and anger, from 'les petits' wreaking havoc at night, to dirt-bike riders setting off on a memorial spin, to the organisation of a big neighbourhood celebration. Throughout these chapters though, something else is brewing, which remains mysterious to the reader until the third and final act. This section, once again, opens with a rap extract: 'J'suis même pas sûr qu'on va trouver la paix. Shit,/ j'connais pas mes limites, j'me demande comment ça va se terminer'.²⁶ It culminates in the spectacular explosion of the pyramid, a public landmark around which the novel's action has revolved.

Diallo's novel attends to the realities of life under Fifth Republic for black and arab men living in *quartiers populaires*, overdetermined by the violence of structural racism as mediated through the exactions of the French police (from constant harassment under the guise of *contrôles d'identité* to physical violence and murder). In 2024, young black and arab men were four times

²¹ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 7; 18.

²³ Gordon, 'Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity', p. 2.

²⁴ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 169; 165

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁶ Laylow, *MEGATRON*, Trinity (Digital Mundo, 2020).

more likely to be targeted by police identity checks, and twelve times more likely to experience a “contrôle poussé” (including being searched or being taken into custody).²⁷ *Contrôles d'identités* are rarely spontaneously justified by police officers, but there are two main ways in which they are legally authorized. One results from a hostile migratory environment: under the guise of identifying people who have overstayed their visas, the law encourages the surveillance of anyone presenting ‘signs of foreignness’.²⁸ The other is the argument that someone matches a description given as part of the report of a criminal activity.²⁹ This form of racial profiling is one of the main ways through which young black and arab men’s ‘suspect citizenship’ is mediated.³⁰ It also endangers these men: nearly a quarter of the 578 deaths from police brutality which occurred in France between 1978 and 2018 resulted from one of these identity checks.³¹ Moreover, this climate of constant harassment and violence produces a profound fear of, and anger at, the police, perpetually justified and reinforced by new exactions.³² At demonstrations against police brutality in France, a recurrent sign states: ‘Théo et Adama nous rappellent pourquoi Zyed et Bouna couraient’.³³ In this context, the event at the heart of *Deux secondes* (15-year-old Samy’s murder) both is and is not a rupture. It reproduces and prefigures deaths bound to occur.

Against this background, *Deux secondes* is utterly uninterested in exposition, in explanations or justifications. Instead, sticking close to bodies, to feelings and to lives unfolding, the novel enables us to better apprehend the texture of haunting in the Republic. From the outset, we feel – with Astor. Diallo’s sensuous writing makes it impossible to observe from a distance, to watch the action unfold without feeling implicated: we see with Astor, hear and taste with him, smell through his nose. ‘L’odeur caractéristique des endroits sans soleil me saute au nez, agite l’hippocampe dans mon crâne et mes souvenirs d’enfant... C’est l’odeur de la part qu’on nous laisse’.³⁴ Diallo uses the senses to affectively capture and convey the world into which we find ourselves thrown, and it is through an assault on the senses that violence first emerges, rupturing the suspended temporality of the party, interrupting the flows of desire: ‘L’odeur de ma peur s’estompe mais mon nez se met à piquer. À piquer puis à brûler. Mes yeux à leur tour. Je reconnais l’odeur, capte que l’espace de la fête est clos: on est dans la merde’.³⁵ This brutal interruption forecloses other possibilities, other directions in which the story could have gone, and reminds us of the sequencing of violence: ‘La première violence, c’est la violence de l’État’, as Assa Traoré writes in *Le Combat Adama*.³⁶ Violence is introduced into peaceful situations by ‘les dépositaires [de l’autorité publique]’, here, through the

²⁷ Défenseur des Droits, *Enquête sur l'accès aux droits, Volume 1 – Relations police/population : contrôles d'identité et dépôts de plainte*. 2ème édition. (2025). <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/2025-06/ddd_EAD-2024_volume-1_relations-police-population.pdf> [accessed 16 February 2026], p. 4.

²⁸ Omar Slaouti and Fabien Jobard, ‘Police, Justice, État: Discriminations Raciales’, in *Racismes de France*, ed. by Omar Slaouti and Oliver Le Cour Grandmaison (La Découverte, 2020), pp. 41–58, p. 47.

²⁹ As reported for instance by all the interviewees in Sarah El-Attar’s documentary *Je Suis la France* when discussing their experiences of *contrôles d'identité*. *Je Suis La France*, dir. by Sarah El Attar, 2022.

³⁰ Jean Beaman, ‘From Cultural Citizenship to Suspect Citizenship: Notes on Rethinking Full Societal Inclusion’, *Cultural Dynamics*, 35. 1–2 (2023), pp. 60–70, p. 66.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Malika Mansouri, *Révoltes Postcoloniales Au Coeur de l'Hexagone: Voix d'adolescents* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), p. 111.

³³ Théo Luhaka was beaten up and raped by four police officers in 2017, when he was 22. He remains permanently disabled as a result. Adama Traoré was killed in police custody in 2016, on his 24th birthday. Zyed Benna (17) and Bouna Traoré (15) died electrocuted in 2005, while they were being chased by police.

³⁴ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 12–13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21

³⁶ Assa Traoré and Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, *Le Combat Adama* (EPUB, Stock, 2019). n.p.

use of tear gas.³⁷ Subsequently, violence escalates and, at times, results in death.

The first chapters of the novel move across space and time, oscillating between *le dessus* (the square) and *le dessous* (the car park), and constantly going forward and back in time. They establish a similar pattern: the arrival of the police ruptures an ordinary hot summer's evening of errands, barbecues, and dancing, 'soirée tranquille, presque chiant'.³⁸ *Les grands* (Chérif, Issa, Reem and others) set up their homemade barbecue on a square to celebrate Chérif's successful exam results. When the police first approach, they hardly notice them: 'les sirènes et les gyrophares, on n'y prête plus tellement attention. Ils sont jumelés aux bons moments.'³⁹ Through the initial interaction between the young men and the police, Diallo establishes the robotic logic through which rules designed to make public spaces uninhabitable to certain parts of the population are enforced. A reminder that barbecues are prohibited escalates into a generalized identity check, which immediately becomes violent: racist insults, sexual harassment, physical violence. Diallo depicts this violence as ordinary, belonging to a much longer and perpetually negated history (the very history subjected to the hegemonic regime of forgetting). 'Plus encore que d'ordinaire, le processus semble avoir été écrit à l'avance'.⁴⁰ Although Samy is not initially present at the site of the *contrôle*, upon learning that his older brother Chérif is there, he heads there as the passenger on his friend Bak's motorbike. When tear gas penetrates their eyes, throats and noses, they decide to turn around. Across the crowd, Samy locks eyes with Chérif. As Bak drives away from the scene, they cross paths with more police cars arriving as backup. The police drivers see them, lay chase, and decide to shoot them. Bak is injured, and Samy dies, his arms wrapped around his friend's waist.

After Samy's death, a new temporality is introduced in the novel, one of grief and haunting. Prior to this event, the novel was already straying from linearity, moving forward and backwards. From the moment of Samy's death onwards, time becomes fully circular, goes backwards through memories and remains suspended, peering into the future. Gordon describes haunting as 'the domain of turmoil and trouble [...], when easily living one day and then the next becomes entirely impossible, when the present seamlessly becoming "the future" gets entirely jammed up'.⁴¹ Samy's death 'jams up' the future, and the haunting it produces fundamentally transforms the characters. Some become 'living dead': Chérif, 'pas suffisamment vivant pour accueillir les illusions qui tuent le temps quand ça va bien,' his older brother Farès, 'vacillant et vide'.⁴² This language echoes that used by survivors of police brutality and their relatives in public discourses, such as Théo Luhaka at his aggressors' trial, describing himself as a 'mort-vivant', or Mahamadou Camara, Gaye Camara's older brother, saying in a documentary 'je ne vis qu'à moitié maintenant'.⁴³ Samy also returns as a ghostly figure, metaphorically haunting every conversation, appearing to Chérif in dreams ('dans mes rêves où tu reviens tu le dis que t'aurais préféré rester'), and to Astor the night of the ritual party: 'j'aperçois Samy qui se tient debout. Transparent, à la surface des billes de gaz

³⁷ Diallo never writes 'la police' or 'les policiers' in the novel, preferring such distancing alternatives as 'les dépositaires,' 'les agents', 'les hommes en bleu,' or refusing to refer to them as individuals entirely ('en face, dans l'autre camp'). In an interview, she characterises this choice as a refusal to humanize the police, saying: 'Je parle de dépositaires car ce n'est pas un livre sur la police.' (Diallo in 'Une cité, des flics, une émeute, et la force d'un roman. Diaty Diallo Au Poste,' dir. by Alex Gorz and David Dufresne, #AuPoste, 23 September 2022)

³⁸ Diallo, *Deux Secondes d'air Qui Brûle*, p. 31.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 32, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ Gordon, 'Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity', p. 2.

⁴² Ibid., p. 144; 143.

⁴³ Gaye Camara was shot in the head by a police officer in 2018, while he was driving. He was 26. *Je Suis La France*, dir. by Sarah El Attar, 2022.

dans l'air... Un survêtement iridescent l'habille. Il est beau, mort, et nous observe, l'iris amusé'.⁴⁴ This ghost himself oscillates between emotional states, seeming calm to Astor 'ça va, en vrai, dans l'au-delà,' and regretful to Chérif: 'si tu le pouvais tu roulerais encore, tu roulerais toujours sur deux roues, sur une roue en Y, ondoyant et libre'.⁴⁵ Finally, one figure disappears entirely: Bak, wounded in the attack which killed Samy. After the accident, he is not mentioned again. The story of Muhittin Altun, the third victim of the chase that led to the deaths of Zyed and Bouna, comes to mind. While it was his witnessing and testimony that sparked the 2005 uprisings, Altun is mostly excised from narratives of the events. As a reader, I kept thinking about Bak, whose friend died with his hands around his waist, who, likely, was the witness who told everyone what had happened. His absence, too, haunts the novel.

Haunting, in *Deux secondes*, alters subjectivities, makes thinking impossible and produces specific feelings. The morning after Samy's death, when Astor finally finds Chérif, he wonders: 'à quoi tu penses Chérif, est-ce que tu peux encore penser?'⁴⁶ This question returns like a refrain throughout the novel. Thinking is paralysed by grief, replaced by guilt, and most importantly by anger: Astor says it, '[j]e ne pense plus. Le volcan sous l'os de mon crâne est entré en éruption', and Issa declares 'un truc comme ça, même si tu connais pas l'enfant tu pètes des cables'.⁴⁷ This anger burning inside, akin to an erupting volcano, registers the haunting and signals that something must be done. Anger also signals aliveness, and an ability to act, which distinguishes Chérif, entirely incapacitated by grief, from Astor, who is still able to rage: '[j]'ai la haine, je dis/Ça sert à rien d'haïr, dit Chérif'.⁴⁸ However, being angry (*avoir la haine*), does serve a purpose. As Audre Lorde writes in 'The Uses of Anger', 'anger is loaded with information and energy', and in signalling that something is wrong, it also opens up possibilities for action.⁴⁹ The information that anger carries must be decoded and its energy needs to be channelled: '[b]eing against something is also being for something', writes Sara Ahmed, 'but something that has yet to be articulated or is not yet. While anger is determined, it is not fully determined. It translates pain, but *also needs to be translated*'.⁵⁰ Like haunting, anger messes with temporality, clinging to the past as it opens towards the future.

Siding with the ghosts

In the second act of the novel, new entities appear, ready to act in response to haunting, to translate rage. Some are collective, '*les petits*' working relentlessly to exorcise their anger, 'développ[ant] leur génie artificier'; Demba and his army of dirt bike riders, 'une centaine de squelettes d'os et d'acier'; '*les mamans*' feeding the grieving crowd, and most importantly, Nil, Astor's eccentric double.⁵¹ Inspired by Olivier Marboeuf's essay 'L'émeutier et la sorcière', Diallo makes Nil into a witch, ready to heed the ghost's call when others are paralysed by grief: '[i]l possède de grandes compétences pour foutre le zbeul, mais des zbeuls carrés. Alors là tout de suite c'est l'homme de

⁴⁴ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 162; 128.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁶ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 66; 141.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴⁹ Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 120–129, p.122.

⁵⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 175, emphasis mine.

⁵¹ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 79; 103; 121.

la situation, il invente, élabore, organise, là où moi *je n'arrive même plus à penser*.⁵² In a 2023 interview, Diallo stated: 'il me semble, mais je suis vraiment maintenant quasiment sûre de cette théorie, qu'Astor et Nil, c'est la même personne'.⁵³ This reading of the text situates madness differently at the heart of the text, with the narrator splitting into two in order to be able to move beyond grief's paralysis, toward action. As these various entities frantically set into action, the characters engage in a range of caring practices. These efforts are collective, because the pain and grief are collective: '[q]uand une personne est arrachée trop tôt à sa vie, la souffrance déborde de son foyer pour atteindre la rue. C'est une communauté qui a mal'.⁵⁴ In the text, caring appears as 'the antidote to violence,' to borrow Saidiya Hartman's formulation, although Astor recognises that these practices might only be able to soothe rather than durably heal:⁵⁵ '[i]l y a quelque chose à calmer ce soir. Ensemble. Quelque chose de dur qu'il faut soulager à défaut de guérir'.⁵⁶ And this is precisely what lies at the heart of haunting, it can 'be deferred, delayed, and disseminated, but with some crimes of humanity – the violence of colonisation – there is no putting to rest'.⁵⁷ There is only respite, there is only 'mercy'.⁵⁸ Therefore, the actions sparked by haunting are both soothing rituals and defiant spectacles of revenge. These are moments in which the living decide to side with the ghosts, act in solidarity with them, for their own survival.

One such action spurred by haunting is Demba and his riders' motorcycle parade, where they encircle the city and flood the Champs Élysées, the capital's most famous artery, clad in memorial t-shirts. 'On avait surtout envie de montrer aux gens de là-bas c'est quoi le vrai visage de ce pays de niqués... les français [*sic*] présents ils avaient l'air de très bien savoir où on voulait en venir en tous cas'.⁵⁹ For a moment, wearing the ghost's face on their clothes, they lend him their bodies, play their 'symphonie rageuse', and haunt the city for him.⁶⁰ Demba spontaneously organizes the others, rallying them through his Instagram feed. He dedicates their *baraude* to Samy, and they ride off again, a vengeful spectacle and a cathartic exercise in solidarity and in anger. 'Une parade de colère, d'autodidactie et de glow... De Bruxelles à Perpignan, ça lève fort, les poignets en rotation, endorphine et sérotonine plein les crânes, l'évacuation des pensées sombres le long de la bande d'arrêt d'urgence'.⁶¹ The practice of wearing t-shirts with the name and sometimes the portrait of victims, alongside slogans calling for justice, is common amongst collectives working against police brutality.⁶² By dressing the riders in these memorial t-shirts, and having them ride

⁵² Olivier Marboeuf, 'L'émeutier et La Sorcière', in *Sorcières: Pourchassées, Assumées, Puissantes, Queer* (B42 et Maison Populaire, 2013), pp. 54-71. <<https://olivier-marboeuf.com/2020/09/08/lemeutier-et-la-sorciere-the-rioter-and-the-witch>> [accessed 16 February 2026]; Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 88, emphasis mine.

⁵³ 'Épisode 144 - Diaty Diallo', dir. by Lauren Bastide, *La Poudre*, 12 October 2023 <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3dfrXkCRxwzuen6BJOQqFU?si=11279165ea5c4eb9>> [accessed 16 February 2026].

⁵⁴ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ Christina Sharpe in conversation with Hazel Carby, Kaiama Glover, Saidiya Hartman, Arthur Jafa, and Alex Weheliye, 'The Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe'. 7 February. Barnard Center for Research on Women. 7 February 2017. <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/in-the-wake-a-salon-in-honor-of-christina-sharpe> [accessed 16 February 2026].

⁵⁶ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 122, emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Tuck and Ree, 'A Glossary of Haunting,' p. 648.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶² Some examples of inscriptions on t-shirts are: 'Gaye une justice pour reposer en paix'; 'Justice pour Adama sans justice vous n'aurez jamais la paix'; 'Justice pour Nahel 27/06/23'; 'Justice et Vérité pour Babacar, tué par la police de Rennes la nuit du 2 décembre 2015'. They all demand justice and truth as a precondition for peace (including peace for the victims or the ghosts, *une justice pour reposer en paix*).

through and around the city, Diallo shows how these commemorative practices directly undermine the mechanisms of silencing central to the production of forgetting. Haunted by the possibility of Samy's death being immediately occulted and forgotten, of it not registering on a scale wider than that of the *quartier*, Demba and his acolytes resist forgetting through their noisy, visually imposing practice of dirt-bike riding. This practice both acts as an appeasing salve for them and jams up the forgetting machine, at least for a moment.

Another ritual is collective celebration, led by Hawa, high priestess for one night : '[o]n va chasser les mauvaises vibes du quartier'.⁶³ After dusk, once the mothers have fed everyone, once the children are done playing, Hawa starts mixing, and people begin to dance. 'La fête reprend là où elle s'était éteinte. C'est pour toi notre ami, qui n'a pas pu la faire. Ces instants d'envol qu'on nous retire'.⁶⁴ She puts together loopy, fast-tempoed, soaring songs (Kings of Tomorrow's *Finally*, Tame Impala's *Keep on Lying*) and revolutionary classics (Public Enemy's *Fight the Power*). By creating this hypnotic assemblage, Diallo portrays DJ-ing as sorcery. Hawa facilitates a moment of respite, brought about through dancing and exhaustion. Astor sums this up as '[j]e crois que la musique et l'électricité créée par les frottements de la foule ont réussi à atteindre mon cœur cassé... J'avais faim. J'ai même plus faim. Ça danse. Le reste on verra demain avec le jour qui se lève'.⁶⁵ This soothing temporal loophole enables desire to return. Just for a moment, we witness insurgent joy, a siding with the ghosts in pleasure: 'On veut contraindre nos corps à la disparition, nous les avons fait briller. La résistance est dans le mouvement. Notre terrain aujourd'hui est un carnaval'.⁶⁶ Here, too, lies the power of Diallo's narrative: she refuses to let pain overdetermine the lives of her characters. Despite violence, she remains committed to centring desire, which Tuck and Ree call '[an] antidote, a medicine to damage narratives'.⁶⁷ If the regime of forgetting works through erasure, at all levels, then affirming presence is a form of resistance. Again, this ritual operates in two ways, at once resisting forgetting *and* acting as a balm, soothing the characters' pain and enabling a peaceful ghost encounter, when Astor sees Samy gazing down at him. Nonetheless, the ritual must come to an end : '[l]e diamant, poussé toujours plus près du bord à mesure qu'il se rapproche de la fin de la chanson, bientôt ne jouera qu'un silence ponctué d'un court souffle régulier venant souligner que le temps presse'.⁶⁸ And to open the last act of the novel, Diallo turns to Laylow's 'MEGATRON,' a fast-paced, anxious, vaguely threatening tune, centred around whispers and echoey voices : 'J'me demande comment ça va s'terminer/J'suis même pas sûr qu'on va trouver la paix'.⁶⁹ In the heart of the summer night, during a heatwave, it is now the time of vengeful spirits.

For the grand finale of these haunting rituals, Nil, aided by Astor and the others, blows up the pyramid standing at the centre of their neighbourhood, landmark around which much of the action has revolved. The aims are big: 'créer de la fiction éphémère... fractionner le temps... créer de la pression'.⁷⁰ The explosion is a spectacle (some might call it an act of terrorism), but that isn't all it is. As the characters 'font sortir le feu d'eux-même' and transform their anger, they remake the world.⁷¹ The explosion profoundly reshapes the public spaces they know so well and from

⁶³ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Tuck and Ree, 'A Glossary of Haunting', p. 648.

⁶⁸ Diallo, *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle*, p. 129.

⁶⁹ Laylow, *MEGATRON*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96; 97; 98.

⁷¹ Diallo, citing Malika Mansouri, in Bastide, 'Épisode 144 – Diaty Diallo'.

which they are perpetually being evicted and made undesirable, whether through state repression or through gentrification. ‘Ils prévoient de casser la pyramide pour la remplacer par on ne sait trop quel projet concerté... Moi j’en mets ma main à couper que peu d’entre nous passerons la porte. Ça nous fera peur, on leur fera peur’.⁷² Faced with the prospect of a slow removal, and compelled by haunting, the characters take action. Nil creates an instrument for their project: ‘un objet robuste qu’on pourrait – parce qu’on le devrait – réutiliser un jour... un objet sorcier... un outil illisible pour le reste du monde, dont l’appartenance ne ferait sens que pour nous’.⁷³ A tool made-up of scavenged parts, ingeniously designed by themselves, for themselves. In creating this tool to be reused, because they would need to, Nil and his accomplices recognize that their action will not fundamentally change anything. And yet, and still, they want to create an interstice of freedom. The explosion suspends time, and Diallo’s writing becomes sparser, scattered around the page. Empty white spaces slow the reader’s eyes. It is dawn, and, sitting on a roof with Issa, Demba, Hawa, Nil, Chérif and Astor we witness ‘un souffle, des comètes en fusion, de la terre vers le ciel./Deux secondes d’air qui brûle’.⁷⁴ Through destruction, this action creates a memorial, ‘l’emplacement dépourvu de sa matière, c’est un nouveau monument, à nos béances, à nos morts’.⁷⁵ This unexpected monument fashions the urban landscape in the image of the characters’ internal states, making their ghosts visible.

But there is no illusion, this act constitutes neither justice nor repair. Here, too, ‘revenge is wronging wrongs, a form of double-wronging’.⁷⁶ As such, the novel doesn’t end on the spectacular explosion, or even with Astor’s thoughts. It returns to Chérif, Chérif who cannot forget how to breathe, try as he might.⁷⁷ Chérif witnesses the spectacle, ‘mais dans son corps il ne ressent rien. Pas de pensée sous l’os du crâne. Un simple cri long’.⁷⁸ The novel ends on this long internal scream, a single sentence running across four pages. Chérif’s memories flood in, his circular thoughts destroy time. He wonders what could have gone differently, he is overcome with guilt and a sense of betrayal, and through the grief or with the grief, Chérif witnesses the forgetting machine setting into action again: ‘cette table qui t’emporte en roulant, ta peau froide et bleue ; cette première mécanique d’enfouissement de la vérité’.⁷⁹ In the intimacy of his grief, the French state is already acting to obscure the causes of his brother’s death, as it always does. In this final act, Diallo shows how an act of ephemeral resistance – blowing up the pyramid – changes the world in the moment without being future-oriented. The explosion effectively refuses the hegemonic regime of forgetting: at least for some time following it, the environment will look markedly different and will prompt remembrance. With the ruins of the pyramid recalling Samy’s murder, the processes of silencing and erasure are somewhat suspended in one location. However, this act does not necessarily lead to further change, nor does it resolve any issues: it does not put an end to violence, nor to haunting. Further, as suggested by Chérif’s internal scream, the forgetting machine is already in motion elsewhere, with Samy’s body taken away from his family. With this observation, Diallo points at the established processes through which state institutions (from the police itself, to

⁷² Diallo, *Deux secondes d’air qui brûle*, p. 110.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷⁶ Tuck and Ree, ‘A Glossary of Haunting,’ p. 654.

⁷⁷ Diallo, *Deux secondes d’air qui brûle*, p. 144.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

medical institutions, to the judiciary) work to obscure the realities of police murders.⁸⁰ She demonstrates that attempts at undermining the forgetting machine come together as counter-hegemonic projects that can create revolutionary affects and offer respite from haunting, even if they don't immediately defeat the oppressor (in this case the racist French state – the undead Empire – and its arsenal of forgetting and erasure). With this final explosion, and this final silent scream, *Deux secondes* keeps dwelling, to the end, in the ambiguous space which so often constitutes the political horizon for postcolonial citizens of the undead Empire. One where the past is the present, and the future. One where people organise and act through haunting, despite being haunted, because they are haunted. One where forgetting isn't just impossible, it is unconscionable.

Conclusion

‘On charrie des siècles, des tonnes de personnes mortes avec soi. Qu'est ce qu'on fait avec ça?’⁸¹ When asking this question, Diallo expressed a fundamental question at the heart of contemporary cultural production from non-white postcolonial citizens in the Hexagon. What is to be done about haunting, given that, as Gordon stresses, *something* must be done about it? When considering haunting, especially postcolonial haunting, there is a tendency to focus on its sequential temporal aspect: an event in the past, unresolved, produces haunting in the present. But throughout this essay, I have argued that *Deux secondes d'air qui brûle* helps us explore how the colonial past is not *just*, or not even, past in contemporary France. Indeed, while colonial forgetting (of the past) operates as a structuring feature of the Republic, present structural violence leads to harassment, violations, maiming and killing in the name of the state, and those living in France are also mandated to forget about this form of violence. As such, new forms of grief and haunting are continuously produced within the Republic. It is impossible to understand Samy's death without accounting for the repressed histories that shaped his treatment by the police, or indeed the treatment of his entire neighbourhood by the state and its institutions. But simultaneously, it is impossible to understand the events that follow his death without acknowledging the continuum of colonial forgetting that produces haunting. In Diallo's novel, the myriad forms that haunting's 'something to be done-ness' can take are explored, whether through the collective celebration led by Hawa, Demba's motorbike parade, or Nil's blowing up of the pyramid. Moreover, the novel itself is an artefact produced by haunting. In this respect, *Deux secondes* expresses a wider dynamic present in recent Hexagonal aesthetic works (one can think of novels like Seynabou Sonko's *Djinns* or Raphaëlle Red's *Adikou*⁸²), where non-white postcolonial authors channel the supernatural, the ghostly, the magical, to attend to the effects of ongoing colonial forgetting, and of haunting, on life in the Hexagon.

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⁸⁰ For more on these processes, repeated from case to case, see for instance El Attar *Je suis la France*, Assa Traoré and Elsa Vigoureux, *Lettre à Adama* (Paris: Seuil, 2017) ; Traoré and Lagasnerie, *Le Combat Adama*.

⁸¹ Diallo in Bastide, 'Épisode 144 – Diaty Diallo'.

⁸² Seynabou Sonko, *Djinns* (Grasset, 2023), Raphaëlle Red, *Adikou* (Grasset, 2024).

Horizons d'un entremêlement-monde dans *Le papillon et la lumière* de Patrick Chamoiseau

Abstract: Cette contribution analyse *Le papillon et la lumière* (2011) de Patrick Chamoiseau comme un écrit préfigurant les horizons poétiques et environnementaux énoncés par l'auteur dans *Faire-Pays : Éloge de la responsabilisation* (2023). L'article propose une étude de l'espace urbain dans le conte comme le théâtre d'une progressive « responsabilisation » invitant à repenser notre relation au vivant à la suite de la chute de l'empire. Il interroge en quoi le texte place la conscience de l'*entremêlement-monde* comme source d'une agentivité et moteur d'un devenir solidaire, social et écologique. Ainsi, nous proposons de rapprocher les récentes observations de Chamoiseau sur le 'capitalisme-monde' et le 'fait relationnel' avec les travaux d'Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing sur la 'féralisation' afin d'étudier la représentation des mécanismes néocoloniaux et écocides mais aussi l'expression d'une forme de résistance de l'Holocène dans l'ouvrage. Nous soutenons que des dynamiques relationnelles s'opèrent au sein du délitement du 'système Outre-mer' et que celles-ci nous invitent à repenser notre relation à l'humain et non-humain.

Key words: Chamoiseau; Relation; Entremêlement; Liane; Féralisation; Holocène

Introduction : conscience de l'entremêlement-monde et responsabilisation

Le papillon et la lumière (2011) est une œuvre méconnue de l'écrivain martiniquais Patrick Chamoiseau (*1953).⁸³ Sa richesse littéraire alternant entre conte créole, réflexions écologiques et interrogations sur le devenir des Antilles à travers les errances nocturnes de deux papillons dans une ville de Martinique a reçu peu d'attention dans le domaine académique.⁸⁴ Si les représentations de l'espace urbain dans les romans de l'auteur, notamment dans *Texaco* (1992), ont été analysées comme les expressions d'une 'identité créole', cet article avance que la ville est aussi le théâtre d'une 'responsabilisation' en 'devenir'.⁸⁵ De plus, le choix de ce texte pour notre étude s'inscrit dans l'actualité sociale et environnementale des départements et territoires 'ultramarins' marqués notamment par la poursuite des revendications contre la vie chère, les demandes de réparation suite au scandale sanitaire et écologique de l'utilisation du chlordécone et les débats sur l'autodétermination.⁸⁶

⁸³ Les références ultérieures au titre de l'ouvrage figureront sous l'abréviation: *Le papillon*.

⁸⁴ Faute de repères géographiques, nous ne pouvons donner le nom d'une localisation exacte. Cependant, le cadre du récit suggère que l'histoire se déroule en Martinique (lieu de naissance de l'écrivain) marquée par les stigmates de l'univers des plantations. Chamoiseau le souligne notamment à travers cette allusion : 'une antenne tiquetée de rouille et d'escarilles nerveuses venues des champs de cannes' dans Patrick Chamoiseau, *Le papillon et la lumière* (Éditions Philippe Rey, 2011), p. 35.

⁸⁵ Voir l'article de Christine Chivallon, 'Éloge de la "spatialité": conceptions des relations à l'espace et identité créole chez Patrick Chamoiseau' (*L'Espace géographique*, 25.2, 1996, 113–25). Ces recherches ont également abordé le concept de l'"En-Ville", initialement développé par l'autrice Dominique Aurélia puis repris par Chamoiseau. Voir le travail de Lieven d'Hulst et Liesbeth de Bleeker, 'From "Habitation" to "En-Ville": the play with European models of space in the French Caribbean novel (Zobel and Chamoiseau)' (*European Review*, 13.2, 2005, 271–82). Nous empruntons l'emploi du terme 'devenir' à la pensée de Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari dans *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 31–32. L'utilisation du mot, comme perspective créative, parsème l'œuvre de Chamoiseau et ainsi, dans un souci de fidélité à la pensée de l'auteur, nous nous y référons dans cette contribution.

⁸⁶ À ce titre, nous recommandons l'écoute de ce podcast disponible sur le site internet de Radio France : Sébastien Mathouraparsad et al., 'Martinique, aux origines de la vie chère', *France Culture*, 1^{er} novembre 2024, <radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/entendez-vous-l-eco/martinique-aux-origines-de-la-vie-chere-7789757> [consulté le 8 août 2025]. Le chlordécone est un pesticide qui fut très répandu entre 1972 et 1993 dans les plantations bananières aux Antilles. Depuis de nombreuses années, la molécule fait l'objet de protestations massives et d'une inquiétude grandissante quant à ses répercussions environnementales et sanitaires sur les populations. Pour plus

Chamoiseau définit la ‘responsabilisation’ comme ‘une capacité à réflexion collective’ et ainsi : ‘[ê]tre responsables, c’est tout lier, tout relier, tout relayer, tout relater. Le soi s’ouvre au non-soi. L’humain au non-humain’.⁸⁷ Cette contribution se focalise sur l’aspect environnemental de la responsabilisation et ses ‘dynamiques relationnelles’ dans la fondation d’un devenir solidaire, social et écologique. Ici nous nous référons, comme Chamoiseau, à l’idée de ‘Relation’ approchée par le poète et philosophe martiniquais Édouard Glissant (1928–2011), soit un phénomène qui ‘relie (relaie), relate’ l’ensemble des particularités du monde dans un élan créatif.⁸⁸ Nous montrerons qu’une réflexion sur la responsabilisation invite à repenser l’émergence d’un “Nous” incluant le devenir du vivant, ‘humain’ et ‘non-humain’, que l’auteur illustre dans le choix de papillons comme protagonistes.⁸⁹

Écrit entre 2010 et 2011, le livre développe une conscience sociale, politique et écologique qui s’inscrit dans les mouvements de contestations contre la vie chère lancés en 2009 aux Antilles françaises.⁹⁰ Sa publication marque également un tournant dans l’œuvre de l’auteur : le conte est achevé quelques mois après le décès de Glissant, mettant fin à plus de trente années de compagnonnage intellectuel et littéraire. Le livre peut être lu comme un hommage à Glissant comme en témoignent les nombreuses références aux idées du philosophe dans l’ouvrage ou encore la possible analogie entre ‘le vieux papillon’ (Glissant) et ‘le papillon fringant’ (Chamoiseau). La déférence est dans l’exploration du devenir de la pensée du poète que Chamoiseau convoque comme une présence nourricière d’une réflexion philosophique. Nous affirmons donc que *Le papillon* est un *texte-relais*, c’est-à-dire de prolongement plutôt que de rupture, mais aussi un écrit préfigurant les récents horizons poétiques et écologiques de Chamoiseau énoncés dans *Faire-Pays: Éloge de la responsabilisation* (2023).⁹¹ Ainsi, Chamoiseau positionne son ouvrage en concertation et renouvellement de la pensée de Glissant afin de poursuivre sa propre réflexion sur le devenir antillais à travers la forme du conte. Celle-ci s’ajoute à la diversité du corpus de l’auteur qui alterne entre le roman, la poésie et l’essai dans une recherche d’enchevêtrement des genres.

Cette préfiguration littéraire s’appuie sur ce que nous appellerons un *entremêlement-monde*, soit la conscience poétique, politique et écologique de l’enchevêtrement entre le ‘capitalisme-monde’ et le ‘fait relationnel’.⁹² La référence au “Tout-Monde” de Glissant dans l’élaboration de notre propos est ici voulue et souhaitable car nous affirmons que Chamoiseau prolonge cette notion par le biais d’un jeu d’*entremêlements* de formes, poétiques et phénomènes qui agissent comme des explorations littéraires de l’idée Glissantienne.⁹³ Cependant, notre postulat diffère

d’informations, voir le roman graphique de Jessica Oublié et al., *Tropiques Toxiques: le scandale du chlôrdécone* (Les Escales/Steinkis, 2020). Bien que les débats sur l’autodétermination aux Antilles puissent être tracés à partir de la création du Front des Antilles et la Guyane pour l’autonomie (FAGA) fondé en 1961, nous observons que les discussions sur les autonomies se cristallisent récemment autour de la Kanaky-Nouvelle-Calédonie. Voir notamment Benoît Trépied, *Décoloniser la Kanaky-Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Anarchasis, 2025). Notons que les revendications du peuple martiniquais pour l’autodétermination se distinguent de celles de la civilisation Kanak. Les deux appartiennent à des enclaves administratives distinctes : ‘département’ et ‘territoire’ qui entretiennent des rapports différents avec la ‘Métropole’. Ici, il est intéressant d’établir un lien de solidarité et de résistance entre les deux géographies qui, à diverses périodes, ont revendiqué et continuent à demander leur droit à l’autonomie.

⁸⁷ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays: Éloge de la responsabilisation* (K. Éditions/Le teneur, 2023), pp. 74, p. 84–85.

⁸⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation: Poétique III* (Gallimard, 1990), p. 187.

⁸⁹ Dénètem Touam Bona, *Sagesse des lianes: cosmopoétique du refuge, 1* (Post-éditions, 2021), p. 57.

⁹⁰ Voir Pierre Odin, *Pwofitasyon: Luttès syndicales et anticolonialisme en Guadeloupe et en Martinique* (La Découverte, 2019).

⁹¹ Les références ultérieures à l’ouvrage figureront sous l’abréviation: *Faire-Pays*.

⁹² Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 19 ; Patrick Chamoiseau, ‘Toute la beauté relationnelle du monde : Pour une poétique de la Relation’, *FrancoSphères*, 11.1 (2022), 123–28 (p. 127).

⁹³ Glissant nomme le “Tout-Monde” : ‘notre univers tel qu’il change et perdure en échangeant et, en même temps, la “vision” que nous en avons’. Voir Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde: Poétique IV* (Gallimard, 1997), p. 176.

d'une approche 'rhizomatique', telle qu'évoquée par Glissant, au profit de l'image de l'entremêlement. Nous nous servons de la métaphore végétale de la *liane* pour aborder ce processus d'entremêlement, notamment à travers son union solidaire avec ses congénères car 'ne disposant pas de tronc (de structure autoportante), son échappée vers les cieux n'est possible que parce qu'elle s'appuie sur les autres, parce qu'elle se mêle aux autres, tout en les entremêlant'.⁹⁴ Son processus d'ascendance erratique et solidaire se distingue de l'image du 'rhizome' chez Glissant, pour qui les travaux de Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari ont permis de critiquer 'les notions de racines et d'enracinement' par la mise en avant du 'rhizome' comme 'racine démultipliée'.⁹⁵ Il convient de mettre en miroir la pertinence de ce propos dans notre analyse. Les enjeux de la figure de l'entremêlement des lianes que nous souhaitons introduire prolonge ce débat en incorporant les notions de *solidarité* et *résistance* inhérentes à l'expansion organique de la plante mais aussi à notre acception poétique et philosophique de la liane. Nous nous référons au penseur afropéen Dénétem Touam Bona et considérons ainsi la liane 'en tant que figure, en tant que trope' que nous rapprochons de l'idée de 'Relation' évoquée plus haut, à savoir une évocation particulière du 'relayé, relaté'.⁹⁶ Pour nous, il convient de lier l'image de la liane à la démarche poétique de Chamoiseau, à savoir une entreprise d'union d'antagonismes et de schèmes narratifs divers au sein d'un conte abordant une forme de résistance de l'Holocène.

D'autre part, la liane est un topos de la littérature caribéenne. Suzanne Césaire voit en elle une représentation du trouble du devenir antillais dans *Le grand camouflage* (1945).⁹⁷ Aimé Césaire lie l'enchevêtrement des lianes à la psyché et à la 'fraternité' dans *Et les chiens se taisaient* (1956) ou encore à la géographie meurtrie du paysage martiniquais, marqué par l'esclavage, dans *Ferrements* (1960).⁹⁸ Selon nous, Chamoiseau prolonge cette lignée et explore la métaphore de la liane comme trope esthétique, sociologique, poétique et écocritique. Ainsi, la relation du texte et de la flore à travers l'image de l'entremêlement des lianes nous servira donc de base méthodologique à l'analyse des problématiques sociales et écologiques enchevêtrées dans l'ouvrage. Nous interpréterons également cette image florale comme une métaphore de la responsabilisation face aux mécanismes néocoloniaux et écocides au sein du 'système Outre-mer'.⁹⁹

Dans *Faire-Pays*, Chamoiseau évoque l'association conflictuelle entre 'capitalisme' et 'Relation' faisant de la conscience de ces deux éléments antagonistes les bases d'une responsabilisation poétique et politique à mener pour démanteler le 'système Outre-mer'. Hérité de la fin de l'empire colonial français et de la départementalisation de 1946, ce 'système' se caractérise par le décentrement du pouvoir en 'Métropole' qui élève 'l'assistanat', 'la dépendance' et la 'déresponsabilisation' en 'boucle infernale' combinant une myriade de 'forces involutives' induites par le 'capitalisme-monde'.¹⁰⁰ Pour l'auteur, le 'capitalisme-monde' se caractérise par des:

⁹⁴ Touam Bona, p. 57.

⁹⁵ Glissant, *Poétique*, p. 23.

⁹⁶ Touam Bona, p. 15 ; Glissant, *Poétique*, p. 183. Le terme 'afropéen' fait référence à une identité culturelle, mobile et fluide, située à la rencontre des cultures afrodiaporphiques et européennes.

⁹⁷ '[...] les lianes balancées de vertiges prennent pour charmer les précipices des allures aériennes, elles s'accrochent de leurs mains tremblantes à l'insaisissable trépidation cosmique qui monte tout le long des nuits habitées de tambours'. Voir Suzanne Césaire, *Le grand camouflage : Écrits de dissidence (1941-1945)* (Seuil, 2009), pp. 93-94.

⁹⁸ '[...] je démêle avec mes mains mes pensées qui sont des lianes sans contracture, et je salue ma fraternité total'. Voir Aimé Césaire, *Et les chiens se taisaient* (Présence Africaine, 1956), p. 83. Dans le poème 'Spirales': 'les rancunes des hommes/la rancœur des races/et les ressacs abyssaux nous ramènent/dans un paquet de lianes/d'étoiles et de frissons'. Voir Aimé Césaire, *Ferrements et autres poèmes* (Seuil, 1994), p. 20.

⁹⁹ Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

proliférations urbaines spéculatives avec des matériaux mal adaptés à nos climats ; sous-équipement général, à commencer par ceux du logement décent que l'on tente de régler en sacrifiant des terres agricoles ou de belles écologies paysagères [...] perte générale du sens et vide existentiel [...] pauvretés, précarités, misères et inégalités...¹⁰¹

Le 'capitalisme-monde' doit être observé comme un système qui produit des inégalités structurelles, sociales et écologiques insufflées par les flux de capitaux comme l'a souligné le Warwick Research Collective.¹⁰² Notre analyse portera d'abord sur la représentation des inégalités sociales, infrastructurelles et écologiques dans l'évocation des lieux du récit. Puis, notre contribution rapprochera le 'capitalisme-monde' au 'fait relationnel', soit 'cet inextricable de la "mondialisation" et de la "mondialité"'.¹⁰³ Chamoiseau s'appuie ici sur l'idée de 'mondialité', c'est-à-dire 'le sentiment imaginaire que l'on ne peut multiplier les diversités qu'en les mettant en relation les unes avec les autres', empruntée à Glissant et qu'il considère comme l'une des pierres angulaires d'un 'écosystème favorisant' dans *Faire-Pays*.¹⁰⁴ L'auteur lie ces deux processus afin d'esquisser une vision du lieu comme le miroir d'un entremêlement-monde à travers l'interaction conflictuelle entre le 'capitalisme-monde' et le 'fait relationnel'. Ainsi, nous verrons que l'auteur entremêle ces deux phénomènes dans son récit afin de rendre compte du délitement progressif du 'système Outre-mer' mais aussi d'entrevoir les horizons relationnels d'une sortie des schèmes néocoloniaux à travers la responsabilisation.

Enfin, notre réflexion sur la responsabilisation s'élargira au devenir de l'humain et du non-humain en nous appuyant sur les travaux d'Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et de ses collaborateurs dans *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene* (2020).¹⁰⁵ Anthropologue de formation, sa récente théorisation du 'féral' nous apporte un nouvel éclairage sur les enjeux de l'apparition d'écologies imprévisibles à l'ère néolibérale qu'il convient de lier aux représentations poétiques et écocritiques de la ville dans l'ouvrage de Chamoiseau. Notre attention portera sur la notion de 'féralisation' qui se définit comme 'a situation in which an entity, nurtured and transformed by a human-made infrastructural project, assumes a trajectory beyond human control'.¹⁰⁶ Dans le récit, l'auteur dépeint un environnement meurtri par l'urbanisation et marqué par sa décrépitude faisant écho au délitement du système néocolonial et aux limites du développement de l'Anthropocène. Chamoiseau propose ainsi une contre-représentation à l'effacement de toutes autres formes du vivant causé par les activités humaines. Selon lui, la ville poursuit une trajectoire inédite à travers le développement d'une forme de résistance de l'Holocène. L'espace urbain devient le théâtre d'une progressive réappropriation des lieux et d'une recherche de responsabilisation pour les papillons. Afin de révéler ce processus de 'féralisation' dans le conte, nous analyserons l'intersection de ces trois axes : les 'Anthropocene Detonators', les 'Tippers (modes of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰² Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 8.

¹⁰³ Chamoiseau, 'Toute la beauté', p. 127.

¹⁰⁴ Édouard Glissant et François Noudelmann, *L'entretien du monde* (Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2018), p. 12; Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, pp. 92–113.

¹⁰⁵ Voir également Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene* (Stanford University Press, 2020), sans pagination (s.p). Cet ouvrage est intégralement digital et n'est pas paginé: feralatlas.org. Lorsque nous nous référons au terme 'féralisation', nous faisons également écho à Touam Bona : 'le mouvement de féralisation du vivant peut donner naissance à de nouveaux mondes' (p. 61).

infrastructure-mediated state change)' et les 'Feral Qualities'.¹⁰⁷ Ces notions seront abordées successivement et élargiront les problématiques sociales et infrastructurelles à l'écologie et au devenir du vivant dans notre étude de l'entremêlement-monde dans le récit.

Ainsi, nous verrons en quoi le texte place la conscience de l'entremêlement-monde comme source d'une responsabilisation et moteur d'un devenir solidaire. Après avoir analysé les lieux du récit comme reflets du 'capitalisme-monde', nous soutiendrons que des dynamiques relationnelles s'opèrent au sein du délitement du système invitant à repenser notre relation à l'humain et non-humain à travers une progressive responsabilisation.

Anatomie du délitement : les lieux reflets du 'capitalisme-monde'

Dans l'ouvrage, Chamoiseau se positionne en conteur, relatant les péripéties nocturnes d'un jeune papillon et de son aîné durant plusieurs nuits : 'cette nuit-là (qui ne sera pas comme les autres puisque je vais vous l'inventer), un jeune papillon, aux ailes fringantes, s'élance comme tous les autres contre les lampadaires'.¹⁰⁸ L'intervention de l'auteur, s'adressant au lecteur dans la narration, annonce l'ouverture d'une 'la-ronde'. Dans *Le conteur, la nuit et le panier* (2021), Chamoiseau définit une 'la-ronde' comme 'un espace de création' qui traditionnellement se constitue 'd'une assemblée autour d'un bougre qui allait exprimer un souffle d'existence : danser ou donner de la voix' au sein de la plantation.¹⁰⁹ Cette relation entre l'audience et le conteur, ici le lecteur et l'auteur, se déroule la nuit car quiconque contait le jour courrait le risque de 'se retrouver *mofwasé* en panier', c'est-à-dire victime d'une malédiction.¹¹⁰ Il n'est pas anodin que l'écrivain ait donc choisi le papillon de nuit comme lépidoptère noctambule car il incarne le cycle entre le jour et la nuit. Pour l'auteur, il s'agit de reprendre l'esthétique du conte créole et d'endosser le rôle du conteur, 'sa haute source d'écriture', afin d'élaborer un récit où l'imaginaire côtoie le réel.¹¹¹

L'ouverture de la 'la-ronde' permet à Chamoiseau d'entamer une observation amère des lieux et infrastructures du récit, entendons par-là : 'human-built landscape modification projects that emerge within social and political programs'.¹¹² Son constat se dessine à travers l'évocation de l'alternance entre lumière et obscurité, la construction de lieux de consommation, l'urbanisation et l'aménagement inégalitaire du territoire insufflés par plus de quatre siècles de développement de l'Anthropocène en Martinique. Cette organisation découle du colonialisme et expansion de l'empire français : de la 'découverte' du 'Nouveau Monde' au XV^{ème} siècle, le progressif déploiement d'infrastructures agricoles, les plantations, basées sur l'esclavage et une économie capitaliste jusqu'à la prolongation des schèmes coloniaux après la départementalisation. Ces relations entre 'invasion', 'empire', 'capital' et 'acceleration' constituent les 'Anthropocene Detonators', à savoir des éléments déclencheurs qui 'create the troubling conditions we identify with the term Anthropocene'.¹¹³ Chamoiseau aborde ces 'détonateurs' à travers sa description des lieux et infrastructures reprenant l'esthétique du conte créole. En effet, dans *Le papillon*:

les paysages, très peu décrits, sont souvent désignés sous les termes de 'lieux', 'endroits' ou 'côtés' qui défilent autour des personnages [...] ils peuvent se voir réduits à des bouts

¹⁰⁷ Tsing et al., s.p.

¹⁰⁸ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Le conteur, la nuit et le panier* (Seuil, 2021), p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73. Le terme 'mofwasé' est un mot créole qui signifie 'métamorphosé'.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹¹² Tsing et al., s.p.

¹¹³ Ibid., s.p.

d'horizons, à peine esquissés, soumis à des forces violentes, à commencer par diverses irruptions de l'obscur et de la lumière.¹¹⁴

Les lieux sont en effet suggérés et alternent entre clarté et obscurité. L'auteur le souligne dans l'idée d'ascension, évoquant l'image de la liane, catalyseur d'une transition : 'la nuit est montée de la terre'.¹¹⁵ Il évoque cette transition entre le jour et la nuit à travers l'allumage de l'éclairage publique qui 'ensorcelle' la ville de ses 'lumières artificielles'.¹¹⁶ L'artificialisation de l'espace marque le commencement d'un état transitoire : 'une autre ville est là : lueurs des phares automobiles, reflets de pare-brise et de vitres, néons frénétiques et enseignes lumineuses, éclats de vernis, de peintures et d'aluminium jeune'.¹¹⁷ Cette profusion lumineuse s'accompagne de la résistance de l'obscurité : 'lampes, guirlandes, projecteurs et sunlights, spots de sécurité, lasers de boîtes de nuit et grands faisceaux pour patrimoine, combattent pied à pied contre les peuples de l'ombre'.¹¹⁸ Ici, ce 'Tipper' ('state change') est enclenché par l'infrastructure : les lumières artificielles pallient l'obscurité et ainsi la 'transition' est 'so radical that initial configurations of elements [...] no longer hold'.¹¹⁹ C'est notamment le cas avec le comportement des papillons de nuit qui entre clarté et obscurité s'affrontent, mêlent et démêlent leurs vols. La confrontation est meurtrière : 'des millions d'insectes s'écrasent contre les ampoules brûlantes' et 'chaque rondelle de cette clarté sans âme témoigne d'un massacre'.¹²⁰ La relation clarté-obscurité est marquée par la frénésie et constitue un des aspects des 'forces violentes' ancrées dans le paysage.

Cette approche du lieu via l'alternance entre la lumière et l'obscurité passe également par une critique du 'capitalisme-monde'. Bien que celui-ci soit un processus global, il convient ici de localiser ses effets à la Martinique : ce que Chamoiseau nomme 'le choc du petit et du grand contexte'.¹²¹ L'auteur convoque une localité (la ville) pour aborder un phénomène transnational dont les répercussions résonnent à l'échelle locale et globale. Cet entremêlement du local et du global lui permet d'entamer une critique du délitement de l'organisation capitaliste dans les 'Outre-mer' pour analyser comment le vieillissement infrastructurel, l'échec des plans de 'gestion' et de 'développement' entretiennent un 'syndrome', c'est-à-dire des mécanismes 'd'assistanat', de 'dépendance' et de 'déresponsabilisation'.¹²² Chamoiseau avance qu' 'à partir de 1946 donc, avec le peu qui se vit concrètement accordé, l'édifice d'essence coloniale se mit à défaillir' provoquant ainsi un aménagement 'au gré des urgences et autres catastrophes'.¹²³ Ainsi, 'on colmate, on écope, on rafistole, on s'efforce de rattraper le terrifiant retard'.¹²⁴ Le triptyque 'colmater', 'écoper' et 'rafistoler' fait écho à la description des lieux dans l'ouvrage qui sont marqués par leur vieillissement apparent. Tous sont le reflet d'une fièvre consumériste révélée par la progressive dégradation des infrastructures : résultante de la défaillance du 'système Outre-mer'. Les dialogues entre les papillons se déroulent tantôt sur une enseigne McDonald's 'abimée' et 'qui lâche des étincelles', sur une 'antenne de télévision tiquetée de rouille', sur l'arrière d'un feu de circulation qui régent

¹¹⁴ Chamoiseau, *Le conteur*, pp. 74–75.

¹¹⁵ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹⁷ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 14–15.

¹¹⁹ Tsing et al., s.p.

¹²⁰ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 13, 16.

¹²¹ Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 42.

¹²² Ibid., p. 22.

¹²³ Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 23.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

un carrefour déserté' ou encore sur un 'charriot de supermarché abandonné dans un coin de parking'.¹²⁵ L'ironie de l'auteur est à son paroxysme lorsque les papillons se posent sur 'la pointe d'un panneau publicitaire pour des piles alcalines inusables', contrastant avec le paysage urbain vieillissant.¹²⁶

Le vieillissement des structures fait écho au délitement de l'organisation sociale et politique qui est incarné par deux lieux: le drapeau et la banque. Après avoir déambulé dans la ville, le jeune papillon 'trouve un peu de tranquillité' sur 'la toile d'un drapeau poussiéreux qui rappelle la présence d'un pouvoir endormi'.¹²⁷ Ici, deux lectures peuvent être proposées. Le 'drapeau poussiéreux' peut faire référence au drapeau de l'état français, pouvoir administratif en place qui régit tout depuis la 'Métropole'. Il délaisse ainsi les départements et territoires 'ultramarins' au profit de 'dépendances' et 'd'assistanats' mis en place 'par la puissance lointaine'.¹²⁸ Le 'pouvoir endormi' signifie alors l'incurie de l'état français face aux défis territoriaux et administratifs locaux en raison d'une économie reposant sur les importations et le tourisme. L'inaction maintient le territoire et sa population dans un état de 'pseudo-civilisation', c'est-à-dire une situation '*anormal[e]*' et '*tératique*' qui se traduit par un 'effort d'adaptation à un style étranger'.¹²⁹ Ces dynamiques briment tout désir d'agentivité et noient les peuples dans la promotion d'un consumérisme passif. Cependant, le drapeau peut aussi faire écho au drapeau de la Martinique. Le 'pouvoir endormi' est alors la résultante d'une déresponsabilisation massive et subite de sa population par suite des schèmes coloniaux et néocoloniaux ancrés dans le devenir martiniquais. Chamoiseau montre ici l'absence 'd'autorité intérieure' qui pousse les habitants à l'inertie face à la structure inégalitaire de l'administration française.¹³⁰

Un second lieu, la banque, reflète la défaillance économique du département. La 'porte vitrée' ne décourage pas 'deux bougres à bonnet et piercings [de] tent[er] de forcer les résistances d'un distributeur de billets'.¹³¹ Ici, c'est la précarité économique du peuple antillais que Chamoiseau met en avant, montrant que celle-ci pousse aux violences urbaines dans le but de retrouver un semblant de responsabilisation dans le pillage. Le lieu est symbolique car il représente littéralement la faillite du système qui, à coups de prêts dédiés aux 'Outre-mer', faillit à redistribuer les richesses équitablement.¹³²

Parallèlement, la figure du délitement s'étend aux répercussions néfastes du système capitaliste sur le paysage. Pour Chamoiseau, le « capitalisme-monde » produit des 'ruptures': fragmentation de la ville, morbidité apparente, rejets en tout genre ('Dump' pour Tsing et al.) et impact sur l'écosystème.¹³³ Chamoiseau dépeint toutes ces 'insignifiances' urbaines comme la prolongation d'une sur-urbanisation et bétonisation massive découpant la ville selon des critères socioéconomiques définis par l'ordre établi.¹³⁴ Ainsi, des 'villas' avec 'hublots de garage' et 'étranges jardins hantés par des balises solaires' se mêlent aux 'tôles', théâtres d'affrontement nocturnes entre

¹²⁵ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 25, 35, 44, 58.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

¹²⁸ Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 23.

¹²⁹ Suzanne Césaire, p. 74.

¹³⁰ Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 73. Ces dynamiques néocoloniales ont été longuement analysées en littérature. Voir notamment Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris : Seuil, 1981).

¹³¹ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 63.

¹³² Ces « prêts » se traduisent par « des nuées de subventions » et autres « dotations spéciales » provenant de « Métropole » et octroyés aux départements et territoires « ultramarins » (Chamoiseau, *Faire-Pays*, p. 23).

¹³³ Tsing et al., s.p.

¹³⁴ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 75.

rats et chats, mais également aux ‘vieilles automobiles’ et à ‘la poussière des entrepôts fermés’.¹³⁵ Cette évocation est une expression particulière d’un ‘combined and uneven development’: ‘a situation in which capitalist forms and relations exist alongside “archaic forms of economic life” and pre-existing social and class relations’.¹³⁶ Chamoiseau inscrit sa critique dans une observation d’un ‘développement’ inégalitaire où cohabitent modernité et archaïsme. De plus, ces évocations sont souvent accompagnées des figures du morbide et du rejet. En effet, l’auteur pointe les ‘haillons d’un cimetière de cerfs-volants qui pendent le long de la façade’, les tôles sont ‘pâles’ ou encore les trottoirs et ‘le bitume des routes’ apparaissent comme le réceptacle des ‘corps carbonisés’ des papillons.¹³⁷ La mort semble habiter les lieux, traduisant ainsi le délitement progressif du système. Celui-ci fait écho aux déjections urbaines et de l’activité humaine : les ‘flaques et les graisses’, ‘l’huile morte’ et les ‘frites échaudées’ des fast foods.¹³⁸ La faune et la flore de la ville sont également impactées. Les chats sont ‘maigres’, un ‘grand flamboyant’ est ‘noirci par les gaz d’échappement’ et ‘décore de sa tristesse un sinistre rond-point’.¹³⁹ Les plantes ne fleurissent pas et arborent les ‘parkings’ ou rocadés à l’image de cette ‘plante minuscule, couverte de poussière’ qui ‘végète au pied d’un panneau de rond-point’.¹⁴⁰ L’écosystème se retrouve altéré par les infrastructures mais semble, toutefois, s’adapter à ces changements et poursuivre une trajectoire au-delà de sa détérioration.

Les lieux sont donc les reflets d’une décomposition généralisée du ‘système Outre-mer’ et du ‘capitalisme-monde’. Cependant, ceux-ci ne sont pas représentés comme isolés mais liés les uns aux autres grâce aux différents déplacements des papillons qui, à l’image des lianes, entremêlent les espaces. Les lieux deviennent le théâtre des dialogues entre les papillons-personnages qui d’un envol à un autre se réapproprient l’espace urbain : la fragmentation laisse place à la ‘Relation’.

Papillonnages et ‘féralisation’ de la ville

Les dynamiques relationnelles de la ville sont révélées à travers la figure de l’entremêlement des lieux, visions, goûts, sons, fragrances et sensations. Nous montrerons que l’auteur use de la synesthésie comme medium narratif pour retranscrire l’entremêlement du ‘capitalisme-monde’ et du ‘fait relationnel’. Notre réflexion s’appuiera sur la volonté de Chamoiseau de ‘mettre en relation’ les lieux de consommation et infrastructures urbaines avec une progressive ‘féralisation’ de la ville, dessinant ainsi un devenir du vivant dans les décombres du ‘capitalisme-monde’.

La synesthésie se définit par une ‘perception simultanée’ des différents sens expérimentée par un ou des personnages.¹⁴¹ Nous avançons que la simultanéité des perceptions des deux papillons révèle une conscience de l’entremêlement-monde faite d’interactions entre des éléments enchevêtrés: clarté et obscurité, fragrances et relents des infrastructures, vie et mort, écrasement urbain et papillonnages. Tout d’abord, la vue est traitée à travers la relation clarté-obscurité, évoquée précédemment, qui entraîne une réflexion sur le visible et l’invisible : ‘à chaque rencontre d’un atome de clarté et d’une maille d’ombre, il y a de l’invisible, du pas vraiment visible, et ce pas-

¹³⁵ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 19, 35, 19–20.

¹³⁶ WReC, p. 11.

¹³⁷ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 35, 36, 55.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 14, 22.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 48, 69. Ici, la référence à la « maigreur » témoigne une nouvelle fois de l’ironie de l’auteur. Malgré l’abondance du gâchis alimentaire évoquée par les fast foods, la faune est paradoxalement dépeinte comme affaiblie et malnutrie.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 71–72.

¹⁴¹ Josette Rey-Debove et Alain Rey, *Petit Robert : Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris : Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2003), p. 2544.

vu-visible que l'on voit sans rien voir'.¹⁴² 'Voir sans rien voir' révèle une altération de la perception qui, loin d'être un obstacle, se montre génératrice d'une nécessaire médiation à établir entre antagonismes. Grâce à l'évocation de la relation clarté-obscurité, Chamoiseau s'éloigne de toute opposition stérile en enchevêtrant les deux entités tout au long de la narration. Cette interaction se poursuit par le goût, métaphoriquement lié à la notion de désir: le désir de la connaissance.

Celui-ci est abordé sous le leitmotiv de 'l'ivresse' comme assouvissement du goût de 'l'inconnu': la lumière pour un papillon de nuit. La clarté révèle son caractère paradoxal car Chamoiseau la représente comme « meurtrière » mais aussi comme un épanouissement: 'le jeune, à sa suite, se sent alors envahi de lumière jusqu'à une ivresse trouble' ou encore ensemble les papillons 'vivent une alternance d'éblouissements et d'obscurité pleine, à une telle cadence qu'ils sont ivres de plaisir'.¹⁴³ La lumière fédère et dissocie: 'goûter' à la lumière se traduit par l'expérimentation d'un rapport conflictuel où la mort côtoie la vie. L'entremêlement des sens continue par le son et l'odorat. L'intensité des dialogues entre les papillons est constamment interrompue par les bruits de la ville. Ainsi, tantôt 'une sirène de police arrache le jeune à sa lourde réflexion', 'une ambulance qui gémit et qui semble foncer dans six-quatre directions à la fois' fait retentir son gyrophare ou encore 'le son des téléviseurs et la pétarade de quelques moteurs fait parfois tressaillir la vieille tôle des toitures'.¹⁴⁴ Le bruit de la ville vient paradoxalement 'peupler' l'espace qui, hormis les pilleurs, est représenté comme désert laissant libre court aux papillonnages. La présence humaine est toutefois suggérée par les effluves qui viennent se mêler à la vue, au goût et au son. Ainsi, 'les odeurs de Ketchup et de milk-shake glacé [...] traversent le toit et courent au long des tôles pour se rejoindre aux effluves d'essence et de tabac', 'un souffle fait circuler un tiède parfum de citronnelle qui se glisse entre les luminescences grasses et les goudrons de clartés' mais aussi dans 'les relents d'huile saturée et merguez rassises'.¹⁴⁵ Reflets de la société de consommation, ces effluves accompagnent les dialogues à intervalles réguliers. Enfin, le toucher est évoqué plus subtilement dans le récit à travers les envols successifs des papillons. À de nombreuses reprises, Chamoiseau utilise le verbe 'se poser' pour décrire les atterrissages des deux papillons sur le mobilier urbain.¹⁴⁶ À première vue l'utilisation de ce verbe paraît anodine, or celui-ci contraste avec l'idée d'écrasement des infrastructures sur l'environnement. Au même titre que le papillon se pose sur une fleur et la butine ici les deux papillons atterrissent délicatement sur le mobilier, se réappropriant les lieux. La synesthésie permet ainsi à l'auteur de mettre en avant les dynamiques relationnelles reliant les infrastructures, l'humain et le non-humain s'entremêlant dans la narration.

À travers cette ronde des sens, l'auteur révèle le lien nécessaire entre perception et conscience. Dans le conte, la synesthésie est le levier d'une conscience de l'entremêlement entre le 'capitalisme-monde' et le 'fait relationnel'. Leur inextricabilité est sous-tendue par des flux relationnels qui lient et relient des antagonismes. Ces relations conflictuelles mènent à une médiation de l'environnement pour les papillons qui développent une stratégie de responsabilisation dans un élan de réappropriation des lieux. Chamoiseau décrit cet élan de résistance comme une expression particulière de responsabilisation qui mêle le devenir humain et non-humain au sein d'infrastructures urbaines.

Ainsi, Chamoiseau esquisse une représentation de la 'féralisation' de la ville. Pour Tsing et ses collaborateurs, il est urgent de considérer 'the ways in which human and nonhuman histories

¹⁴² Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 15.

¹⁴³ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 76–77.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 27, 28, 92.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 25, 30, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 21, 35, 71.

are inextricably intertwined' à travers une attention aux 'Feral Qualities'.¹⁴⁷ En jeu est cette vision nécessaire du vivant comme un entremêlement des actions humaines et non-humaines, leurs histoires communes, et solidaires. Chamoiseau offre un exemple de 'trajectory beyond human control' qui contrecarre la linéarité souhaitée et organisée par le 'capitalisme-monde'. La réappropriation des lieux par les papillons est l'expression d'une 'resurgence', c'est-à-dire, selon Tsing, 'the work of many organisms, negotiating across differences, to forge assemblages of multispecies livability in the midst of disturbance'.¹⁴⁸ Cette idée 'd'assemblages' fait écho à l'image de la liane que nous proposons de lire ici comme la métaphore d'une résistance de l'Holocène et d'une solidarité naissante initiées par les papillons qui entremêlent les lieux. La 'resurgence' passe par une responsabilisation incarnée par deux lépidoptères qui symboliquement amorcent un nouveau rapport à l'humain et au non-humain : 'le vénérable et le jeune magnifique volent côte à côte, ne s'éloignent jamais l'un de l'autre, virent, montent et descendent' d'une infrastructure à une autre.¹⁴⁹ Les papillons imaginent une alternative et une cohabitation viable dans un environnement meurtri par l'Anthropocène. L'auteur évoque la 'resurgence' du non-humain qui vient occuper des espaces qui ne lui étaient pas destinés: un élan de résistance opérant au sein même de ces infrastructures. Les papillons apparaissent ainsi comme des 'Industrial Stowaways', à savoir des organismes qui errent de lieux en lieux par le biais d'infrastructures construites par l'humain.¹⁵⁰ Ce développement du vivant est imprévisible et Chamoiseau le démontre faisant des lieux des espaces d'expression d'une résistance face à l'Anthropocène. L'auteur imagine ainsi un devenir du vivant dans les décombres du 'capitalisme-monde' à travers l'entremêlement de phénomènes relationnels liant l'humain et le non-humain.

Conclusion : vivre l'entremêlement-monde

S'adressant au 'jeune fringant', le 'vieux papillon' souligne que la conscience:

tremble parce qu'elle est vivante. Elle tremble aussi parce qu'elle fixe ensemble, les relie, les rallie, tous les contraires, tous les impossibles et tous les impensables [...] C'est pourtant là que commence l'affaire de vivre et de penser sa vie.¹⁵¹

Son observation lie le 'vivant' à une nécessaire perception de l'entremêlement des 'contraires' pour approcher 'les impossibles' et 'les impensables'. Dans l'ouvrage, ces 'impossibles' et « impensables » se traduisent par le devenir imprévisible du vivant dans les décombres du système capitaliste et apparaissent donc comme des voies à explorer pour créer un devenir solidaire, social et écologique. Chamoiseau pose les fondations d'une responsabilisation venant d'organismes non-humains (deux papillons) qu'il souhaite faire retentir à l'échelle humaine. Si les papillons expriment la possibilité d'un devenir liant l'humain et le non-humain, l'auteur veut surtout inspirer de futures actions politiques et poétiques qui viendraient prolonger la 'réflexion collective' initiée dans ce conte. En cela, l'ultime propos du 'vénérable' sur les 'questionnements' trouve un écho singulier dans le discours de l'auteur: 'garde-les, pose-les à toi-même, propose-les à tous, sème-les à tous les

¹⁴⁷ Tsing et al., s.p.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 'A Threat to Holocene Resurgence Is a Threat to Livability' dans *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress*, ed. par Marc Brightman et Jerome Lewis (Londres : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 51–65 (p. 52).

¹⁴⁹ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁰ Tsing et al., s.p.

¹⁵¹ Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, pp. 61–62.

vents. La question n'enseigne rien et ne prêche rien: elle appelle. C'est l'énergie du devenir'.¹⁵² Dans ces derniers mots (l'aîné décède par la suite), l'auteur 'appelle' le lecteur à envisager le 'devenir' comme une recherche permanente d'un futur relationnel.

Ainsi, Chamoiseau referme sa 'la-ronde' sur ce *double relais* entre d'une part le 'vieux papillon' et le 'fringant' et d'autre part l'auteur et son lecteur. Nous avons montré que l'auteur fait de la conscience de l'entremêlement-monde un prérequis à une responsabilisation. Notre analyse de l'intrication entre 'capitalisme-monde' et 'fait relationnel' révèle l'entremêlement des deux phénomènes dans la narration et souligne les interactions conflictuelles à l'œuvre dans le cheminement progressif d'une résistance de l'Holocène dans les décombres du 'système Outre-mer'. Plus encore, c'est l'expression d'un devenir liant l'humain et le non-humain comme rempart face au fait néocolonial et écocide que l'auteur esquisse dans l'évocation des horizons d'un entremêlement-monde.

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¹⁵² Chamoiseau, *Le papillon*, p. 95.

Hamid El Houadri, Mostafa El Nissaboury, and the anti-capitalist poetics of *Souffles-Anfās* (1966–1972)

La noblesse du fauteuil détermine la dignité humaine de celui qui est assis dessus, aussi sûrement qu'un mets succulent comme la *bargma* ou la *mbencha* provoquent la dignité du ventre.¹⁵³
Driss Chraïbi, *Une enquête au pays* (1981)

Abstract: This article examines the use of visual imagery and poetic form in two poems published in the anti-colonial Moroccan leftist literary journal, *Souffles-Anfās* (1966–1972). The article interprets the visual imagery and poetic form in the works of Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury as small yet significant acts of resistance that delinks the urban landscape of Casablanca from its associations with ideas of 'empire' in form. In contrast to existing scholarship on the *Souffles-Anfās* corpus, this article explores the contents of the journal's earlier editions for the invocation of natural imagery and modes of Amazigh storytelling as a means of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian resistance to French occupation and the material, lived conditions of Morocco's *années de plomb* (1961–1999). This essay explores two perspectives of the same city, Casablanca, drawing them together to illuminate how each, in turn, forms their own anti-capitalist poetics that do not rely on French or Arabic ways of seeing and knowing narrative, form, and structure.

Keywords: natural imagery; Casablanca; Amazigh storytelling; *Souffles-انفاس*; Hamid El Houadri; Mostafa El Nissaboury

Morocco and its political literature have often been overlooked within French and Francophone Studies in favour of authors whose works, as Abdellatif Laâbi explains in the prologue to the first edition of *Souffles-Anfās* (*Souffles-انفاس*), were written with metropolitan French audiences in mind.¹⁵⁴ Morocco's significance as a site of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian resistance after the 'ends' of empire, consequently, often remains unexplored. Moroccan literature in French, however, provides additional opportunities to access and engage with North African creative products, written or spoken, in Arabic, Darija, and Tamazight. This article examines how journals such as *Souffles-انفاس* lead the disruption of narratives that fuel division across lines of ability, class, and gender that have historically upheld and maintained relations of colonial-imperialism.¹⁵⁵

From 1966 to 1972, *Souffles-انفاس* amplified literary voices from North Africa and beyond in its seven-year run as a journal, before it was banned by Royal decree. The journal's impact both within North Africa and in resistance to European and American colonial imperialism across the globe was far-reaching, part of a much larger network of anti-colonial resistance that stretched between Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.¹⁵⁶

Souffles-انفاس was established by Abdellatif Laâbi, with the support of other artists living and working across Morocco. Abraham Serfaty, writer, activist and Morocco's then-most famous

¹⁵³ Driss Chraïbi, *Une enquête au pays* (Éditions Points, 1981), p. 97.

¹⁵⁴ Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Prologue', in *Souffles-Anfās*, ed. by Abdellatif Laâbi (1966), pp. 1–10 (p. 6), doi:10.1515/9780804796231-004. 'Souffles-Anfās' is hereafter written as *Souffles-انفاس* to reflect the name of the journal as presented to its readers.

¹⁵⁵ Walter D. Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of power and decolonial thinking', in *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), ed. by Walter D. Mignolo (2007), pp. 155–67 (p. 164), doi:10.1080/09502380601162498.

¹⁵⁶ Hoda El Shakry, 'Souffles/انفاس' in *Revolutionary Papers* (2025), <https://revolutionarypapers.org/journal/Souffles/انفاس/> [accessed 25 March 2025].

political prisoner, joined Laâbi and comrades at *Souffles*-انفاس later, in 1968. The journal provided a space of respite and freedom of expression for the Moroccan left and its lay readers.

Souffles-انفاس confronted the adversities of everyday life during *les années de plomb*.¹⁵⁷ It sought, as Khalid Lyamlahy writes, ‘to renew Moroccan literary and artistic forms, and, in doing so, to lay the foundations for a broad cultural revolution’.¹⁵⁸ This cultural revolution aimed to rejuvenate contemporary perceptions of the French language and distance it from its colonialist, imperialist, and classist connotations by using French to depict the mundane aspects of everyday life during Morocco’s *années de plomb*. Walter D. Mignolo illuminates how ‘decolonial thinking’ is one of the many ways to disrupt common ways of seeing and knowing, such as *Souffles*-انفاس does, and unsettle the place of French in the Moroccan social sphere.¹⁵⁹ Mignolo’s decolonial thinking helps to understand how the writing and translation of traditional Amazigh signs, symbols and cultural practices into French, from this perspective, operates as a mode through which Moroccan literary and artistic forms can be renewed.

This article explores current ways of seeing and knowing post-independence Morocco and their failure to reflect lived and embodied experiences as a shaping force in North African political literature published throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It examines a selection of Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury’s poems to explore how they present everyday life, or the mundane, *boring* aspects of day-to-day living. Equally, everyday life is also the uninteresting, the earthly, and the comfort in repetition and routine, which grounds us firmly in our own lived environments. The article elucidates the anti-capitalist poetics of *Souffles*-انفاس, showing how the dull monotony of daily life can be read not only as visual and verbal reminders of the concrete, material conditions of life but as affirmations of community in times of uncertainty about the future.

An anti-capitalist poetics illustrates how a failure to engage with Morocco in all its political, cultural and linguistic complexities yields incomplete perspectives on twentieth-century Moroccan culture and society, perpetuating relations of colonial-imperial dependence. This dependence shapes misinformed, often negative, perceptions of North Africa and the rest of the Francophone world as an amorphous monolith that is only viewed through the lenses of coloniality and imperialism. As such, the histories, languages, and cultures of peoples in the Global South are often misinterpreted and subject to erasure in popular and scholarly discourse. Using the term ‘anti-capitalist poetics’, this article engages with the works of two early contributors to *Souffles*-انفاس, Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury, for their decentralisation of the human figure within their poems. I use the term ‘anti-capitalist poetics’ to capture the various intersections where politics meets literature, the rural meets the urban, and the state meets the citizen.

The lack of engagement with Arabic, Darija and Tamazight cultural production in place of French language and culture leads to misrepresentations of North African cultural and linguistic identity, ignoring the place of Arabic, Darija and Tamazight in everyday Moroccan lived experience, dramatically overstating the role of French in day-to-day interactions. Journals like

¹⁵⁷ Written in the early years of *les années de plomb* (1961–1999), a period of Moroccan history characterized by widespread corruption, poverty, and the perpetration of state crimes against its journalists and left-wing political activists. Working-class Moroccan Arab and Amazigh people (Imazighen) who spoke out against the autocratic leadership of King Hassan II also faced hostility and violence from the government and the police.

¹⁵⁸ Khalid Lyamlahy, ‘A ‘Boundless Creative Ferocity’: the *Souffles* generation, Moroccan Poetry, and Visual Art in Dialogue’, in *Multilingual Literature as World Literature*, eds. Jane Hiddleston and Wen-chin Ouyang, (Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 76

¹⁵⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto” in *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production*, 1.2 (2011), pp. 44–66, p. 46.

Souffles-انفاس provide a multilingual outlet for freedom of expression of all kinds. However, the scholarly detachment of Tamazight, Arabic and Darija cultural products as a topic of enquiry within Francophone Studies misconstrues the intentions and ethos of *Souffles*-انفاس, and more widely, misrepresents North African culture, language, and society. As Andy Stafford writes, ‘*Souffles* wanted to go beyond the heroic literature of the anti-colonial struggle [...] to establish an independent and modern Moroccan literature in French written by a younger generation coming to terms with the postcolonial polity’.¹⁶⁰ Whilst much scholarship on the editorial intentions of *Souffles*-انفاس remains limited to the benefits of literature for processing what Karima Lazali calls ‘le traumatisme colonial’, Stafford’s work highlights an important intervention in contemporary understandings of the ‘literary-turned-political’ as a genre: literature operates as a means of resistance against authoritarian populism.¹⁶¹

As much as *Souffles*-انفاس speaks to the afterimages of European colonial-imperialism, the literary works that compose its editions were produced under similar but equally repressive conditions. Though the works of Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury, for example, may reflect the ‘postcolonial polity’ and its underbelly, this article explores how El Houadri and Nissaboury engage the French-language ‘postcolonial polity’ as a backdrop for the restaging of Arabic, Darija and Tamazight cultural production as core to understandings of Moroccan nationhood and identity in the twentieth century. As Abdelfattah Kilito, Moroccan poet, writer and scholar, writes in *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*: ‘[l]anguage is tied to a location on the map or to a given space. To speak this or that language is to be on the right or on the left. As for the bilingual, he is in constant movement, always turning, and since he looks in two directions, he is two-faced’.¹⁶² The lack of engagement with this ‘two-faced’, multi-faceted and polyvalent nature of the linguistic diversity of North African literature has reinforced negative stereotypes of embodied experiences of living in post-independence Morocco. It leads, by extension, to the cultural and linguistic othering of Darija- and Tamazight-language speakers, culture and tradition. This failure to engage dehumanizes and relegates the French-language North African poetic voice to its stereotype as the stern and embittered cypher of colonial trauma, depriving it, as Kilito writes, of its given space within popular and scholarly discussions of colonialism, empire and their ends in North Africa. This dehumanisation appears thematically across the *Souffles*-انفاس corpus and has implications for how we understand the relationship between politics and literature in North African contexts.

This article first maps the many struggles that were daily encounters for the *groupe d’action* at *Souffles*-انفاس, such as austerity, poverty, widespread unemployment and a lack of infrastructure that could cope with the demands of Morocco’s rapidly growing urban centres. It explores *Souffles*-انفاس as a space of sanctuary for the Moroccan left, reifying Morocco’s traditional modes of oral and vernacular storytelling to encourage participation from a larger audience. The article moves on to explore how an anti-capitalist poetics is illuminated in practice (by the written word) in Hamid El Houadri’s ‘Comme ça’ (1966). This poem draws heavily on nonhuman imagery as a form of social and political commentary in a way that implicates the state as predatory and scavenger-like, destabilizing modern and contemporary understandings of the Moroccan political

¹⁶⁰ Andy Stafford, “‘Writing is an act, the poem is a weapon, and discussion an assembly’”: The Political Turn in *Souffles* during Morocco’s 1968’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 59.3 (2023), pp. 444–62, p. 447.

¹⁶¹ Karima Lazali, *Le trauma colonial: Une enquête sur les effets psychiques et politiques contemporaine de l’oppression coloniale en Algérie* (Éditions La Découverte, 2018), p. 13.

¹⁶² Abdelfattah Kilito, ‘The Translator’, in *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, trans. by Wail S. Hassan (Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 21–37 (p. 23).

ecosystem in the 1960s. Finally, this article explores Nissaboury's presentation of Amazigh modes of storytelling and considers the poet's use of natural and Indigenous imagery in his poem 'Texte' (1968) as integral to concretising a Moroccan national literature.

***Souffles*-انفاس: the Moroccan left and the literary politics of resistance**

In his essay for the third issue (1966) of *Souffles*-انفاس, Abdelkébir Khatibi notes that the Arab culture of North Africa as he knew it was at once immobilized, or unable to act, to resist, from the inside, and under attack by external forces, such as neocolonialism, from the outside. Khatibi's essay makes note of the struggles for local, national and transnational unity at the level of the written word, talking about the:

grands problèmes d'édification nationale il faut poser franchement et sans détour la question de la 'littérature' dans des pays en grande partie analphabètes, c'est-à-dire où le mot écrit a peu de chance pour le moment, de transformer les choses, peut-on libérer un peuple avec une langue qu'il ne comprend pas ?¹⁶³

Though Khatibi is right to foreground the significance of *analphabétisme* in French and Arabic across North Africa at his time of writing, his analysis of the 'roman maghrébin' and its shaping of Moroccan national culture severely underscores the purpose and ethos of journals such as *Souffles*-انفاس. As Abdellatif Laâbi explains in an interview with Kristin Prevallet in 2001, the aim of *Souffles*-انفاس was 'to allow an avant-garde movement to be born, to express itself, and therefore to help the literature that was coming out of Arab countries move forward'.¹⁶⁴ Olivia Harrison writes about the journal's move from literature to politics: 'the journal became increasingly political as its editors in chief [...] adopted an explicitly Marxist-Leninist agenda, publishing articles on domestic issues ranging from education reforms to miners' strikes and culminating in the founding of a political party, Ilal-Amam ("Forward"), in 1970'.¹⁶⁵ This positions the writings of *Souffles*-انفاس as reflective of a dual desire for the inauguration of a Moroccan national literature as well as social and political change. Stafford describes the linkages forged between *Souffles*-انفاس, the Tunisia-based journal, *Lotus*, and Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976) from 1968 onwards, as Abraham Serfaty led the journal in a more political direction.¹⁶⁶

The articles, correspondences, essays, poems, and reviews which make up the *Souffles*-انفاس journal operate as small yet significant and interconnected acts of anti-capitalist resistance in the fight against colonial imperialism and the authoritarian populist regimes which have pervaded North African politics since the withdrawal of European colonial administration. Speaking to the potential of literature to ignite paradigmatic shifts in how we perceive culture, politics and society, Laâbi notes that poetry is 'an intellectual resistance as well'. It is one of the rare fields, Laâbi writes, 'where a person can truly practice the freedom of being a man, woman, human being, creator'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Abdelkébir Khatibi, 'Roman maghrébin et culture nationale', in *Souffles-Anfās*, ed. by Abdellatif Laâbi (1966), pp.10–11 (p. 11).

¹⁶⁴ Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Interview by Kristin Prevallet' (2018), <<http://laabi.net/index.php/en/2018/06/30/interview-by-kristin-prevallet/>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

¹⁶⁵ Olivia Harrison, 'Cross-Colonial Poetics: *Souffles-Anfās* and the Figure of Palestine', *PMLA*, 128.2 (2013), pp. 353–69 (p. 359).

¹⁶⁶ Stafford, p. 450.

¹⁶⁷ Kristin Prevallet, 'An Interview with Abdellatif Laâbi', *Global Rights: News & International Magazine*, 27 November 2014. <https://globalrights.info/2016/11/75565/> [accessed 27 August 2025].

Exploring this perspective of poetry as intellectual resistance against occupation and the autocratic leadership of King Hassan II, this article highlights how, as small acts of anti-capitalist resistance, the works of the journal responded to a need to become ‘un lieu névralgique de débats autour des problèmes de notre [marocaine] culture’.¹⁶⁸ As Lyamlahy writes, the use of literature as a means of political communication functioned as ‘a way to outline the visual richness of [...] literature and emphasize the act of reading as a creative navigation between words and images rather than a focus on verbal content’.¹⁶⁹ Nissaboury picks up on this in his retelling of the story of Thiziri in his poem ‘Texte’ (1968).

Medinas, menageries and the mundane in Hamid El-Houadri’s ‘Comme ça’ (1966)

More than fifty years have passed since the last issue of *Souffles*-انفاس was published in 1972. During this time, a handful of articles within Francophone and North African Studies have been published that speak to the impact of *Souffles*-انفاس. These publications facilitate the restoration of a Moroccan national literature which transcends language and embraces the linguistic plurality of North Africa.¹⁷⁰ Each of these works highlights another poet, alongside Laâbi, Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine and Mostafa Nissaboury, as one of the journal’s co-founders, or at least, one of its most regular early contributors. This was Hamid El Houadri, a 22-year-old poet and essayist living in Casablanca in the late 1960s.

One of the few things known about El Houadri is written in *Souffles*-انفاس, which describes him as being between jobs but having regularly contributed to many journals in Morocco and abroad. The poet was also known for his loose association with two pioneers of modern Moroccan painting and sculpture, Farid Belkahia and Mohamed Chebaâ.¹⁷¹ Yet, despite the inextricability of his name from *Souffles*-انفاس as a journal and as a radical space of resistance against authoritarian governance and right-wing nationalism, this article aims to interact with El Houadri’s works, translated from the Arabic by Laâbi and Nissaboury, as they were intended.

This section pays close attention to a poet whose lines depict ‘chacals’ haunting the streets in the writer’s hometown of Casablanca, bringing the desert and its creatures to the coastal city’s eight districts.¹⁷² These streets, indicated both by the melancholy and solitude of the first-person voice and the lack of scholarly engagement with El Houadri’s works, remain unexplored and have, for the author, been taken over by predators, politicians and scavengers. Through a precise yet deliberate rendering of the subject-object dynamic, in conjunction with the quietness of Casablanca’s empty urban avenues and the use of animal imagery, donkeys, jackals and snakes, El Houadri’s poems present a vision of everyday life that does, indeed, reflect the uninteresting parts of our day-to-day lives. The animals are all examples of imagery that are widely used across North Africa. As Massika Merradi and Kamel Bouguerra write, the spider, for instance, ‘holds significant symbolic meaning in Amazigh culture, representing protection, patience, knowledge, resilience, and originality. [...] Its ability to weave intricate webs resembles the Amazigh people’s weaving and textile customs, symbolizing innovation and interdependence’.¹⁷³ The anti-capitalist poetics of

¹⁶⁸ Abdellatif Laâbi, ‘Prologue’, in *Souffles-Anfās*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Lyamlahy, p. 79

¹⁷⁰ This article understands ‘North Africa’ to be inclusive of present-day Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic, and Sudan, as well as many Northern parts of Chad, Mali, and Niger.

¹⁷¹ Hamid El Houadri, ‘indexe des auteurs’ in *Souffles-Anfās*, 1.1, ed. by Abdellatif Laâbi (1966), pp. 33–35 (p. 34).

¹⁷² Hamid El Houadri, ‘qasidat as safar’ in *Souffles-Anfās*, 1.3, ed. by Abdellatif Laâbi (1966), pp. 17–18 (p. 17).

¹⁷³ Massika Merradi and Kamel Bouguerra, ‘The Symbolism of Amazigh Symbols (Animal, Objects, Tattoo)’, *Al-Babith*, 17.1 (2025), pp. 39–57 (p. 45).

Souffles-انفاس and its contributors to larger goals of disseminating literature as an affirmation of community and connectedness to promote positive social and political change in times of instability and uncertainty. By turning to animals, Hamid El Houadri provides an alternative perspective of Casablanca that exists outside of the matrices of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Importantly, El Houadri shows that mundanity is not an experience unique to humans.

Yet what makes these moments of mundanity, human and animal alike, speak to an anti-capitalist poetics is their capacity to illuminate the small acts of resistance that we perform every day. This is seen in the repeated use of the ‘je’ pronoun. These small acts are momentary expressions of frustration towards, for example, increased costs of living, decreased quality of life, and unsustainable work-life balances. For El Houadri’s speaker in ‘Comme ça’ (1966), these thoughts are expressed with a tone of indignation and paired with an atmosphere of anger and insecurity. The poem tells of a wealth-hoarding spider who lives between heaven and earth:

ils l’ont reconduite à l’étable
l’âne qui refusait l’avoine
et le dieu de la ville
a ramené les coffres dans ma grotte.¹⁷⁴

In these lines, Houadri sets ideas of the divine against moments of interspecies bonding between humans and the animals with whom we share our lived environments. The poem’s spider, however, is not restricted to its connections with the earth and the natural environment:

comme d’habitude
le dégoût accroupi sur le cratère d’un volcan
(les barreaux de ma fenêtre sont rouillés
le soleil les a délaissés
et le souffle de la mer ne les a plus parfumés)
cette araignée chiait entre ciel et terre.¹⁷⁵

The poem’s spider moves between heaven and earth and blurs the poetic boundaries that separate the earthly from the otherworldly. It is a spider that dislocates the poem from its written and material contexts of coloniality-modernity and offers an alternate perspective on embodied experiences of Morocco during *les années de plomb*.¹⁷⁶ In ‘Comme ça’, Houadri extends this symbolism of the spider, its web, and its connotations of cunning intelligence through the enjambment that carries throughout the poem, divided into two overlapping and intersecting stanzas.

The donkey ‘qui refusait l’avoine’, then, represents one of the spider’s many victims, continuing this blurring of the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical. In refusing the oat, El Houadri depicts the donkey not only as low in intelligence, but as old, infirm, prey-like and servile.¹⁷⁷ Where the ‘god’ should lead and command, the donkey should follow and serve, yet they

¹⁷⁴ Hamid El Houadri, ‘Comme ça’, in *Souffles-Anfās*, 1.2 (1966), pp. 18–19 (p. 19), lines 25–28.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 16–21.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, line 23.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, line 26.

are both retired, by an unnamed figure or force, perhaps the spider, to the same stable. The word ‘donkey’ in Arabic, ‘حمار’ or ‘7mar’ (‘hamār’), or ‘l’âne’, in French, has often been used pejoratively as a slur which is intended as an affront to someone’s presentation and intelligence and perceived or actual reduced ability or capacity. Forging the association between the earthly, natural image of the donkey and the divine image of ‘le dieu’, this conception of godliness becomes a poetic act of resistance which strips the ‘dieu’ of its all-encompassing power by narrowing its domain to the limits of the poem’s setting and the speaker’s lived or written environment.

The restriction of the ‘dieu’ figure to the city in these lines has a similar effect in its sardonic tone, intimating that ‘le dieu de la ville’ may not be a metaphysical god at all and instead a person with the power to control and condemn, whose role it is to lead the Kingdom of Morocco in matters of faith and spirituality.¹⁷⁸ Though ‘le dieu’ may wield power, it is not as boundless as the spider’s, a symbol for an intelligence that can, like politics, be used as an instrument of fear and intimidation. Or, as Frantz Fanon writes on the function of the ‘colonised intellectual’ as a tool in the ‘destruction de toutes ses idoles : l’Égoïsme, la récrimination orgueilleuse, l’imbécilité infantile de celui qui veut toujours avoir le dernier mot’.¹⁷⁹ The spider, in ‘Comme ça’, then, becomes a symbol of the same corruption and greed that El Houadri laments across his oeuvre.

It is the invocation of the narrator’s right to insist, and by extension, right to insult and right to challenge what they perceive to be wrong, which constitutes, in El Houadri’s poem, an act of resistance which seeks to destabilise and dismantle the institutions of power used to repress movements for collective positive change in Morocco. In ‘Comme ça’, this imbues the poem’s speaker with the ability to resist and overcome the essentialisation, moreover, of North African creatives and intellectuals as an example of the trope of the malcontent, or the embodiment of uncivility and, more generally, everything that runs counter to the French imperialist goal of ‘assimilation culturelle’. This is reflected in, for example, the introduction of French as the language of education, government, and the media, as well as the restriction of Arabic in the public domain to cultural activities, religious ceremonies and services.

For El Houadri’s speaker, colonialism and imperialism are not the only malcontent with which we can associate the ‘dieu’ figure. ‘Comme ça’, as a poem, could just as easily serve as a biting, satirical observation on the difficulties of living in and navigating the social sphere of post-independence Morocco. El Houadri’s early poems rely on nature, its animals and its elements, to act as carriers for the images and messages that he conveys in his limited number of published lines that are currently available in Arabic, Darija or French. Much like ‘Comme ça’, which depicts images of crocodiles, entrails, volcanoes, spiders and donkeys, El Houadri’s other poems bring the pastoral, or, more fittingly, *le désertique*, to the streets of Casablanca. And whilst the animals that feature across his works may change, what remains constant is the indifference with which the speaker describes his home city through the invocation of the ‘je’ pronoun.

El Houadri is a poet whose works have been little explored since the Souffles-انفاس catalogue was first archived and eventually digitized by the Bibliothèque Nationale de la Royaume du Maroc in 2010.¹⁸⁰ Written at the beginning of a career at the cutting edge of the intersection between literature, art and politics in mid-century Casablanca, these poems reflect the early unpolished thoughts of a poet and essayist whose name has quietly passed through history as a

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., line 27.

¹⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Éditions La Découverte, 2021), p. 45.

¹⁸⁰ Abdellatif Laâbi, ‘The magazine Souffles’. <http://laabi.net/index.php/en/the-magazine-souffles/> [accessed 31 March 2025].

footnote in the stories of others. His poems depict themes of alienation and solitude, the earthly and the otherworldly, and they are united in the deployment of the interspecies bond.

The presence of animal imagery across El Houadri's poetry forms an anti-capitalist poetics of its own. By reimagining his home city of Casablanca as taken over and infested by predators, El Houadri's works constitute an act which at once exposes Moroccan politics for its animalistic, brutish side, and allows Morocco, as a nation, in returning to its predators and scavengers, freeing it of complex human social hierarchies and relations, to define itself anew based on shared visions of better quality of living for all.

La 'ville émiettée', l'ogresse-lune and the city-speaker in Mostafa El Nissaboury's 'Texte' (1968)

Mostafa El Nissaboury, also E. M. Nissaboury, is a poet who has been a mainstay of the Moroccan literary scene since its mid-twentieth century renaissance following publications such as *Poésie Toute* (1964), and later, from 1966 to 1972, *Souffles-انفاس*. The former was co-edited by Nissaboury alongside Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine. Nissaboury's poems, essays and novels have been widely read and researched; the latter focusing on how Nissaboury uses language to reflect the realities and limitations of living during *les années de plomb*.¹⁸¹ Like El Houadri, Nissaboury plays on the first-person pronoun 'je' to encourage questions that ask the reader to challenge and question popular ways of seeing and knowing Morocco in the years following its independence from France, in 1956.

Yet, Nissaboury's anti-capitalist poetics comes, in large part, from his use of form to challenge ideas of cultural and self-expression. Nissaboury's early poetic voice is often expressed through meticulously detailed streams of consciousness that are punctuated by rhetorical questions, and fragmented with short, sharp and visually engaging lines that evoke feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. In 'Texte', for example, Nissaboury, presents a piece of writing that does not comfortably fit within common understandings of literary genre in the Global North: it is neither poem, nor prose, nor prose-poetry. It is named 'Texte' precisely, perhaps, for its inability to be contained by a single category for its diverse form and content:

Suis-je une ville reconstituée os après os/ou suis-je une ville éteinte ? Ou de forteresses en résurrection qui/n'ont pas été représentées dans les livres scolaires [...] pour réanimer les instincts de l'ogresse-lune profondément amoureuse.¹⁸²

'Suis-je', as a question, suggests a self-reflexive quality in the speaker. Through this rhetorical question, the speaker asks whether they are a city rebuilt brick by brick (or, 'bone by bone'), or a city whose light has been extinguished. The invocation of 'je' affirms and reinforces the importance of reflexive practice as a form of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian praxis of resistance, mirroring Fanon's own words on 'l'autocritique'.¹⁸³ Nissaboury, in the above lines, which recount tales of abandoned fortresses left out of history books, pays homage to Fanon's words on the process of the intellectual's becoming a 'man of the people'. Using the city as a mouthpiece to express common insecurities amongst those living in majority working-class areas, Nissaboury shows how

¹⁸¹ Anouar El Younssi, 'Souffles-Anfas and the Moroccan avant-garde post-independence', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 23.1–2 (2018), pp. 34–52 and Mary Vogl, 'Art journals in Morocco: new ways of seeing and saying', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 21.2 (2016), pp. 235–57.

¹⁸² E. M. Nissaboury, 'Texte', *Souffles-Anfās*, 3.2 (1968), 44–47 (p. 45, lines 5–10).

¹⁸³ Fanon, p. 46.

in his elevation of the city to the role and status of speaker by imbuing it with the power to express itself represents a significant act of resistance, marking the reclamation of one of Morocco's most important administrative and cultural centres – Casablanca.¹⁸⁴

The poem recasts Casablanca in consideration of the city-speaker's own 'plongée dans le peuple' or its embodiment of the lived experiences of its inhabitants, referred to in Moroccan dialects of Arabic and French as Kazawi ('كازاوي') or Bidawi ('بيضاوي'). This delinks the city from its associations with the Arab, French and Roman empires and presents it in all its modern and new grandeur. Instead, Casablanca becomes a space which has the potential to dismantle the structures of power, of ableism, classism, racism, sexism, and more, that are maintained from within its buildings and boundaries, for the benefit of everyday lived and embodied experience in post-independence Morocco.

Whilst these long, enjambed lines illuminate the city's social affairs in intricate detail, they sit in stark contrast to the indiscriminate and sporadic placement of lines which depict the insecurities and vulnerabilities of the city-speaker:

et moi,
je serai dévoré par un monstre
et qui mettra les lunes en grossesse ?
qui fermera le livre ?¹⁸⁵

These lines offer an alternate perspective on these insecurities of (un)certainly about the future, and of navigating conditions of austerity and poverty, and targeted violence at the level of police and state. Via the city-speaker, Nissaboury retells an Amazigh folktale, commonly referred to as 'l'ogresse et la princesse Clair-de-lune', or in Tamazight, as the story of Thiziri ('ⵜⴰⴳⴷⴰⵢⵜ'), a widowed mother who struggles to feed her seven children.¹⁸⁶ 'Texte' offers an anchoring point for its Moroccan readers and listeners and functions, at once, as a moral fable which makes broad allusion to both Morocco's recent history of occupation and its then-present history of authoritarian populism that would develop as *les années de plomb* progressed. In exercising his right to creative licence in the combination of the *conte tifinagh* (or, less accurately, the 'conte berbère marocain') with the elevation of the city to the status of speaker, Nissaboury, like El Houadri, forms an anti-capitalist poetics of his own.

Nissaboury, in 'Texte', sends a clear and important message which encapsulates the vision and mission of *Souffles*-انفاس: to advance and elevate the literatures being written and published in North Africa, but most importantly, to resist and dismantle imperial and authoritarian regimes of power. The city's elevation to speaker, and the interweaving of the city-speaker's insecurities with the tale of Thiziri, emphasize the anti-capitalist nature of *Souffles*-انفاس and its dedication to the revalorisation of North African culture. As if to delegitimise the impact of Arab, Roman, and European imperialism on the cultural and social histories of present-day North Africa, Nissaboury

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., lines 16-20.

¹⁸⁵ Nissaboury, p. 45, lines 37-40.

¹⁸⁶ Making a deal with an ogress ('Tyriel', or ⵜⴰⴳⴷⴰⵢⵜ) who offers to provide for the family across seven difficult winters in exchange for Thiziri's eldest son. Thiziri soon finds that she has been deceived and must convince her son to live as an ogre so that he is not, too, devoured by the child-sacrificing ogress, Tyriel. Nissaboury's city-speaker presents a similar narrative; the city worries, like Thiziri, for the welfare of those under their guardianship. Léonore Canéri, 'L'ogresse et la princesse Clair-de-lune (conte kabyle)', 7 May 2018. *Maison de la Culture*, <<https://www.maisondelaculture.pf/logresse-et-la-princesse-clair-de-lune-conte-kabyle/>> [accessed 11 April 2025].

does not dwell on the duty of the people to serve their city but presents a city ready and willing to serve and defend its people.

Despite Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury's shared yet distinct experiences of their home city, Casablanca, the lives of these two poets seem to have followed different trajectories. The poems depict a city that has, ultimately, been stripped of its associations with empire in its many conceptions, whether Arab, Roman or European. El Houadri returns Casablanca to its animals, creating a biting satire of Moroccan politics during the early years of *les années de plomb* and offers a poem which presents a poetic rewinding of Morocco's most important cultural and urban centres. This, El Houadri intimates throughout the poem, is preferable to the speaker's current 'lived' environment. Nissaboury, in contrast, chooses to concentrate his poetic focus on the relationship between the lived environment and those whose lives unravel within it. This promotes unity in resistance against regimes of colonial and authoritarian power through the delinking of human lived experiences from colonial matrices of power across North Africa's history of occupation by Arab, Roman and European forces.

These two poems embody *Souffles*-انفاس's mission to elevate often unheard stories coming out of North Africa and Southwest Asia, centring its main goal to reconstitute both a national literature for countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco that exists at a distance from their associations with French colonialism and empire.

Conclusion

Across its short history, *Souffles*-انفاس made significant contributions to the Moroccan literary, political and social landscape. The journal jump-started the careers of many of the names associated with the literatures being published in North Africa since its disbandment in 1972, such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Driss Chraïbi, and Abdelkebir Khatibi. However, for all its significance as a site of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian literary resistance, *Souffles*-انفاس' commitment to the elevation of Arab national literatures is limited to those in French and Arabic, a narrow perspective on the true diversity of creative and cultural production in North Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, including Tamazight-language cultural production. It also features very little in the way of works produced by women writers.

Yet *Souffles*-انفاس has nonetheless paved the way for the many who have followed in the footsteps of Abdellatif Laâbi, Mohamed Khaïr-Eddine, Mostafa El Nissaboury and Hamid El Houadri. The journal is the first of many such publications to become an advocate, guardian, and preserver of a Moroccan national literature that would continue to emerge in the years following the journal's disbandment. This authorly and political duty to the preservation of a Moroccan national literature would be taken up again by *Intégral* (1971–77), founded by Mohamed Melehi, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Mostafa El Nissaboury, and continued later, in 1981, by *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* and its rédactrice-en-chef, Zakya Daoud.

The anti-colonial, anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist spirit of Laâbi's *Souffles*-انفاس is captured today in the form of a new, yet related publication: *Souffles Monde: A Pan-African Journal and Platform*, established in 2023 by Brahim El Guabli. Comfortably taking over the reins of the *Souffles*-انفاس legacy, the mission statement of *Souffles Monde* notes that 'our time is different from the 1970s [...] In resurrecting *Souffles*, we are not striving to resurrect the mother-journal but rather envisioning to build off of this history to put the broader North Africa into dialogue with itself

and the wider world'.¹⁸⁷

The journal's switch from a space of sanctuary for freedom of expression and experimentation for writers seeking to rebuild the 'national literatures' of North Africa reflects its cognisance of the real, embodied impact of living in conditions that still reflect echoes of coloniality-imperialism under the then newly installed authoritarian governance of King Hassan *années de plomb*. The poems of Souffles-انفاس's many editions, at social and political levels, are committed to striving towards positive social and political change, as is reflected in the works of its contributors. These works are shared because they are an anchoring point for their readership, which consistently reminds the reader of the journal's purpose: to dismantle common ideas of literature as a space of escapism from the outside world, and to reconstruct how literature is seen and known – as an important tool of resistance against the harsh modes of political leadership that shape the embodied realities of everyday life. The poems of Hamid El Houadri and Mostafa El Nissaboury communicate aspects of Moroccan culture that pre-exist its multiple encounters with coloniality and imperialism, and the authoritarian leadership of King Hassan II.

What is key, as the journal upholds, to the restoration of a national literature is to do away with the many colonial matrices of power and cultural imperialism that have influenced how people see and know Moroccan culture and society in the present day. Souffles-انفاس is a cultural touchstone that translates the abstract, theoretical information of the 'intellectual' into practical knowledge to be used to dismantle and resist colonial-imperial and authoritarian systems of power as necessary steps towards positive political change. This, most importantly, encapsulates the essence of both literature and politics: to bring people together and create communities and movements that, together, will encourage and facilitate the social change that we see in contemporary Moroccan literature, which bears the same self-reflexive qualities as Souffles-انفاس's earliest contributions. Just as *Souffles Monde* offers to fulfil such a promise, *Souffles-انفاس* offers a promise fulfilled.

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¹⁸⁷ Brahim El Guabli, 'Our mission & history: Souffles: The Platform of Post-colonial Subjectivity', *Souffles Monde: A Pan-African Journal and Platform*, <<https://www.soufflesmonde.com/mission>> [accessed 11 April 2025].

BOOK REVIEWS

Frantz Fanon: Gender, Torture and Biopolitics of Colonialism. By AZZEDINE HADDOUR. London: Pluto Press, 2025. 232 pp. ISBN 978-0-7453-4154-5.

Azzedine Haddour, author of the relatively recent *Frantz Fanon, Postcolonialism and the Ethics of Difference* (2019), has published another work on the Martinican psychiatrist who plunged into the maelstrom of postwar African revolutions, particularly the violent Algerian War of Independence against French colonialism. The Algerian Revolution ignited November 1, 1954, on the heels of the ignominious defeat of the French imperialist military in Vietnam at Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954. In keeping with Haddour's poststructuralism, particularly that of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, the discursive formation of French colonialism Haddour lays bare is at once engaging and anomalous.

Haddour's primary contribution in *Fanon: Gender, Torture and the Biopolitics of Colonialism* (2025) is his excavation of primary source materials documenting France's construction of its settler colonial state in Algeria, taken from archival texts and repositories (for instance, the *Collection du Centenaire de l'Algérie 1830–1930*, a documentary archival collection commemorating the centenary of France's colonisation of Algeria). More than previous excursions into the colonial field of Fanonian theory and *praxis*, Haddour engages in a forensic investigation of multiple sites and discursive formations of medicolegal policymaking, urban and regional planning, serial constructions of hygienic *cordons sanitaires*, technological radiophonic interventions, household economics, and civic engagement campaigns in gendered deculturation of Algerian society. Haddour's construction *via* deconstruction of the colonial environment in which Fanon practiced psychotherapy and revolution benefits researchers in foregrounding the field or terrain of Fanonian *praxis*, which in most Fanon Studies is no more than background noise in which Fanon scholars and critics endeavor to locate the Fanonian signal. In Haddour's case, however, it is the noise of French imperialist colonisation of Algeria that is privileged. Though Haddour provides a compelling analysis, for example, of French communications warfare and both the FLN's and regional Arab states' efforts to circumvent it, he privileges the French colonisation to such an extent that his text loses sight of Fanon's theorisation of an Algerian subject of revolution, either because it focuses on the discursive formation of the colonial edifice or because it renders the Algerian subject as subjugated, instead of Fanon's *revolutionary* subject.

Haddour's forensic investigation of primary source materials presents as a 'crime scene' of a colonial edifice that Frantz Fanon's lifework engaged in radically deconstructing. However, behind the postmodernist episteme 'deconstruction' lies Fanon's unassailable imperative of *revolution*, the revolutionary theory and *praxis* of the 'damned of the earth'. Haddour provides a necessary service in excavating a discursive history of French colonisation of Algeria, particularly its medicolegal construction of *cordons sanitaires* (apartheid), through a series of colonial policies that assume the ideological expression of the materiality of French colonial hospital and clinic construction. This conveys a sense of the sociohistorical environment into which Fanon stepped in 1953 to practice psychiatry and engage in a nascent revolutionary *praxis* of decolonisation. Nevertheless, the measure of Haddour's literary strategy remains the measure of what Fanon himself practiced, *viz.*, centering the discourse of decolonization on a *subject of revolution* – the Algerian people. And by this yardstick, Haddour's work, despite its originality, is left wanting.

Haddour painstakingly renders the oppressive edifice of French colonisation as a process

of state construction of an apartheid society, which he explicates via Althusser's ISA (ideological state apparatus) concept, with particular *foci* devoted to the medicalisation of colonialism and its hygienic practices. On the one hand, he examines the deculturation of Algerian society by way of decentring the Algerian woman from sociocultural relations, beginning with French colonialism's all-out assault on "the veil," the *haïk* (France's obsession with the *haïk* persists into the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by France's numerous authoritarian campaigns against Muslim women and girls wearing various forms of the veil or head coverings in French social institutions). So, whereas Fanon recreates the dialectics of liberation at the heart of Algerian decolonisation (dying colonialism) and centres the subject of revolution against the colonial edifice that Haddour's text has deepened our understanding of, Haddour loses the thread of the dialectics of revolution of a subject irrevocably engaged in the sociohistorical act of liberating themselves *by any means necessary*. Thus, while we are afforded deeper insight into the colonial edifice as a project of what Haddour, borrowing from Foucault, calls 'biopolitics' (which inspired Haddour's own postmodernist neologism, 'nosopolitics'), we are none the wiser regarding the dialectics of liberation of the Algerian revolutionary subject.

Haddour's treatment of Frantz Fanon is not the first to beg the question: what self-limitations are involved in non-revolutionary theorists writing about a revolutionary theorist like Frantz Fanon? That this is not a parochial question of periodisation of Fanon scholarship, let alone 'waves' of Fanonian scholarship, is confirmed by the multiple, ongoing resurfacings, or leveling up of Frantz Fanon in the midst of revolutionary movements, from the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s to the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter global movement in the second decade of the twenty-first century, to global protests today against Palestinian genocide in Israeli-occupied Gaza. The meaning of Frantz Fanon 'at the barricades' turns on the mass recognition by successive generations of would-be revolutionaries that his thought and the global transmission of his meme (image) represent the self-conscious recognition of new revolutionary generations that he famously projected in *Wretched* would be tasked with discovering their mission, fulfilling it, or betraying it. Thus, it isn't so much history, let alone the 'historical record,' which impels us to measure the veracity of Haddour's discourse on Frantz Fanon by the dialectics of revolution. Instead, it is the pull of the present historic moment that makes Fanon's recreation of the dialectics of liberation, not only in general in Africa and the Third World, but quite specifically as he caught its emergence in the Algerian revolution, neither reducible to Foucauldian biopolitics, nor to nosopolitics (however construed). Fanon's is not a theory of subjugation (à la Foucault), nor an ethno-sociology (à la Bourdieu). In a word, Fanon's theory is a theory of revolution, or it is nothing, to paraphrase Karl Marx's spelling out the sociohistorical imperative of the working class.

Finally, there remains the anomaly of what Haddour misreads as 'Marxism' in the penultimate chapter of his work. Despite his apparent defence of the Marxian dimension of Fanon's thought, from the outset of Chapter Seven, Haddour commits the conceptual error of thinking that the PCF, the Stalinist French Communist Party, is synonymous with Marxism, and thus the egregious mistake of measuring Fanon's Marxism by the PCF's caricature of Marxism. Since, however, he correctly sees that the PCF and the SFIO (the Social Democratic Party of France) provided fertile ground for the emergence of colonial fascism in the 1950s, Haddour is compelled to distance his reading of Fanon's Marxism from the ideological bankruptcy of French socialism and turn to Fanon's last philosophic testament to the dialectics of revolution, viz., *The Wretched of the Earth* to conclude that Fanon reworked Marxist theory. Without addressing the

misconceptions regarding 'Marxism' and Fanon's 'Marxist' critics in the final chapter of the work, Haddour's monograph is an otherwise compelling work of excavating French colonial archives to map the colonial terrain that Frantz Fanon's critical analysis of the dialectic of France's 'dying colonialism' rendered by revolutionary Algeria. That and not Haddour's liberal assumptions about Fanon's mythical French republicanism makes Fanon a contemporary and a comrade.

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Decolonial Care, Reimagining Caregiving in the French Caribbean. By JENNIFER BOUM MAKE. Rutgers University Press, 2025. 219pp. ISBN: 978-1-9788-4046-1.

In this book, Jennifer Boum Make investigates decolonial kinds of care from the perspective of those who live in the impact of uncaring situations perpetuated by the predatory ideology of colonialism. By placing the French Caribbean at the centre of reconfiguring practices of care, the study expands the gendered definition of caring which informed the 1980s Northern American scholarship to the race and class discrepancies enmeshed in the history of transatlantic slavery. In the context of colonial enslavement, care was a commodified resource, which leads to the absurd and unjust situation, until today, in which the women caregivers of the postcolonial domestic spheres, whose roles were and still are essential for maintaining life, remain unacknowledged. Each of the four chapters of the book renders visible the complexity of caregiving in the context of environmental erosion and plantocratic domination which continue to damage life in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the aftermath of slavery. A major contribution to the field of Caribbean cultural analysis, the book remarkably analyses a variety of contemporary French Caribbean corpuses, from novels to graphic narratives and exhibitions, offering in-depth, close-reading and interdisciplinary analysis that dialogue with each other to complicate the meaning of care and identify decolonial practices of self-care and caring for others.

Chapter one enquires how curating silences can turn into a positive strategy to emerge from uncaring practices shaped by colonialism, leaning on the other sense of the term curating as restoring to health. By analysing the 2019 exhibition *Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse* at the Mémorial ACTe alongside Fabienne Kanor's 2020 novel *Humus*, Jennifer Boum Make examines texts and discourses that interrogate both the impossibility of narrating silenced lives and the limits of historical representation. In doing so, she shows how these works restore individuality to Caribbean women anonymized and commodified by colonial history, inviting readers to care by attending to voices long-denied names and existence.

Chapter two investigates care from the perspective of the BUMIDOM, a state-regulated agency through which 200,000 people from French Guyana, Réunion, Martinique and Guadeloupe came to France between 1963 and 1982 with a one-way ticket to work as carers and form a cheap caring labour source. The invisibilized BUMIDOM workforce emerges from the testimonial written by the Martinican Françoise Ega in 1978 *Lettre à une Noire*, while she was placed as a housekeeper in Marseille and echoes the personal stories told by Jessica Oublié in her 2017 graphic novel *Péyi An Nou*. Informed by the recent scholarship that contextualized the exploitative and harming methods of BUMIDOM in the context of postwar economy, rural depopulation in France and anticolonial social movements in the overseas departments, Boum Make establishes a subtle

archive which pays attention to those French Caribbean carers, witnessing their harsh and silenced experience as depersonalized and closely dominated individuals under the control of their metropolitan employers.

Chapter three offers an innovative overview of literary strategies that negotiate the tensions between the colonial-environmental damage of the land and the possibility of recovery for its inhabitants. Boum Make brings into conversation Gisèle Pineau's novel *Morne Căpresse* (2008), and the failed green utopia of Mère Pacôme's female only congregation project, with Jessica Oublié's second graphic novel *Tropiques Toxiques* that documents real life testimonials and photographs of Guadeloupians intoxicated by chlordecone. Centred around contrasting formulations of the garden that implicitly bring to mind Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics*, the chapter documents the struggle of caregivers to implement restorative practices of care but also the lack of care that haunts those who are learning and willing to learn to inhabit a polluted land, inviting the reader to 'contemplate practices of care that can be salvaged in a world that has turned to a wild garbage dump'(p. 104).

Chapter four offers a new approach on the myth of the *Potomitan* woman by deconstructing the archetype of the strong and resilient female carer. Instead, Boum Make offers a compelling reading of Frida's murder and suicide in Fabienne Kanor's novel *D'Eaux Douces* (2004) as a liberating act of self-care by using violence to restore her denied selfhood, in dialogue with Gael Octavia's unmaking of the taboo of vulnerability in *La bonne histoire de Madelaine Démétrius* (2020) to interrogate as much the possibilities as the limitations that come with the representation of Caribbean women and girls in fiction.

Through subtle conversations with scholars of feminism and decolonial care, from Joan Tronto (1993), Pascale Molinier (2013), Sandra Laugier (2021) and Fabienne Brugère (2011) to Françoise Vergès (2019) and Elsa Dorlin (2019), Jennifer Boum Make proposes a necessary reevaluation of the meaning and possibilities of care, which invites the reader to participate in an 'aspiring-to-be-caring world' (p. 35).

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Creole Cinema: Memory Traces. By LOUISE HARDWICK. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025. 272pp. Hb. £96. ISBN: 97-8-1836-2431-20

Louise Hardwick's fascinating new monograph, *Creole Cinema: Memory Traces*, is the first book-length study of Francophone Caribbean cinema, and thus a very welcome addition to scholarship on Francophone Caribbean culture. Specifically, the study investigates a body of films which Hardwick terms a 'creole cinema' as they foreground Creole language and culture while also participating in important postcolonial debates surrounding memory, nation, and identity. The analysis of these films is theorized through Patrick Chamoiseau's work on the 'trace-mémoire', a concept which Chamoiseau has always located at the intersections of literature and visual culture since his collaboration with French photographer Rodolphe Hammadi on the phototext *Guyane: traces-mémoires du bagne* (1994). Hardwick deftly shows how Chamoiseau's notion of the trace-mémoire – which foregrounds latent marginalized and suppressed memories through reference to 'heightened haptics and sensory perception' (p. 23) – can be applied both to Chamoiseau's own

cinematic collaborations and to a broader corpus of Francophone Caribbean films produced over an extensive period, from the 1980s to the 2000s.

The book follows a clear and logical structure. Following an introduction which theorizes ‘creole cinema’ with reference to the trace-mémoire (as well as to Laura Marks’s notion of intercultural cinema and Hamid Nacify’s work on accented cinema), the first chapter provides a very useful overview of Francophone Caribbean cinema and its production, as well as a historiographical study of the emergence of Caribbean cinema as a field of study. Each chapter then considers a specific film as a case study, through the lens of one of the components of creole cinema, as theorized by Chamoiseau. Chapter Two investigates the theme of memory in *Biguine* (2004), a collaboration between Chamoiseau and Guy Deslauriers; Chapter Three examines community in *Nord-Plage* (2004), a collaboration this time between Chamoiseau and José Hayot; Chapter Four turns to intersectional discussions of race and gender in Euzhan Palcy’s groundbreaking film *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983); and Chapter Five analyses the role of violence in Jean-Claude Barny’s *Nèg marron* (2005). A brief concluding chapter brings these four case studies together very well.

This extremely well researched and well written monograph has many strengths. Chapter One, ‘Boundary Crossings’, examines a very large and wide-reaching corpus of Francophone Caribbean films and reviews both the history and historiography of filmmaking in the Francophone Caribbean, an area of Caribbean cultural production which has been somewhat neglected in academic scholarship. Furthermore, the theorisation of creole cinema through the lens of the ‘trace-mémoire’ is rigorous and convincing; Hardwick demonstrates very clearly the value of engaging with Chamoiseau’s conceptualisation of memory beyond the literary sphere. The analysis of the four primary films of Hardwick’s corpus is rich and compelling, and she also refers to other works in a filmmaker’s oeuvre where appropriate (such as in Chapter Two, in which she briefly discusses the film *Aliker*, a later collaboration between Chamoiseau and Deslauriers dating from 2009). The analysis is also supplemented with reference to paratextual material, such as published interviews with the directors and ‘making-of’ footage available on DVD versions of the films. In addition, still images from the films help to bring the material to life, while the detailed filmography at the back of the book enhances its pedagogical value as a teaching tool and work of reference.

Perhaps more could be said to justify the inclusion of the four films in the primary corpus. Given that Chamoiseau worked on the script of the first two films, their inclusion in this study of creole cinema seems more obvious, but why have the other two films been selected over others? It would also be interesting to reflect on the importance of this paradigm for more recent films, given that the most recent film in the corpus dates from 2005, now twenty years ago. Has Francophone Caribbean cinema produced in the last twenty years engaged with these questions of language, memory, and identity in similar ways?

Overall, this is a highly original and engaging study of Francophone Caribbean cinema which will be essential reading to scholars and students of Francophone postcolonial studies and screen studies. The translations provided in English render the work accessible to non-French speakers, while the contextual and historiographical chapters will make for excellent teaching material for students. An essential read for all cinephiles.

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Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies

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