

FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

*Engagement in Twenty-first Century  
French and Francophone Culture*



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FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

*Engagement in Twenty-  
first Century French and  
Francophone Culture*

*Countering Crises*

*Edited by*

HELENA CHADDERTON  
AND ANGELA KIMYONGÜR



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# Series Editors' Preface

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This series showcases the work of new and established scholars working within the fields of French and francophone studies. It publishes introductory texts aimed at a student readership, as well as research-orientated monographs at the cutting edge of their discipline area. The series aims to highlight shifting patterns of research in French and francophone studies, to re-evaluate traditional representations of French and francophone identities and to encourage the exchange of ideas and perspectives across a wide range of discipline areas. The emphasis throughout the series will be on the ways in which French and francophone communities across the world are evolving into the twenty-first century.



Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara







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popular fiction: Remembering the Algerian War of Independence in contemporary French crime fiction', *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 2014; 'Dominique Manotti and the *roman noir*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2013. She is currently working on a monograph about the politics of contemporary French crime fiction.

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## Introduction

# *Engagement* in Twenty-first-Century French and Francophone Culture: Countering Crises

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HELENA CHADDERTON AND ANGELA KIMYONGÜR

The question of the responsibility of the artist towards the society in which s/he lives has been contested in the French context at least since the writings of Flaubert and Baudelaire and the credo of 'l'art pour l'art' versus 'l'art social'.<sup>1</sup> The view that art should be independent of political ideas, that it should function according to its own laws and fulfil a need of its own is encapsulated in a statement by the Goncourt brothers, that 'l'artiste, l'homme de lettres, le savant, ne devraient jamais se mêler de politique: c'est l'orage qu'ils devraient laisser passer au-dessus d'eux.'<sup>2</sup> While this philosophy thus serves as the backdrop to contemporary Francophone culture, the relationship between culture and society has nonetheless been disputed as a result of moments of crisis, not least in 1898, when Zola published his famous open letter 'J'accuse' in order to take a public stand over the Dreyfus affair in his capacity as a writer. The concept of *engagement* itself emerged in the early twentieth century, and while Sartre is often considered to be the initiator of the idea, it was already at the centre of discussions between writers such as Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland in the 1920s<sup>3</sup> and, in the 1930s, in the pages of the review *Esprit*, founded in 1932 as a forum for the discussion of politics and culture.<sup>4</sup> However, it was Sartre's theorising of *engagement* in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* in 1948 that had the greater, more lasting influence on the debate. What all

of these interventions have in common is that the discussion of the artist's responsibility at these different moments in time takes place in the wake of moments of crisis: Zola and the Dreyfus affair; Barbusse and Rolland in the aftermath of the First World War; *Esprit* in the context of the sharp ideological polarisation between left and right, Communism and Fascism, both within France and wider Europe, that characterised the 1930s; Sartre following the Second World War.

Indeed the Nazi occupation of France resulted in a fracturing of the French intellectual scene, as the act of writing increasingly became a highly political and committed act. At one pole, writers such as Aragon, Vercors, Éluard and many others, often with a left-wing political allegiance, became involved with the intellectual resistance and put their pens at the service of its cause, while at the other end of the spectrum, others of a right-wing persuasion collaborated with the German enemy. Under Vichy, Robert Brasillach continued his editorial duties at *Je suis partout*, while Pierre Drieu la Rochelle became editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, both very much at the heart of French cultural collaboration with the Germans. On both sides of the divide, writing and cultural expression were intimately linked with political positions.<sup>5</sup> In the postwar period, when Sartre was articulating his theories of the engaged writer, the political and cultural dominance of the left, engendered in part by the experience of occupation and resistance, ensured the continuation of a climate favourable to overtly political writing. However, even at this time there was wariness among intellectuals about the risks of placing their writing too emphatically at the service of a cause. Just as Sartre refused to surrender his personal and artistic freedom by aligning himself unequivocally with a particular party, Camus was equally wary of using his writing as a vehicle for an ideology, and indeed in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech compared the truly committed artist to the *franc-tireur* or guerrilla fighter in the context of war.<sup>6</sup> During the Cold War, as cultural positions within the French Communist Party (PCF) became ever more entrenched in response to the deepening political divides within Europe, and as writers who had joined the party endeavoured to tie their works ever closer to the expression of partisan political views, antipathy to what many saw as the cultural excesses of socialist realism became a factor in the desire of writers to dissociate themselves from the expression of a political stance in



their writing. Tony Judt has suggested that the self-imposed blindness of the French intellectual to the realities of Stalinism led to the violence of the shock that followed the collapse of Communist support in France in the aftermath of Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956.<sup>7</sup> Following this came the arguable failure of the events of 1968 and the disappointments engendered by the return to power of the left in 1981.<sup>8</sup> Such political realities in France arguably led to not just a generalised sense of powerlessness on the left, but moreover an increased suspicion of an unproblematic association between literature and politics, while globally, the advent of postmodernism and the blurring of the ideological frontiers between left and right culminating in the dominance of neo-liberalism, have further contributed to a sense of political, social and cultural impotence.

Theoretical developments have also influenced perceptions of *engagement*. Sartrean *engagement* was already losing its currency in the 1960s when interest in literary experimentation (embodied in works associated with *le nouveau roman* and with Oulipo) started to take precedence over the work of writers who used their creative talents to express a political view. Barthes's 'death of the author' and the focus on readerly responses to texts, as opposed to authorial intention, had already created an environment in which the notion of a writer using a text as an unproblematically transparent means to promote a political viewpoint was falling from grace. Expression of support in literary works for specific causes was replaced by the abstract generalities of structuralism, the revolutionary practices of the *nouveau roman* and the tendency to concentrate on the *engagement* of form, most famously theorised by Roland Barthes in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, in which he sees the poetic of language as the starting point for *engagement*.<sup>9</sup> Alongside the decline of the figure of the engaged writer, satirised as the '*grantécrivain*' by Dominique Noguez,<sup>10</sup> the authority of the public intellectual in the twenty-first century has also irrevocably waned. Furthermore, recent years have seen growing criticism of the contemporary French literary scene, in part as a result of the perceived disconnect between the French novel and social and political realities.<sup>11</sup> In response to this, the critical narrative surrounding French literature began to chart what was called a 'retour au récit', or return to the story,<sup>12</sup> as well as a revival of and re-engagement with not only storytelling, but also with the subject

and the contemporary world around us. In addition, there is a proliferation of scholarly work returning to the concept of literary *engagement*.<sup>13</sup> The work of philosopher Jacques Rancière and contemporary literature scholar Dominique Viart, among others, has provided frameworks which help to redefine and theorise the concept of *engagement* for contemporary times. Rancière's work on the role of the political in culture has been seminal. He has conceived of new ways of reading the relationship and influence between politics and literature, including the capacity of literature to disrupt 'le partage du sensible'.<sup>14</sup> This refers to the destabilisation of established power configurations and literature's ability to render visible traditionally excluded groups. While noting the increased contemporary literary interest in social realism and political reality, Dominique Viart nevertheless rejects the sense that we are seeing a return to *littérature engagée*. Indeed he considers that literature is seeing the creation of a new genre, which he labels 'fiction critique'. Essential to this concept is the idea that the 'positivité' and call to action which was such a part of Sartrean *engagement* and depended so much on the authority of the intellectual, is in fact replaced by an interrogation of both content and form. As Viart shows, the 'fiction critique' brings into question both means and methods, in that it 'porte bien à la fois sur l'objet et sur son traitement [...]'<sup>15</sup> Indeed Viart suggests that these new forms of what can, nonetheless, be considered politically involved literature, problematise not only their socio-political subject, but also any canonical attempts to represent that subject, and, in addition, their own attempts to remedy this lack.

While literature thus continues to play a key role in the unfolding story of *engagement*, in a cultural context within which the boundaries between high and low/mainstream and popular culture are increasingly fluid, this collection testifies to the fact that it is only one *engagé* form among others. Indeed despite the contested legacy of *engagement*, this collection demonstrates that French and Francophone writers, artists, intellectuals and film-makers are using their work in order to confront unforeseen and unprecedented challenges, campaigns and causes in a politically uncertain post-9/11 world. This volume is thus interdisciplinary in its treatment of *engagement* in a variety of forms as we reassess the relationship between different types of cultural production and society as it is played out in the twenty-first century. For

this reason, the essays in this book are not grouped according to discipline, but rather into two broad sections which allow us to examine both the nature of the crises addressed in the contemporary Francophone world and the specific ways in which cultural forms have shifted to accommodate both our changing world and our changing understanding of *engagement*.

Part 1, entitled ‘Culture in crisis? Evolving cultural forms in the twenty-first century’, takes as its focus the way in which particular cultural forms and frameworks have reinvented themselves, or have found a new motivation in their reaction to changing crises and a changing world. In Chapter 1 Helena Chadderton identifies *la fiction d'affaires* (workplace fiction) as a literary genre which overcomes the simplistic division between *engagement* of content and *engagement* of form. With reference to the work of contemporary French writers Thierry Beinstingel and François Bon, she shows that their focus on neo-liberal work practices through an interrogation of language and textual features represents a new form of *engagement*. Rachel Howarth’s chapter on *la chanson engagée* adopts a popular music perspective in order to explore French singer-songwriter Renaud’s *engagement* as articulated through his songs, performances, and writing. She focuses in particular on the tensions between perceptions of him as a politically engaged singer and his identity as *auteur-compositeur-interprète* in the tradition of French *chanson* within the increasingly commercialised context of entertainment in twenty-first-century France. In Chapter 3, Sophie Noël turns to the world of publishing to explore the impact of the small independent presses that have emerged in France in the past twenty-five years in the field of social critique. The books that they publish, usually within the social sciences, often take a stance of opposition to the excesses of neo-liberalism, and Noël presents them here as new forms of intellectual and political *engagement*. Chris Tinker’s analysis of television benefit concerts also explores a phenomenon of *engagement*, rather than a material product. The long-running television coverage of ‘Les Enfoirés’ benefit concerts, together with the associated discussion and debate programmes, provides a unique resource for understanding and re-evaluating the role of popular performers engaged in charitable activities that have often been associated with arousing emotion whilst at the same time simplifying, decontextualising and depoliticising the

causes that they seek to promote. In Sam Wilkinson's chapter on the work of France's most prominent caricaturist, he examines the stances taken by Plantu in his portrayals of French political life, focusing particularly on his treatment of incumbent President Sarkozy and François Hollande during the 2012 presidential election campaign. In particular, he employs Peter Kemp's distinction between 'causes particulières' and 'causes fondamentales' to nuance the underlying differences between Plantu's status as a figure of the centre left and unexpected aspects of his representation of the respective presidential candidates in 2012. In the final chapter of this section, Angela Kimyongür's discussion of the work of Dominique Manotti focuses on French crime writing as a genre within which a generation of writers, many with left-wing political affiliations, have displayed a social, political or ethical conscience in their critique of contemporary French society. This chapter identifies the ways in which Manotti deploys the investigative structure of the crime novel in order to lay bare political and economic corruption, and situates her work within the framework of *engagement*.

Where Part 1 focused on the development of cultural forms, the chapters in Part 2 shift the emphasis to the particular crises in contemporary French and Francophone society that have attracted the attention of cultural practitioners. Andrea Hynynen's chapter is the volume's second contribution on crime fiction, reflecting the important role played by the genre in responding to the concerns of the real world. In this case, Hynynen shows how Dominique Sylvain's Ingrid Diesel and Lola Jost series promotes multiculturalism and globalisation as a response to the divisive rhetoric that emerged post-9/11, and concludes that although Sylvain distances herself from the idea of *littérature engagée* typical of the *roman noir*, she writes crime fiction comedy that nonetheless addresses serious global events. Clive Hunter explores how the works of Michel Houellebecq evoke a sense of crisis in dominant masculinity. He argues that Houellebecq's works manipulate contemporary discourses of masculinity in crisis as a strategic response to forces that would seek to precipitate the deconstruction of dominant masculinity, and that the portrayal of masculinity in crisis in Houellebecq's works is in fact complicit with an order that privileges the white heterosexual male and that seeks to reassert his dominance. At the time this collection went to press, crises of

migration had taken on increased urgency and Sophie Watt's timely contribution examines French photographer Mathieu Pernot's use of photographic images in parallel with text in order to address the silenced history of migrants to France. She argues that his work 'Les Migrants' reaches beyond political statement and creates a historical and critical text that reinscribes the story of the refugees within a neo-colonial and global context in which France plays a major role. Jean-Frédéric Hennuy's chapter on Michel Onfray's creation of the Université Populaire of Caen explores philosophy as an existential practice of everyday *engagement*. His chapter analyses how Onfray's initiative constitutes a philosophical, educational and political *engagement* which attempts to counteract the current state of crisis in education. Finally, Charlotte Baker considers the work of contemporary Francophone writer Fatou Diome, who is concerned with the complexity of identity in the twenty-first century. The committed literature of anticolonial writers and then of those highlighting the injustices of postcolonial regimes has been replaced in Diome's work by a literature that is 'engaged' in a new sense of the word. This chapter examines the ways in which Diome's *Kétala* problematises the idea of France as a promised land for migrants, engages with the complexity and fluidity of postcolonial identities but, most importantly, demonstrates that aesthetic as well as political issues are now central to the question of *engagement* in the Francophone world.

This collection of essays will thus map and analyse some of the ways in which cultural texts of all kinds are being used to respond to, engage with, and challenge crises in the contemporary Francophone world. It aims to show how moments of crisis continue to inform evolving cultural forms, as well as how the development of those forms can allow a new understanding of the relationship between culture and social and political crises. The interdisciplinary nature of the collection, as well as our extreme contemporary treatment of the subject, will, we hope, allow us to open up debate in this area.

### Notes

- 1 'art for art's sake versus art with a social purpose'; see Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

- 2 'the artist, man of letters or intellectual should never get involved with politics: it's the storm that they should allow to pass over them'; Enzo Caramaschi, *Réalisme et impressionisme dans l'œuvre des frères Goncourt* (Paris: Nizet, 1971), p. 96.
- 3 See D. J. Fisher, 'The Rolland–Barbusse Debate', *Survey*, 91–2 (1974), 121–59.
- 4 See David Schalk, *The Spectrum of Political Engagement: Mounier, Benda, Nizan, Brasillach, Sartre* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979). *Esprit* is currently described on its website as 'une revue d'idées engagée dans son temps' (<http://www.esprit.presse.fr/whoarewe/history.php>).
- 5 See Gisèle Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).
- 6 'Discours de Suède', in *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 1072.
- 7 Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–56* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).
- 8 Ironically, the Socialists' accession to power in 1981 was the trigger that motivated Dominique Manotti to turn to writing in her disenchantment with the possibilities for political action under Socialism. See Chapter 6 of this volume for details.
- 9 Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953).
- 10 Dominique Noguez, *Le Grantécrivain et autres textes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).
- 11 This actually began as early as 1960 in a speech given by Julien Gracq later published as 'Pourquoi la littérature respire mal', in *Préférences* (Paris: Corti, 1961), pp. 71–104. See also, among others, Jean-Marie Domenach, *Crépuscule de la culture française?* (Paris: Plon, 1995); William Marx, *L'Adieu à la littérature: Histoire d'une dévalorisation XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Minuit, 2005) and Tzvetan Todorov, *La littérature en péril* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007).
- 12 See, among others, Colin Davis and Elizabeth Fallaize, *French Fiction in the Mitterrand Years: Memory, Narrative, Desire*, Oxford Studies in European Culture (Oxford University Press, 2000) and Simon Kemp, *French Fiction into the Twenty-first Century: The Return to the Story* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010).
- 13 For example, E. Boujou (ed.), *L'engagement littéraire* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005) ; Benoît Denis, *Littérature et engagement* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Sonia Florey, *L'engagement littéraire à l'ère néolibérale* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Septentrion, 2012); B. Havercroft, P. Michelucci and P. Riendeau (eds), *Le roman français de l'extrême contemporain: écritures, engagements, énonciations* (Laval: Éditions Nota bene, 2010) and J. Kaempfer, S. Florey and J. Meizoz (eds), *Formes de l'engagement dans le champ littéraire* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2006).
- 14 Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000). This has been translated as both 'distribution of the sensible' in Gabriel Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) and 'distribution of the sensory' in Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (London: Polity Press, 2013). By 'sensible' or 'sensory', Rancière is referring to what can be apprehended through the senses: the visible and the audible in terms of who is speaking and who is heard.

- 15 'reflects both the object and the way in which it is represented'; Dominique Viart, '«Fictions critiques»: La littérature contemporaine et la question du politique', in J. Kaempfer, S. Florey and J. Meizoz (eds), *Formes de l'engagement dans le champ littéraire*, p. 195.

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Part 1

# Culture in Crisis? Evolving Cultural Forms in the Twenty- first Century

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# 1

## *Engagement in la fiction d'affaires: François Bon and Thierry Beinstingel*

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HELENA CHADDERTON

The treatment of social and political issues and formal experimentation have been traditionally polarised in the development of the French novel. Reflecting this polarisation, from the end of the 1980s, there has been a backlash against what is perceived to be the hegemony of formalism: against self-reflexivity and metatextual questioning, which arguably came to dominate the offerings of the French novel from the *nouveau roman* onwards. Indeed, there has been a revival of narrative which is socially and historically anchored to reality. This has involved a 'retour au récit', or return to the story, as summarised by Simon Kemp in *French Fiction into the Twenty-first Century: The Return to the Story*, as well as a renewed interest in history, and a preoccupation with contemporary social and political issues.<sup>1</sup> It is this final aspect of this revival which will interest us here. In March 2007, a campaign entitled 'Pour une littérature-monde en français' was launched in *Le Monde* to reinstate 'le monde, le sujet, le sens, l'histoire, le "réfèrent"' in French literature.<sup>2</sup> In the same way, Tzvetan Todorov, in his 2007 critique, *La littérature en péril*, laments what he perceives to be the metafictional posturing of French literature and calls for a return to the study of texts in terms of what they bring to 'la connaissance de l'humain'.<sup>3</sup> The quandary which contemporary writers now face is how to present the social and political world while nonetheless acknowledging the loss of innocence, the expected questioning of the relationship between language and the world, that has been



brought about by literary theory and recent literary movements, from Barthes's 'death of the author' to the *nouveau roman's* rejection of realism on the grounds that it is the creation of an illusion. Indeed, shortly after the peak of publications associated with the *nouveau roman*, Barthes asked: 'Notre littérature serait-elle toujours condamnée à ce va-et-vient entre le réalisme politique et l'art-pour-l'art, entre une morale de l'engagement et un purisme esthétique, entre la compromission et l'asepsie?'<sup>4</sup>

Despite a long and problematic history in the French context,<sup>5</sup> contemporary understanding of literary *engagement* is now largely constituted by a similar binary opposition. This opposition is represented on the one hand by the Sartrean understanding of the term, that a literary text functions as a call to action and that language functions instrumentally to contain a particular message,<sup>6</sup> and on the other, by Barthes's understanding of *engagement* of form and the poetic of language.<sup>7</sup> *La fiction d'affaires*,<sup>8</sup> or business fiction, is particularly interesting as a genre that aims to overcome this restrictive literary perception as it is very much 'of the world', rooted in social reality, and yet at the same time is a genre within which use of language is of the utmost importance. The blurb of *Dire le travail: fiction et témoignage depuis 1980*, a collected volume of writing on work, attempts to explain why:

Le monde des ouvriers, des employés et des cadres, observé, décrit, raconté ou fictionné pour lui-même, n'est pas un objet comme un autre, mais un de ceux qui ont le plus contribué à renouveler les formes narratives depuis trente ans en France et ailleurs dans le monde. Entre autres raisons parce que c'est un objet de langage: dans un monde où «l'entreprise» a imposé ses normes à la langue, le roman, comme la poésie, doit inventer les formes qui rendent toute sa puissance critique à la pensée.<sup>9</sup>

The manipulation of language has been one of the major ways of instigating often unwanted change in the workplace. Examples include the eradication of certain roles through changes in job title or the requirement not to deviate from prescribed scripts in communication with customers. Consequently, the relationship between language and the workplace is particularly productive in inspiring literary activity, as Bruno Blanckeman has shown:

La culture de la communication, dans le monde de l'entreprise et sur la scène publique, valorise la performance fonctionnelle de la langue au détriment de sa puissance signifiante. Dans ces

circonstances, la pratique du roman fait sens: ni conservatoire comme jadis, ni laboratoire comme naguère, elle *réanime* la langue.<sup>10</sup>

The language of neo-liberalism has been accused of impoverishing and limiting language, rendering it impersonal and emptied of meaning and value. Through examples from the work of contemporary authors François Bon and Thierry Beinstingel, this chapter will tease out the nature of the *réanimation* Blanckeman describes. Beinstingel makes the point that since ‘la culture d’entreprise’ has used language so aggressively to manipulate perceptions, we must respond using the same tools: ‘Dans cette perspective où l’entreprise tente une mainmise sur le langage, le roman et la fiction représentent peut-être la seule issue possible. En effet, comment dénoncer sinon en utilisant les mêmes armes?’<sup>11</sup>

The use of language as a tool, a medium and a means with which to capture, represent or reflect the social world is, however, challenged by François Bon. For this reason, he refuses the concept of *littérature engagée*, arguing that ‘La question de l’engagement part toujours d’un malentendu [...] parce qu’elle constitue le monde social et son actualité comme cible et but de l’activité d’écriture.’<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, this chapter will show how Bon’s refusal of this division is apparent both in his work and also in that of Thierry Beinstingel. Through examples from selected texts, which fit into the developing genre of *fiction d’affaires*, I will suggest that their work foregrounds the role of language and links it to situations of alienation and insecurity surrounding work. In this way, I will show how Bon and Beinstingel overcome the simplistic division between *engagement* of content and *engagement* of form in order to condemn the neo-liberal workplace, and in so doing, contribute to what can be seen as a new form of *engagement* for the twenty-first century. Alongside *la fiction d’affaires*, France has also seen a trend for *témoignages*, factual accounts that record the experiences of often difficult working conditions, set both in the present, such as Florence Aubenas’s *Le quai d’Ouistreham*<sup>13</sup>, in which the journalist went undercover as a contract cleaner, and in the past, such as Frank Magloire’s *Ouvrière*<sup>14</sup> and Aurélie Filipetti’s *Les derniers jours de la classe ouvrière*,<sup>15</sup> which both recall the authors’ parents’ experiences as factory workers. In *Ouvrière*, Magloire’s mother argues that the pages of the book are nothing more than ‘des copies de la vie’.<sup>16</sup> In focusing on fiction rather than such individual

testimonies, an additional aim of this chapter will be to establish the contribution of fiction to an understanding of the contemporary workplace.

François Bon has been writing since the early 1980s and is the author of over thirty full-length texts dealing largely with the working-class industrial and post-industrial experience. He has written several works which can be classified as *fiction d'affaires*: *Sortie d'usine* (1982), *Temps Machine* (1993) and *Daewoo* (2004). Bon himself worked in a factory and is clearly politically engaged; alongside his individual acts of writing, since 1992 he has held creative writing workshops in schools, prisons and community centres, and three of his books actually emerged from these classes. He talks about his reasons for publishing the novels in *Tous les mots sont adultes*: 'la voix des humbles, la voix des anonymes, ne résonne encore que bien trop faiblement dans la littérature.'<sup>17</sup> Yet Michel Ragon, in *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne de langue française*, describes Bon's style as: 'plus proche de Claude Simon que d'Emile Zola',<sup>18</sup> suggesting that Bon's commitment is to form rather than the highlighting of social ills. Indeed Bon is far more than a witness of social deprivation, rejecting the description of his work as 'l'écriture sur [quelque chose]'.<sup>19</sup> His objection to the preposition 'sur' as a divider between writing and subject of writing suggests that he does not consider the two to be connected by a simple relationship of means and message, or that he sees writing as a tool with which to capture an object external to itself. Indeed, what I will go on to show is that while Bon's work indisputably focuses on the social world, in so doing it nonetheless questions the representative relationship between language and the world. In *Sortie d'usine*, Bon evokes strike, hierarchy, accidents at work and the mind-numbing monotony and danger of factory work. Tellingly in *Daewoo*, published twenty-two years later, Bon deals this time with twenty-first-century crisis: the neo-liberal economic imperative forcing the closure of an otherwise profitable electronics factory.

*Daewoo*, named for the Korean electronics manufacturer, takes as its subject the closures of the Daewoo factories in Lorraine in 2003–4, amid circumstances mired in political and financial scandal.<sup>20</sup> Yet direct comments on social injustice or exploitation, such as this example at the opening of *Daewoo* in which the narrator explains his desire to undertake the project, are rare: 'parce que ce qui transperce l'actualité, séparant ou brisant ce qui était établi de façon stable entre les hommes et les choses, a disparu sans suffisant

examen préalable des conséquences' (p. 13).<sup>21</sup> Rather, in focusing on the materiality of language through his visceral and innovative style, Bon's work ineluctably links his content to representation and use of language, thereby encouraging new understandings of the situations he presents. In Bon's work we come across fragments, limited accounts, multiple voices, ellipses, repetition, delay and the switching of genres, all of which highlight, as the following examples from *Daewoo* show, the productive power of language to comment on its own usage.

Bon emphasises throughout *Daewoo* how his subjects express themselves: 'sa façon de dire les mots' (p. 103),<sup>22</sup> the rhythm and cadence of their voices, the kind of words they employ: 'Je notais à mesure, sur mon carnet, les phrases précises qui fixent une cadence, un vocabulaire' (p. 48).<sup>23</sup> Stories are told several times in different ways by different people, highlighting, as Korthals Altes has shown, the importance of 'des manières de dire et de voir'.<sup>24</sup> This interest in *how* is echoed on a structural level in that *Daewoo* is generically unstable. Indeed Bon's texts are infamously hybrid, allowing him to highlight different representative modes, something which has led him to publish with Minuit, Fayard and Verdier; all his works which appear with Verdier are classed as  *récits*. In 2007, Bon set up the collection 'Déplacements' with Seuil, which aimed to encourage the publication of unknown first-time authors and to break down generic norms. Bon, a leading light in the digital revolution, now self-publishes via his website *le tiers livre*. *Daewoo*, arguably the most generically unstable of Bon's texts, is made up of a mixture of interviews, narrative and what Bon calls 'theatre', in which his protagonists take it in turn to speak, although on the title page it claims to be a novel. In this way, the reader's attention is constantly drawn to the movement between different representative modes. The following example shows this generic clash in miniature in its use of concrete geographical information followed by a poetic image:

Mont-Saint-Martin c'est la périphérie immédiate de Longwy, une ville qui autrefois, quand les cheminées des usines remplissaient la nuit le ciel de leurs flammes orange, ne prenait pas assez soin d'elle, et maintenant paraît comme quelqu'un qui aurait maigri sans changer d'habitat' (p. 16).<sup>25</sup>

This generic hybridity also allows for a multiplicity of ways of telling, thus questioning the concept of unitary representation. The

use of theatre, for example, means that there is no organising voice through which to filter the workers' voices, thus allowing them freedom and agency. Bon's use of generic multiplicity allows the voices of all groups involved to be heard: those of the bosses, MPs, onlookers, his own, and those of individual workers. Further, extracts from outside the matrix text are imported directly into his narrative, giving a clear sense of the conflicting voices. In this example the worker's voice and a snatch of advertisement are juxtaposed: 'Et le casino, pour bien racler les sous. Les bandits manchots, j'ai essayé, une fois (mais pas deux): *300% de bonheur à partager, le cinquième casino de France sur plus de 150 établissements, 270 machines à sous et vidéo-poker*' (p. 201)<sup>26</sup> While such a technique increases the social realism of the text, it also functions as a reflexive act, questioning the capacity of text to represent reality without its actual inclusion. Again, the reader's attention is drawn to issues of representation.

In *Daewoo*, Bon talks of 'novlangue', the French translation of George Orwell's 'newspeak' made famous in *Nineteen Eight-Four* and since then used to refer to any deliberately obfuscatory use of language. In the following example Bon describes as 'novlangue' the language of administration, filled with euphemism and complexity, with which the former employees of the Daewoo factory are confronted as they wait anxiously for news and action:

*En effet, la facilité avec laquelle une personne sans emploi en retrouvera un autre dépend de la rapidité avec laquelle les entrepreneurs peuvent se départir des productions ne répondant plus aux attentes des consommateurs – qui sont eux-mêmes littéralement les employeurs des entrepreneurs. Cette mobilité du capital, si elle ne protège en rien les emplois liés aux productions périmées, constitue cependant la meilleure protection des emplois à venir – ceux qui sont justement liés aux productions qui ont désormais la faveur des consommateurs. Par voie de conséquence, les entraves artificielles à la mobilité des capitaux ne peuvent que rendre la recherche d'un nouvel emploi plus ardue pour tous. L'intelligence aurait dicté aux employés de l'usine sidérurgique de Forgeval ou de Cellatex de s'en prendre, non à leur employeur, mais bien aux butors syndicalistes réduisant le champ du possible pour tout le monde.* (p. 150)<sup>27</sup>

The italics are Bon's originals, highlighting the use of subordinating conjunctions, whose linguistic purpose should be to make



connections and facilitate comprehension. However, these conjunctions in fact have an ironic purpose, since they fail to render the ‘novlangue’ any less bewildering. As Viart has said: ‘[Bon] désigne [...] un monde où le langage est devenu plus souvent masque que révélation.’<sup>28</sup> As a contrast, Bon chooses to follow this long-winded discourse with short, snappy, simple, direct descriptions of strikes taking place all over France in one week of June 2003, as collated by Nadia Nasser, one of the laid-off workers. We are given the name of the industry involved, followed by a short account of the dispute and the actions taken by the workers, as in this example: ‘Sidérurgie. Les salariés de l’usine Metaleurop de Noyelles-Godault, dans le Pas-de-Calais, jettent des engins de chantier et des pains de sodium dans le canal qui jouxte l’usine, afin d’obtenir les indemnités au titre du préjudice moral que constitue leur licenciement’ (p. 150).<sup>29</sup> The only conjunction used here is ‘afin de’,<sup>30</sup> indicating a clear connection and purpose. My final example of language use in *Daewoo* is the attention Bon draws to the staff signs in the call centre he tours and compares to the closed factories. The jaunty familiarity of the language used in these signs belies the fact that every employment right has been fought for, even the right to toilet breaks: ‘les salles joyeusement signalées *repos*, ou *fumeurs*, où la *café*’ (p. 274).<sup>31</sup> Drawing attention to the subjective and political role of language highlights its significance in working life, and, in particular, in the context of social struggle.

Thierry Beinstingel, writing since the year 2000 and author of nine texts, also draws attention to use of language in the workplace. Beinstingel’s focus is the crisis of neo-liberalism and the alienation created by *la culture d’entreprise*. The writer has been described, similarly to Bon, in terms of his capacity to be both socially aware and linguistically playful: ‘un Balzac qui aurait croisé Perec’ according to Christine Rousseau.<sup>32</sup> Beinstingel’s first novel, *Central* (2000), gives the protagonist’s personal history of working at a telecommunications company, while *CV Roman* (2007) explores the concept of the CV. Language is key to Beinstingel’s work, to such an extent that he is adamant that his work is *about* language. Further, Beinstingel has suggested that the alienation felt by employees in contemporary workplaces (illustrated notably by a spate of suicides in the telecommunications sector in 2009)<sup>33</sup> is caused by their alienation from language.<sup>34</sup> In *Central*, then, in the author’s own words, he shows how ‘l’entreprise tente de hiérarchiser la valeur des

mots',<sup>35</sup> and in *CV Roman*, according to Chantal Michel, he shows how 'le langage normatif des CV influe sur nos vies'.<sup>36</sup>

In *CV Roman* the protagonist is redeployed within the company, which is down-sizing, to a new role which consists of finding new jobs for his colleagues. His new job title is 'conseiller mobilité référent' (p. 40) 'mobility counsellor'. Beinstingel deconstructs the connotative meanings of this for the reader: 'Le troisième mot ("référent") a un goût de craie, de marque, de repère. Cela fait animateur référent, animateur de quartier, c'est un adjectif qui insiste, force au pragmatisme, à l'obligation de résultats, celui auquel on se réfère, l'exemple, celui qui vient du même monde' (p. 43).<sup>37</sup> In this way he highlights both his loss of status and the way the words chosen insidiously dictate his role and his actions. Throughout this novel Beinstingel playfully uses the initial capitals of 'CV' to undermine the importance of this document, emphasise the significance of what is not included in a CV, and draw attention to the hopelessness of the CV rewriting task: 'CV comme Convaincre et Végéter ici pour une peine à durée indéterminée' (p. 178); 'CV comme Cramer une voiture' (p. 183); 'CV comme courir en vain' (p. 199).<sup>38</sup> He also focuses on the sound of signifiers, finishing chapters with random terms which often appear on a CV but choosing to group them according to their phonetic similarity, for example: 'Dispositions, expositions, situations' (p. 82); 'Occupations. Situations' (p. 106).<sup>39</sup> The effect is to satirise their lack of content. These word games function as an attack on the multiple acronyms and often nonsensical use of language faced by the workers that make up the 'novlangue' which regulates their everyday lives.

Beinstingel provides a comparison of different types of language used in the offering and seeking of jobs in *les petites annonces*. This is one of a series which juxtaposes individuals' simple and practical demands for work with companies' bombastic calls for candidates:

Assistante maternelle libre au 1<sup>er</sup> janvier cherche nourrisson.  
Proximité des lignes de bus uniquement.

Entreprise, ambitieuse dans la distribution de proximité, ambitieuse dans la transmission des valeurs de réputation et de partage de nos magasins, ambitieuse dans la réussite du groupe, référence internationale, plus de 7 000 enseignes dans 10 pays, propose poste de direction à candidat motivé. Soyez ambitieux et fier de l'être. Suivi personnalisé de votre carrière. (*CV Roman*, pp. 58–9)<sup>40</sup>

The difference between the jobs people actually seek, and what business tells them they seek, is striking, and is made all the more so by the use of language and presentation, such as the contrasting length of the advertisements, the use of simple or complex sentences, the repetition in the above example of ‘ambitieuse’ (ambitious), and the humble need for work apparent in the use of ‘chercher’ (to look for) versus the grandness of the company which chooses to ‘proposer’ (offer).

It is in *Central*, however, that Beinstingel carries out his most daring Oulipian experiment. When forced to reapply for their own jobs, the telecommunications workers are given the edict to write a job description for themselves without using personally conjugated verbs. Correspondingly, Beinstingel sets himself the challenge to write the novel, and include everything that is personal about work within it, without using conjugated verbs, recalling Georges Perec’s *La Disparition* (1968) which he wrote without using the letter ‘e’. This recourse to infinitives and present participles rather than conjugated verbs recalls the constraints placed upon the workers’ lives by company interference as well as the ultimate replaceability of the worker, reduced to a mere function: ‘Ne devenir ainsi qu’une chose innommée et innommable; perdre la moitié de sa vie dans une non-existence au travail’ (pp. 48–9); ‘Derrière la phrase insipide, incolore, inodore, des hommes et des femmes jetés dehors’ (p. 103).<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, by producing something as creative and personal as a novel using this restrictive technique, Beinstingel can be said to be reclaiming this impersonal language for a creative act.

Through this selection of stylistic features used by Bon and Beinstingel we can see how both authors link corporate use of language to alienation and insecurity at work. This forces us as readers to consider whose views are represented, and how, to become more aware of how language positions and controls. It encourages us to see and hear language, to consider its role as an active, productive and divisive tool, and to reconsider its role in the workplace. Korthals Altes states that Bon’s work traverses the boundary between two types of *engagement*:

le type d’engagement associé à Jean-Paul Sartre, basé sur une conception du langage comme transitif et de l’écriture comme acte, et d’autre part celui appelé par Roland Barthes – et sur un mode plus radical par Theodor Adorno – , résidant dans le questionnement de la forme littéraire même.<sup>42</sup>

While it is clear that Bon, and indeed Beinstingel, both address the problems of the social world and question literary form, they in fact go beyond this. The strategies I have focused on show that the concentration on language and the textual nature of representation is essential because it reflects the way that perception is formed. The reader's understanding of the workplace is thus directed by use of language and textual strategy. Indeed, although the writers' strategies are textual, their focus is the movement of language through society. The concentration on language and representation in these novels is therefore not an internal or metatextual issue, but an external judgement, entirely to do with 'la connaissance de l'humain' à la Todorov. In this way Bon and Beinstingel contribute not just to traversing the boundary between two types of *engagement*, but also to rendering that very boundary meaningless. The fact that these texts succeed simultaneously in presenting the social and political world and harnessing the power of language to talk about itself shows that the continued perception of a division between texts which focus on the human, social world, and texts which question the means of representation, is vastly oversimplified. The insistence of these authors on the significant role of language in the workplace suggests that the political and the aesthetic are, in fact, inseparable. Finally, the fact that these texts are not examples of *témoignage* gives them the freedom to go beyond individual experience. Their creativity with voice, genre and language gives their work a poetic quality which accords the subject universal value. Equally, the reader is necessarily implicated by modes of narration which do not narrate or explain but attempt to allow the reader to experience, in these instances, not only *la culture d'entreprise* and its effects, but also the intrinsic role of language within this.

### Notes

- 1 Simon Kemp, *French Fiction into the Twenty-first Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), pp. 1–18.
- 2 'the world, the subject, the meaning, history, the referent'. 'Pour une littérature-monde en français', *Le Monde des Livres* (16 March 2007), 2. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.
- 3 'human knowledge'; Tzvetan Todorov, *La littérature en péril* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), p. 85.
- 4 Roland Barthes, 'La réponse de Kafka', *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 138. 'Is our literature forever doomed to this exhausting oscillation between political realism and art-for-art's-sake, between an ethic of commitment and an aesthetic purism, between compromise

- and asepsis?’ Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, ‘Kafka’s Answer’, in *Critical Essays* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 133.
- 5 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l’art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992) and Stéphane Giocanti, *Une histoire politique de la littérature* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009) for useful summaries.
  - 6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
  - 7 Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953).
  - 8 *La fiction d’affaires* is a distinct genre dealing with economics, business and the workplace that is well positioned to bring these two strands together. The clearest definition is that given by Chris Reyns-Chikuma: ‘une fiction qui met en scène les institutions, mécanismes et/ou personnages liés au monde économique’ (‘a fiction which features institutions, mechanisms and/or characters linked to the economic world’); Chris Reyns-Chikuma, ‘La Fiction d’affaires en France: de la fiction anti-affaires à la anti-fiction d’affaires’, *Neophilologus*, 98 (2014), 61–76; 62.
  - 9 ‘The world of workers, employees and managers, observed, described, recounted or fictionalised for itself, is not an object like any other, but one of those which has most contributed to renewing narrative forms in the last thirty years in France and elsewhere in the world. Among other reasons because it is an object of language: in a world where ‘business’ has imposed its norms on language, the novel, like poetry, has to invent forms which entirely privilege critical thought’; blurb for S. Bikialo and J.-P. Engélibert, *Dire le travail: fiction et témoignage depuis 1980* (Rennes: La Licorne, 2012).
  - 10 ‘The culture of communication, in the world of business and in public, highlights the functional performance of language to the detriment of its signifying power. In these circumstances, writing novels makes sense: neither conservative as it was before, nor a laboratory as in the past, it is reanimating language’; Bruno Blanckeman, *Les fictions singulières: étude sur le roman français contemporain* (Paris: Prétéxte Editeur, 2002), p. 94.
  - 11 ‘In the sense that business is attempting a stranglehold on language, the novel and fiction perhaps represent the only possible way forward. Indeed, how do we fight this except by making use of the same weapons?’; T. Beinstingel, ‘La sauvagerie du langage à l’œuvre’, in Bikialo and Engélibert (eds), *Dire le travail*, p. 67. See also Sonia Florey, *L’engagement littéraire à l’ère néolibérale* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Septentrion, 2012).
  - 12 ‘The question of political commitment is always based on a misunderstanding [...] because it sets up the social world as the objective and goal of the activity of writing’; «Littérature. L’engagement aujourd’hui», coordonné par Christophe Kantcheff, *Politis*, 642 (15–21 March 2001).
  - 13 Florence Aubenas, *Le quai d’Ouistreham* (Paris: L’Olivier, 2010).
  - 14 Franck Magloire, *Ouvrière* (Paris: Points, 2012).
  - 15 Aurélie Filipetti, *Les derniers jours de la classe ouvrière* (Paris: Stock, 2003).



- 16 'copies of life'; Magloire, *Ouvrière*, p. 25.
- 17 'the voices of the humble, of the anonymous, are still rarely heard in literature'; Bon, *Tous les mots sont adultes* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 300. Oliver Davis has suggested that Bon's approach to his creative writing classes recalls Jacques Rancière's political philosophy in its acceptance of equality between students and teacher; Oliver Davis, 'The Radical Pedagogies of François Bon and Jacques Rancière', *French Studies*, 64/2 (2010), 178–91.
- 18 'closer to Claude Simon than to Emile Zola'; Michel Ragon, *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne de langue française* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986), p. 285.
- 19 'writing about [something]'; T. Hesse, 'Cahier François Bon', *L'Animal, Littératures, Arts et Philosophies*, 16 (2004), 135.
- 20 See also Chapter 6 in this volume in which Angela Kimyongür refers to Dominique Manotti's treatment of the same scandal.
- 21 'Erasure: because what has broken the present apart, separating or shattering what was created, what was stable between people and things, has disappeared, without prior and proper examination of the consequences.'
- 22 'their way of using words'.
- 23 'I noted as I went along, in my notebook, precise phrases which create a particular rhythm, a vocabulary.'
- 24 'ways of speaking and seeing'; L. Korthals Altes, 'L'engagement littéraire contemporain – A propos de *Daewoo* de François Bon et *Presque un frère* de Tassadit Imache', in B. Havercroft, P. Michelucci and P. Riendeau (eds), *Le roman français de l'extrême contemporain: écritures, engagements, énonciations* (Laval: Éditions Nota bene, 2010), p. 71.
- 25 'Mont-Saint-Martin is in the immediate outskirts of Longwy, a town whose factory chimneys, in the past, filled up the night sky with their orange flames, a town which has not taken enough care of itself and now seems like someone who has lost weight without changing clothes.'
- 26 'And the casino, to scrape some cash together. The one-armed bandits, I tried, once (but not twice): *enjoy 300% happiness, the fifth biggest casino in France out of more than 150, 270 slot machines and video poker.*'
- 27 'Indeed, the ease with which a person without a job will find another depends on the speed with which the entrepreneurs can move away from production which no longer responds to the demands of the consumers – who themselves *literally* keep the entrepreneurs in work. This mobility of capital, although it in no way protects jobs linked to obsolete production, nonetheless offers the best protection for future jobs – those which are *in fact* linked to productions which are henceforth favoured by consumers. As a consequence, artificial constraints on the mobility of capital will only make looking for a new job harder for everyone. Employees at a factory such as Forgeval or Cellatex would be well advised to blame not their employer, *but rather* the union boors, who are reducing what is possible for everyone.'
- 28 'Bon creates [...] a world where language is more often used to mask than to reveal'; D. Viart, 'François Bon: écrire les fractures du monde',



- in S. Houppermans, C. Bosman Delzous and D. de Ruyter-Tognati (eds), *Territoires et terres d'histoire: perspectives, horizons, jardins secrets* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. 137.
- 29 'Steelworks. Workers from the Metaleurop factory at Noyelles-Godault, in the Pas-de-Calais, are throwing machinery and sodium blocks into the canal next to the factory, in order to get compensation for their unfair dismissal.'
- 30 'in order to'.
- 31 'rooms cheerfully labelled *rest*, or *smokers*, or *canteen*'.
- 32 'Balzac crossed with Perec'; C. Rousseau, 'Thierry Beinstingel, Charly Delwart, Nicole Malincoli: écrivains entrepreneurs', *Le Monde des Livres* (22 November 2007), [www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/11/22/thierry-beinstingel-charly-delwart-nicole-malincoli-ecrivains-entrepreneurs\\_981140\\_3260.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/11/22/thierry-beinstingel-charly-delwart-nicole-malincoli-ecrivains-entrepreneurs_981140_3260.html).
- 33 See S. Waters, 'A Capitalism that Kills: Workplace Suicides at France Télécom', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 32/3 (2014), 121–41.
- 34 T. Beinstingel, 'La sauvagerie du langage à l'œuvre', p. 66.
- 35 'the company is trying to order the value of words'; T. Beinstingel, 'Langages et littératures du travail chez les écrivains français depuis mai 1968', *Intercâmbio*, 5 (2012), 50–60; 58.
- 36 'the normative language of CVs influences our lives'; C. Michel, 'Travail et contrainte dans l'œuvre de Thierry Beinstingel', *Intercâmbio*, 5 (2012), 150.
- 37 'The third word (referent) tastes of chalk, it's a brand, a label. It makes you think of a host, a local play leader, it's an adjective that is insistent, forces you to be pragmatic, to think of results, the one you refer to, the example, the one who comes from the same world.'
- 38 'CV as in Convince and Vegetate here for a sentence of undetermined length.' 'CV as in Torch a car.' 'CV as in run away in vain.'
- 39 'Dispositions, expositions, situations.' 'Occupations. Situations.'
- 40 'Nursery assistant available from 1 January seeks baby to look after. Proximity to bus routes essential. / Company, ambitious in the distribution of local services, ambitious in the transmission of the values of reputation and sharing in our shops, ambitious for the success of the group, which is internationally recognised, with more than 7,000 brands in 10 countries, offers a management post to the right candidate. Be ambitious and proud of it. Personalised career monitoring.'
- 41 'To avoid becoming an unnamed, unnameable thing; to lose half your life in a non-existence at work.' 'Behind the insipid, colourless, odourless sentence, men and women thrown out.'
- 42 'the type of political commitment associated with Jean-Paul Sartre, based on a conception of language as transitive and writing as an act, and on the other hand, the type linked to Roland Barthes – and on a more radical level to Theodor Adorno – to do with the questioning of the literary form itself'. L. Korthals Altes, 'L'engagement littéraire contemporain – A propos de *Daewoo* de François Bon et *Presque un frère* de Tassadit Imache', p. 68.

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## 2

# Evolutions of *engagement*: Renaud and *la chanson* *engagée* in Twenty-first- Century France

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RACHEL HAWORTH

Renaud Pierre Manuel Séchan, or Renaud as he is more commonly known, is a prolific *auteur-compositeur-interprète* (ACI) (singer-songwriter) of the *chanson* tradition,<sup>1</sup> who rose to fame in the mid-1970s and who remains popular today. At the time of writing this chapter, Renaud's most recent studio album was released in 2009 and entitled *Molly Malone – Balade irlandaise*; despite a mixed critical reception, the album entered the French album chart in the number-one spot and reached double-platinum status in just one month. In 2011, the compilation/cover album *La Bande à Renaud* was released and proved extremely popular, entering at the top of the album chart in its first week of release and selling over 100,000 copies by the end of the second week. A *Volume 2* tribute album was released later that year. And in 2015, two new Renaud compilation collections were released, *Les 50 plus belles chansons* and *Les 100 plus belles chansons 1985–2006*.

Biographers, journalists and popular music critics seek to emphasise Renaud's place in the *chanson* subgenre, with all the legitimising connotations that this term carries.<sup>2</sup> These connotations, of literariness, authenticity, hard work, poetry, education, and 'the best' that French popular music has to offer, are derived from the rhetoric that surrounds *chanson*. This rhetoric conceptualises authenticity within French popular music through the creation of contrasts

between genres, such as *chanson* and pop, as well as between singers and performers, fans, techniques, instrumentation, and song content. The resultant binaries of what does and does not constitute authentic music produce a series of hierarchies within popular music, which place that which is constructed by the rhetoric as 'inauthentic' firmly at the bottom of scale and that which is perceived as 'authentic' and thus legitimate at the top, which is *chanson*, in its purest, most idealised form. This conceptualisation of the genre is most commonly associated in *chanson* discourse with the works of Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Léo Ferré, the 'holy trinity' of *chanson*,<sup>3</sup> and is said to signify 'an art form, a crafted and polished piece of work, which represent[s] the hard labour and skill of its composer'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, David Looseley speaks of *chanson* having 'a national, para-literary legitimacy', and points out that 'singer-songwriters [...] enjoy a special status because they have a double legitimacy within French republican culture: their work is both poetic and popular [i.e. of the people], aesthetically demanding yet democratic.'<sup>5</sup> It is thanks to the rhetoric which surrounds *chanson* that these are the connotations which the subgenre now evokes and it is into this tradition that Renaud is placed.<sup>6</sup> But his evident popularity, continuing commercial success and star status in twenty-first-century France introduce a potential challenge to Renaud's *ACI* status, since commerciality is constructed as inauthentic within *chanson* discourse.

Moreover, biographers and writers have sought to classify Renaud as 'un poète moderne qui a su s'imposer dans le panthéon de la chanson française comme un chanteur à la fois sensible et engagé, à l'image d'un Brassens ou d'un Léo Ferré'.<sup>7</sup> According to such writers, Renaud is the first authentic 'chanteur populaire' that France has really had,<sup>8</sup> and is given the moniker of 'poète éternel',<sup>9</sup> like Brassens before him. The description of Renaud as poet, sensitive and politically engaged singer, authentic and popular singer, and the new Brassens or Ferré, demonstrates the weight of expectation that is attached to the label *chanson* due to the rhetoric outlined above. It also illustrates the preoccupation with *engagement* that exists in the discourse surrounding Renaud. In order to classify Renaud as an *ACI* of the *chanson* tradition, it must be possible to see him as an authentic poet of the people but also to identify the nature of his *engagement* through his desire to comment on society, thus emulating the greats of the *chanson* genre. In his volume on

Brassens, Michel Beaufrils explores the nature of *engagement* in *chanson*, in order to contextualise and analyse what he deems to be Brassens's personal approach to *engagement*. The characteristics of the *chanson engagée* which emerge from this analysis and are pertinent here are informed by the work of such singers as Guy Béart, Boris Vian, Jean Ferrat and Léo Ferré. We learn that the *chanson engagée* may: comment on current affairs; constitute open attacks on the world of politics; defend the individual; perpetuate nonconformism and anticlericalism. Not all songs will exhibit all these characteristics, according to Beaufrils's analysis. Nevertheless, it is within this tradition that Renaud is placed and these are the characteristics that make it possible to label him *engagé*.<sup>10</sup> However, we must question how Renaud's perceived *engagement* squares with his status of commercially successful entertainer and star. This chapter therefore takes as its focus the nature of *engagement* within *chanson* as represented by Renaud. It explores the lyrics and music of his songs, in order to establish the nature of Renaud's *engagé* status, and then traces the evolving significance of this label in the increasingly commercialised context of the twenty-first century through a consideration of a range of press articles written by and about Renaud. The chapter thus examines the relationship between *engagement* and *chanson* in contemporary France and, by taking into consideration Renaud's commercial success and star status, offers a redefinition of what it means to be a *chanteur engagé* in twenty-first-century France.

### Renaud and *engagement*

As we have seen, not only is Renaud conceptualised as an *ACI*, with all the legitimising connotations that that term evokes in French culture, but he is also regularly labelled as *engagé* by biographers and commentators writing about his career, songwriting, and *œuvre*.<sup>11</sup> This approach in turn generates a set of expectations that we have as listeners as regards the nature of Renaud's songs, performances and persona. Laurent Berthet, for example, explains that, because Renaud draws inspiration from the society in which he lives, it has been possible to label him as 'un «chroniqueur», une «lampe-témoin», un «observateur» de la société, nationale et internationale'.<sup>12</sup> Such labels would suggest that Renaud adopts a passive stance in his desire to engage with society, and thus chooses

merely to observe, highlight and record what he sees, without taking the further step of suggesting or promoting societal change. However, according to Berthet, Renaud does go beyond mere observation and in fact becomes *engagé* by entering the public debate, seeking to influence society through his own 'personal' interpretation of the situation upon which he is commenting.<sup>13</sup> This, then, is our expectation of Renaud's perceived *engagement*: that he seeks to effect change within society in his presentation of the world around him, with song as his means of entering the debate.

As far as content and lyrics are concerned, then, Renaud's apparent ability to observe the minutiae of everyday life, and to comment on and demonstrate intolerance of ingrained social attitudes and conventions not only places him firmly within the *chanson* tradition but also allows us to perceive him as a *chanteur engagé*, according to Berthet's definition. In the same vein, Peter Hawkins explains that:

the macro-politics of Renaud's songs are [...] recognisable [...]: they fit predictably into the marginal, anarchistic tradition of Bruant, Ferré and Brassens. Renaud's attacks on the institutions of authority are on the whole more direct, probably because recent liberalism has made this possible; but at the same time seasoned with satirical humour in the *chansonnier* style, with the corresponding assumption that all official targets are fair game.<sup>14</sup>

A closer examination of Renaud's songs (and particularly those from the early part of his career) demonstrates that he does broadly deal with apparently *engagé* subject matter, including topics such as urbanisation, segregation and antimilitarism. His cast of narrators and secondary characters draws on the marginalised of society and includes petty criminals and juvenile offenders (for example 'C'est mon dernier bal' (1978); 'Buffalo débile' (1978)); down-and-out yobs and street urchins ('Écoutez-moi, les gavroches' (1974); 'La chanson du loubard' (1977); 'La java sans joie' (1974)); rebel youths looking for a fight ('Marche à l'ombre' (1980); 'Baston!' (1980)); and left-wing anarchists ('Ravachol' (1974); 'Crève salope' (1982); 'Société, tu m'auras pas!' (1974)). Indeed, as far as the character of the narrator is concerned, Renaud's song lyrics are carefully constructed, both in content and in linguistic references, to establish the character of 'a working-class Parisian, a revolutionary anarchist who identifies with popular culture, with suburban petty criminals, bikers, punks and drop-outs'.<sup>15</sup> But in the

imagination of the listener, this revolutionary, *engagé* anarchist from Paris merges with the persona of the singer-songwriter, owing in part to the careful management of Renaud's presentation, particularly on album covers. For example, he is portrayed on the cover of his debut album *Renaud* (1975; also known as *Amoureux de Paname*) as a *paysan* (countryman) of the people, wearing a traditional flat cap and neckerchief. For the cover of *Renaud* (1979; also known as *Ma gonzesse*), he is the *loubard* [yobbo] anarchist from the city, wearing black leather and blue denim, who has presumably set fire to what appears to be a Citroën DS, a quintessential 'myth' of France,<sup>16</sup> that burns in the background of the photograph. However, this merging is also in part thanks to the recurrent references to the singer-songwriter as the actual narrator of certain songs. The result of this blurring of the fictional narrative voice with the persona of the singer-songwriter is that the perception of Renaud as *chanteur engagé* is reinforced. The use of the narrative 'je' underlines this coming together, and so, for example, in 'Société tu m'auras pas!' (1974), the listener believes Renaud the *ACI* to be the narrator, a wandering minstrel, observing and passing comment on French society through the decades. In 'Où c'est que j'ai mis mon flingue?' (1980), the singer-songwriter has seemingly become disillusioned with his own persona as he feels *récupéré* (rehabilitated) by the song industry in which he works and is thus apparently rendered incapable of moving his listeners. And in 'Pourquoi d'abord' (1980), Renaud the *ACI* is apparently being interviewed about his writing process and takes the opportunity to denounce society and the inherent commercialism of the recording industry, before closing the conversation with a customary punchline that reflects the comment about his song-writing back onto the singer-songwriter, who must respond to the demands of his record label: 'C'est vrai qu'elle est un peu bâclée / C'est parc'que sur mon disque / Des chansons j'en avais qu'un neuf, / Et y m'en fallait dix!' (ll. 45–8).<sup>17</sup>

Despite the diversity of narrators across Renaud's songs, one common feature is the way in which these narrators seek to comment on society and draw the listener's attention to the shortcomings of those in power through satire and irony. Politicians, the police force, the bourgeoisie and the 'comfortable' are all targets for Renaud's lampooning. In 'Hexagone' (1974), for example, we learn that 'La France est un pays de flics / à tous les coins d'rue

y'en a cent / pour faire régner l'ordre public / ils assassinent impunément' (ll. 13–16),<sup>18</sup> demonstrating the perceived police rule and level of control to which France's citizens are subjected. Indeed, the whole song is a satire on French consumer-driven society of the 1970s; the relative lack of slang and swear words, which are both so apparent in other songs where they function to create a humorous gap between the subject matter and the narrator thus offering some light relief, in fact reinforces the bitterness of this portrayal. The customary biting humour returns in 'La bande à Lucien' (1976), as the narrator meets his old friend, Lucien, a former *soixante-huitard*, only to discover that Lucien has married, has children and has a good job (ll. 42–4). Although Lucien has clearly become comfortable in his abandonment of the '68 ideals, and thus a target for the narrator's irony, the joke is also on the narrator, whose zeal for 'the good old days' of the '68 gang, has prevented him from becoming a member of society, unlike Lucien: 'Eh toi mon vieux, mon pote Lucien, / c'est vrai q't'habites chez ta belle-doche, / Que t'es marié, que t'as des mioches, / qu'tu travailles pour qu'ils aient du pain? / Tu sais j'ai une idée super, / on va former une nouvelle bande, / si tu veux c'est toi qui commandes, / siou-plaît patron, encore une bière [...]' (ll. 41–8).<sup>19</sup>

But to what extent is the highlighting through humour and satire of the reality of class divisions, the impact of politics, the control of the state, and the pressure to conform, an example of *engagement*? Chevandier points out that 'la contestation culturelle se fit également par l'humour [...] Ce type d'humour destructeur joua un rôle important dans la fin des années 68 et semblait être spécifique à la contestation de gauche'<sup>20</sup> and then concludes that Renaud is very much a part of this tradition. Such an analysis suggests that the use of humour, irony and satire in order to identify the shortcomings of the social status quo is enough to earn one the label of *engagé*. Yet the notion of *contestation culturelle* suggests a change in behaviour or attitude is required, if one is truly to contest the status quo. Indeed, in his analysis of politicised art, Jacques Rancière argues that such work aims at:

disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations. As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a

meaningful spectacle that would lead to an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.<sup>21</sup>

It is this ‘sensible or perceptual shock’ that, Rancière argues, produces the undoing of the given systems of meaning within societies, and establishes other ‘networks of the sensible’,<sup>22</sup> or, in other words, other possible reconfigurations of these accepted systems of meaning. According to Rancière, therefore, merely to produce awareness of a situation is not enough to warrant the label *engagé*: a truly ‘political’ (or, in the context of this chapter, *engagé*) piece of art must produce a rupture with what we as an audience expect or feel we know.

In Renaud’s case, his singer-songwriter persona and the themes and characters that he presents in his songs, together promote merely an awareness of the cultural, social and political situation in France at the time of his writing. Where Renaud begins to generate ‘rupture’ and thus encourage the reconfiguration of accepted significations associated with French culture, society and politics, is in the way he employs humour to subvert expectation. The customary, unexpected punchlines (for example ‘Je suis une bande de jeunes’ (1977); ‘Ma gonzesse’ (1978)) and self-deprecating and humorous characterisation of the narrator (for example ‘Laisse béton’ (1975)) rely on the listener’s knowledge of the given systems of meaning within society, in order for the shock of the unexpected outcome or comparison to challenge that knowledge and allow for the creation of new meanings. In ‘Je suis une bande de jeunes’ (1977), for example, we expect the song to be about a group of *loubards* [yobbo] but then learn that the lone singer-songwriter in fact constitutes the whole gang. To be part of such a group and thus feel as if he conforms to society’s expected role for a young person, the narrator must play all the various characters that would make up a gang. This denouement allows us then to create new meanings of what it means to be young in French society of the 1970s, by satirising the discrimination that this social group often faced at the time.

Knowledge of the given systems of meaning is also important in regard to Renaud’s use of music. A knowledge of the significance of the *chanson française* leads us to expect that Renaud’s music will



adhere to the 'genre rules' of *chanson*.<sup>23</sup> According to the critics, this is a genre in which the text takes precedence over the music; where hard work and artistry are valued over commercial concerns and industry practices; which is an authentic expression of what it means to be French (often in some ineffable way). Traditionally the musical accompaniment is simple, played on acoustic instruments (guitar, double bass, occasionally piano), to showcase lyrics that are complex, cleverly constructed and often said to be forms of contemporary poetry.<sup>24</sup> Yet Renaud is well-known for using a wide range of musical instruments in his songs. He also references a variety of musical styles, including those most obviously associated with *chanson* (incorporating the stereotypical accordion and customary acoustic guitar and double bass), but also Anglophone rock, rhythm 'n' blues, American rock 'n' roll of the 1950s, country, love ballads, tango and folk music. As Hawkins points out, 'the music of Renaud's songs is usually fairly simple: a catchy melodic hook and predictable harmonies. The dimension of refinement comes in the extensive use of musical allusion and parody, which interacts with the satirical lyrics: the music is also that of the ironic double take.'<sup>25</sup> This refinement, or what can also be termed musical *métissage*, constitutes a 'rupture' in the listener's expectations and allows a new interpretation of and reaction to the traditional genre of *chanson*: this is another facet of Renaud's *engagement*.

### Renaud and *Charlie Hebdo*

Renaud's *engagement* is not limited to his songs. During the 1990s, he developed for himself the role of 'cultural commentator' through his involvement with the newly re-established satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. In addition to offering financial support to the newspaper, Renaud wrote a column for the publication in 1992–3 (entitled 'Renaud bille en tête'), and again in 1995–6 (entitled 'Envoyé spécial chez moi'). In the context of the discourse outlined previously, which describes Renaud as an *engagé ACI* and modern-day poet, this foray into journalism may seem somewhat unexpected. It even arguably constitutes a break with how we might expect an *ACI* to behave, given that the genre rules for *chanson* suggest that song and song alone be the means of communication for its proponents. However, we must remember that Renaud is also seen as a 'chroniqueur', a 'lampe-témoin' and an 'observateur'<sup>26</sup> in

his approach to songwriting and, arguably, the move to comment on society from beyond the confines of *chanson* by producing these columns is in line with this conceptualisation of Renaud's role as *chanteur engagé*. If in a way we might expect this type of journalistic activity from Renaud, it becomes necessary to examine the articles themselves in more depth in order to identify and delineate the *engagement* or 'rupture' that these pieces arguably constitute.

If we take as a case study the articles from the column 'Envoyé spécial chez moi', which were published together as a collection in 1996 and so had a wider potential readership, we discover that the volume asserts that these are 'des chroniques politiquement incorrectes à consommer sans modération' in which 'Renaud nous ouvre les portes de son jardin secret, pour traquer avec humour et tendresse la poésie du quotidien'.<sup>27</sup> The subject matter, then, focuses on events in Renaud's everyday life: he chronicles what happens to him on a daily basis, describing his home life with his wife and daughter, going on tour, his holidays, and meeting his fans in the street. By describing the banal events that constitute his everyday life, Renaud is sometimes then able to focus on their political consequences. The political is predictably most obvious in the articles which speak both directly and indirectly about France's political parties, elections and presidents. Yet the trigger for Renaud's political reflections in these pieces is always something from his personal life. In 'Énervé par la colère' (originally published 26 April 1995), for example, Renaud indirectly describes his frustrations at the election results of 1995 which saw a rise in support for Le Pen and the far-right, and only a small proportion of the vote go to the Green Party. But the catalyst for his outburst is the fact that 'je me suis cassé un ongle. [...] Celui du doigt du milieu, celui pour Le Pen. Pis pour la plupart des autres candidats aussi'.<sup>28</sup> Renaud's inability to insult all those candidates with whom he does not agree, humorously due to the fact he has broken his fingernail, becomes a viciously ironic comment on his inability to change the political outlooks and voting preferences of the general public. Significantly, the political comment in this article demonstrates the limitations of Renaud's *engagement*: the singer-songwriter is unable to effect real change or suggest a different way of behaving, and so his only recourse is to insult those who did not vote as he did. But in doing so, a space is created for readers that 'ruptures' their previous conceptualisation of the political status quo, and

encourages them to re-evaluate and reconfigure their personal relationship with political parties, thus empowering the reader to carry forward Renaud's *engagement* and become *engagé* themselves.

'Rupture' also occurs when we think of these articles in the broader context of Renaud as a well-established *ACI* of *chanson*. In this context, 'rupture' can be seen as something that occurs not only within art but also within the structures and discourses that surround it. As far as *chanson* is concerned, we have already seen how the genre's discourse functions to create a series of binaries that constitute the hierarchy underscoring *chanson's* authenticity. This rhetoric also generates a set of rules and expectations that govern *chanson* production. Despite originating from the initial debate in the 1950s and 1960s, these rules still remain influential today. They focus on the potential challenge to *chanson's* artistic status of the commercialised music industry within which *chanson* must function; the poetic and educational functions of the genre; the complexity of the lyrics over the musical accompaniment; and the prominence of the folkloric and the everyday in the genre. These rules function to legitimise *chanson* as the ideal artistic/musical form and thus suggest that writing and performing *chansons* is the best and even the only acceptable way for an *ACI* to express his sentiments, write poetry and provide a cultural commentary, and to avoid such banal concerns as making money and appealing to fans. In this context, Renaud appears a problematic figure: his star status within contemporary *chanson* from the 1970s onwards is certainly clear from the high sales figures achieved by his albums, and the large audiences at his arena concerts. Yet such popular appeal could be seen to go against what might be expected of a 'serious' *ACI*, given the context of the rhetoric which surrounds *chanson*. Moreover, the decision to allow fans a glimpse into the banal and mundane nature of the life of a singer-songwriter by writing a column for *Charlie Hebdo* arguably confounds the expectation of what it means to be a serious *chanson* singer-songwriter who should allow his art to speak for him. Furthermore, the decision to embrace the commercial nature of being a singer-songwriter and music star is something which *chanson* rhetoric suggests should be avoided. Thus the revelation of the nature of being a performer on tour that we receive as readers of the column 'Chez la mère à Tito', which recounts Renaud's tour of Bosnia in 1995,<sup>29</sup> and the frank and intimate details of Renaud's life at home with his wife and

daughter that we are privy to in pieces such as ‘Rita (chanson d’amour)’,<sup>30</sup> ‘Je parle pas aux légumes!’,<sup>31</sup> and ‘Nique ta bonne mère’,<sup>32</sup> constitute instances of rupture with the *chanson* rhetoric that governs how we expect Renaud to behave and what we expect him to say. Thus the presentation of the quotidian, mundane and banal details of Renaud’s life ‘chez moi’ (at home) allows for a possible reconfiguration of the accepted system of meaning associated with *chanson* and with the *ACI*. In this context, then, these articles can be seen as *engagés* as they produce a rupture with what we as an audience expect or feel we know about Renaud, and with the accepted system that defines star status within *chanson*. As we discover these intimate details about Renaud’s life, so we are encouraged to rethink the role of the singer-songwriter in French society and of the music industry in disseminating information, ideals and values. We thus reconsider the extent to which commercial forms of culture can in fact be considered *engagé*.

### Renaud post-2000

Significantly, the rupture that facilitates the rethinking of the ongoing ‘commercial versus *engagé*’ debate, seen so often in *chanson* rhetoric, also continues to be prevalent in the post-2000 period as far as Renaud is concerned. Indeed, as we will see, the extent to which Renaud has appeared in the national press, and the subject matter of these news articles, continue to demonstrate new ways of re-evaluating the role of the singer-songwriter and, more broadly, of commercial and industrialised cultural forms in contemporary France. If we accept Renaud as an exemplary *ACI*, as suggested by Berthet, Gaston and other biographers, then the ways in which the media have reported on him since 2000 illustrate the extent of the pervasiveness of the *chanson* genre rules as they apply to Renaud, as well as demonstrating the extent to which Renaud in fact ‘ruptures’ these rules, and this facilitates our re-evaluation of the genre. In the context of *chanson* and its relationship with the print media in France, Lebrun points out that

Significantly, the enduring esteem for Brassens and the anti-pop conceptualisation of *chanson* were most prevalent in the highbrow press. *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Point* all cater for a highly educated readership with sophisticated, intellectual credentials [...] As catalysts of, and vehicles for, elite taste,

these publications confirmed, in the early 2000s, the symbolic superiority of *chanson* over *variétés*.<sup>33</sup>

Articles about Renaud from these publications in the 2000s therefore constitute my focus here, as we might expect *chanson* conventions to be reinforced in such articles, thus shedding new light on the extent to which Renaud actually challenges and breaks these conventions and thus is truly *engagé*.

These articles appear at key professional or private moments in Renaud's life, including the release of new albums (*Boucan d'enfer* in 2002, *Rouge Sang* in 2006 and *Molly Malone* in 2009), box-sets, songs and biographies. For example, in *Le Monde* on 15 August 2005 the article 'Manhattan-Kaboul' was published. This traced the evolution of the eponymous song and, in particular, the search for a partner with whom Renaud could duet on the single. The article simultaneously recounts the long, artistic journey that was required to produce the final song, and highlights the work and careful reflection that were involved in its production, whilst also stressing the moment of inspiration and luck that was required for the recording – these are elements that are usually overlooked in *chanson* discourse, which instead stresses the necessity of hard work and craft in the process of producing a song. Significantly, we also learn about the commercial appeal of the song, as the journalist Claire Guillot tells us that, unlike many other pop stars who produce successful duets in the form of love songs,

Ce n'est pourtant pas avec une chanson d'amour que Renaud Séchan a atteint le Nirvana commercial: 'Manhattan-Kaboul', locomotive de l'album *Boucan d'enfer*, évoque les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 à New York. Les deux personnages ne s'aiment pas; d'ailleurs ils ne se connaissent même pas et meurent à la fin. Ce qui n'a pas empêché le single de s'écouler à plus de 500 000 exemplaires, et l'album de dépasser les 2 millions.<sup>34</sup>

The information presented here functions as a rupture with the constitutive discourse of *chanson*. Rather than ignoring the success of this *engagé* single, the journalist places this information at the start of the piece, thus focusing the reader's attention on the commercial nature of this particular song. The songwriting process is then the focus of the rest of the piece, but the traditional hierarchy at play within *chanson* discourse (that places commerciality firmly at the bottom of all concerns to do with *chanson*) is here

inverted. This inversion undermines what we expect of a *chanson* singer-songwriter and his song. This allows a possible reconfiguration of the meaning of the genre for the twenty-first century; a meaning which begins to acknowledge the inherent commerciality of *chanson* within the discourse.

The expected role of an *ACI* is again undermined in articles that were published around two specific moments in Renaud's private life: his divorce and subsequent descent into alcoholism in 2011, and the announcement of a forthcoming album, which triggered another public conflict between the *ACI* and his brother, Thierry Séchan, in 2015. Here, the focus is on Renaud's private life, and the journalists report in detail on his failed marriage, his use of alcohol, his failing health, and his problematic relationship with his brother. We thus become privy to intimate details about the daily life of the singer-songwriter. For example, in an article published by *Le Nouvel Observateur* in November 2011, in which Thierry Séchan is interviewed about his brother, we learn that, when driving home from a restaurant whilst drunk, Renaud was stopped by the police but rather than arrest the *ACI*, the policemen instead ask him to pose for photographs with them. The article points out the irony of this situation by referencing the lyrics of 'Où c'est qu'j'ai mis mon flingue?' (1980) in which the same request is made of the narrator singer-songwriter who proceeds to spit in the faces of the officers and refuses to sign their caps. However, 'c'était avant que la France s'inquiète de sa déprime et mesure son addiction supposée à son médicament préféré, l'apéro anisé.'<sup>35</sup> Renaud's star status is reaffirmed in this piece, as we learn that he is not punished for his drink-driving in return for posing for photographs and signing autographs – an ironic inversion of Renaud's supposed attitude towards the police. However, we also learn of the extent of Renaud's alcoholism and its dangerous impact on his life and health. These are details that we would not expect to learn about an *ACI*, whose songs should speak for him, as we have seen. The knowledge of such personal details, then, again constitutes a rupture in our perception of the *ACI* and of *chanson*, and encourages new reconfigurations of their meaning through the emphasis on the emotional, personal response to Renaud's condition that is not normally elicited in *chanson* discourse.<sup>36</sup>

A similar effect is seen in the articles published in 2015 that outline the very public argument between Renaud and his brother

regarding the release of a new studio album (still imminent at the time of writing). The news of this new album broke in June 2015, with various newspapers reporting that Renaud had once again returned to songwriting and to the recording studio. *Libération*, for example, reported:

‘J’ai écrit 14 chansons, je veux les enregistrer vite’, assure l’auteur de *Mistral gagnant*, que le quotidien a très brièvement rencontré à L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, la commune du Vaucluse où il est désormais installé. D’une voix rauque et un peu chevrotante, le chanteur a confirmé à la mi-journée sur RTL s’être ‘remis à écrire’ depuis ‘quinze jours’.<sup>37</sup>

The good news here is tempered by the description of Renaud’s voice, which recalls his previous struggles with alcoholism and depression. Indeed, this focus remains as the article goes on to quote Thierry Séchan, who explains that for the moment, his brother cannot sing as he has smoked too many cigarettes and drunk too much Pernod. Despite assuring fans that Renaud is well, Séchan goes on to explain that his brother is still drinking and that, in order to be able to record the new album, it is vital for him to see an ear, nose and throat specialist. By quoting Thierry Séchan, the article emphasises Renaud’s potential loss of talent and ability to sing, his continued use of alcohol, and his mental health, and provides details regarding the *ACT*’s personal life to which we would not expect to be privy in the context of the constitutive discourse of *chanson*. This focus on intimate details and private relationships made public continues in the articles published in late 2015 about Renaud’s new album. For example, in an article entitled ‘Renaud contre Thierry, duel de Séchan’, published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in September 2015, the journalist Sophie Delassein details the argument between Renaud and his brother regarding the comments made in June (quoted by *Libération*), and then goes on to trace in detail the various fallings-out that the two brothers have had in recent years.

Such an approach serves to underscore the star status of Renaud in twenty-first-century France. Meyers argues that:

the supposedly ‘true’ intimate and behind-the-scenes details of a celebrity’s private life are of the utmost concern [...] as they emphasize the notion of a ‘real’ celebrity [...] Thus, while the fan may recognise that the star seen on screen or stage is a highly constructed figure, the star is brought close and revealed as a

regular person through the media coverage of the details of her private life within celebrity media.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst the notion of the singer-songwriter as ordinary person is one of the pervading discursive constructs within *chanson* discourse, it is not used a marker of star status because notions of stardom and commercial success are largely ignored and even refuted by *chanson* discourse. Yet with Renaud, the focus on his private life functions to reaffirm his star status, which in turn creates ‘rupture’ with the expected depiction and function of an *ACI*. This allows us as readers of these articles, listeners of Renaud or fans of *chanson* to begin to reconfigure this depiction and function, thus creating new ways of thinking about the role of *chanson* in the twenty-first century.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated some of the ways in which *engagement* is redefined in the case of the discourse surrounding the singer-songwriter, Renaud. Moving beyond the common acceptance that Renaud’s songs are *engagées* thanks to their subject matter, it has illustrated that his *engagement* is rooted in the use of humour and musical references to subvert the listener’s expectations, thus producing ‘rupture’ (as conceptualised by Rancière) and allowing other possible reconfigurations of the accepted systems of meaning within the context of *chanson*. Beyond his songs, the way in which Renaud behaves as an *auteur-compositeur-interprète* also produces a ‘rupture’. His writing for *Charlie Hebdo* is one example of the possible reconfigurations of the accepted role of the *ACI*. The attention that Renaud gives in these columns to the minutiae of his everyday life, which then become the focus of more recent press articles about the singer-songwriter, also serves to underscore his star status and appears at odds with his *engagement*. In the context of *chanson* rhetoric, which largely ignores the subjects of stardom and commercial success, the reconciliation which takes place in the discourse surrounding Renaud suggests that his *engagé* status also allows for possible reconfigurations of the accepted systems of meaning for *chanson* itself.

In the context of debates regarding culture and its status in contemporary France, the potential of the reconfiguring of *chanson* cannot be overestimated. In his exploration of cultural discourse in



modern France, Brian Rigby explains that ‘a universalist, humanist notion of “Culture” with a capital C still survives strongly in French society.’<sup>39</sup> Yet the discourse surrounding culture suggests that this conceptualisation has been threatened and weakened by various events:

The economic progress of postwar French society is also said to have undermined the premises of a humanist Culture through the growth of materialism, acquisitiveness, consumerism and so forth. Added to this is the crucial development of the mass media (radio, cinema, television) which have often been thought to offer short-term, low-grade satisfaction and mere entertainment in place of the more worthwhile and lasting experiences of Art and Culture.<sup>40</sup>

Although Rigby was writing in 1991, these hierarchies continue to pervade cultural discourse in contemporary France, with consumerism and mass culture still often perceived as threats to (allegedly) more worthwhile cultural experiences and forms. It is in this context that we must read the potential reconfigurations of meaning within *chanson* that are encouraged by the acknowledgement of Renaud’s star status. To acknowledge that Renaud is a *chanson* star is to challenge the specific hierarchy of value within the discourse surrounding *chanson* as a cultural product as well as the broader hierarchies present within cultural discourse in contemporary France. Renaud’s *engagement*, as I have defined it here, and the discourse that surrounds him, break with the genre rules and expectations of *chanson*, and through the acknowledgement and embracing of stardom and commerciality, encourage the re-evaluation of cultural hierarchies more broadly in twenty-first-century France.

### Notes

- 1 In this chapter, I use *chanson* as shorthand for what David Looseley describes as that ‘elite subgenre variously called the text-based song (*chanson à texte*), the author song (*chanson d’auteur*) or the poetic song (*chanson poétique*)’; David Looseley, *Édith Piaf: A Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 98. I then use *ACI* as short for *auteur-compositeur-interprète*, to refer to the singer-songwriter within this genre.
- 2 See David Looseley, *Popular Music in Contemporary France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), p. 65.

- 3 See Adeline Cordier, *Post-war French Popular Music: Cultural Identity and the Brel-Brassens-Ferré Myth* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2014) for an in-depth exploration of this triumvirate of *chanson*.
- 4 Rachel Haworth, *From the chanson française to the canzone d'autore in the 1960s and 1970s: Authenticity, Authority, Influence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), p. 12.
- 5 Looseley, *Édith Piaf*, p. 98.
- 6 In the first full-length study in English of *chanson*, Peter Hawkins argues for the inclusion of Renaud as one of his exemplars for the subgenre. See Peter Hawkins, *Chanson: The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 178–188.
- 7 'A modern poet who knew how to establish himself in the pantheon of *chanson* as a singer who is both sensitive and politically engaged, following in the footsteps of Brassens or Léo Ferré'; Delphine Gaston, *L'intégrale Renaud: Tout Renaud de A à Z* (Grainville: City Éditions, 2006), back cover. All translations are the author's own, unless stated.
- 8 'Popular/Folk singer'; Claude Duneton, 'Préface', in Renaud, *Le temps des noyaux suivi di Mistral gagnant: Chansons et dessins* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), p. 11.
- 9 'Eternal poet'; Régis Lefèvre, *Renaud, deux vies: Retour gagnant* (Lausanne and Paris: Favre, 2002), p. 7.
- 10 See Michel Beaufils, *Brassens: Poète traditionnel* (Niort: Éditions Imbert-Nicolas, 1976), pp. 79–84.
- 11 See, for example, Laurent Berthet, *Renaud: Le Spartacus de la chanson* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 2002), Gaston, *L'intégrale Renaud*, and Lefèvre, *Renaud, deux vies*.
- 12 'Someone who writes chronicles, who shines a light on matters, who observes both French and international society'; Berthet, *Renaud: Le Spartacus de la chanson*, p. 12.
- 13 Berthet, *Renaud*, p. 13.
- 14 Hawkins, *Chanson*, p. 183.
- 15 Hawkins, *Chanson*, p. 178.
- 16 See Barthes, *Mythologies*, pp. 140–2.
- 17 'It's true that it's a bit botched / It's because on the album / I only had nine songs / but I had to have ten!'
- 18 'France is a country of coppers / There are a hundred of them on every street corner / So as to maintain public order / they assassinate with impunity.'
- 19 'So Lucien, my old mate, / is it true that you live with your mother-in-law, / that you're married and have kids, / that you work so that you can feed them? / You know, I've got a brilliant idea: / let's make a new band, / if you want, you can be the leader, / another beer please, barkeeper [...]'
- 20 'Cultural contestation is also achieved through humour [...]. This kind of destructive humour played an important role at the end of '68 and seemed to be specific to left-wing contestation'; Régis Chevandier, *Renaud: Foulard rouge, blouson de cuir, etc.: Construction d'un personnage social 1975–1996* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p. 32.

- 21 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 63. With thanks to Riccardo Orlandi for the introduction to the usefulness of Rancière as a framework for reading *engagement* in popular music through his doctoral work on the Italian singer-songwriter Fabrizio De André, currently being completed at the University of Hull (UK).
- 22 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 64.
- 23 Franco Fabbri, 'A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications', in *Popular Music Perspectives* ed. David Horn and Philip Tagg (Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1982), p. 52; Franco Fabbri's term, indicating that genres are 'set[s] of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules'.
- 24 See Looseley, *Popular Music in Contemporary France* (2003) and Haworth, *From the chanson française to the canzone d'autore* (2015) for further explanation of the genre rules of *chanson* and the ways in which these rules are in fact the result of the discourse which surrounds the genre and is generated by journalists, critics, fans, industry representatives and even singer-songwriters themselves.
- 25 Hawkins, *Chanson*, pp. 184–5.
- 26 Berthet, *Renaud*, p. 12.
- 27 'Politically incorrect chronicles to be consumed without moderation' in which 'Renaud opens to us the doors to his secret garden, in order to track down, with humour and tenderness, the poetry in the everyday'; Renaud, *Envoyé spécial chez moi* (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1996), back cover).
- 28 'I broke a nail [...] The one on my middle finger, the one for Le Pen. And for the majority of the other candidates, too'; Renaud, *Envoyé spécial*, p. 20.
- 29 Renaud, *Envoyé spécial*, pp. 25–57.
- 30 Renaud, *Envoyé spécial*, pp. 7–11.
- 31 Renaud, *Envoyé spécial*, pp. 12–14.
- 32 Renaud, *Envoyé spécial*, pp. 109–13.
- 33 Barbara Lebrun, 'Beyond Brassens: Twenty-First Century Chanson and the New Generation of Singer-Songwriters', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 22/2 (2014), 165.
- 34 'It is, however, not with a love song that Renaud Séchan has reached commercial Nirvana: "Manhattan-Kaboul", the driving force of the album *Boucan d'enfer*, evokes the 11 September attacks in New York. The two characters do not love one another; in fact, they do not even know one another and die at the end. This has not stopped the single selling more than 500,000 copies and the album more than 2 million'; Claire Guillot, 'Manhattan-Kaboul', *Le Monde* (25 August 2005), available from [http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2005/08/25/manhattan-kaboul\\_682510\\_3246.html?xtmc=renaud\\_sechan&xtcr=7](http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2005/08/25/manhattan-kaboul_682510_3246.html?xtmc=renaud_sechan&xtcr=7).
- 35 'This was before France began to worry about his depression and to measure his alleged addiction to his medication of choice, Pernod'; Jean-Frédéric Tronche, 'Interview. Thierry Séchan: "Renaud

- reviendra dans 2 ans”, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (16 November 2011), available from <http://o.nouvelobs.com/people/20111116.OBS4656/inter-view-thierry-sechan-renaud-reviendra-dans-2-ans.html>.
- 36 See Barbara Lebrun’s Introduction to her edited volume on *chanson* and performance for an in-depth exploration of the tendency to privilege ‘head over heart’, or intellect over emotions, in *chanson* discourse, in Barbara Lebrun (ed.), *Chanson et performance: Mise en scène du corps dans la chanson française et francophone* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).
- 37 “I’ve written 14 songs and I want to record them quickly” the author of *Mistral gagnant* assures us. Representatives of this newspaper briefly met with the singer in L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, the small village in the Vaucluse where he now lives. With a husky, slightly quaking voice, the singer confirmed at midday on the radio station Radiotélévision Luxembourg that he has been writing again for the past fortnight; anon., ‘Renaud prépare son retour’, *Libération*, 20 June 2015, available from: [http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2015/06/20/renaud-prepare-son-retour\\_1333826](http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2015/06/20/renaud-prepare-son-retour_1333826).
- 38 Erin Meyers, “‘Can you handle my truth?’: Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image”, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42/5 (2009), 892.
- 39 Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study in Cultural Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 4.
- 40 Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France*, p. 5.

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# 3

## ‘Radical’ Independent Presses in France at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century: A New Form of Political and Intellectual *engagement*?

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SOPHIE NOËL

### Introduction

The question of *engagement* in the cultural sphere today is generally addressed from the production side, by focusing on authors, ideas, intellectual currents, thereby paying little attention to intermediation. However, authors and texts do not travel alone, and the role of publishers is essential in the dissemination of ideas and visions of the world. Even in the age of self-publication on the Internet, an author needs a publisher in order to reach a general audience and attain legitimacy, and it is generally in the form of published books, whether digital or printed, that we gain access to texts and authors. This chapter aims to shed some light on publishers, the often neglected intermediaries between authors and readers, and to examine their contribution to the emergence of politically engaged authors in the current French cultural scene. To do so, I will focus on a group of thirty-three independent presses that have been created in the past thirty years in the field of social sciences and social critique, which I have termed, for lack of a better word in English, ‘radical’ or politically committed.<sup>1</sup> As far as methodology is concerned, I draw on historical data, present-day documentation



and catalogue surveys, together with in-depth interviews conducted with editors, booksellers and distributors over a period of five years.<sup>2</sup>

These presses are revealing in as far as they exemplify renewed forms of intellectual and political *engagement* in the French public sphere today, at a time when the book industry is subject to increasing financial rationalisation.<sup>3</sup> They represent pockets of resistance to the economic rationale that has become dominant in the cultural industries, in the name of the 'autonomy' of cultural and artistic fields from political and economic constraints.<sup>4</sup> Although heterodox publishing operations remain economically vulnerable, such a context has proved paradoxically stimulating for their creation. Situated at the pole of restricted production,<sup>5</sup> such presses emphasise that symbolic value (i.e. content and ideas) should prevail over economic considerations in publishing in order to resist the pressures of the global market, thus asserting the specific value of books as singularities not random commodities.<sup>6</sup>

The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of politically committed presses in France today, briefly retracing their genesis, before taking a closer look at their political profile in the second part, with a view to analysing their impact on the French publishing field. I intend to show that although marginal in terms of output or turnover, their influence is far from negligible, for they play an important part in the dynamics of the cultural and intellectual scene in France today.

## 1. Radical independent presses in France

### a) *L'édition indépendante critique*: main characteristics

This analysis is based on a group of independent French presses, publishing in the sector of social sciences in general, that present themselves as 'politically engaged' and on the left or extreme left wing. The fact that they are independent is important: they own one hundred per cent of their capital when they are business structures and do not belong to larger groups such as Hachette or Editis, which means that they are quite vulnerable economically.<sup>7</sup> They were created between 1985 and the first decade of the twenty-first century, in the wake of anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements such as ATTAC, but their political inspirations are heterogeneous: Green movements, anarchism, libertarianism, Marxism ... Literature

occupies a small or often non-existent portion of their lists, for they are, first and foremost, *des éditeurs d'idées* for which subjects such as sociology, history, gender studies or economics represent a way to tackle current issues with a critical edge. Situated at the crossroads of different publishing sectors – academic, mainstream, political and avant-garde – they occupy a niche characterised by a combination of political and intellectual commitment, a niche that has been quite dynamic over the past thirty years.<sup>8</sup>

Four main subgroups can be identified to better understand this cluster of publishers. The first one consists of very small structures with a marked political stance, generally anarchist or libertarian, such as *Les Nuits rouges* and *L'Insomniaque*. They can hardly be considered professionals since publishing is for them a secondary activity financed by other sources of revenue<sup>9</sup> and they remain on the margins of the publishing field. The next group, situated at the crossroads of academic and radical publishing, is best exemplified by *Raisons d'agir*, a not-for-profit operation created by Pierre Bourdieu in 1996 in order to provide a counter to neo-liberal ideas, that is grounded in academic legitimacy. A third group brings together avant-garde presses, such as *Amsterdam* or *Les Prairies ordinaires*, which publish essays in critical theory mainly based on translations; while the last group, closest to mainstream publishing, specialises in books based on social and political investigations such as those for which *Les Éditions des Arènes* has gained a reputation.<sup>10</sup>

The terms used by these politically committed presses to define themselves are varied – *éditeur hétérodoxe*, *critique*, *subversif*, *alternatif* – and such variety bears witness to the multiple sides of the *éditeur engagé* in France at the turn of the twenty-first century. If one were to search for equivalents in the United Kingdom, Verso and Pluto Books would spring to mind, although both were created in the 1960s and operate within a thoroughly different national framework.<sup>11</sup> But beyond specific national contexts, these two presses share some general traits with their French counterparts, the main one being their radical positioning and the profile of their authors and lists.

Radical presses are also diverse from the point of view of organisation (see Table 1): some are very small businesses run by one or two individuals, with an output of fewer than five titles a year, others are established businesses with a small staff on a full or part-time



basis, publishing twenty to fifty books a year. One in four is a not-for-profit organisation, while the rest act as private businesses. A handful have achieved recognition – Raisons d’agir, Amsterdam, La Fabrique, Les Prairies ordinaires – but most of them are little known to the general public. However, they operate in the same arena as mainstream publishers: authors circulate easily between their lists and those of trade publishers, some editors have moved from a position in a small avant-garde press to a major trade one, and their books are available in all major bookshops across the country.

**Table 1**

Publisher	Creation date	Legal status	Salaried staff	Number of titles/year
L’Éclat	1985	Ltd	2	10–25
Syllepse	1989	Association	1	> 25
Encyclopédie des nuisances	1993	Ltd	0	< 10
Ivrea	1992	Ltd	0	< 10
L’Insomniaque	1993	Association	0	< 10
Dagorno	1992	Ltd	0	< 10
Le Temps des cerises	1994	Ltd	3	> 25
Sens & Tonka	1995	Ltd	2	10–25
Sulliver	1995	SA	0	10–25
Raisons d’agir	1996	Association	1	< 10
La Dispute	1996	Ltd	3	10–25
Agone	1997	Association	6	10–25
Les Arènes	1997	Ltd	6	10–25
Le Passant ordinaire	1997	Association	2	< 10
Exils	1997	Ltd	0	< 10
Golias	1997	Ltd	3	10–25
Les Nuits rouges	1997	Association	0	< 10
La Fabrique	1998	Ltd	1	< 10
Nautilus	2000	Ltd	1	< 10
Parangon	2000	Ltd	0	10–25
Aden	2000	Ltd	2	10–25
Les Éditions libertaires	2001	Association	0	10–25
Le Croquant	2003	Cooperative	0	10–25
Homnisphères	2003	Ltd	1	< 10
Amsterdam	2003	Ltd	2	10–25
Lignes	2003	Ltd	1	10–25
L’Échappée	2004	Association	0	< 10
Sextant	2004	Ltd	0	< 10
Delga	2004	Ltd	0	< 10
Les Prairies ordinaires	2005	Ltd	1	< 10

### b) 'Radical' production

However diverse, these presses share a 'community of vision', i.e. a concern for political matters in the broad sense of the word (*polis*) that makes them distinctive in the publishing field today. Their production covers a wide array of genres, from essays on current issues addressing a large readership, to theoretical and academic texts in political and social theory geared for a more selective audience. Roughly speaking, two main profiles can be identified. The first revolves around the production of *essais*, a loosely defined genre generally employed by high profile authors – mainly academics – to address *la fraction cultivée*<sup>12</sup> of the public, whereas political documents and investigation books are written by less prestigious authors (journalists, activists, social workers) for a wider readership. Only a handful of publishers such as Agone or Syllepse publish across the board, putting together academic texts and highbrow essays in their catalogues alongside more accessible texts. Most of their counterparts specialise in one specific genre.

Generally speaking, small formats and paperbacks are popular with radical publishers, a choice that was typical of nineteenth-century Republican and Catholic presses.<sup>13</sup> Closer to our time, *La petite bibliothèque Maspero*, a series that was pivotal in the dissemination of political and theoretical texts in the 1960s, is still a central reference point today. Series such as *La petite Bibliothèque* (Éditions Aden), *La Petite collection rouge* (Éditions Le Temps des cerises) illustrate this revived tradition. Pierre Bourdieu's publishing structure, *Raisons d'agir*, built its success in the second half of the 1990s on a series of small (one hundred pages or so) and cheap (less than ten euros) books on topical issues that were clearly in line with radical nineteenth-century series and *La petite bibliothèque Maspero*. Bourdieu's *Sur la télévision* and Serge Halimi's *Les Nouveaux chiens de garde*<sup>14</sup> were among the bestsellers of this not-for-profit structure relying on the sales force of Le Seuil, who published them. Both titles sold more than 100,000 copies in less than a year, which is an unusually high figure in this sector, where average sales remain around 1,500 copies.<sup>15</sup> This proved to be an initiative that was to be widely copied in the following decade, both by radical and mainstream presses such as *Zones* (an imprint of La Découverte) and *La République des idées*, launched by Pierre Rosanvallon with the help of Le Seuil.

The creation of new editions of revolutionary classics, from the works of Rosa Luxemburg to those of Bakunin and Engels, including texts by George Orwell and Bertrand Russell, is also a common feature. Making political classics accessible to the public, together with the works of lesser-known authors belonging to the anarchist or libertarian tradition, is typical of the desire to put readers in contact with a corpus of texts echoing today's issues, hence constituting a sort of 'ideal library' for today's political engagement. Such editions are relatively easy to put together (no rights or advances need to be paid to authors), and are consequently accessible to newcomers devoid of both economic and symbolic capital. A good illustration is provided by *Les Nuits rouges*, a small publisher founded in 1997, which has revived the writings of feminist and adventurer Alexandra David-Néel, together with little-known anti-colonialist nineteenth-century texts.<sup>16</sup> *L'Insomniaque*, a libertarian publishing collective founded in 1993 on the outskirts of Paris, is another example of passionate publishers acting as historians, gathering unpublished data and forgotten archives. This small press made a name for itself by publishing the carefully edited and illustrated memoirs (running to 847 pages) of Isaac Marius Jacob, an anarchist burglar and major figure of the *Propagande par le fait* movement.<sup>17</sup>

Another major feature of these publishers' productions is the translation of internationally renowned thinkers whose texts were not available in French until the 1990s due to a cautious attitude to translations by major trade publishers in the field of social sciences. Indeed, such major authors as Noam Chomsky,<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, David Harvey, Frederic Jameson and Giorgio Colli were not translated into French until the end of the twentieth century, and this was done by small independent presses feeling the need to 'fill the lacunae', as the founder of Éditions Amsterdam puts it (Interview, 7 October 2005). Small independent presses have played a key role in the 'importation' of these authors into French,<sup>19</sup> hence accumulating a symbolic capital that they badly needed as new entrants in the field.<sup>20</sup> Generally speaking, the publishing of recognised names enables unknown presses to build their own intellectual reputation and legitimacy as intellectual go-betweens. The translation of radical thinkers is therefore a powerful resource, enabling publishers to assert an avant-garde image and to distance themselves from competitors. It is an effective strategy of distinction for new

entrants. However, following an unwritten rule, 'big names' usually end up signing up with mainstream publishers who can guarantee them higher advances, better commercial deals and more effective distribution. This has notably been the case with Slavoj Žižek (currently published by Flammarion) and Noam Chomsky (published by Fayard and Le Seuil). In a book industry dominated by international media groups and powerful literary agents, small players are clearly disadvantaged in the long run.

Éditions Amsterdam, founded in Paris in 2003 by Jérôme Vidal, aged thirty-three at the time, with a degree in English and some experience in teaching and translating, provides a good example of how a newcomer can build a list based on renowned foreign authors. Translations, mostly from English, make up more than sixty per cent of his list. Vidal began by publishing two classic history texts: the monumental *Radical Enlightenment* by Jonathan Israel (more than 900 pages long), and *The Invention of Tradition*, by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.<sup>21</sup> In a bold departure from traditional academic texts,<sup>22</sup> he then focused on gender, queer and subaltern studies (by authors such as Judith Butler, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Spivak), before moving on to post-colonial studies (Neil Lazarus, Marcus Rediker). Les Prairies ordinaires is another example of a relatively new press (founded in 2005) with a strong commitment to publishing translated works of social critique. The *Penser/Croiser* series, offering small format and affordable books (ten to fifteen euros), was launched in 2007 in order to make accessible to the French public authors such as Frederic Jameson, Mike Davis and David Harvey, together with social sciences classics by Raymond Williams and Stanley Fish, among others. The aim was to publish 'the best in world thinking', with texts that have 'made a difference in the theoretical field over the past thirty years'.<sup>23</sup> A final example is provided by Agone, a press with six employees in Marseille and a backlist of more than one hundred titles including texts by Paul Willis, Pierre Bourdieu, Victor Serge and Karl Kraus. Agone, whose name evokes 'combat' in ancient Greek, is associated with the successful publication in 2002 of the translation into French of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, which became a bestseller with more than 30,000 copies sold in hardback and paperback editions.<sup>24</sup>

Radical presses have had an enduring impact on the French publishing field since the 1990s, introducing new authors, topics

and genres such as the 'radical/academic' essays of *Raisons d'agir*. Most of these presses are professional structures, publishing carefully edited and translated highbrow essays that compete both with academic presses and established trade publishers such as Gallimard, Flammarion, Le Seuil or La Découverte. All in all, they have been instrumental in putting political theory back on the publishing agenda after its eclipse in the 1970s and 1980s, and trade publishers have had little choice but to follow suit, developing radical series of their own to respond to the new demand for political texts.<sup>25</sup> In that sense, one may wonder what makes radical independent presses distinctive from mainstream presses. In order to answer this question, we need to turn to the context in which they emerged, which will help to understand their intellectual and political positioning.

## 2. A new form of engagement?

It should first be remembered that radical presses represent a striking departure from the process of 'depoliticisation' that characterised the intellectual and publishing world in the late 1970s and 1980s, after François Maspero left the eponymous press he had founded<sup>26</sup> and most radical publishers went bust or disappeared. After the 'golden age' of the 1960s and 1970s, when structuralism was unchallenged and authors such as Foucault, Barthes and Lévi-Strauss were breaking new ground in literary theory, anthropology and history in the wake of the political effervescence of 1968, major publishers turned away from the social sciences and social critique. It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that a new climate set in. Political and intellectual life converged again against the backdrop of a new socio-economic context characterised by rising unemployment and inequality, and the domination of neo-liberal ideas in the public sphere. The social unrest of 1995, when the French capital came to a standstill for several months in protest at the Juppé plan to reform the public pension system, together with the impact of the Social Forum in Porto Alegre the same year, crystallised this contestatory mood, and demand for radical texts rose. The huge success of *La Misère du monde*<sup>27</sup>, a collective work on social suffering edited by Pierre Bourdieu in 1993, is one of the best illustrations of this changed climate.

At the same time, the profound transformations of the publishing sector have also contributed to the emergence of radical independent presses. In France, as everywhere, the publishing market has been increasingly concentrated and polarised between, on the one hand, large media groups that have an in-house distribution service ensuring them a de facto control of access to the market and, on the other, very small businesses that struggle to keep their heads above water and find it difficult to make their books visible.<sup>28</sup> Hachette accounts for 33.7 per cent of the book market, followed by Editis (Planeta), with 11.1 per cent.<sup>29</sup> The sector is highly concentrated as the first ten groups account for 82.2 per cent of the global turnover. The increasing rationalisation of practices in the publishing field has spurred resistance from smaller players eager to criticise the declining autonomy of the cultural sphere, and to promote an idealised vision of publishing. They bemoan the fact that the field is increasingly dominated by market values and conglomerates, mainly interested in churning out standardised bestsellers that contribute to the shrinking of a diverse cultural offer. Paradoxically, creating a publishing structure has never been easier, a few thousand euros being enough to launch a small publishing operation. Indeed, publishing is an unregulated sector with very low entry costs resulting from the development of cheap desktop publishing software. Hence the number of new players entering the field each year, often with disappointing results after a few years.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, the French book market has been characterised by a high level of state intervention since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, owing to complex historical and cultural reasons that will not be addressed here.<sup>31</sup> The cornerstone of state intervention is the 1981 law (the *Loi Lang*), which set a fixed price for books and whose main objective was to protect diversity within the marketplace and allow a dense network of independent bookshops to stay in business when book chains such as Fnac and supermarkets (and today virtual bookshops like Amazon) were entering the game. Independent publishers in France can rely on public subsidies, put in place in the 1970s, at different national and local levels. The Ministry of Culture has set up a specialised body, *le Centre National du Livre* (National Book Centre) to distribute subsidies to a wide array of publishers (irrespective of their size) based on the quality of their projects, while most regional authorities have developed

schemes to help publishing operations and bookshops stay in business.

Although subsidies and zero interest loans do not radically alter the ecosystem of small publishers, it is obvious that they do make a difference, enabling them to pursue editorial projects that could not exist if they were left to market forces. As the founder of L'Éclat, a small press with an eclectic list in philosophy and religion based on translated texts (notably from Hebrew, Arabic or Italian) puts it:

Si le Centre National du Livre n'existait pas, il y aurait encore moins de traductions en France. Le CNL est criticable à plein de niveaux, mais c'est un outil majeur. On ne peut pas s'en passer. Ou alors il faudrait que les livres de traduction soient autour de 40 euros, mais plus personne ne les achèterait.<sup>32</sup> (Interview, 23 March 2010)

All of these factors have contributed to the emergence of politically engaged presses that have developed an uncompromising view of *engagement* inspired by historical figures such as François Maspéro and Jérôme Lindon (Éditions de Minuit),<sup>33</sup> who are still influential today. Following this tradition, being a 'great publisher' is associated with taking risks and surviving in dire financial conditions, in order to make it possible for alternative voices to be heard. Books remain for these publishers *des biens pas comme les autres*<sup>34</sup> that need to be defended at all costs inasmuch as they are essential to a democratic and pluralistic public sphere. At the same time, books are more difficult to sell today than in the 1960s. The number of readers keeps decreasing in the general, as well as in the student, population;<sup>35</sup> the 'window of opportunity'<sup>36</sup> for small players in the media and in bookshops is shrinking, while the number of new titles published each year continues to rise.<sup>37</sup> Although radical presses can rely on a robust network of independent booksellers, cash flow remains a constant problem and they live from hand to mouth. As a result, ascetic behaviour and self-exploitation tend to be the rule, and the work of those who are employed in such presses can be described as a 'mission', or a labour of love.<sup>38</sup> Most of them have a second job in order make a living, often in graphic design, teaching or translating. Unsurprisingly, employees are often retired people and individuals with unemployment benefits. Their work is often referred to as a kind of calling disconnected from material incentives, which is typical of indie structures in the cultural field.

### Political *engagement* and intellectual excellence: two sides of the same coin

How can one best characterise the *engagement* of twenty-first-century radical presses in this specific context? While they can be placed in the wake of such prestigious predecessors as Maspero and Lindon, their form of *engagement* presents some distinctive features. To begin with, one cannot emphasise enough the fact that the word ‘militant’ has become a foil carrying negative connotations today; hence there is a marked preference for adjectives such as *engagé* or *critique*, however blurred they might be. In these publishers’ views, *engagement* goes hand in hand with intellectual excellence and critical enquiry, not with partisan politics. The presentation of La Fabrique on its website provides an illustration of this:

Nous avons fondé La Fabrique en 1998. “Nous”, c’est un groupe d’amis, les uns philosophes, les autres historiens, d’autres encore éditeurs, qui ont envie de travailler ensemble à publier des livres de théorie et d’action. Ces livres, nous les voulons ancrés politiquement, mais sans céder à aucun esprit de chapelle, sans être inféodés à aucun groupe ni parti. Ce sont des textes de philosophie, d’histoire, d’analyse de notre temps. Français ou étrangers, contemporains ou classiques, célèbres ou très jeunes, les auteurs sont de ceux qui remettent en cause l’idéologie de la domination.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to the previous generation of publishers (notably Maspero), their *engagement* is disconnected from political forces and traditional parties or unions. The older ones, who were in their twenties in the 1970s, were generally linked to Trotskyist and Maoist groups or the PSU (Parti socialiste unifié), but they are no longer involved. As for the younger ones, they prefer to be associated with NGOs or various advocacy groups. But whatever their age, they will not identify with the type of publishing that characterised previous decades, particularly the Communist Party presses.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, radical presses represent a hybrid locus between partisan publishing and academic publishing, together with a potential substitute for traditional political *engagement*.<sup>41</sup> Following a long-established tradition in France, radical publishers – who are mainly educated white males from middle- and upper-class backgrounds – see themselves as engaged intellectuals in the public sphere. It is not unusual to find their names in the national press and in selected journals, and they often participate in debates with academics and activists. Their



opinion is valued in the media and intellectual circles as they benefit from the intellectual clout of the prestigious authors published by their press. To give but one example, the founder of Éditions Amsterdam wrote several 'open letters' that were published in *Libération* and *Le Monde* prior to the 2007 presidential election, before writing a book (published by his own press) about the problems facing the French left, drawing on Spinoza and Israel.<sup>42</sup>

While expressing their views on a variety of general issues (immigration, nuclear energy, Europe, party politics), these publishers are also active on the professional front, defending alternative ways of doing publishing. One could define their position as a moral crusade against the commodification of culture and shrinking cultural diversity, that is steeped in the critique of mass culture pioneered by Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer.<sup>43</sup> The self-presentation of a small press on its website is quite typical of the rhetoric of radical publishers:

(Nous sommes) une structure éditoriale indépendante des groupes monopolistes qui phagocytent et tuent à petit feu l'édition en transformant connaissances et œuvres en produits. Des phrases qui donnent à penser dans cette civilisation du loisir et du divertissement permanent [...] Des écrits pour abolir l'objet éphémère de la pure consommation et retrouver l'objet singulier, relié et porteur de sens qui permet à la vie de dépasser le stade de la survie.<sup>44</sup>

*L'édition sans éditeurs* by André Schiffrin,<sup>45</sup> published by La Fabrique in 1999, has become a symbol of resistance to conglomerates worldwide. The book has been particularly successful in France, where Schiffrin's blistering account of the changes that have affected the book industry has tapped into the debate about cultural diversity and the *exception culturelle*. Schiffrin, who died in 2013, was a permanent star guest in professional meetings and academic conferences in France. This prestige was shared by his publisher, Éric Hazan, an ardent advocate of small independent presses and founder of La Fabrique.<sup>46</sup>

Generally speaking, these publishers share a rationalist faith in the emancipatory power of the written word, using texts as intellectual weapons, as resources to foster public debate. They believe that books are intrinsically subversive inasmuch as they fuel public discussion and provide weapons to resist the doxa of neo-liberalism. As Éric Hazan declared during a debate organised by a Parisian

bookshop in May 2010, ‘books are the most subversive arms’, hence their determination to publish books that are ‘different’ (in content) but that are also produced differently, according to an artisan ethos and not according to the standards of the conglomerates. As such, they hold strong views about relationships with authors, subcontractors and colleagues – even though the concrete results of such views are often disappointing, when not blatantly at odds with the principles invoked – and believe that ideas should be put before profit. All in all, radical presses strive to create a coherent system of values where symbolic and material conditions are interconnected.

### Conclusion

Independent radical presses have had an enduring impact on the French cultural scene, an impact to which the proliferation of ‘radical series’ in mainstream presses and the steady stream of politically committed publishing operations testify.<sup>47</sup> Their contribution to public debate has been tangible: new voices, renewed topics and popular genres have emerged thanks to them and they are now part of the publishing landscape, if only on the margins. But the flipside of this success is that competition with large trade structures has also greatly increased. It has become more difficult for radical publishers to attract the most successful authors, the ‘brand names’ that produce bestsellers and gain media attention. As their financial situation remains extremely precarious, some end up being bought up by a larger business after a few years. Others struggle to stay in business. As a result, one wonders whether this constant risk of marginalisation is the price that has to be paid for an uncompromising *engagement* in the cultural field today.

### Notes

- 1 I use the term ‘radical presses’ as an equivalent to the French *édition critique*, knowing that the translation is not entirely satisfactory, owing to historical cultural differences between France and the UK; hence the quotation marks around ‘radical’.
- 2 This article is based upon a case study carried out for my Ph.D. dissertation in 2010: ‘L’édition indépendante «critique» en France au tournant du xxie siècle. Une identité instable dans le champ éditorial’ (unpublished PhD thesis, École des Hautes études en sciences sociales

- (EHESS), 2013). Sixty-two semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out between 2006 and 2010 with publishers, booksellers and sales representatives.
- 3 André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London: Verso, 2000); John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
  - 4 Pierre Bourdieu retraces the process through which cultural and artistic fields, and more specifically the literary field, took shape in the nineteenth century as a space set apart, progressively becoming autonomous of all external rules. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
  - 5 According to Bourdieu, the book market is structured around the opposition between the pole of restricted production, where intellectual criteria prevail, and the pole of large-scale production, ruled by commercial success; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).
  - 6 Lucien Karpik, *Valuing the Unique: The Economics of Singularities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
  - 7 On the difficult conditions experienced by new publishing structures in France, see Bertrand Legendre and Corinne Abensour, *Regards sur l'édition*, vol. 2: *Les nouveaux éditeurs, 1988–2005* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2007).
  - 8 See Sophie Noël, *L'édition indépendante critique: engagements politiques et intellectuels* (Villeurbanne: Presses de l'ENSSIB, 2012).
  - 9 This point is addressed in more detail at the end of the chapter.
  - 10 Les Arènes attracted a lot of media attention by exposing the Clearstream scandal. See Denis Robert and Ernest Backes, *Révélations* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2011).
  - 11 S. Noël, 'Indépendance et édition politique en Grande-Bretagne. Le cas de quelques éditeurs engagés', *Communication & Langages*, 170 (2011), 73–85.
  - 12 'The cultured minority'.
  - 13 I. Olivero, 'Les propagandes catholiques et républicaines dans la librairie au début de la IIIe République (1860–1880)', in J.-Y. Mollier (ed.), *Le commerce de la librairie en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: IMEC, 1998), pp. 243–53.
  - 14 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1996); Serge Halimi, *Les Nouveaux chiens de garde* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1996).
  - 15 More than 200,000 copies of *Sur la télévision* were sold over a period of fifteen years; source: C. Ferrand, 'Contestation: petits prix, mais ils vendent le maximum', *Livres Hebdo*, 294 (22 May 1998), 23–4.
  - 16 Alexandra David-Néel, *Féministe et libertaire: écrits de jeunesse* (Paris: Les Nuits rouges, 2003).
  - 17 The 'propaganda of the deed' is a strategy promoted by a group of anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century in order to spread their political principles with deeds, and not only with words. It

- included bombings, acts of sabotage, theft and boycott; Isaac Marius Jacob, *Ecrits* (Montreuil: L'Insomniaque, 2004).
- 18 This assertion only covers the political writings of Chomsky; his academic work on linguistics was published and translated into French earlier, mainly by Le Seuil.
  - 19 S. Noël, 'L'engagement par la traduction. Le rôle des petits éditeurs indépendants dans l'importation des ouvrages de sciences humaines', in G. Sapiro (ed.), *Traduire la littérature et les sciences humaines: obstacles économiques et culturels* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2012), pp. 273–95.
  - 20 Gisèle Sapiro, *Translatio, Le marché de la traduction en France à l'heure de la mondialisation* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008) and J. Heilbron 'Towards a sociology of translation: book translation as a cultural world system', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2 (1999), 429–44.
  - 21 Jonathan I. Israel, *Les Lumières radicales* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2005); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *L'Invention de la tradition* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2006).
  - 22 On the subject of academic disciplines in France, see François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
  - 23 [www.lesprairiesordinaires.fr](http://www.lesprairiesordinaires.fr).
  - 24 For a more detailed account of the strategies of these three presses, see S. Noël, 'L'engagement par la traduction', pp. 273–95.
  - 25 To name just a few of these series: *Révolutions* (Actes Sud), *Sur le vif* and *Zones* (La Découverte), *Les Petits livres* (Mille et Une nuit/Fayard), *L'École des idées* (L'Aube), *Café Voltaire* (Flammarion).
  - 26 In 1959, François Maspero founded a bookshop and a publishing house under his name that became a central place for leftist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. He also took a stand against French Algeria, and was in favour of anti-colonial movements all over the world. Les Éditions Maspero became La Découverte in 1982, under the direction of François Gêze. See Julien Hage, 'François Maspero: éditeur partisan', *Contretemps*, 13 (2005), 100–8.
  - 27 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
  - 28 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, pp. 151–68.
  - 29 F. Pialut, 'Les 200 premiers éditeurs français', *Livres Hebdo*, 1058 (16 October 2015).
  - 30 Legendre and Abensour, *Regards sur l'édition*.
  - 31 On the history of cultural policy in France, see Yves Surel, *L'État et le livre: les politiques publiques du livre en France: 1957–1993* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) and Philippe Urfalino, *L'invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2004).
  - 32 'If the Centre National du Livre did not exist, there would be even fewer translations in France. The CNL can be criticised on various levels, but it is an important tool. We cannot do without it. Or

- translated texts would have to be priced at around 40 euros and no one would buy them any more.'
- 33 The *Éditions de Minuit*, founded clandestinely during the German occupation of France, epitomise an uncompromising conception of publishing. Jérôme Lindon, its director after World War Two, maintained this spirit by publishing essays against the French government's policy in Algeria during the war of independence. He also played an important role in the passing of the 1981 'Fixed Book Price' law.
- 34 'Commodities with a difference'.
- 35 'Big readers', who declare reading at least twenty-five books a year went down from 15 to 11 per cent of the general French population between 1997 and 2008; Olivier Donnat, *Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère numérique: enquête 2008* (Paris: La Découverte / Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 2009). Available at [www.pratiquesculturelles.gouv.fr/doc/08synthese.pdf](http://www.pratiquesculturelles.gouv.fr/doc/08synthese.pdf), p. 8.
- 36 Up to the 1990s, books used to remain for several months in bookshops before being sent back to publishers in the event of insufficient sales. Today, they are sent back after a mere two or three weeks if sales are considered disappointing. Their 'window of opportunity' has therefore dwindled.
- 37 A total of 66,527 new titles was put on the market in 2013; *Livres Hebdo/Electre*, données 2012 révisées.
- 38 See S. Noël, 'Keeping the economy at a distance: The case of radical independent presses in France', in U. Shuerkens (ed.), *Global management, local resistances* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 220–37.
- 39 'We created La fabrique in 1998. "We" are a group of friends; some are philosophers, others historians or publishers who wish to work together to publish books of theory and action. We want these books to be politically oriented, but without pledging allegiance to any group or party. They are philosophy and history books, books that address current issues. Their authors, whether French or not, contemporary or classic, famous or very young, are those who question the ideology of domination'; <http://lafabrique.atheles.org/page/quisommesnous.html>, accessed 5 November 2015.
- 40 Marie-Cécile Bouju, *Lire en communiste. Les maisons d'édition du Parti communiste français, 1920–1968* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010).
- 41 For a more detailed account of radical publishers' specific forms of *engagement*, at the crossroads of the political and intellectual fields, see S. Noël, *L'édition indépendante critique*, pp. 345–68.
- 42 J. Vidal, 'Otages du parti socialiste?', *Libération* (2 March 2007); '2007 année zéro de la gauche', *Le Monde*, 17 May (2007); *La Fabrique de l'impuissance*, vol. 1: *La gauche, les intellectuels et le libéralisme sécuritaire* (Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2008).
- 43 W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Schocken, 1968), pp. 217–52; T. W. Adorno, and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

- 44 'We are independent from monopolistic conglomerates that are swallowing up and slowly killing the publishing industry by transforming knowledge and books into commodities. We publish books providing food for thought in a society dominated by leisure and permanent entertainment. We publish texts that aim to abolish books as ephemeral objects of pure consumption in order to rediscover them as singular objects, bound and meaningful, that make it possible for life to be about more than just survival'; <http://www.lechappee.org/la-maison/texte-fondateur>.
- 45 André Schiffrin was the director of Pantheon books in the US for many years until he resigned in 1989 to set up a not-for-profit house. *L'édition sans éditeurs* was published in English under the title *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London:Verso, 2000).
- 46 Éric Hazan, *Faire mouvement: entretiens avec Mathieu Potte-Bonneville* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2005).
- 47 To name just a few such publishing structures created in the past ten years: Les Petits matins (2005), Libertalia, Les Fondateurs de briques (2007), Le Passager clandestin, La Digitale (2008), La Ville brûle (2009).

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## 4

# Charity Engagements: Television Coverage of *Les Restos du Coeur* and *Les Enfoirés*

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CHRIS TINKER

In 1985, the comic Coluche (Michel Colucci) launched the *Restaurants* ('Restos') *du Coeur* (restaurants of/from the heart) food-distribution charity, asking the singer-songwriter Jean-Jacques Goldman to produce a charity single 'La Chanson des Restos' (1986) to raise funds for the project. Goldman and Coluche, along with the actors Nathalie Baye, Catherine Deneuve and Yves Montand, the television presenter Michel Drucker, and the footballer Michel Platini featured on the track and video clip. Although Coluche was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident just a few months later, the *Restos du Coeur* association continued to develop, and in 1989 six well-established figures of the French popular music scene (Goldman, Johnny Hallyday, Michael Jones, Eddy Mitchell, Véronique Sanson and Michel Sardou), known as *Les Enfoirés* (literal translation: 'Tossers/Assholes'), named after one of Coluche's insults/catchwords, embarked on a concert tour in aid of the charity.

Since 1992 the *Enfoirés* concert has taken place annually, backed by extensive media coverage, accompanied by CD/DVD releases and featuring a large number of performers, and since 2002 a different city has been selected each year as the venue for a series of performances lasting around a week. In 2013–14 *Les Enfoirés* raised around 23 million euros, around 12 per cent of the total annual



income of the charity.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 the concert featured thirty-five performers and televised coverage reached over 11 million viewers – around a half of the available audience share. A single peak-time broadcast lasting around three hours, the televised *Enfoirés* concert was based on one annual concert (1992–9), but has more often been based on the final concert or the last two in a series staged over several days (1989 and from 2000 onwards). Every year *Les Restos du Coeur* invites bids for the rights to televise the *Soirée des Enfoirés*. TF1, France's first terrestrial channel, privatised in 1987, has, for the most part, won the rights, although the publicly owned public service broadcaster France 2 televised the concert between 1998 and 2000.

The creation of the highly mediatised *Restos du Coeur* in the mid-1980s indicated a growing public consciousness of 'la nouvelle pauvreté' (new poverty) in France and a lack of effective political solutions, as well as unease and guilt during what was a period of economic liberalism.<sup>2</sup> However, over the years, there has been relatively little direct reference to or campaigning for *Les Restos du Coeur* during the annual televised *Enfoirés* concert. A giant portrait of Coluche appears as a backdrop during the opening and/or closing number involving the whole troupe; viewers are reminded regularly to purchase the CD/DVD of the concert (representing the value of 18 meals) and not to download it illegally; and towards the end of the concert just before the final number the host always yells Coluche's catchphrase 'On compte sur vous' ('We're counting on you'). Explicit promotion of the charity is, however, a feature of the linked programmes which directly precede or follow the concert broadcast – and it is these programmes that will form the focus of this chapter. They have become a regular fixture since 2003, broadcast in a late-night slot immediately following the *Soirée des Enfoirés* (and a commercial break), attracting an audience around five times smaller than that of the concert itself.<sup>3</sup> The linked programmes feature discussion (from a studio or the concert venue) interspersed with reports focusing on specific individuals, especially beneficiaries and volunteers, as well as archive footage. A clear division is thus made between the entertainment function of the televised *Enfoirés* concert and the linked discussion and debate programmes, usually featuring presenters, representatives from the *Restos du Coeur*, volunteers, beneficiaries and, on occasion, individual music artists representing *Les Enfoirés*.

Television coverage of *Les Enfoirés* contributes towards what commentators have identified as the well-established association between mainstream culture and mediated charity initiatives and events such as charity singles and benefit concerts.<sup>4</sup> As Barbara Lebrun observes, concerts produced within a more alternative music scene (e.g. *Liberté de Circulation* in support of illegal immigrants in France) are not necessarily conducive to raising money and awareness: 'The artists and organisers of *Liberté de Circulation*, who convincingly wrap their pro-migration discourse in notions of solidarity and universality, often confine themselves in artistic and production terms to a certain marginality, and consequently fail their objective of raising public awareness.'<sup>5</sup> Coverage also continues the enduring relationship in France between the mass media and humanitarian causes exemplified by the support given by *L'Illustration* newspaper to Guadeloupe following an earthquake in 1843<sup>6</sup> or by the famous radio appeal against homelessness and poverty made by the Catholic priest l'Abbé Pierre in 1954.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the 2007 edition of the *Enfoirés* concert was dedicated to l'Abbé Pierre following his death.

Over the years *Les Enfoirés* has become the subject of heated debate and criticism, particularly in the popular press, which has seen well-known figures from the French popular music scene, including former participants in the concerts, rejecting what they perceive as increasing commercialism, the unnecessary inclusion of non-musicians and performers from the wider show business world, as well as self-promotion on the part of artists.<sup>8</sup> In response, current participants in the concerts have reacted, at times angrily, insisting on the positive and tangible contribution that the concerts have made towards fulfilling the aims of the *Restos du Coeur* charity.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, the 2015 *Enfoirés* charity single 'Toute la vie', widely criticised as 'reactionary' and 'anti-youth', particularly in social media, has generated headlines and controversy as well as further publicity for the concerts.

In academic accounts, mediated charity initiatives and events in general have been associated with arousing emotion, especially pity, compassion and hope, while simplifying, decontextualising and depoliticising the causes that they seek to promote.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Olivier Driessens et al. describe celebrity participants as exclusive, glamorous and motivational figures who serve to commodify charity and 'inject the distant suffering of others with a substantial

amount of local relevance'.<sup>11</sup> Commentaries focusing more specifically on the *Enfoirés* concerts have highlighted the diversity of performers in terms of gender, generation, ethnicity and profession, and a sense of solidarity, unanimity and consensus.<sup>12</sup> In a 2015 article published in *French Cultural Studies*,<sup>13</sup> I also showed how television coverage of the *Enfoirés* concerts over the last twenty-five years has reinforced and problematised the television variety genre, gender identities and the French Republican model.

The linked discussion and debate programmes certainly emphasise emotion. For the presenter Antoine de Caunes, speaking in 1998, the term *Enfoirés*, previously filled with negative connotations, has almost become synonymous with 'tenderness'. In 2007 the presenter Patrick Poivre d'Arvor refers to the 'témoignages importants' (poignant testimonies) provided in various reports.<sup>14</sup> *Restos du Coeur* volunteers are also represented in terms of their emotional experience. In 2000 the *Enfoirés* Patrick Timsit and Marc Lavoine discuss the 'human warmth' encountered on meeting volunteers. In 2007 the presenter Claire Chazal asks two female volunteers in Paris if they are mothers, which in turn leads to them describing their intense sadness at seeing young people, often young mothers, cut off from their families. Emotional intensity is conveyed not only through spoken discourse but also in visual terms. In the 2005 programme, we see the *Enfoirés* host Mimie Mathy wipe her eyes after watching an interview with l'Abbé Pierre regarding *Les Restos du Coeur* and his meeting with Coluche in March 1986. In the same programme, Claire Keim, a new member of the *Enfoirés* troupe, also describes how moved she is by the interview.

While the linked programmes on occasion generate emotion, this chapter, drawing on television archive research carried out at the French broadcasting archives (Inathèque, Paris), also argues that they fulfil other distinct roles: explicating the *Restos du Coeur* charity to audiences, mythologising Coluche as founder of the charity, promoting a certain view of its beneficiaries and calling for action to tackle ongoing social problems. In addition, the linked programmes raise questions around the distinctive character of *Les Restos du Coeur*, its function viewed in relation to that of public authorities, and the motivation behind volunteering. Moreover, while echoing Sartrean notions of crisis, responsibility and commitment, the discussion programmes effectively represent a distinctive

audio-visual form of social and charitable *engagement* in response to ongoing concerns regarding hunger, poverty and exclusion in contemporary France.

### **Explaining *Les Restos du Coeur***

The linked programmes serve primarily to describe and contextualise the role and various activities of the *Restos du Coeur* charity. In opening and closing sequences, presenters often explain that the aim is to help viewers better understand the workings and logistics of the charity (1998; 2008) as well as the aim of the *Enfoirés* concert (2003). The titles of certain programmes emphasise their intended role: *Au Coeur ... des Restos du Coeur* (*At the heart ... of the Restos du Coeur*) (2005); the 2003 programme title asks *Les Restos du Coeur: pour qui? Pourquoi?* (*Les Restos du Coeur: who is it for? Why?*).

The linked programmes illustrate the various practical, often innovative, forms of support offered by *Les Restos du Coeur*, including and beyond its original food distribution function. Indeed, over the years it has extended its areas of support to include new parents, housing, social and work insertion, homelessness, educational support for children, cultural activities, legal aid and micro lending. Specific areas, programmes and initiatives within this broad and varied provision are presented in reports and studio discussion, including food distribution by *les Camions du Coeur* (food vans of the heart); 'la maraude' (volunteers out on the streets providing food and support to homeless people) (1998); a butcher who prepares and donates venison resulting from road kill accidents to the charity (1996); 'les Lunettes du Coeur' (spectacles of the heart), offering eye consultations and repairs to spectacles, and work experience to students with motor disabilities training to work in the eyewear business (1996); 'les Ateliers du Coeur' (workshops of the heart): workshops for jobseekers including carpentry, calligraphy, printing and sewing in preparation for a carnival involving school children in Aulnois-sous-Laon (1996); 'les Jardins du Coeur' (gardens of the heart): working gardens employing individuals on insertion/integration contracts and generating produce for the charity (2003); 'Les Restos à la campagne' (restaurants in the countryside): a van which visits and offers support to isolated families living in L'Hérault (1998); 'Les Toits du Coeur' (roofs of the heart): providing accommodation in the commune of Poissy

(Île de France) for periods of between six and twelve months (1988); ‘Les Péniches du Coeur’ (barges of the heart): emergency shelters on board canal boats (1998); holidays for families at the Val d’Akor centre near Grenoble, which provide time, and bring ‘warmth’ and ‘hope’ (2007); the teaching of literacy skills (2010); and free cinema tickets (2000). Many programmes also include reports detailing personal testimonies from across France (e.g. 2008, 2009 and 2010). Indeed, the presenter Patrick Poivre d’Arvor highlights the variety of French accents in the reports (2005).

Coverage also regularly features factual information, data and statistics emphasising the amount of support offered by *Restos du Coeur*, including numbers of people helped and meals distributed. The President of *Restos du Coeur*, Olivier Berthe, points out that the proceeds from the concerts and associated CD/DVDs represent around 20 per cent of *Restos du Coeur* resources (2011). The programmes also provide a platform for leading figures within *Les Restos du Coeur*, including successive presidents, to provide assurances that the charity and its financial accounts and procedures in particular are sound and transparent. In 2003 Marielle Condom of the Association *Restos du Coeur de Haute-Savoie* explains the action taken following the discovery of financial irregularities in the *département* in 1999. Coverage also seeks to reassure the viewing public that volunteers and beneficiaries are regulated. Berthe discusses the ‘Charte des Bénévoles’ (volunteer code of conduct) and training programmes (2006). In 2003 Poivre d’Arvor and Véronique Colucci, the former wife of Coluche, discuss the necessity of vetting and monitoring beneficiaries. In 2006, Bruno Lalande, a member of the *Restos du Coeur* board of directors based in Bordeaux, argues in favour of providing honest feedback, whether positive or negative, to individuals on work programmes.

### Mythologising Coluche

While explaining and promoting the *Restos du Coeur*, the programmes effectively historicise, contextualise and mythologise Coluche, *Les Restos du Coeur* and *Les Enfoirés*, featuring a great deal of television archive material charting their development over the years<sup>15</sup> and highlighting the unique contribution of Coluche, including his early career as a comedian and actor; his joke candidacy for the 1981 presidential election and his subsequent

withdrawal; his public appearance dressed in a bridal gown following a mock wedding to the humorist Thierry Le Luron on 25 September 1985; his radio appearance on Europe 1 the following day suggesting the creation of what was to become *Les Restos du Coeur*; follow-up television appeals on TF1 and Canal+; the recording of the charity single 'La Chanson des Restos'; his meeting with l'Abbé Pierre on 25 March 1986 during which he handed over a cheque for 1.5 million francs to the Emmaüs charity, whose mission is to combat poverty and homelessness; his appearance in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 20 February 1986 when he successfully campaigned for EU food surpluses to be donated to associations like *Les Restos du Coeur*; his campaign for tax relief on charitable donations leading to the Coluche law (1988); and his tragic death in a motorcycle accident on 19 June 1986 and the outpouring of grief that followed. Footage also features several of Coluche's public pronouncements (used notably in the 2008 and 2011 programmes), for example, regarding the need not only to provide overseas aid but also to address France's own problem of hunger.

In addition, several commentators (media personalities and figures associated with *Les Restos du Coeur*) highlight Coluche's important contribution through their own personal observations and assessments: in 2011 the television and radio presenter Maryse Gildas highlights Coluche's power to galvanise French opinion and actions; Claire Chazal describes Coluche as a donor *par excellence* (2008); in 2011 Véronique Colucci recognises his skills as a political strategist in launching a campaign before the 1986 legislative elections; Olivier Berthe highlights Coluche's contribution in terms of his generosity, energy, drive and ideas (2008), as well as the struggle since his death to build on his legacy and remain faithful to his vision (2011). In the 2011 programme commentators including Véronique Colucci, Jean-Jacques Goldman and the television journalist Marie-Laure Augry describe the power of Coluche in death to inspire others to continue the work of *Les Restos du Coeur*. Members of the general public also contribute towards Coluche's recognition. In a 1998 vox pop one interviewee describes him as compassionate, while another highlights his closeness to the public. In a 2014 report, *collégiens* (high school pupils) share their knowledge of Coluche and his achievements. Coverage also contrasts the serious aims of the *Restos du Coeur* cause and the light-hearted way

in which these are pursued, reflecting the spirit of Coluche. Jean-Jacques Goldman regards Coluche's sense of humour as what makes *Les Restos du Coeur* distinctive (2003), observing that the comic succeeded in combining humour, mockery and seriousness, but without taking himself seriously (2011), and describing how *Les Enfoirés* attempts to follow such an approach (2000).

### Defining beneficiaries

Another function of the linked programmes is to define the beneficiaries of the *Restos du Coeur* charity. It is often emphasised that it is all too easy for anyone to fall into a situation of need. In 2013 Chazal mentions the 'brutality' with which individuals can suddenly 'fall into exclusion', citing a recent survey which found that 75 per cent of people in France feel they are at risk of *la précarité* (insecurity). In the same programme Berthe observes how problems can quickly stack up for individuals. In 2007 Fabien, a beneficiary, recounts the 'spirale implacable' (relentless downward spiral) into which he fell following his divorce, while 2013 coverage features the story of Alexis, a former company manager, who became homeless.

A perennial question is whether *Les Restos du Coeur* produces a benefit culture of 'assistés'. The title of the 1997 follow-up programme articulates a fundamental choice between 'Assister ou ré-insérer?' (aid or reintegration). However, the emphasis is firmly on the latter. In the 1997 programme Muriel Robin states that *Restos du Coeur* helps the excluded 'find a place in society'. Later, in 2006 Berthe rejects the idea that *Les Restos du Coeur* simply provides 'l'assistantat' (handouts). The rejection of such a culture in the linked programmes corresponds to what Duvoux terms a 'suspicion profonde de la société française vis-à-vis des assistés',<sup>16</sup> represented by the introduction of the *Revenu de solidarité active* (RSA) (Earned Income Social Supplement) benefit in 2009 as a replacement for the *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* (RMI) (Minimum Integration Income) and the *Allocation parent isolé* (AOI) (single-parent allowance).<sup>17</sup> The linked programmes accordingly express a desire to help beneficiaries gain independence and develop a sense of responsibility, encapsulated in the title of the 2009 follow-up programme, *Les Restos du Coeur: une chance d'être responsable* (*Les Restos du Coeur: a chance to be responsible*). An example



of 'tough love' is conveyed in a 2000 report on the *Maison Coluche* in Arras when the head of the centre suspends a young woman's emergency housing benefit (she is said to have a drink problem and be unable to assume her family responsibilities), until she agrees to appropriate therapeutic help. In 2006, Christine, one of the beneficiaries featured in the programme, observes that *Les Restos du Coeur* provides support, but will also 'botter les fesses' ('give a kick up the backside') when necessary. The work programmes known as 'chantiers d'insertion' (back-to-work schemes), which allow individuals to learn a trade, are also a regular feature of coverage. The promotion of 'responsabilisation' (making individuals aware of their responsibilities) in the linked programmes effectively corresponds to the kind of political consensus which, as Duvoux observes, considered that 'le RMI avait été trop laxiste dans l'application des « devoirs » qu'il convient de mettre face aux droits',<sup>18</sup> and saw the two main 2007 presidential candidates accept the principles behind its replacement, the RSA: namely that 'le retour à l'emploi' is 'toujours plus rémunérateur que le maintien dans l'assistance' and that 'le travail donne à tous la garantie de sortir et d'être protégé de la pauvreté'.<sup>19</sup>

Helping individuals to overcome problems permanently, particularly the idea of 's'en sortir' ('pulling through') is also emphasised by the title of the 2006 follow-up programme, '*Les Restos du Coeur: pour s'en sortir*'. In 2013 Berthe argues for recognition of this aim. In the same programme the presenter Laurence Ferrari emphasises the importance of personal success stories. The 2012 and 2014 programmes include coverage of a young man Florent, who, over the course of the two years, moves from living in his car to leading a 'normal life', finding an apartment and a job working in a warehouse. In interview, Florent highlights the usefulness of *Les Restos du Coeur* and the absolute necessity of overcoming personal difficulties. In 2007 a beneficiary called Jacques speaks of his wish to be 'normal' again. The desire to be like everyone else is highlighted by Berthe as natural (2013). On occasion, we see former beneficiaries become volunteers, for example, in 2006 the case of a forty-five-year old former banker, who following his own period of recovery, is responsible as a *Restos du Coeur* volunteer in Tourcoing for assisting the reintegration of workers.<sup>20</sup>

Overcoming solitude and making social contact are, in addition, viewed as desirable outcomes of *Les Restos du Coeur*. 'La maraude' is

identified not only as an opportunity to distribute food to those in need, but for volunteers and beneficiaries to ‘share a moment’ – one of respite from ‘solitude’ (2005). The leading figure in *Les Enfoirés*, Jean-Jacques Goldman, also highlights a need for human contact, highlighting the case of ‘les sans papiers’ (illegal immigrants), who are unable to access the world of work (2005). Social reintegration is also highlighted by Berthe, who refers to a whole range of initiatives to assist beneficiaries, the duration of which is proportional to length of exclusion experienced (2007). The importance of maintaining and regaining one’s personal dignity is also emphasised, for example, in a 2000 report on access to free cinema tickets in Paris, or in a 2007 report on a beneficiary, Eric, who describes regaining his self-esteem after securing work in a restaurant.

### Addressing social problems

A further function of the discussion and debate programmes is to address ongoing social problems, particularly exclusion. In 1996, following the previous year’s Presidential campaign, which included particular focus on ‘la question sociale’, ‘l’exclusion’ and ‘la fracture sociale’,<sup>21</sup> the sociologist Alain Touraine calls upon a France based on ‘solidarity’, represented by *Restos du Coeur*, to reject ‘exclusion’. More specifically, Touraine highlights what he perceives as the isolation of young people and the importance of links between young people and the family unit. In 2005, Bernard Denerier, a *Restos du Coeur* board member, highlights the plight of the excluded: ‘abandoned, ‘invisible’, transformed either into ‘déchets’ (‘waste’) or into ‘mobilier urbain’ (‘urban furniture’), while the President of the ‘Péniche du Coeur’ emergency accommodation centre, Alain Le Cléac’h, describes the acceptance of exclusion as a challenge and views the homeless as ‘l’échec de notre société’ (‘the failure of our society’). In 2006, Marie-Rose Moro, psychiatrist at the Avicenne de Bobigny hospital, defines exclusion as more than ‘poverty’: a lack of work and decent housing, loss of relationships with others and marginalisation. For Moro, exclusion is ‘le regard de l’autre sur vous [...] un regard qui vous dit que vous n’existez plus pour notre société’.<sup>22</sup>

Looking ahead, the linked programmes exert political pressure, albeit of a non-partisan nature, within both a French and wider

European/EU context. Housing provision in France is a significant issue. In 2006 Berthe supports the call of the *Fondation Abbé Pierre* to reinforce the 2000 *loi relative à la solidarité et renouvellement urbain* (SRU) requiring communes to ensure that 20 per cent of housing stock is social housing, so as to promote a greater social mix. The following year Berthe expresses the hope that housing and accommodation policy will be placed at the heart of the 2007 presidential debate and future political developments, and that the actions of public authorities and associations will be more effectively coordinated. In 2013 he explains how the EU food aid programme will be cut drastically within the context of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) with dramatic consequences for *Les Restos du Coeur* and other associations (2013). As Berthe argues, this cut makes no sense when the EU is aiming by 2020 to reduce the number of individuals living in poverty by 20 million (2013).

### Raising questions and uncertainties

While the linked programmes deliver clear and unambiguous messages, explicating *Restos du Coeur*, *Les Enfoirés* and Coluche, defining beneficiaries, and tackling social problems, at times they also raise questions and uncertainties. The *Restos du Coeur* charity (along with *Les Enfoirés*) is defined in terms of both its uniqueness and its similarity to other associations. On the one hand, the singer-songwriter Maxime Le Forestier regards as ‘unique in the world’ the annual reunion of artists from across the generations – Charles Aznavour appearing alongside MC Solaar for example in 2005, while for the journalist Eric Brunet there is nothing comparable internationally to *Les Restos du Coeur* and France’s emphasis on state aid, community involvement and volunteering (2014). On the other hand, *Les Restos du Coeur* is seen within a broader context as just one amongst several other associations. In 1996 the follow-on programme features reports from neighbouring European countries outlining national specificities and differences. The 2004 programme also features artists from *Les Enfoirés* discussing the other associations in France to which they lend their support including *Secours Populaire*, *Secours Catholique*, Emmaüs and *Médecins du Monde*. As the presenter Laurence Ferrari observes, other associations are invited to participate in the programme at the request of Véronique Colucci in a spirit of ‘solidarity’ and

'sharing'. Indeed, in the 2014 programme, Eric Brunet asks whether other associations are 'jealous' of the coverage that *Les Restos du Coeur* receives, which suggests that its relative prominence is an issue of some sensitivity. Berthe addresses such concerns by responding that other associations also involve popular artists and raise money via CD/DVD releases, while highlighting the particular emphasis of his charity on everyday volunteering in the service of others.

Participants in the linked programmes question the future role of *Les Restos du Coeur*. Indeed, the 1996 follow-up programme is entitled *Le débat: 86–96, où vont les Restos?* (*The Debate 86–96 – where are the Restos heading?*), the title of the 2010 programme, *Les Restos du Coeur: la faim justifie les moyens* (*The Restos du Coeur: hunger justifies the means*),<sup>23</sup> effectively answers those who question the existence of the charity, while the following year the title emphasises the ongoing need for the charity – *Restos du Coeur et Enfoirés: même combat depuis 25 ans* (*Restos du Coeur and Enfoirés: the same struggle for 25 years*) (2011). Moreover, the programming features discussion and debate regarding the relative responsibilities of the *Restos du Coeur* and the public authorities where social problems are concerned. A variety of viewpoints are expressed. For example, François Bloch-Lainé, a senior civil servant, financial inspector and then president of the *Comité de la Charte* (the French Charity Commission), argues that we expect a great deal of the state (owing to long-standing Colbertist traditions of state intervention) and organised religion (1996). In the same programme Alain Touraine advises against an obsession with the division between the state and the individual, looking to the examples of Italy and Spain where the family is said to provide more support. In 1998, the co-presenters Antoine de Caunes and Michel Drucker engage in a lively set-piece discussion in which de Caunes questions the reliance of public authorities on 'le réseau associatif' (the voluntary sector), while Drucker argues that the state cannot be relied on for everything. In 2003, Muriel Robin, the main host of *Les Enfoirés*, argues for state intervention, while recognising that there are current needs to be addressed urgently by the voluntary sector. In the same programme, the presenter Poivre d'Arvor asks whether *Les Restos du Coeur* perpetuates the current situation, as individuals are effectively protected by a safety net. While Jean-Jacques Goldman describes how he grew up with a sense that the political left was associated

with social justice and considered that charity was the province of the right, he argues that the state should take responsibility and that the ‘pockets of poverty that society is unable to deal with’ (2003) need to be tackled.<sup>24</sup> In 2006, Berthe expresses a desire for the public authorities to take on more responsibility while the charity takes on less. In 2014 the presenter Anne-Claire Coudray asks whether *Les Restos du Coeur* has become an ‘alibi’ (‘get-out’) for government, while the journalist Natacha Polony arguing that the Republic and state, which represents ‘Fraternité’, should take charge, observes that *Les Restos du Coeur* prevents the ‘system’ from exploding, but that we can rightly deplore the need for its very existence.

Finally, volunteering represents a further area of discussion. In 2004 the presenter Laurence Ferrari tells viewers to ‘bougez-vous!’ (‘get a move on’) by donating money and giving up time, and emphasises how it is possible to ‘enrich oneself personally’ through volunteering (2004), while in 2010 the presenter Harry Roselmack highlights the ‘valeurs de partage, d’entraide et de solidarité’ (‘values of sharing, mutual aid and solidarity’) associated with volunteering. *Restos du Coeur* volunteers are also represented in diverse terms. Poivre d’Arvor mentions the variety of social classes involved, while Chazal identifies young people as a significant group (2006). Linked programmes regularly feature reports on individual and groups of volunteers at work along with discussion of their personal motivations for taking part, as articulated in the title of the 2004 programme *Bénévoles pourquoi?* (Why volunteer?). Members of the *Enfoirés* troupe also elaborate on their motives. Indeed, certain *Enfoirés* who offer their services via the annual concert identify volunteering as a personally satisfying, enriching and rewarding activity to the point of egotism. Maxime Le Forestier describes the ‘happiness’ and ‘pleasure’ he derives from helping people (2005). In 2004 Zazie describes her involvement as a ‘modern’ or ‘new’ form of ‘solidarity’ or one which recognises that artists are ‘egoïste’ (self-interested) and is born of ‘l’envie des gens’ (people’s desires) rather than guilt. Similarly, the singer Yannick Noah identifies a form of ‘solidarity’ which is ‘un peu egoïste’ (‘a little self-interested’) and which contributes towards his own ‘équilibre personnel’ (sense of balance) (2004). However, Pierre Palmade observes that the *Enfoirés* artists leave their egos in the changing room when they take part in *Les Enfoirés* (2000). A clear

division of labour is also made where volunteering for *Les Enfoirés* and *Les Restos du Coeur* is concerned. As Véronique Colucci comments, artists who voluntarily take part in the *Enfoirés* concerts are not expected to take part in other activities such as distributing food (2003), as is seen in the case of other charities and national contexts. On occasion, the gratification to be derived from volunteering is viewed in more problematic, critical terms. Jean-Jacques Goldman contrasts the attitudes of two volunteers: first Annie, who says that she would not take part if she did not derive satisfaction; then François, who expresses outrage at having to decide who should or should not receive food assistance. On reflection, Goldman comments that ‘toute la problématique des Restos est là’ (2000).<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, while television coverage of the *Enfoirés* concerts is limited to raising basic awareness of the *Restos du Coeur* and to commercial and fundraising aims, separate linked programmes provide the space, albeit in a late-night slot, for a distinctive audio-visual form of social and charitable *engagement*, which presents, contextualises and promotes the charity more fully, develops a sense of solidarity, which is at times self-interested, promotes the reintegration and responsibilities of beneficiaries, and raises awareness of contemporary social problems, while interrogating the status and role of the charity, including the act of volunteering itself. In effect, the two different programme genres – the benefit concert and the linked discussion programme – work in different yet complementary ways to engage both with the ongoing *Restos du Coeur/Enfoirés* project and with television audiences.

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## Notes

- 1 'L'Essentiel 2013–2014 des Restos' (2014), [www.restosducoeur.org/sites/default/files/RESTOS%20L'Essentiel\\_DEF\\_0.pdf](http://www.restosducoeur.org/sites/default/files/RESTOS%20L'Essentiel_DEF_0.pdf).
- 2 N. Duvoux, 'Nouveaux pauvres, nouvelles politiques', *Politiques sociales et familiales*, 104, 'Les politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté' (2011), 8.
- 3 Based on 2011–13 viewing figures from Médiamétrie/INA.
- 4 B. Lebrun, 'Charity and Political Protest in French Popular Music', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 13/4 (2005), 436–7; and L. Robinson, 'Putting the Charity Back into Charity Singles: Charity Singles in Britain 1984–1995', *Contemporary British History*, 26/3 (2012), 407.
- 5 Lebrun, 'Charity and Political Protest in French Popular Music', 436.
- 6 Yves Lavoinnie, *L'Humanitaire et les médias* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2002), pp. 59–62.
- 7 Yves Lavoinnie, *L'Humanitaire et les médias*, pp. 67–8.
- 8 See, for example, 'Ils ne portent pas Les Enfoirés dans leur cœur, et ils le disent ...', *Le Point* (14 March 2014), [www.lepoint.fr/ces-gens-la/ils-ne-portent-pas-les-enfoires-dans-leur-coeur-et-ils-le-disent-14-03-2014-1801322\\_264.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/ces-gens-la/ils-ne-portent-pas-les-enfoires-dans-leur-coeur-et-ils-le-disent-14-03-2014-1801322_264.php); and 'Renaud: Les Enfoirés «un grand cirque carnavalesque»', *Libération* (3 February 2011), [next.liberation.fr/musique/2011/02/03/renaud-les-enfoires-un-grand-cirque-carnavalesque\\_712245](http://next.liberation.fr/musique/2011/02/03/renaud-les-enfoires-un-grand-cirque-carnavalesque_712245).
- 9 See, for example, C. Auger, 'Les Enfoirés: Michèle Laroque répond aux critiques d'Eddy Mitchell et Florent Pagny', *Téléstar* (17 February 2014), [www.telestar.fr/2014/articles/news/les-enfoires-michele-laroque-repond-aux-critiques-d-eddy-mitchell-et-florent-pagny-14797](http://www.telestar.fr/2014/articles/news/les-enfoires-michele-laroque-repond-aux-critiques-d-eddy-mitchell-et-florent-pagny-14797); 'Patrick Fiori s'indigne contre les critiques faites aux Enfoirés « Que personne n'ouvre sa gueule!»', *Voici* (23 April 2014), [www.voici.fr/news-people/actu-people/patrick-fiori-s-indigne-contre-les-critiques-faites-aux-enfoires-528964](http://www.voici.fr/news-people/actu-people/patrick-fiori-s-indigne-contre-les-critiques-faites-aux-enfoires-528964); and K. Sekkai, 'Renaud critique Les Enfoirés, Mimie Mathy défend la troupe', *Paris Match* (10 February 2011), [www.parismatch.com/People/Spectacles/Renaud-Mimie-Mathy-Les-Enfoires-145867](http://www.parismatch.com/People/Spectacles/Renaud-Mimie-Mathy-Les-Enfoires-145867).
- 10 Y. Carlet and J.-M. Séca, 'Vingt ans de Live Aid: comment le charity rock a-t-il transformé l'engagement politique en musique populaire?', *Cahiers de psychologie politique*, 7 (2005), [lodel.irevues.inist.fr/cahierspsychologiepolitique/index.php?id=1164](http://lodel.irevues.inist.fr/cahierspsychologiepolitique/index.php?id=1164); O. Driessens, S. Joye and D. Biltreyst, 'The X-factor of charity: a critical analysis of celebrities' involvement in the 2010 Flemish and Dutch Haiti relief shows', *Media Culture Society*, 34/6 (2012), 709–25; Lavoinnie, *L'Humanitaire et les médias*; and Lebrun, 'Charity and Political Protest in French Popular Music', 435–47.
- 11 Driessens, Joye and Biltreyst, 'The X-factor of charity', 717.
- 12 Carlet and Séca, 'Vingt ans de Live Aid'; Lavoinnie, *L'Humanitaire et les médias*; and Lebrun, 'Charity and Political Protest in French Popular Music', 437.
- 13 C. Tinker, 'Genre, Gender and the Republic: Televising the Annual Charity Concert Les Enfoirés', *French Cultural Studies*, 26/3 (2015), 343–53.
- 14 A full list of discussion and debate programmes referred to is provided at the end of the chapter under 'Television Coverage'.

- 15 Such archive material features in coverage during particular milestone years: 1992, following an absence from television of more than two years; 1998, when the public broadcaster France 2 took over coverage from the privatised channel TF1 (for three years), and in 2011, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the charity.
- 16 'deep suspicion of French society with regard to people on benefits'; Duvoux, 'Nouveaux pauvres, nouvelles politiques', 13.
- 17 Terms translated into English by D. Anne and Y. L'Horty, 'The RSA (Revenu de solidarité active) and back-to-work incentives in France', *International Social Security Review*, 65/3 (2012).
- 18 'the Revenu minimum d'insertion (RMI) benefit had been too lenient in defining the "responsibilities" of recipients, which should match their rights'; Duvoux, 'Nouveaux pauvres, nouvelles politiques', 13.
- 19 'return to work is always more profitable than staying on welfare, and that work should give everyone the guarantee of escaping and being protected from poverty', quotation from the 'Letter of mission' from the President of the Republic of France and the Prime Minister to the High Commissioner for Active Solidarité against Poverty, in M. Hirsch, *Livre vert vers un revenu de solidarité active* (Paris: Haut commissaire aux Solidarités actives contre la pauvreté, 2008), 10, translated and discussed by Anne and L'Horty, 'The RSA (Revenu de solidarité active)', 78.
- 20 See also the 2003 programme for an account of the journey of a participant, Jacky, from beneficiary to volunteer.
- 21 Duvoux, 'Nouveaux pauvres, nouvelles politiques', 8.
- 22 'the look from other people [...] the look that tells you that you no longer exist in the eyes of our society'.
- 23 'La faim justifie les moyens': wordplay on 'la fin justifie les moyens' ('the end justifies the means').
- 24 'niches de misère que la société ne peut pas couvrir'.
- 25 'therein lies the whole issue of Les Restos'.

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*Restos encore, enfoirés en Coeur*, France 2, 7 February 1998, 18:55.  
*Au Coeur des Restos*, France 2, 26 February 2000, 23:37  
*Les Restos du Coeur: pour qui? pourquoi?* TF1, 21 February 2003, 23:46.  
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*Les Restos du Coeur: pour s'en sortir*, TF1, 7 April 2006, 23:40.  
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# 5

## Plantu and the 2012 presidential election: *un caricaturiste engagé?*

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SAMUEL WILKINSON

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be the cartoons of Jean Plantureux, better known as Plantu, published in *Le Monde* during the 2012 presidential election campaign.<sup>1</sup> The primary aim is to determine whether this political cartoonist, who publishes in an outlet that prides itself on its status as a newspaper of record and on its independence, is politically *engagé*, and, if so, analyse the extent to which this is apparent in his cartoons of this campaign. This begins with a definition of the term *engagement* and its application in this chapter. It goes on to explore *Le Monde's* history of partisan affiliation, and Plantu's position within this publication, before moving on to an analysis of a corpus of cartoons from the presidential election campaign. This analysis is separated into two sections. The first applies a quantitative approach supported by historical research, dealing with the images featuring the less popular candidates in this election. In the second, the focus shifts to those of the two mainstream candidates, President Nicolas Sarkozy, and the challenger François Hollande, applying a more qualitative analysis. It discusses the nuances of their representations in Plantu's cartoons, and concludes that, although there is not an overt partisan *engagement* in favour of either candidate, there is an underlying *engagement* that influences the artist in the period just before the election.



### The concept of *engagement* and the French press

The concept of *engagement* has most frequently been considered in literary contexts, rather than journalistic ones. Yet, the notion of *la presse engagée* is embedded in French cultural history. Partisanship in the French press dates back to the Revolution, and has persisted because of France's oscillations between various political regimes throughout the long nineteenth century and the resulting, continuous efforts of a range of groups in French society to influence public opinion.<sup>2</sup> In the post-war era, the French press has been in gradual decline and, with the advent of television, it has had to compete with other sources of news in order to protect its revenues. As a result, commercial interests are increasingly placed at the heart of editorial decisions. As I will go on to explain, *Le Monde's* U-turn with regards to the Mitterrand presidency proves that it is no exception to this trend. A traditional, more literary, opinion-focused style of journalism has been neutralised, and the French media are moving ever closer to an Anglo-Saxon model, which strives for objectivity.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, one part of the French press remains steadfast in its critical gaze: the political cartoon. The *image engagée* played an essential part in the formation of public opinion, particularly during times when literacy was the preserve of wealthy elites. In recent times, social scientists have sought to determine the effects of political satire, often in a televisual context. The main conclusions seem to be that this engaged visual satire has several possible outcomes. The first is evidenced by studies of satirical US television programmes, such as *The Colbert Report* or *The Daily Show*: this kind of satire engages a wider audience than the mainstream news outlets, and has a mobilising effect on viewers,<sup>4</sup> suggesting that the *engagement* of a satirist can influence perceptions of a political actor.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, there are those who claim that satire often has the opposite effect to that desired by its creators: *Les Guignols de l'info*, for example, is often cited in accounts of Jacques Chirac's 1995 election victory, largely owing to the humanising effect that the show had on his image.<sup>6</sup> Finally, political satire can also be said to instil disaffection in its observers/readers/listeners as it offers a more cynical view of the political status quo. It would be misguided to speculate on the effect of Plantu's political cartoons in relation to the studies mentioned above, since their conclusions are drawn from televisual satire, conducted for the most part in the US. It is

also problematic to seek to determine the influence of any one specific medium – particularly a political cartoon, which forms a discrete part of another medium (the newspaper) – as it is unlikely to be the only influence on any given citizen's political choices.

In order to determine the nature and level of *engagement* in Plantu's cartoons, it is important to understand how this concept is defined. In *La théorie de l'engagement* (1973), Peter Kemp makes the distinction between a 'cause particulière' (particular cause) and a 'cause fondamentale' (fundamental cause). The former, he argues, is an action that is directed by the latter: 'Je me dévoue pour une cause particulière selon mon attachement à ma cause fondamentale,' adding that 'la cause fondamentale est *ma* raison d'agir.'<sup>7</sup> However, one must ask whether Plantu's cartoons can be considered as forms of *engagement* at all. As will be explored in more detail below, those images relating to international affairs, particularly humanitarian causes, are more clearly definable as *causes particulières*, and could thus be described as *images engagées* (politically engaged images). They often serve to bring certain issues to the attention of *Le Monde's* readers which have not been covered by the mainstream media. Those images relating to the 2012 presidential election are less easily defined as *causes particulières*. Instead they are better described as *images contestataires* (critical images), offering a critical perspective on existing news narratives, and challenging the political communication strategies of the actors that they depict. As Kemp notes, 'par nature l'homme engagé est contestataire' and 'il proteste contre le mal du temps.'<sup>8</sup> It is the critical nature of these cartoons, which do not offer constructive solutions, that renders them *contestataire*. As with *engagement*, it is not easy to determine the effects of these *contestations*, but we can determine how this manifests itself in Plantu's cartoons by analysing the *causes particulières* with which he chooses to engage, and whether this gives an indication about the nature of Plantu's *cause fondamentale*.

### Plantu and *Le Monde*

It was in 1972 that *Le Monde* first published a cartoon by Plantu. Since then, he has published more than 20,000 cartoons, seeking to offer a humorous commentary on social and political issues in France. Despite being established as a non-partisan publication striving for political neutrality, *Le Monde* has often been considered

to have a centre-left affiliation. This dates back to its anti-Gaullist stance in the 1960s, its fierce critique of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing during the Bokassa Diamonds affair (a scandal that broke in 1979 after it emerged that the president of the Central African Republic, Jean-Bédél Bokassa, had gifted diamonds to President Giscard d'Estaing during his tenure as finance minister in 1973), and its explicit support of François Mitterrand in the 1981 presidential election. However, these overtly partisan stances were damaging for the newspaper as they undermined the illusion of neutrality, and caused sales to drop by 15 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Following this, *Le Monde* became increasingly critical of the socialist president, reporting on the Rainbow Warrior affair (a scandal that implicated the president in the sinking of a Greenpeace protest vessel, and the death of a campaigner), and later published details of Mitterrand's illegitimate daughter who was being supported at the state's expense, all of which led to the relationship between the president and *Le Monde* being described as a 'duel à mort' in the last year of his presidency.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, the newspaper has maintained its reputation as a publication of the centre-left. Accordingly, one might expect Plantu, the newspaper's principal cartoonist, to adopt a centre-left stance in his portrayals of French political actors. This seems to be the suggestion of Bruno Frappat, *Le Monde's* director from 1991 to 1994, who described the 'parfaite adéquation entre lui [Plantu] et notre lectorat qui penche à gauche'.<sup>11</sup> However, *Le Monde's* coverage remained distinctly anti-Mitterrand and, after Jean-Marie Colombani's appointment as managing director in 1994, and his promotion of investigative journalist Edwy Plenel to the post of chief editor, the newspaper offered a critical perspective of the president's legacy long after his death. This, along with the methods of Colombani and Plenel, was heavily criticised in Pierre Péan and Philippe Cohen's *La face cachée du Monde* (2003), which denounced the newspaper's editorial shift from *contre-pouvoir* (counter-power) to *anti-pouvoir* (anti-power) with regard to the Mitterrand presidency.<sup>12</sup> Yet it has also been suggested that it is only since 1994 that *Le Monde* has regained its status as the *journal d'indépendance* (an independent newspaper).<sup>13</sup> Of course, this is not to say that a publication cannot retain a centre-left affiliation whilst also remaining critical of a president who purports to embody the values of the centre-left. Focusing on a career that spans each of these changes in the newspaper's direction, this chapter will

investigate the extent to which Plantu, as Frappat suggested, appeals to this left-leaning readership.

It should be noted that Plantu has not always had complete editorial freedom in the production of his cartoons. Between 1994 and 2005 his cartoon almost always portrayed the event that was the focus of the newspaper's headline, and therefore he was bound by the agenda set by the newspaper's editors, rather than being able to set his own.<sup>14</sup> Between 2005 and January 2009, he was afforded more leeway and his cartoons began to appear independently of the headlines, though there was often a short piece accompanying these images. By January 2009 he was permitted full independence from any written journalistic piece and his cartoons were published in their own section, 'Le regard de Plantu' (Plantu's view), which meant that although he had already enjoyed a greater degree of freedom in his framing of cartoons, he now also had the freedom to feature issues of his own choosing, thus setting his own agenda. Nevertheless, *Le Monde* has been described as Plantu's 'cage dorée' (gilded cage),<sup>15</sup> and he himself has acknowledged that he enjoys less autonomy there than in the production of his cartoons for *L'Express*.<sup>16</sup>

It is also important to consider the concept of issue framing when analysing the level of Plantu's *engagement*. Alongside agenda setting, issue framing is another way in which analysts seek to determine the media bias. In an article detailing the effects of framing, Dhavan V. Shah and colleagues explain how choices of language and perspectives, through which a story is presented to the public, help to shape citizens' political perceptions and preferences by 'emphasizing certain details whilst omitting others'.<sup>17</sup> This is undoubtedly a feature of political cartoons, which seek to exaggerate, or caricature, certain salient traits of a political event, whilst minimising others. In emphasising and reducing particular traits, Plantu provides a prism through which an existing news narrative is read and refocuses the reader's attention. The ways in which Plantu chooses to frame this news, therefore, are essential in determining his political *engagement*. Through qualitative analysis of Plantu's framing of political events, this chapter will explore the nature of that *engagement* during the 2012 presidential election campaign.

One particular area where Plantu's status as a *caricaturiste engagé* is unquestionable, both in terms of his agenda and his issue framing, is in his representation of international affairs. He frequently

chooses to foreground political events from around the world, exposing humanitarian crises, particularly when the mainstream media seem especially focused on domestic issues. He has long been engaged in this way, from his exposition of the conflict in the Middle East, the two Gulf wars, and the Algerian civil war, for example.<sup>18</sup> Plantu's *engagement* was expanded beyond the pages of *Le Monde* and *L'Express* in 2006 when he established an organisation called *Dessins pour la paix* (Cartooning for Peace) with the then-United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan. The organisation was founded under the auspices of a United Nations initiative, 'Unlearning Tolerance', with the aim of promoting discussions about freedom of expression, recognising the status of cartoonists as journalists and offering the appropriate support and protection wherever necessary.<sup>19</sup>

However, this chapter is less concerned with Plantu's cartoons on international affairs, focusing instead on the issue of domestic politics during the 2012 presidential election. It seeks to determine whether there was a clear, partisan *engagement* in favour of a particular candidate in Plantu's cartoons published in *Le Monde* from this period. As we will see, the message of Plantu's visual narrative over this campaign is far from unequivocal. There is a distinct sense that Plantu does not favour the incumbent president's candidacy, yet the portrayal of the centre-left Hollande is not entirely positive either. Rather, the prevailing theme is one of disenchantment with the political status quo, as we are provided with some homogenising perspectives of the two mainstream candidates.

### Plantu: *artiste engagé*?

Between 1 January and 6 May 2012, 109 issues of *Le Monde* were published. Plantu's cartoons featured almost daily, appearing in 99 issues, with 67 of those cartoons relating to the presidential election campaign. The most prominently featured political actor in the election-themed cartoons was the incumbent president, who was the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, appearing in just under two-thirds (63 per cent) of all cartoons pertaining to the election; a fact which, given the critical nature of political cartoons, could lead to a conclusion that Plantu was particularly committed to undermining the president's campaign. The next most frequently featured actor was the



candidate of the centre-left Parti socialiste (PS), François Hollande, who appeared in just under half of Plantu's work relating to the campaign. As the greatest threat to Sarkozy's presidential ambitions, it is unsurprising that Hollande also featured prominently. As one might expect these cartoons to reflect wider media coverage, it is perhaps also less predictable that the mid-level candidates were infrequently featured, with the Front national's (FN) Marine Le Pen, the Front de gauche's (FG) Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the Mouvement démocrate's (Modem) François Bayrou appearing just four times each. Finally, the majority of minor candidates, namely Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, Philippe Poutou, Natalie Arthaud and Jacques Cheminade, did not feature in any of these cartoons. The only minor candidate to appear at all was Eva Joly, who was depicted five times. These quantitative data provide some interesting insights into electoral coverage. Why do Sarkozy and Hollande feature so frequently? Why does Plantu choose to exclude those candidates who are significant electoral players, such as Le Pen, Mélenchon and Bayrou? Why is Eva Joly featured so frequently, whilst other minor candidates are excluded? And what, if anything, can this quantitative analysis tell us about Plantu as an *artiste engagé*?

It is particularly remarkable that the coverage of the mid-level candidates is significantly reduced in these images. The increasing popularity of the FN in the 2012 campaign ensured that Marine Le Pen received more media coverage than had previously been the case for the FN. Conversely, she appeared relatively infrequently in Plantu's cartoons, being portrayed only four times between January and May 2012, with two of these images published after the first round of voting, when she was eliminated (though she still had the potential to influence the outcome of the second round through the *consigne de vote*).<sup>20</sup> Given that Plantu had consistently campaigned against the FN in his cartoons throughout the 1980s, it is, *prima facie*, surprising that he did not seek to undermine her rhetoric during the 2012 campaign. However, this could be a result of Plantu's belief that increased media coverage of the FN would lead to increased publicity that might benefit the FN as, in 1992, 'Plantu montrera qu'il préférerait que les médias cessent de faire la promotion de Le Pen. Il montre d'abord des manifestants empêchant l'avion de Le Pen d'atterrir, ce qui lui permet de rebondir dans les sondages (Le Pen dit même merci aux manifestants).'<sup>21</sup> In opposing the FN in his cartoons, Plantu felt that he was providing the party

and their policies with greater media prominence. The infrequent appearance of Marine Le Pen, then, could be a result of Plantu's conscious *disengagement* with the far-right. By refusing to engage with their campaign, he effectively avoids providing them with opportunities to increase support for their political programme.

Plantu has demonstrated a similar historic disdain for the Parti communiste français (PCF), which could perhaps explain Mélenchon's infrequent appearances in Plantu's cartoons. In 1988 the daily *L'Humanité*, a newspaper linked both politically and financially to the PCF, published an open letter from Gaston Plissonnier, written on behalf of the PCF's Central Committee, which described two of Plantu's cartoons as demonstrating 'une rare ignominie' and which placed *Le Monde* 'aux côtés de *Minute* et de la presse d'extrême droite dans une campagne anticommuniste'.<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted, however, that Plantu depicted Marchais's successor Robert Hue more favourably, particularly after the appointment of Lionel Jospin's government in 1997, and that the artist was less hostile towards the PCF in the wake of Marchais's departure.<sup>23</sup> A cartoon published by Plantu in *L'Express* in 2009, entitled 'L'ascension des néopopulismes' (the rise of neo-populisms), showed Mélenchon and Le Pen reading from two ends of the same script with the title 'Tous Pourris',<sup>24</sup> suggesting that the artist believes that both of these political actors are gaining popularity due to disaffection with the more mainstream parties, rather than through a legitimate policy platform. It is possible that Plantu avoided portraying Mélenchon for the same reason that he avoided Le Pen: a diminished media presence might prevent these parties from legitimising their policies.

The only candidate to appear with the same frequency as those others is Eva Joly. This surprising frequency is arguably because her party, Europe Écologie-Les Verts (EELV), had formed electoral alliances with the PS and was expected to become a party of government in the event of an Hollande victory. This resulted in an increased media presence for Joly, who, as a result, would have been recognisable to *Le Monde's* readers, and therefore more likely to appear in cartoons than the other minor candidates who were undoubtedly less known. Despite this greater prominence, Plantu portrays Joly unfavourably and seeks to emphasise the distance between Joly and the electorate. In one cartoon he depicts Joly addressing the Greek people with the famously incorrect

expression of John F. Kennedy, 'Ich bin ein Berliner.' The confused Greeks are also addressed by a Frenchman, who tells them 'Oui, je sais ... Chez nous, c'est pareil!' (Yes, I know... It's the same at home!). This refers to Joly's supposed incoherence due to her accent (Joly is Norwegian-born), a criticism that had been expressed largely by members of the UMP. However, it also forms part of a wider series of cartoons, which seek to show Joly as being out of touch with French voters. Her prominence in his cartoons is a sign that Plantu does not perceive her to be a key actor in this election, and that she presents an easy target for a caricaturist.

Finally, there is the presence of the Modem candidate François Bayrou. As was the case with cartoons of Le Pen, half of these appearances occurred between the first and second rounds of the election, where Bayrou's only influence was to be through the *consigne de vote*. His two previous portrayals in these campaign cartoons seek to show him as self-destructive, and as his own worst enemy. Although his influence is not so ideologically extreme as the far-left Mélenchon or the far-right Le Pen, the threat lies in his centrism. His broader appeal as a candidate, as in 2007, might draw voters from the mainstream PS and UMP parties, which could mean that one of the mainstream parties would not be able to progress. However, the rationale behind the exclusion of Bayrou from Plantu's images is a thornier issue than that of the more extreme candidates, because Plantu has not expressed disdain for Bayrou or his politics in his cartoons in the same way that he has for Mélenchon or Le Pen.

### The front-runners

A focus on the two leading candidates is common in advanced democracies and is also present in Plantu's cartoons. As Jacques Gerstlé has observed, the tenor of French campaign coverage has altered, with the focus moving away from presenting the candidates' messages (*les enjeux*)<sup>25</sup> to an interpretation of their motives and tactics (*les jeux*).<sup>26</sup> It has been argued that this development in electoral reporting has been driven by commercial concerns, and that this new style of coverage has led to increased revenues for media outlets.<sup>27</sup> These analyses of the changes in modern political communication explain the intensification of reporting on the two leading candidates in an election; a trend that is apparent in

Plantu's cartoons from this campaign period, particularly with Sarkozy featuring in almost two-thirds of these images, and Hollande appearing in just under half.

The prominence of Sarkozy in these images is unsurprising for several reasons. The executive in France is deemed to have a more dominant role in setting the media agenda than is typically the case in other western democracies with comparable media systems,<sup>28</sup> meaning that Sarkozy had the potential to affect the media agenda through his campaign, and in his role as president. Secondly, as an incumbent he had an established track record, which more readily facilitates the critical perspective usually offered through cartoons than might be the case with the other candidates. Finally, Sarkozy's frequent appearance may also be a result of Plantu's personal artistic preference. In an interview given shortly after the 2012 election, he expressed some regret at Sarkozy's departure:

Son départ a été une catastrophe pour moi. Je n'ai jamais connu un homme politique qui, à ce point, soit une caricature de lui-même [...] Sarko, je lui dois de l'argent, tellement il m'a facilité le travail: le dessin venait tout seul, le crayon courait sur le papier [...] C'est pas la même histoire avec Hollande.<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult, therefore, to draw any conclusions from Sarkozy's prominence in Plantu's cartoons, because of the range of factors that might influence his agenda.

Hollande appears less frequently than Sarkozy in these campaign cartoons. As mentioned above, his decreased prominence in these cartoons is perhaps due, in part, to Plantu's assertion that he does not lend himself as well to visual satire in the same way that Sarkozy does. Sarkozy's communications strategy was founded on intense political activity, designed for an era of soundbite politics, and characterised by an especially personalised style. Hollande, by contrast, sought to reshape the presidency from its state of *hyperprésidence* under Sarkozy, and project an image of himself as a *président normal*. In seeking to accentuate the differences between himself and Sarkozy, Hollande did not want to saturate the media in the same way that the Sarkozy had during his presidential term. It could be that this led to less media prominence for Hollande, which, in turn, is reflected in Plantu's cartoons.

While the quantitative analysis demonstrates an unsurprising prominence of the two mainstream candidates, a qualitative

analysis offers greater insights into Plantu's *engagement*. Art historian Bertrand Tillier provides a definition of a *caricaturiste engagé*:

Le dessinateur conçoit ses caricatures d'après un point de vue qui cultive l'esprit partisan. Aucune image n'est neutre, mais la caricature ne l'est particulièrement pas, puisque son absence de neutralité est présente dans sa syntaxe graphique même – dans ses éléments textuels aussi et dans les rapports établis, à la lecture – qui conjugue des moyens d'accentuation, de formation, d'exagération et d'outrance.<sup>30</sup>

The assertion here is that cartoons are *engagés* by their very nature. The aim in this section, therefore, is to determine the extent to which Plantu seeks to cultivate 'l'esprit partisan'<sup>31</sup> by discussing the *causes particulières* that he chooses to depict, particularly with regard to the two central players over the course of the 2012 campaign.

The first point of analysis lies in the cartoon incarnations of Sarkozy and Hollande. It is remarkable that, despite only a small difference in height between the president and the PS candidate (6 cm), this is wildly exaggerated in their cartoon forms. The significance of this difference lies in the perception of power, and its construction in gendered terms. As Marlène Coulomb-Gully notes, referring to the 2007 presidential election, 'le personnage de Nicolas Sarkozy, au regard de la norme masculine, constitue une

## Affaire Woerth Affaire Bettencourt



Figure 1. Plantu, 'Affaire Woerth', *Le Monde*, 12 February 2012.

exception par sa petite taille.<sup>132</sup> In 2007 this was not necessarily a damaging element to Sarkozy's overall image, and, as Coulomb-Gully also reminds us, 'les modèles ne manquent pas de héros populaires valorisés par leur petite taille, ou grâce à elle, le peuple y voyant du démocratique',<sup>133</sup> yet by 2012, due to his status as the incumbent, the emphasis on his diminutive size can also be considered to be a reflection on his perceived presidential stature. There is nothing remarkable about Hollande's height in these images, other than that he provides a stark contrast to the miniature Sarkozy.

Another important contrast, again relating to gender, is the representation of the candidates' facial expressions. In Figure 1 we can see Sarkozy's characteristically short body, with an inflated head attached to it, indicating a sense of inflated ego. His ears are protruding, with pointed ends, almost devil-like in appearance. His head is squat, but distinctly square, clean-shaven, with his eyes and nose pushed to the centre of a larger blank face. The eyes and nose take on a phallic form yet, far from symbolising the usual virility, there is something emasculating in the portrayal of the nose which droops low below the jawline. The bags below the eyes, themselves encircled in shadow, indicate a sense of fatigue, but also give the character an air of malice. These features appear consistently in

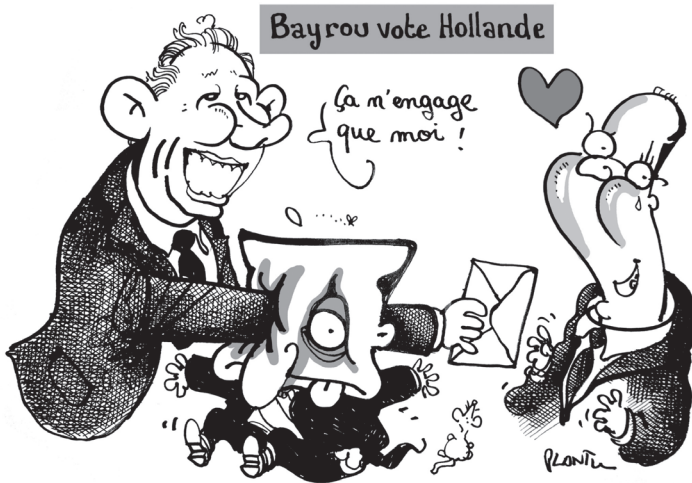


Figure 2. Plantu, 'Bayrou', *Le Monde*, 5 May 2012

portrayals of Sarkozy throughout the election campaign, and offer a reflection on his diminished popular and political legitimacy. In opposition to the distinctly masculine yet somewhat impotent Sarkozy, Hollande's appearance is characterised by an air of vitality (see Figure 2). There is a youthfulness to his appearance, as his full, rounded cheeks are often tinted with a pinkish hue, and his wide grin conveys a sense of happiness with the progress of his campaign. He has small, rounded eyes, symbolic of a certain astuteness, which is emphasised by his aquiline nose. His fresh-faced appearance shows the enthusiasm and energy of a candidate that has not yet been depleted by the presidency as Sarkozy has. However, there is often a bead of sweat on his brow, indicating that he is not entirely comfortable with the idea of holding presidential office. Hollande's relative vigour could equally be interpreted as a sign of his political inexperience in leadership roles, with his fresh face symbolising a naivety that stems from his lack of ministerial experience. In these observations on the incarnations of the two mainstream candidates, there are some signs that Hollande emerges more favourably than Sarkozy, though barely, and this is less through a positive promotion of Hollande's traits than through a negative portrayal of Sarkozy's.

In considering the themes of Plantu's election cartoons, it is important to note that they were largely consistent with those presented in the wider media. Firstly, this was an election that took place 'in the shadow of crisis', and it was undoubtedly the French economy that was the primary frame of this election.<sup>34</sup> One particularly significant blow to Sarkozy was the loss of France's 'triple A' credit rating in January 2012. The downgrade was interpreted as a negative judgement on Sarkozy's record of governance, and diminished his economic credibility. In a cartoon appearing shortly after the rating downgrade (Figure 3), Sarkozy is shown as the captain of a sinking ship, as Plantu combines this news with that of the sinking of the *Costa Concordia*.<sup>35</sup> The idea of a *président-capitaine* able to guide the nation through tempestuous economic times was an image evoked by Sarkozy to project a sense of his economic credibility, but which was reappropriated by Plantu for comic effect. The implication in this cartoon, as with the *Costa Concordia* crisis, is the culpability of the captain in the disaster. With the sinking of the cruise liner, it was supposed (when this image was published) that the captain's hesitancy to evacuate had increased the number of

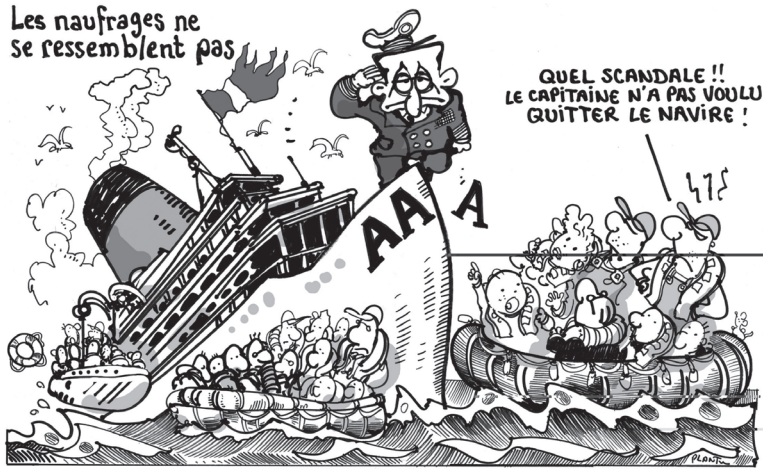


Figure 3. 'Naufrages', *Le Monde*, 18 January 2012

casualties. In this cartoon, that connotation is carried over, and we see Sarkozy refusing to relinquish command of the vessel – a metaphor for his reluctance to quit the presidency – which worsens France's own economic crisis, as symbolised by the tattered tricolour that flies from the top of the sinking vessel, and the outrage of its evacuees. Plantu subverts the notion that the captain should be the last person to abandon ship and implies that his departure would be advantageous. This image seems to hold Sarkozy solely accountable for France's economic troubles, despite them being the result of a global financial crisis.

The particularly fragile economic context was often contrasted with accusations of Sarkozy's being *le président bling-bling* (the bling-bling president); a label that he had gained in the early years of his presidency owing to his perceived vanity and superficiality. In addition, his efforts to have his son, Jean, appointed as the head of a body that managed the development of Paris's largest business district, La Défense, were regarded as nepotistic. Moreover, there were allegations of financial irregularities in the funding of Sarkozy's 2007 presidential election campaign. The combination of these factors, along with the intense mediatisation of the President and his private life during the 2007 campaign and the early years of his term, provoked suggestions that the presidency



had been desacralised. Returning to Figure 1, we can see that this is foregrounded in Plantu's cartoons. An ailing Sarkozy is featured in the official presidential dress, with a fly buzzing around his head, signifying that there is something suspicious about the President's activity. Behind him trails Eric Woerth, the former budget minister who was implicated in the scandal relating to campaign finance. Woerth was accused of offering a Légion d'honneur award to Patrice de Maistre, the asset manager of L'Oréal heiress Liliane Bettencourt, who, in turn, was allegedly duped into donating large cash sums to Sarkozy's campaign in 2007, in exchange for his wife's employment. This image sees the phrase *trainer des casseroles*<sup>36</sup> take visual form, with saucepans attached to Woerth along with the medal of the Légion d'honneur. Sarkozy's 'casserole' is Woerth himself, showing that he has been implicated in the corruption. With this cartoon, Plantu acknowledges the detrimental effect that these scandals may have on Sarkozy's campaign, yet he chooses to foreground them all the same. The mouse in the bottom-left corner – frequently a vehicle for peddling the cartoonist's own views or sentiment, especially where they are not able to be expressed in the image – is smoking a cigar, evoking a sense of cronyism, and offering an anti-establishment critique.

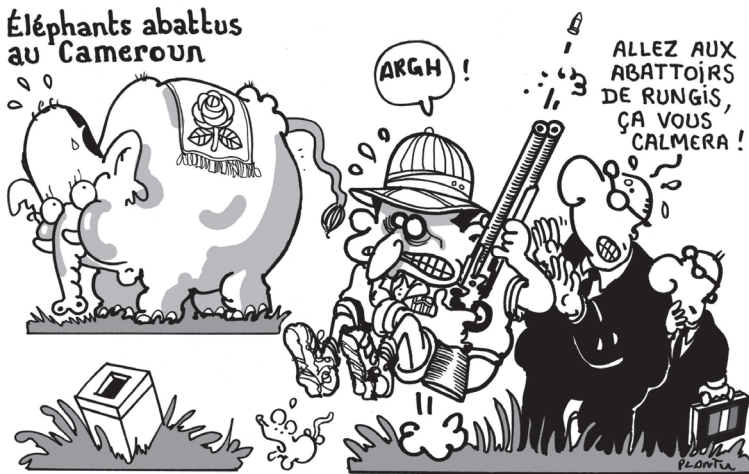


Figure 4. 'Eléphants', *Le Monde*, 22 February 2012

One of the consequences of this background coverage, which was undoubtedly detrimental to the President, was that Sarkozy was forced to assume, in some instances, the role of the challenger, whilst Hollande was able to adopt the role of the incumbent.<sup>37</sup> This thesis is apparent in Plantu's representations of the presidential campaign where Sarkozy is portrayed as a crazed hunter, and Hollande as the prey (Figure 4). This image shows an incensed, compulsive and aggressive Sarkozy, combining the news stories of the slaughter of 500 elephants in Cameroon with the Halal meat scandal,<sup>38</sup> and associating them with the electoral race. By contrast, Hollande has morphed into the socialist elephant; an image often used to evoke the socialist leadership, and an animal which, in political cartooning, is admired 'pour sa taille et son poids [...] son calme apparent, sa puissance physique, ainsi que sa grande longévité'.<sup>39</sup> These traits are certainly features of Hollande's candidacy in so much as he was a career politician and was perceived as more stable than Sarkozy, who had long been criticised for his *hyperprésidence*. Superficially, it might seem that Plantu sought to foreground the President's frustrations, whilst portraying Hollande in the more advantageous defensive position. Yet it should also be said that at this stage of the campaign, Hollande was in a more favourable position than his opponent, who was suffering from significant image problems that stemmed from his term of office and the negative background news coverage.

However, as the ballot approached, Plantu's coverage began to offer a more homogenising view of the mainstream candidates. Several cartoons portrayed Sarkozy and Hollande as Dupont and Dupond, the farcical and identical duo from Hergé's *Tintin*, whilst another showed the two candidates simultaneously declaring themselves victorious after a boxing match, and yet another as two schoolboys in a classroom. A further dimension is added to several of these cartoons with the appearance of Marianne, an allegorical incarnation of the Republic, and one of Plantu's stock characters, Paul Emploi (a play on words with *pôle emploi*).<sup>40</sup> In those cartoons featuring Marianne or Paul, the focus is redirected to the French people, characterised particularly as blue-collar workers and the unemployed, who appear to have been forgotten by a political elite preoccupied with the election battle. Each of these images clearly places the strategies of the candidates over their policies. This, combined with the emphasis on the similarities of the two

candidates, could almost be construed as a protest, albeit a humorous one, against what Plantu considers to be a misguided focus on the electoral contest. It redirects the attention of the newspaper's readers, who might otherwise have been relegated to the position of spectators of the electoral race rather than critical observers. Although these *contestations* may seem to conform to the *tous pourris* narrative of those politicians who occupy the poles of the political spectrum, by foregrounding the detrimental effects that this has on the electorate, Plantu demonstrates what could be described as a commitment to a *cause fondamentale*.

Aside from this homogenising narrative, which might appear to convey a sense of apathy, *Le Monde* also published several of Plantu's cartoons in the final weeks of the campaign that seem to put Hollande ahead of Sarkozy in the electoral race. These images all show that Hollande has increasing support from various different sources, including Fadela Amara (a Socialist municipal councillor who served in François Fillon's government during the Sarkozy presidency), the CGT (Confédération générale du travail, one of France's principal trade unions), François Bayrou (Figure 2) and the public (through the opinion polls). Nevertheless, these cartoons all feature negative aspects of Hollande's support, such as Amara's remarks that Hollande will be no more effective than Sarkozy, or Bayrou's gesture which will 'only engage him' as it states in Figure 2. It is inaccurate, therefore, to say that Plantu manifests any explicit support for the Socialist candidate.

## Conclusions

It seems that Plantu's status as a *caricaturiste engagé* is more complex than one may have initially considered. It is true that there is no overt partisanship, such as that displayed by *Le Monde* in its support of Mitterrand in the 1981 presidential election. However, considering historical research into Plantu's *oeuvre* and the exclusion of certain candidates in this election coverage, it is fair to say that Plantu seeks to prevent some actors from gaining media salience. The relationship between Plantu and the mainstream candidates is more complex, however. The particular focus on Sarkozy could suggest a penchant for his denigration, though this too could be related to Plantu's assertion that he is more easily satirised than Hollande and, although the focus on Sarkozy's track record is

particularly prevalent throughout the campaign period, this is also reflective of wider media trends. Moreover, the qualitative analysis also shows that the inference that Sarkozy is Plantu's primary target needs greater nuancing. There are a significant number of cartoons which portray a sceptical view of both mainstream actors. The nature of political cartooning, along with this more cynical political viewpoint expressed towards the end of the campaign, seems more consistent with the element of protest connoted by the term *contestation*, than it does with the concept of promotion that is evoked by the term *engagement*. Instead, it seems that Plantu's status as a figure of the centre-left is more discernible through his foregrounding of the social issues facing the electorate who, he implies, have been relegated to a lesser status by both mainstream candidates' focus on the campaign. Although his *contestations* on the *causes particulières* do not manifest a partisan *engagement* for Hollande and the PS as might have been predicted, Plantu does demonstrate his commitment to a distinctly socialist *cause fondamentale* through his efforts to offer an alternative perspective to dominant news narratives towards the end of the campaign.

### Notes

- 1 The length of the campaign period is extremely difficult to determine because the nature of modern political communication effectively means that political actors are constantly campaigning. For the purposes of this chapter, it is taken as the period beginning 1 January 2012, as designated by the regulator of the broadcast media, the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel.
- 2 Harry R. Kedward, *Resistance in Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 45.
- 3 Erik Neveu, *Sociologie du journalisme* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2001).
- 4 L. H. Hoffman and D. G. Young, 'Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation', *Communication Research Reports*, 28/2 (2011), 159–68.
- 5 Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, 'One "Nation" Under Stephen? The Effects of the Colbert Report on American Youth', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52/4 (2008), 622–43.
- 6 The suggestion that there was a direct correlation between Chirac's election victory in 1995 and his portrayal in *Les Guignols* is devoid of nuance. As noted by Annie Collovald and Erik Neveu (1996; 1999), it is more likely that the producers of the programme were seeking to satirise the contrast between Chirac and Edouard Balladur's communications strategies and that in so doing they perpetuated the image

that the former was hoping to project; that is, that Chirac was closer to the interests of the electorate. Due to the success of the programme, this contrast was then picked up by the wider media, and repeated in their reporting. In seeking to ridicule the media and their conformity to the strategy of political actors, *Les Guignols* inadvertently became a victim of its own success.

- 7 Peter Kemp makes the distinction between a 'particular cause' and a 'fundamental cause'. The former, he argues, is an action that is discredited by the latter: 'I commit to a particular cause according to my attachment to my fundamental cause,' adding that 'the fundamental cause is my reason for acting'; Peter Kemp, *Théorie de l'engagement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p. 169, emphasis in the original. All translations are the author's.
- 8 'the engaged man is, by nature, subversive/dissident' and 'he protests against the ills of the age'; Kemp, *Théorie de l'engagement*, p. 173.
- 9 S. Collard, 'Le Monde and Mitterrand: challenging the «yellow line»', *Web Journal of French Media Studies*, 8 (2010), unpaginated.
- 10 Bernard Poulet, *Le pouvoir du Monde. Quand un journal veut changer la France* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2003), p. 70.
- 11 'perfect harmony between him [Plantu] and our readership, which leans to the left'; *Le Monde*, 'Plantu: «Resservir le "Casse-toi pau" con!', c'est me piquer mon boulot», 1 October 2012.
- 12 The term *contre-pouvoir* (counter-power) denotes the role of the press as a check and balance on political power, whereas the term *anti-pouvoir* (anti-power) indicates an explicit hostility.
- 13 Patrick Eveno, *Le journal Le Monde. Une histoire d'indépendance* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2001).
- 14 The term 'agenda setting' is taken from the field of media studies, and was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their study 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media' (1972) of the 1968 US presidential election in which they asked one hundred respondents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, their opinion on the most important issue in that election, and compared this with what the media reported as the most important issue. Their study was the foundation of this theory which has been developed extensively since, and the concept is often used to determine the influence of the mass media. It is also widely acknowledged that the media are not alone in their position as agenda setters, but that politicians and the public, too, are able to do this. The extent of the influence of each of these actors varies between different countries and their media systems.
- 15 Maguy Pothier, 'Les implicites culturelles chez un dessinateur humoristique, Plantu' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université Paris III: Nouvelle Sorbonne, France, 1991), 127.
- 16 Rémi Pézerat, 'La signification politique des dessins de Plantu (1997–2000)' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Université Nancy 2, France, 2002), 555.
- 17 D. V. Shah et al., 'News Framing and Cueing of Issue: Regimes Explaining Clinton's Public Approval in Spite of Scandal', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66/3 (2002), 340.

- 18 A particularly prominent achievement of Plantu was a 1992 cartoon, featuring Shimon Peres (then Israel's foreign minister) and Yasser Arafat (then chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation). He succeeded in convincing both of these leaders to put their signatures on this image, a year before the opening of the secret negotiations that resulted in the 1995 Oslo Accords.
- 19 [www.cartooningforpeace.org](http://www.cartooningforpeace.org).
- 20 The *consigne de vote* is the term given to the official endorsement of a candidate in the second round by a candidate who was eliminated in the first round. The endorsing candidate instructs their first-round supporters to vote for a particular candidate.
- 21 'Plantu shows that he would prefer the media to stop promoting Le Pen. Firstly, he shows protesters preventing Le Pen's plane from taking off, which allows him to rebound in the polls (Le Pen even thanks the protesters)'; Pézerat, 'La signification', p. 139.
- 22 *L'Humanité*, 13 February 1988.
- 23 Pézerat, 'La signification', p. 157.
- 24 *Tous pourris* is translated literally as 'all rotten', but conveys a sense of discontentment with the entire political class.
- 25 'the issues'.
- 26 Jacques Gerstlé, *La communication politique*, 2nd edn (Paris: Colin Armand, 2008); 'the tactics'.
- 27 S. Iyengar, H. Norpoth and Kyu Hahn, 'Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horserace Sells', *Journal of Politics*, 66/1 (2004), 157–75.
- 28 Raymond Kuhn, 'Where's the Spin? The Executive and News Management in France', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 13/3 (2005), 307–22.
- 29 'His departure was catastrophic for me. I've never known a politician who was, to such an extent, a caricature of himself [...] I owe Sarko money, he's helped my work so much: the drawing drew itself, the pencil ran across the paper [...] It's not the same story with Hollande'; *Le Monde*. 'Plantu: 40 ans de dessins parus dans *Le Monde*', 1 October 2012.
- 30 'The cartoonist devises his/her caricatures according to a point of view that cultivates the partisan mentality. No image is neutral, but the caricature is especially not, since its absence of neutrality is even present in its graphic syntax – in its textual elements too and the links that they form with the interpretation too – which combines means of accentuation, formation, exaggeration, and excess'; Bertrand Tillier, *À la charge! La caricature en France de 1789 à 2000* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, 2005), p. 68.
- 31 'partisan mentality'.
- 32 'the character of Nicolas Sarkozy, with regard to masculine norms, constitutes an exception with his small size'; M. Coulomb-Gully, 'Le corps présidentiel. Représentation politique et incarnation dans la campagne présidentielle française de 2007', *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 89 (2009), 27.

- 33 'There is no shortage, among the role-models, of popular heroes appreciated for their small size, or who benefit from it, the ordinary people seeing something democratic in it.'
- 34 N. Hewlett, 'Voting in the Shadow of the Crisis. The French Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 2012', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 20/4 (2012), 403–20.
- 35 The *Costa Concordia* was a cruise ship that ran aground off the coast of Italy in January 2012, costing the lives of thirty-two passengers and one crew member. It was not immediately clear what had caused the accident, but in the days immediately following the incident it was believed that the captain was responsible. It was also reported that the captain was slow to respond to events, though it later emerged that he had left the vessel himself and abandoned passengers and fellow crew.
- 36 'to have skeletons in the closet'.
- 37 R. Kuhn, 'Electoral Cross-Dressing: The Role Reversal Campaigns of Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande in the 2012 Presidential Election', *Nottingham French Studies*, 52/2 (2013), 155–66.
- 38 The subject of halal meat became an electoral issue after Marine Le Pen claimed that 100 per cent of meat slaughtered in the Île-de-France region was halal. President Sarkozy initially rejected Le Pen's claims, but later made it a policy issue by proposing to introduce legislation that would force distributors to label their products with the method of slaughter. This was perceived by detractors as an electoral manoeuvre by Sarkozy to attract some of Le Pen's supporters.
- 39 'its size and weight [...] its apparent calm, physical power, as well as its great longevity'; Guillaume Doizy and Jacky Houdré, *Bêtes de pouvoir. Caricatures du XVIIe siècle à nos jours*, (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2010), p. 136.
- 40 The *pôle emploi* is the national employment agency in France.

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## 6

# Dominique Manotti and the Politics of Crime Writing

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ANGELA KIMYONGÜR

Crime fiction has long been acknowledged as a form associated with the articulation of critical perspectives on society, and links between the crime genre and an interest in societal or political matters have been frequently identified. Jean-Patrick Manchette, himself a writer of politically radical crime writing in the post-May '68 era, famously referred to the form in these terms: 'Le polar, pour moi, c'était – c'est toujours – le roman d'intervention sociale très violent',<sup>1</sup> while in 1997, the critic Jean Pons explicitly described the *roman noir* as a politically committed form: 'Le roman noir est une écriture engagée et offensive parce qu'en exhibant les mécanismes qui expliquent le pourquoi des choses et des actes, il dénonce les procédures de mensonge, d'aliénation et de violence qui quadrillent notre espace social.'<sup>2</sup> The fact that Pons chose to make this statement in a special issue of *Les Temps modernes* dedicated to the *roman noir*, fifty-two years after Sartre had used the foreword to the first issue of the very same review as the platform from which he set out his ideas on the responsibilities of the writer in the post-war world, is surely no coincidence. Rather more recently, in a special issue of *Le Matricule des Anges* that debated the question 'La littérature est-elle encore engagée?', Lionel Destremau commented on the essentially political nature of the *roman noir*: 'une dimension politique baigne le *roman noir* tel qu'il s'est constitué aujourd'hui' and he identified a number of writers whose works illustrate this, writers who 'tous font preuve, d'une manière ou d'une autre, d'une critique sociale radicale en adéquation avec leur désir d'engagement politique.'<sup>3</sup> Against the backdrop of these



observations, this chapter aims to situate crime writing in relation to notions of *engagement* in order to show how the genre has oriented itself towards, rather than away from, *engagement*, and has thus defined itself as a popular form with a serious intent; and it will offer a case study of the French crime writer, Dominique Manotti, through an analysis of her motivation and her fictional practice, in order to explore the relationship between her crime writing and the notion of *engagement*.

From the 1950s onwards, literary culture in France was distancing itself from the notion of the author's role as a social and political conscience, in particular with the emergence of the *nouveau roman*. Indeed the notion of the authorial voice itself was treated with scepticism and subordinated to the primacy of the text as writers espoused experimental, non-representational modes of writing. Meanwhile the trajectory of post-war French crime fiction, seen as a popular genre that was not a part of the literary mainstream, was rather different. In its early days, the genre was heavily influenced by American crime fiction when, in the wake of the Second World War and the cultural limitations imposed during the Occupation of France, the French public was hungry for novels and other cultural imports from the United States. The earliest publications in Gallimard's *Série noire* were either translations of American crime novels, or novels written in French by French authors who adopted Anglophone pseudonyms and retained the grittiness of the hardboiled form.<sup>4</sup> As it developed, crime writing in France not only retained a rootedness in everyday concerns, but was increasingly open to commenting on the political issues of the day. The challenge of writing that not only represented society's problems but also articulated a political response to them became newly pertinent in the late 1960s with the emergence of a politically radical form of crime fiction, named the *néo-polar* by its foremost exponent, Jean-Patrick Manchette, and seen as inextricably linked to the events of May 1968 by David Platten, who describes the form as 'a powerful, collectivist attack on the ravages of transnational capitalism and its deleterious effects on the individual and communities alike'.<sup>5</sup>

While the *néo-polar* itself experienced only a relatively brief flowering, French writers of crime fiction have since continued to exploit the genre as a form particularly well suited to socio-political commentary, even a politically committed form. A generation of

writers, born during or shortly after the Second World War, and who came to political consciousness around 1968, have turned to crime writing in order to explore contemporary political and social themes. Authors including Didier Daeninckx, Maurice Gouiran (described as ‘un auteur engagé’ on the website of his publisher, Jigal), Jean-Claude Izzo, Thierry Jonquet, Dominique Manotti, Patrick Pécherot, Jean-Bernard Pouy, Patrick Raynal and Jean-François Vilar,<sup>6</sup> several of whom are or have been politically militant in some way, either in left-wing or in trade union organisations, have written crime novels that display a social, political or ethical conscience in their treatment of a range of topics: historical wrongdoings, the aftermath of decolonisation, political corruption and social marginalisation. Moreover, a younger generation of crime writers continues to demonstrate a similar interest in contemporary social and political crisis. It is of interest to note that the most recent cover of Rachid Santaki’s 2013 novel *Flic ou caillera* describes him as ‘Le Victor Hugo du ghetto’, an implicit reference to Hugo as a writer of fiction that addressed social and political questions.<sup>7</sup> I suggest that these authors can be considered as writers in the tradition of *engagement* in that they use the *roman noir* and, in several cases, their own varied personal experience of militancy or political involvement, to contest and criticise the dominant power structures or the social fabric of contemporary France.

This chapter will focus exclusively on the *roman noir*, as opposed to the classic *roman policier* or *polar*.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the *roman policier* is characterised by narratives in which the disorder engendered by crime is dispelled and order is restored by an authoritative yet reassuring investigating figure, the *roman noir* has been defined as a form where ‘la barrière entre le Bien et le Mal est souvent plus ambiguë, et le coupable est plus une société organisée qu’un individu.’<sup>9</sup> This focus on the grey, intermediate zones between the poles of good and evil, and upon crime in society, rather than on individual crime, is one common to crime writers who could be deemed *engagé*.<sup>10</sup> Many of these contemporary novelists reveal a society in which, even when the perpetrator of the crime, or crimes, is identified, disorder persists; a society where crime is pervasive and resists the reassurance of resolution at the novel’s end; a society in which the police and judicial system are frequently not the unambiguous upholders of social order that we might expect. As Franck Evrard has commented: ‘Alors que l’ancien roman policier

confortait les valeurs bourgeoises en rétablissant l'ordre perturbé, le "néo-polar", au contraire, exhibe les diverses formes de la violence étatique et les injustices d'une société qui a perdu ses repères.<sup>11</sup> With its focus on state-inspired violence and injustice, this observation applies equally well to the *roman noir*. Crime writer Dominique Manotti espouses a very similar view of the modern *roman noir* as one characterised by a disorder that resists closure at the end of the novel.<sup>12</sup> It is to her work that I will now turn as an example of a contemporary writer whose novels reveal some of the inner workings of a corrupt, disordered society and who, by that token, and despite her own reluctance to be associated with that term, might be described as *engagée*.<sup>13</sup>

Manotti was an academic historian, specialising in nineteenth-century economic history, until her retirement. Just as importantly, she has also been a political activist, involved in left-wing militant groups during the 1960s and 1970s, and an active *syndicaliste* within the CFDT.<sup>14</sup> She came to crime writing relatively late in life, publishing her first novel *Sombre Sentier* in 1995. This was followed in 1997 with *A nos chevaux*, *Kop* in 1998, *Nos fantastiques années fric* in 2001, *Le corps noir* in 2005 and *Lorraine Connection* in 2006. After a number of publications with Seuil and Rivages, her 2010 novel, *Bien connu des services de police*, made it into Gallimard's prestigious *Série noire*, where her work has been published since. The year 2011 saw the publication of *L'Honorable Société*, a collaborative project, co-written with fellow crime writer and scriptwriter DOA,<sup>15</sup> which won the major French crime writing prize, the *Grand Prix de littérature policière*, that year. In 2013 she published *L'Évasion*, followed in 2015 by her most recent novel, *Or noir*. In addition to her crime novels, she has written an essay, *Le Rêve de Madoff* (2013) on Bernie Madoff, the man responsible for the 1990s investment scandal, and regularly uses her website to comment on current affairs. These have included short pieces on the ongoing investigations into the police killings of two young boys that preceded the 2005 riots in the Parisian *banlieue*; the Russian incursion into Ukraine and the *affaire Dieudonné*, to name a few.<sup>16</sup>

In order to examine Manotti's writing, it is worth exploring the reasons why a woman with her professional profile as well as her background of militancy should have turned from this path not merely to the writing of fiction but to the crime novel. She attributes her decision to a sense of political disillusionment coupled

with a recognition of the limits of political activism; both of these she has specifically related to the Socialist victory of May 1981 and the accession of François Mitterrand to the presidency, a development which she saw as a defeat for her political hopes and, more broadly, a betrayal of the hopes of the Left.<sup>17</sup> She articulates her disappointment, and her reaction to it in her website biography, where she describes herself as:

Romancière, sur le tard, et pas par vocation, plutôt par désespoir. L'arrivée de Mitterrand au pouvoir sonne, d'une certaine façon, comme le glas des espoirs de transformation radicale de la société. Alors, le roman noir apparaît comme la forme la plus appropriée pour raconter ce que fut l'expérience de ma génération.<sup>18</sup>

She has frequently commented on the appropriateness of her choice, as a historian, of a fictional form that she sees as another way of writing history: 'Et j'ai fini en écrivant des romans policiers. Ce qui est une autre forme d'histoire.'<sup>19</sup> The parallels between the crime writer and the historian are, for her, to be found in their common aim of exposition and revelation. The crime story is 'une enquête, ou plutôt une quête [...] qui aboutit à un dévoilement [...] On n'est pas si loin de la démarche de l'historien, qui met au jour, ordonne et rationalise les traces du passé.'<sup>20</sup>

Manotti has explained her own espousal of the *roman noir*, rather than of the classic *roman policier*: 'Le roman policier est par définition un roman d'ordre. Le mal existe, mais en fin de compte, l'ordre est restauré.'<sup>21</sup> For her, the *roman noir* has two key characteristics: firstly, where the *roman policier* concludes with the eventual re-establishment of order, the *roman noir* is predicated on continuing disorder; if a measure of order *is* re-established, through the solution of a crime, this merely offers a temporary respite from the prevailing disorder; secondly, where the *roman policier* is interested in individual crimes, the *roman noir* foregrounds crime within a given social framework:

Le roman 'noir', lui, enracine les crimes dans les circonstances sociales dans lesquelles ils sont commis. Ce n'est plus l'individu seul qui est criminel, c'est le monde de souffrance, de misère, de violence et de corruption dans lequel nous vivons qui produit les individus criminels [...] Le rétablissement de l'ordre, s'il a lieu, n'est jamais que le rétablissement précaire [...] d'une apparence d'ordre et de paix.<sup>22</sup>

Her choice of words in the second sentence ('le monde de souffrance, de misère, de violence et de corruption') hints strongly at her political attitude towards that society. If her notion of crime writing as an alternative means of writing history hints at a dispassionate revelation of reality, Manotti's insistence that crime is a symptom of a disordered society, together with her left-wing politics and the way in which her political preoccupations infuse her fiction, offers a powerful rationale for considering her to be *engagée*. Indeed, in an explanation of her choice of the genre of crime writing, she has commented that fiction offers a different way of articulating her political commitment: 'J'ai donc voulu déplacer mon engagement politique ... dans un autre domaine. Cela ne veut pas dire que je n'ai plus mes convictions, j'ai simplement déplacé [*sic*] le terrain.'<sup>23</sup> The themes underpinning her novels – the exposure of corruption within political, economic and industrial life, corruption within the police force, the experience of excluded or marginalised social groups – are very much aligned with a politically inspired tradition of social critique, one which aims to seek out and question the underlying mechanisms of a given society: 'je me demande toujours: derrière il y a quoi? Et ça, c'est fondamentalement une démarche de roman noir.'<sup>24</sup>

Having established Manotti's motivation in espousing the *roman noir*, this chapter will now turn to an exploration of some of these key themes in her novels in order to illustrate and interrogate her writing practice. The focus will be upon her presentation of a society polarised between those with political and economic power and authority – politicians, businessmen, the police – and those at the mercy of that power, such as workers, or those living on the margins of society: ethnic minorities, illegal migrants and prostitutes. Manotti's Marxist background ensures that the corruption of capitalist society, even or, perhaps, especially under a socialist government, is a constant theme in a number of novels. She has evoked her ambition to use her novels to expose the Mitterrand years as 'celles de l'explosion de la corruption et du ralliement de la gauche à la rationalité du profit'.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the corrupting power of money is a constant theme in her novels. Her early novels *A nos chevaux* (1997) and *Kop* (1998) both focus, in one way or another, on the theme of 'la saga de l'argent sale'.<sup>26</sup> In *Kop*, the plot revolves around transfers, doping and fixed matches in the world of football, while money laundering and cocaine dealing within the

world of horse racing feature in *À nos chevaux. Nos fantastiques années fric* (2001) drives the point home further. Its epigraph, ironically a quotation attributed to Mitterrand, focuses the reader's attention from the very beginning on the power and ubiquity of money in the president's inner circle: 'L'argent qui corrompt, l'argent qui achète, l'argent qui écrase, l'argent qui tue, l'argent qui ruine, l'argent qui pourrit jusqu'à la conscience des hommes.'<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the collusion of powerful businessmen and highly placed politicians for their mutual benefit, set against the background of illicit arms dealing during the Iran–Iraq war is a frequent motif in this novel. It is a collusion whose roots run deep according to Manotti, who sees a line of continuity between the compromises of the period of wartime collaboration and the present, as she explains in comments on plans for her novel set during the Occupation, *Le Corps noir*:

(Mon) prochain (livre) s'intéressera à la Carlingue, c'est-à-dire, la Gestapo française de Bonny et Lafon [sic] en 1944. C'est un sujet profondément noir [...] et un peu la matrice de la société française dans les années qui vont suivre [...] Je reviens à cette période parce que, selon moi, le mitterrandisme est né en 1943–44.<sup>28</sup>

The link she makes between Mitterrand and the Occupation years ties in of course with revelations in the 1990s about Mitterrand's associations with Vichy, as well as with her own acute disillusionment with left-wing politics, and in particular her scepticism about Mitterrand as a man of the Left, manifest in her repeated characterisation of the Mitterrand years as 'les années fric'.<sup>29</sup> These echoes between the Vichy régime and the Mitterrand government are developed in *Nos fantastiques années fric* through the character of François Bornand, who is a special adviser to the president. Bornand bears a striking resemblance to Maurice Bourseul in *Le Corps noir*. Both worked for Vichy and the Milice during the Occupation, all the while sustaining links with the Resistance in order to be able, as the end of the war approached and it became clear that the Allies would defeat the Nazis, to set aside their collaborationist past. *Le Corps noir* finishes with an image of a photo in the Bourseul family album, showing Bourseul who, despite having collaborated with the Gestapo during the Occupation, was fully reintegrated into the post-Liberation 'camp des vainqueurs', with a street in his home town named after his son who was, ironically, a

member of the Resistance: 'Photo de groupe, Bourseul en longue redingote noire, col de fourrure, feutre gris [...] Tous les regards se tournent vers le maire de Marcq en Barouel qui, bras levés, découvre une plaque en émail bleu, lettres blanches: Rue François Bourseul. Le camp des vainqueurs.'<sup>30</sup> It does not take much of a leap of imagination to see in the triumphant Bourseul, safely installed in the 'camp des vainqueurs' a forerunner of the François Bornand of *Nos fantastiques années fric* in which, after his wartime involvement with the Milice, Bornand rises to become a trusted adviser to Mitterrand, all the while involved in illicit arms dealing with Iran during the Iran–Iraq war.<sup>31</sup>

High-level corruption is a key motif in *Lorraine Connection* (2006), where Manotti takes the true story of the privatisation of the Thomson electronics group and uses it to explore the relationship between big financial corporations, the siphoning off of European subsidies and high-level political interventions in business takeovers. The political ramifications in this case are so compromising that at the end of the investigation the findings of corruption are not aired publicly but are suppressed.<sup>32</sup> *Or Noir*, Manotti's most recent novel, takes a rather different look at international capitalism in the 1970s, through an investigation into gangland murders against the backdrop of the burgeoning oil market, seeing in it the root of much broader problems: 'toute la contrebande avec l'Afrique, le programme pétrole contre nourriture, la pollution toxique, et puis plus généralement le capitalisme financier'.<sup>33</sup>

While the exposure of high-level corruption is a favoured approach in Manotti's investigation of the political classes in France, at the other extreme, the plight of marginal and vulnerable groups within contemporary France is another recurrent topic. Such groups are foregrounded, particularly in *Bien connu des services de police*. Set in 2005, the year of urban riots in the Parisian suburbs,<sup>34</sup> the novel is located in the fictional *banlieue* of Panteuil, though the novel draws attention to suburban problems that are all too real. *Commissaire Le Muir* of Panteuil is determined to clear a zone which not only poses law and order problems, but is also ripe for commercial development, a development that cannot take place until the area is cleared. Home to a range of marginal, homeless groups, illegal workers, immigrants, drug addicts and gypsies squatting in unoccupied buildings, it is, therefore, politically sensitive and as such has remained untouched, much to Le Muir's frustration. Le



Muir wants the 'nettoyage de la zone' so that she can both take credit for the resultant lowering of the crime figures and set the economic renewal of the area in motion. Nor is she too particular about the means used to achieve this end, as she deliberately hints to her driver Pasquini: 'Alors, j'attends une intervention divine, un miracle, une catastrophe, au choix. Un incendie [...] tout est bon, je prends tout.'<sup>35</sup> Pasquini, whose past involvement with extreme right-wing groups suggests a readiness to act against the inhabitants of the squats, takes her at her word, thus setting in motion the tragedy that unfolds. The subsequent police investigation focuses on the fire that conveniently breaks out and destroys the squats, rendering their inhabitants homeless. This is just one of a sequence of events that demonstrate the vulnerability of a range of dispossessed groups. Much of the action of the novel is located in the Panteuil commissariat, where we see that the treatment accorded to victims of crime depends on race. Complaints of domestic violence and burglary by members of ethnic minorities are dismissed with comments such as 'Si t'es pas content, retourne dans ton pays.'<sup>36</sup> Such treatment is put into sharp relief by the disproportionate reaction to the complaint of a white woman who, having lost her mobile phone, wrongly assumes it to have been stolen by 'un jeune, de type maghrébin'.<sup>37</sup> Her allegation generates a misguided police response that escalates into a full-blown incident complete with tear gas, arrests and the hospitalisation of the unfortunate innocent suspect.

As might be expected, given Manotti's past involvement with trade union activity, two novels focus on the precariousness of workers' rights. *Sombre Sentier*, Manotti's first novel, is the one that most explicitly bears the hallmarks of her own experience of trade union activism, with its narrative focus on the struggles of illegal Turkish workers in Paris to obtain regularisation of their status. The novel contains a fictional reworking of her own personal involvement in a real-life, successful campaign that took place in 1980 when Manotti was an official of the CFDT (Confédération générale du travail) in Paris.<sup>38</sup> In the novel, the Turkish workers are led in their struggle by Soleiman, an exiled Turkish left-wing militant, wanted in his home country for the murders of a right-wing militant and a policeman. He has been recruited as a police informer by *Commissaire* Daquin of the drugs squad, who is investigating the links between drugs trafficking and extreme right-wing Turkish

elements in Paris. The novel traces the development of Soleiman from the vulnerable figure he originally cuts, as marginal a figure as the workers he represents, to something of a folk hero as he heads the committee organising action on behalf of the illegal workers and succeeds in ensuring the legalisation of their status. The evocation of his success is fused in the novel with Manotti's own memories of the part she played in real-life events and her regret at the way the victory was overshadowed by news of the Turkish military coup of 1980, in what is for her a unique authorial intervention, and one that flags her personal commitment to the story: 'Finalement, on n'a pas fait la fête, pour célébrer notre victoire. Et c'est le seul regret que j'aie gardé de ce printemps 1980.'<sup>39</sup> Her authorial regret at failing to celebrate the victory is explicitly linked in the text to the intervention of the Turkish military coup in 1980, but is doubtless also a symptom of her retrospective consciousness that the battle was 'la dernière des grandes grèves des années 70'.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the outcome of the workers' struggle in *Sombre Sentier* is a positive one, unlike that presented in *Lorraine Connection*. This in itself is attributable to the changed timeframe, with the latter novel set well after Mitterrand's accession to power and changes in workplace politics. The plot in this work is once more a fictional interpretation of real events: those surrounding the privatisation of the Thomson group in 1996, its sale to Daewoo, the subsequent prime ministerial reversal of the decision and the 2003 fire at the last Daewoo factory.<sup>41</sup> While Manotti's primary focus is on the fictional high-level financial and political manoeuvring behind these events, her aim was also to highlight the break-up of union structures in the wake of 1981, a process described in the novel as the 'délabrement des structures syndicales, et la rupture dans la transmission d'une culture et d'un savoir ouvriers'.<sup>42</sup> This can be seen in the difference between the organised support, and ultimate victory, for the Turkish workers in *Sombre Sentier*, set in 1980, and the lack of such support, and ultimate failure, in *Lorraine Connection*, set after 1981. The novel is set in the Daewoo factory in fictional Pondange, a town already devastated by the collapse of the steel industry. Manotti's pessimism about trade union activists is echoed in the breakdown of union support structures in the factory and the lack of unity amongst the demotivated workforce. These are illustrated in the chaotic response to a workplace accident and to suspicions that the

management is preparing to remove all stock from the factory as a prelude to its closure. The union representative Amrouche is weak, a man already broken by his experience of the closing down of the steel factory where he used to work. The closure is symbolic for him of the lost hopes of the working class in Pondange, a defeat that has left him disillusioned and lacking the drive to fight any further battles, as he observes: 'L'usine démantelée, rayée de la vallée. Une classe ouvrière dynamitée [...] Et désormais une certitude: les vainqueurs, c'est eux, ceux d'en face. Il faut faire avec.'<sup>43</sup> Worse still, as the final phrases suggest, with their suggestions of necessary compromise, he has become far too close to the management, something his colleague Rolande has already realised when she describes him in the following terms: 'toujours à traîner dans les couloirs de la direction, celui-là'.<sup>44</sup> This suspicion of Amrouche's readiness to bend to management's will reflects a critical view of union autonomy made in an interview by Manotti in which she commented that three quarters of CFTD leaders joined the government in the six months following Mitterrand's election victory.<sup>45</sup> The lack of union leadership together with union representatives who are ill equipped to confront a management preoccupied with covering up the dubious practices of the Korean owners, means that the workers are vulnerable to workplace accidents, unjustified sackings and the ultimate threat of redundancy. It is an intensely negative portrait of the workplace that reflects Manotti's own acute disillusionment with the undermining of union power that she associates with Mitterrand's government and the sense of impotence that led her to crime fiction as an alternative channel through which to articulate her response to political problems.<sup>46</sup>

If Manotti uses her fiction to reflect her anger at the undermining of the trade union movement, we can see that same anger directed at the treatment of a rather different social group that features in almost every Manotti novel: sex workers. In an article entitled 'Enfin le crime paie', Manotti uses her website as a platform from which to comment on a Eurostat recommendation that European states include profits from prostitution and the drugs trade in their GDP figures, a recommendation that surprises even her in its cynicism: 'Je dois dire que malgré ce que j'ai écrit sur le crime comme rouage de la machine de l'ordre social [...] je ne m'attendais pas à une légitimation aussi ouverte et aussi rapide des grandes machines criminelles.'<sup>47</sup> Given her identification in this

article of prostitution as an integral part of the capitalist order, it is hardly surprising that prostitution with its frequent corollary, sexual violence, is a recurrent motif in most of her novels, though it takes very different forms. While not all the prostitutes depicted in her novels are seen as poor or powerless by any means – some in organised brothels make a good living from well-to-do clients, including politicians and powerful business men – the narrative emphasis is more usually on the young and often foreign victims of the trade. *Sombre sentier* opens brutally with the murder of a twelve-year old Thai prostitute by her client. Manotti's outrage is, one assumes, reflected in the cold anger of her detective Daquin as he pursues his investigation which reveals that the young girl's murder took place in a club, frequented by politicians and businessmen, which specialises in the prostitution of minors and the provision of a video recording service for those who want a souvenir of their activities in Paris. The club is supplied by a business which brings in under-age children from Thailand to provide sexual services. In *Bien connu des services de police*, prostitutes from eastern Europe are being run in a car park in Panteuil by police officers. The vulnerability of this group is demonstrated graphically, again in the opening scene of the novel, which features the casual rape of one of the prostitutes by her pimp who, the reader slowly realises, is a policeman. Prostitutes are not the only victims of sexual violence, nor is this the only rape by a policeman. The casual rape of a suspected drugs carrier by a police officer in *Sombre sentier* causes no more than a slight discomfiture and a little impatience on the part of his watching colleague. While the use of prostitutes by businessmen and politicians is common currency, it is never normalised. The vulnerability of this marginalised group is consistently highlighted through their dealings with authority figures who are, almost without exception, corrupt, ruthless or both.<sup>48</sup>

Surprisingly, perhaps, murder, the favoured subject of the classic crime novel as the driver of a mystery to be elucidated, is almost peripheral to the central thrust of Manotti's *noir* novels. This is not to say that murder is absent – in some novels the body count is quite high – but more often than not, the killer is already known to the reader, who often witnesses the killing. The key purpose of these novels is not the resolution of a mystery but something rather different in which the disorder engendered by crime is not conveniently dispelled by an authoritative investigator. On the contrary,

crime often goes if not undetected, then unpunished in an environment in which disorder persists. Herein lies the common characteristic of Manotti's profoundly pessimistic novels: all lay bare for the reader what she sees as the disorders of contemporary society, and seem, through their very pessimism and lack of resolution, to embody her loss of belief in the possibility of social and political change. Does this subject matter and approach allow us to consider her novels to be *engagés*? The subjects she tackles – venal politicians, the experience of exclusion and marginalisation in the troubled Parisian *banlieue*, corruption within the police force, arms and drug dealing, prostitution, the plight of migrant and illegal workers – are self evidently anchored in the contemporary world and seem to be inspired by her political views. What is more, these subjects are regularly highlighted in commentaries on her website.<sup>49</sup> Yet, as we have already seen, Manotti has distanced herself from the label of *engagement* insofar as it implies writing with a message: 'Je ne crois pas au message en littérature.'<sup>50</sup> Further emphasising her rejection of an instrumentalist approach to literature, she has asserted that the *roman noir* is not a political pamphlet, but a literary form that is unable to effect change in society.<sup>51</sup> Yet, while crime fiction may be for some (readers and writers alike) no more than a form of entertainment, this would not appear to be the case for Manotti's choice of the form. While she is acutely aware of the limits of literary *engagement* and rejects the notion that literature can bring about revolutionary change, she nonetheless identifies her writing as a form of action – the only one left to her after her abandonment of political activism, but action nevertheless. She has observed that her aim is to 'raconter ce que je connais de cette société dans laquelle je vis',<sup>52</sup> a statement that suggests a level of detachment. If literary *engagement* is conceived as the articulation in fiction of a political stance or as a channel for the author to persuade the reader into thinking or acting in a particular way, then Manotti cannot be described as an *écrivain engagé*. If, however, we think of literary *engagement* in terms of what Sartre called 'dévoilement'<sup>53</sup> or, somewhat more recently, what David Caute called 'a form of secondary action, action by disclosure',<sup>54</sup> then we have something much closer to Manotti's own practice. Furthermore, if we consider the thematic and narrative choices highlighted in this chapter, then Manotti does shape up as an *écrivain engagé* in her writing of novels that are anchored in the real,

and in her acknowledgement that the very revelation of social realities is a form of activism, of engagement in that reality: ‘tell[ing] the story of the society that I know. That’s my activism.’<sup>55</sup> More generally, what we can say with absolute certainty is that the investigatory structure of the *roman noir*, with its lack of resolution, is eminently well suited to her forensic examination of the ills of contemporary French society.

### Notes

- 1 ‘For me, the crime novel was, and still is, the novel of extremely violent social intervention’; Jean-Patrick Manchette, *Chroniques* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 1996), p. 12. All translations are the author’s own.
- 2 ‘The *roman noir* is a form of writing that is both politically committed and militant, because by revealing the mechanisms that account for the rationale behind words and acts, it denounces the lies, alienation and violence that control our society’; J. Pons, ‘Le roman noir, littérature réelle’, *Les Temps Modernes*, 595 (1997), 9.
- 3 ‘Is literature still politically committed?’ ‘who all display, in one way or another, a radical social critique that matches their desire for political commitment’; L. Destremau, ‘Le «néo-polar» français, et après?’ *Le Matricule des anges*, 133 (2012), 26.
- 4 The development of the early French *roman noir* is ably charted in C. Gorrara, ‘Cultural intersections: the American hard-boiled detective novel and early French *roman noir*’, *Modern Language Review*, 98/3 (2003), 590–601.
- 5 David Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime. Reading Modern Crime Fiction* (Amsterdam and New York; Rodopi, 2011), p. 93.
- 6 Manotti was a trade union activist, as was Patrick Pécherot, while Daeninckx, Jonquet, Raynal and Vilar have all belonged to left-wing organisations. Izzo campaigned for Pax Christi, a Catholic peace movement.
- 7 ‘The Victor Hugo of the ghetto’. This designation appears on the 2014 Livre de Poche edition of the novel.
- 8 There is little space here to elaborate on terminology in French. Gorrara provides a series of definitions, based on Todorov’s ‘Typology of Detective Fiction’, in *The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture: Dark Fictions*, pp. 2–6.
- 9 ‘the barrier between Good and Evil is often more ambiguous, and the culprit is an organised group rather than an individual’; Destremau, ‘Le «néo-polar français»’, p. 26.
- 10 Margaret Atack has observed: ‘Film *noir* and *roman noir* rely, structurally, on the interchangeability of good and bad, the figures of the policeman and the criminal, in order to realize in action the question of moral ambiguity, the otherness of transgression, which is so central

- to them'; *May 68 in French Fiction and Film: Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 131.
- 11 'Where the old detective story reinforced bourgeois values by re-establishing a disrupted social order, the «néo-polar», on the contrary, reveals the different forms of state violence and the injustices of a society that has lost its way'; Dominique Viart and Bruno Vercier, *La Littérature française au présent* (Paris: Bordas, 2008), p. 367.
  - 12 Manotti, 'Splendeurs et mystères du roman noir', Intervention au Colloque de Bari, organisé par les universités de Bari, Bergame et Palerme, 2009.
  - 13 Manotti has said, 'Je ne crois pas au message en littérature' ('I don't believe that literature should be used for conveying a message'); Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
  - 14 Donald Reid provides a detailed examination of Manotti's political activism in 'The Red and the Black: Marie-Noëlle Thibault and the novels of Dominique Manotti', *French Cultural Studies*, 26/3 (2015), 277–88. Marie-Noëlle Thibault is Manotti's birth name.
  - 15 Author of *Ligne de sang* (2004), *Citoyens clandestins* (2007) and *Le Serpent aux mille coupures* (2009).
  - 16 See [www.dominiquemanotti.com](http://www.dominiquemanotti.com).
  - 17 See Reid, 'The Red and the Black', p. 281 for more detail.
  - 18 'A novelist, late in life, not out of a sense of vocation but rather out of despair. Mitterrand's arrival in power in a way sounded the death knell for any hopes of radical social transformation. The *roman noir* seemed, at the time, the most appropriate form to recount the experience of my generation'; 'Biographie', [www.dominiquemanotti.com](http://www.dominiquemanotti.com).
  - 19 'I ended up writing detective novels, which is another form of history'; Pierre Vincent Cresceri and Stéphane Gatti (eds), 'Entretien avec Marie-Noëlle Thibault.', *Chantier. De mai 68 à ...* [www.bdic.fr/expositions/mai68/pdf/chantierthibault/pdf](http://www.bdic.fr/expositions/mai68/pdf/chantierthibault/pdf), p. 25.
  - 20 'an investigation, or rather a quest [...] that ends in a revelation [...] This is not so far from the approach of the historian who reveals, orders and rationalises the traces of the past'; Manotti, 'Chéries noires', *La Raison présente*, 134 (2000), 92.
  - 21 'The detective novel is, by definition, a novel of order. Evil exists, but at the end of the day, order is restored'; Manotti, 'Splendeurs et mystères'.
  - 22 'In the *roman noir*, crimes are rooted in the social fabric within which they are committed. It is no longer the individual alone who is a criminal, it is the world of suffering, poverty, violence and corruption in which we live that produces criminals [...] The restoration of order, if it materialises at all, is never more than a precarious restoration of a semblance of order and peace'; Manotti, 'Splendeurs et mystères'.
  - 23 'So I decided to transfer my political commitment to another domain. That doesn't mean I no longer have my convictions, just that they have changed ground'; F. Frommer and M. Oberti, 'Dominique Manotti: Du militantisme à l'écriture tout en parlant de politique', *Mouvements*, 3/15–16 (2001), 43.

- 24 'I always ask myself: what is behind this? And that question is the essential strategy of the *roman noir*'; Y. Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
- 25 'the Mitterrand years, those years when corruption exploded and the Left rallied to the cause of profit', *www.dominiquemanotti.com*.
- 26 'the saga of dirty money', *www.dominiquemanotti.com*.
- 27 'Money that corrupts, that buys, that crushes, that kills, that ruins, that rots the very conscience of men'; *Nos fantastiques années fric* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2001), p. 7.
- 28 'My next book will focus on the Carlingue, the French Gestapo of Bonny and Lafont in 1944. It is a profoundly *noir* subject [...] and one that to a certain extent set the mould of French society in the following years [...] I have returned to this subject because in my opinion, Mitterrandism was born in 1943–4'; F. Frommer et M. Oberti, 'Du militantisme à l'écriture', p. 46.
- 29 Reid has elaborated on Manotti's views about Mitterrand in 'The Red and the Black', p. 281.
- 30 'In a group photo Bourseul is wearing a long black overcoat, with a fur collar, and a grey trilby... Everyone's eyes are on the mayor of Marcq en Barouel who, with raised arms, is uncovering a blue enamel plaque with Rue François Bourseul in white letters. The victors' camp'; *Le Corps noir* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), p. 277.
- 31 The parallel is reinforced by physical description. Bourseul's appearance in this quotation clearly recalls that of Bornand in the earlier novel: 'Bornand, dans sa longue redingote ajustée, coiffé d'un borsalino gris perle, a des allures d'élégant des années vingt' ('Bornand, in his long fitted overcoat, a pearl grey fedora on his head, cuts a stylish 1920s figure'); *Nos fantastiques années fric*, p. 30.
- 32 Reid identifies in this novel a similar parallel between politically dubious allegiances in the past and present-day corruption. See 'The Red and the Black', p. 282.
- 33 'All the smuggling with Africa, the oil for food programme, toxic pollution and, on a more general level, financial capitalism'; Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
- 34 In October 2005, Paris erupted into urban violence, triggered by a police *bavure*. Two teenagers, believing they were being followed by police as they returned home from a football match, took refuge in an EDF transformer where they were electrocuted. That evening, on news of their deaths, riots broke out in Clichy-sous-Bois and spread rapidly throughout the Parisian suburbs, making international headlines.
- 35 'So, I'm waiting for a divine intervention, a miracle, a catastrophe, whatever you will. A fire... anything will do, I'll accept anything'; Manotti, *Bien connu des services de police* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p. 32.
- 36 'If you aren't happy, go back to where you came from', p. 33.
- 37 'A young man, North African-looking', p. 56.
- 38 Manotti's account of this campaign can be found in M. Galano and A. Spire, '«French Confection»: le Sentier (1980)', *Plein Droit*, 55 (2002).



- 39 'In the end, we didn't celebrate our victory. And that's the only regret I have from spring 1980'; Manotti, *Sombre Sentier* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p. 313.
- 40 'The last of the big strikes of the 1980s'; Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
- 41 See also Chapter 1 in this volume where Helena Chadderton discusses François Bon's treatment of the Daewoo affair.
- 42 'the erosion of union structures and the break in the transmission of working-class culture and knowledge'; Manotti, 'Splendeurs et mystères du roman noir'.
- 43 'The factory dismantled, wiped out of the valley. The working class blown up [...] And from now on, one single certainty: that they are the victors, the ones over there. It's them we have to work with'; Manotti, *Lorraine Connection* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2006), p. 22.
- 44 'He's always hanging around the managers' offices', p. 19.
- 45 Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
- 46 This disillusionment is articulated at length in an interview in which she comments: 'La CFDT a été un lieu étonnant [...] A la limite, elle ne s'est jamais rendue [*sic*] compte de la richesse qu'elle avait en elle. Quand on est passé à Mitterrand, l'ordre a été rétabli dans la CFDT. Il n'y avait plus rien à faire' ('The CDT was an amazing place .... You could almost say that it never realised the wealth of its own resources. When Mitterrand came to power, order was re-established in the CFDT. There was nothing more to be done.');
- 47 'Entretien avec Marie-Noëlle Thibault', p. 25.
- 47 'I have to say that despite everything I've written about crime as a cog in the workings of society, I didn't expect such an open and rapid legitimisation of the machinery of crime', [www.dominiquemanotti.com](http://www.dominiquemanotti.com).
- 48 A fuller discussion of prostitution in Manotti's novels can be found in A. Kimyongür, 'Dominique Manotti and the roman noir', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 7/3 (2013), 235–52.
- 49 At the time of writing, her website featured an ongoing rubric on real-life parallels between *Bien connu des services de police* and current developments, an article on the extension to the state of emergency following the Paris attacks of November 2015 and a critique of twentieth-anniversary celebrations of the death of Mitterrand.
- 50 'I don't believe that literature should be used for conveying a message'; Le Tumelin, 'Rencontre avec Dominique Manotti'.
- 51 Frommer and Oberti, 'Dominique Manotti, du militantisme à l'écriture', pp. 43–4.
- 52 'tell the story of what I know of this society in which I live'; C. Dupuis, 'Dominique Manotti, 20 ans de talent', [www.encoredu noir.com/2015/05/dominique-manotti-20-ans-de-talent-par-christophe-dupuis.html](http://www.encoredu noir.com/2015/05/dominique-manotti-20-ans-de-talent-par-christophe-dupuis.html).
- 53 Sartre stated in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 30: 'L'écrivain engagé sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer' ('The politically committed writer knows that words are action; he knows that to reveal is to change').
- 54 David Caute, *The Illusion: An Essay on Politics, Theatre and the Novel* (London: André Deutsch, 1971), p. 73.

- 55 A. Belhadjin, 'From Politics to the Roman noir', *South Central Review*, 27/1–2 (2010), 74.

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Part 2

**New Responses to New  
Crises: France and the  
Francophone World in the  
Twenty-first Century**

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## 7

# Crime and Comedy: Dominique Sylvain's Ingrid Diesel and Lola Jost Series Post-9/11

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ANDREA HYNYNEN

The attacks on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 had a profound impact not only on world politics and the media but also on literature. A growing number of studies illustrate how different writers reacted to the traumatic event and dealt with the ensuing crisis in their literature, raising important questions about trauma, history, religion, ethics, empathy, otherness, etc.<sup>1</sup> Studies of post-9/11 literature tend to focus on American or English-language novels, poetry or drama, but the attacks also had repercussions on the French literary field.<sup>2</sup> This chapter concentrates on French crime writer Dominique Sylvain, whose work changed considerably in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the atmosphere of terror and increasing animosities that ensued; indeed she invented a new crime novel series targeted at the prevailing discourse of 'us' versus 'them' and its manifestations in Franco-American relations. My aim is to investigate the reorientation of Sylvain's writing in relation to the tradition of *engagement* in French crime fiction, a tradition which, in Claire Gorrara's words, 'continues to shape the form and function of crime fiction in France today'.<sup>3</sup>

In the French crime fiction arena, *engagement* is primarily associated with denunciatory social critique and political commitment as presented by the *roman noir* and *polar* or *néo-polar* genres, which often resonate with leftist overtones. Scholars widely agree on this,

although the terms used to describe the phenomenon vary: ‘radical politics’,<sup>4</sup> ‘political commitment’,<sup>5</sup> ‘politics’,<sup>6</sup> ‘romans noirs engagés’<sup>7</sup> and ‘roman d’intervention sociale’<sup>8</sup> are some of the expressions used. In these genres, political and social *engagement* coincides with *engagement* in the literary domain.<sup>9</sup> Prominent authors such as Jean Amila, Léo Malet, Jean-Bernard Pouy and Jean-Patrick Manchette experimented with form, narrative techniques and linguistic expression to convey their social and/or political involvement.<sup>10</sup> In addition, a persistent struggle for legitimatisation undertaken by writers, editors and amateurs ensured that these politically engaged *romans noirs* and *polars* gradually gained notoriety as serious, worthy literature. In the process, seemingly non-political crime novels (*romans policiers*) and thrillers were relegated to the category of simple entertainment that appeals to the masses and abides by the status quo, as becomes evident from Véronique Rohrbach’s study of the politics of the *polar*.<sup>11</sup> As I will go on to show, Dominique Sylvain’s stated ambition to bring comfort to her readers through entertaining, humorous crime novels may hence seem contrary to the traditional expression of *engagement* in the French crime genre. However, if we accept Benoît Denis’s assertion that engaged literature involves ethical choice, a willingness to get involved, a sense of urgency and, in addition, a reflection on the role and idea of literature, it appears that Sylvain’s new series displays several features of engaged literature.<sup>12</sup>

Before 9/11, Dominique Sylvain used to write conventional, rather violent crime novels of the *roman policier* type, devoid of any particular political message. Her emphasis in these novels lies on investigators solving crimes by identifying and catching killers. Sylvain’s award-winning *Vox* novel, in which commander Alec Bruce hunts a serial murderer who is in search of a perfect voice and thus records his female victims’ last emitted sounds while killing them, presents descriptions of women being raped, hurt and killed.<sup>13</sup> Similarly vivid images can be found in Sylvain’s early novels about private investigator Louise Morvan, such as *Sœurs de sang* (‘Blood Sisters’), which depicts the corpse of a singer that is displayed as a sort of morbid artwork.<sup>14</sup> Morvan and Bruce both live alone and express rather cynical views on human relations and life in general. For instance, Bruce rejects the affections of a young woman by explaining that he enjoys his solitary life and that she should not confuse a few sexual encounters with love.<sup>15</sup> Morvan, on the other



hand, makes condescending remarks about her clients, saying that people live in fear and crave reassurance.<sup>16</sup> However, the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath prompted Sylvain to write a new kind of crime fiction as she suddenly became concerned about the horrors and the desolation hitherto expressed in her stories: she started to question the appropriateness of writing dark fiction at such anxious times.<sup>17</sup> She felt that people in anguish might need something different.<sup>18</sup> In 2007, the author stated explicitly that her detective duo was born in reaction to President Bush's plans to invade Iraq and the fierce international controversy caused by this.<sup>19</sup> Sylvain has also explained that in the wake of 9/11 she wanted her writing to reassure and comfort readers rather than reinforce their anxieties and sense of insecurity, and so she abandoned her earlier detectives Morvan and Bruce to invent the comforting Lola Jost character.<sup>20</sup> This reclusive Parisian *ex-commissaire* has left the police profession because of the unresolved, brutal murder of her partner. Yet Lola Jost remains highly respected by her former colleagues and her legendary professional prowess is well known in the neighbourhood. What is more, Sylvain, who enjoys blending genres and styles, took the decision to combine her crime novels with comedy.<sup>21</sup> In order to introduce humorous dialogue into the texts, she created Lola's counterpart, Ingrid Diesel. For Sylvain, the American Ingrid Diesel offered a means of illustrating perceived differences between France and America while highlighting the positive sides of American culture. Consequently, Ingrid is repeatedly designated as 'the American' (*l'Américaine*) by the narrator, by Lola Jost and by many other characters. Sylvain's atypical detecting duo was introduced in 2004 in the novel *Passage du Désir*,<sup>22</sup> translated into English as *The Dark Angel*.<sup>23</sup> The pair reappeared a year later in *La Fille du Samouraï* ('The Samurai's Daughter') which was soon followed by *Manta Corridor* ('Manta Corridor') and *L'Absence de l'ogre* ('The Missing Ogre'), published in 2006 and 2007 respectively.<sup>24</sup> After 2007, subsequent novels appeared at greater intervals: *Guerre sale*, translated into English as *Dirty War*,<sup>25</sup> was published in 2011 while the last book of the series, *Ombres et soleil* ('Darkness and Light'), appeared in 2014.<sup>26</sup> In this chapter, I will argue that with her Jost and Diesel series Sylvain invented a singular kind of crime fiction comedy that takes a stand while following a very different course from what is traditionally perceived as engaged French crime fiction.

Crime fiction as a particular form of popular culture is intimately linked to the surrounding society, current concerns and debates, which makes it an apt vehicle for social and political commentary or *engagement*. Elfriede Müller and Alexander Ruoff demonstrate in their study of French crime fiction and history that the crime genre has reacted to important crises throughout its history.<sup>27</sup> The American hard-boiled novel arose out of the social unease and disenchantment caused by increasing criminality and corruption, poverty and misery during the interwar period in the United States. When these novels started to be massively imported to France in the 1940s, a major factor contributing to their success was that they resonated with the traumatised atmosphere reigning in post-war France.<sup>28</sup> The early French *roman noir* was based on the American model but soon developed into a genre of its own and paid attention to specifically French topics and realities, such as the presence of war, the Resistance, the Occupation and its legacy during the post-Liberation period.<sup>29</sup> A few decades later, the highly politicized French *néo-polar* was born out of the Left's discontent with the political and social landscape in France post-1968.<sup>30</sup> Jean-Patrick Manchette, the leading figure of the *néo-polar* movement, has described crime fiction as a 'literature of crisis' that speaks of an unsettled world on the brink of collapse.<sup>31</sup> It could be argued that 9/11 and its aftermath mark an almost similarly disruptive milestone in history.

Sylvain is far from being the only contemporary French crime writer whose fiction engages with 9/11 and subsequent counter-terrorist measures and actions; for instance, Maurice G. Dantec's sci-fi thriller *Villa Vortex* (Gallimard, 2003; 'Villa Vortex'), Maxime Chattam's esoteric thriller *Les arcanes du chaos* (Albin Michel, 2006; 'Secrets of Chaos'), DOA's award-winning *Citoyens clandestins* (Gallimard, 2007; 'Clandestine Citizens') and John N. Turner's recent debut novel *Amérithrax* (L'Aube, 2014; 'Amerithrax') all have connections with 9/11. The most compelling example of this tendency is perhaps Maud Tabachnik, in view of the fact that she writes about Islamism and terrorism in several novels.<sup>32</sup> However, what sets Sylvain apart from such writers is a combination of three factors. Firstly, as already mentioned, her writing was subject to a dramatic reorientation through the invention of a new series that required a considerable remodelling of style and genre: the invention of new characters, the insertion of

humorous dialogue and other elements borrowed from comedy, as well as changes in tone and atmosphere. The second factor is Sylvain's explicit promotion of multiculturalism and globalisation in response to escalating tensions between different groups of people. Thirdly, she focuses specifically on Franco-American opposition in her critique of the current 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric.

In what follows, I shall demonstrate the many ways in which Sylvain's Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel series foregrounds multiculturalism, globalisation and collaboration before taking a closer look at her combination of crime and comedy. I will then discuss the humour and the emphasis on multiculturalism found in the Jost and Diesel novels in relation to the tradition of *engagement* in the crime genre in France. The final part will highlight some changes detected in the two latest books in the series, which indicate that Sylvain's work is gradually steering away from her initial concern with increased Franco-American antagonism and the reign of terror.

The principles underlying Sylvain's Jost and Diesel series crystallise when we read the novels against the background of escalating antagonism, distrust and abuse relating to religion, nationality and ethnicity that followed from 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror declared by President George W. Bush. French anti-Americanism is, as Denis Licorne and Jacques Rupnik point out, a multifaceted and fluctuating phenomenon that changes according to current debates, trends and important political events.<sup>33</sup> In an article on Franco-American cultural intersections, Gorrara elucidates the various ways in which the crime genre has, ever since its inception, been affected by cultural connections between France and America that range from mutual admiration and cross-fertilisation to outright hostility.<sup>34</sup> In 2003, anti-French sentiment skyrocketed in America because of France's refusal to support the invasion of Iraq proposed by the United States. Accordingly, anti-Americanism increased in France. This was a moment when the many divergent and contradictory opinions about America that proliferate in what is an irrefutably heterogeneous French society merged into a dominant, negative view.<sup>35</sup> The Iraq crisis brought out and intensified an underlying anti-Americanism, reactivating and reformulating long-existing scepticism and prejudices.<sup>36</sup> It is in the context of this changed and unsettling landscape that Sylvain's Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel series sets out to promote globalisation and

multiculturalism in an effort to counter national, ethnic, cultural and religious oppositions.<sup>37</sup> Richard Gray remarks, in *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11*, that while some authors retreated into old certainties and clung to what he calls ‘the seductive myth of American exceptionalism’, others realised that to emphasise the intercultural, the transnational and the hybrid was, on the contrary, a more useful way of trying to deal with such trauma and the question of otherness.<sup>38</sup> Sylvain’s response evidently falls within this second category. Multiculturalism, hybridity and intercultural connections pervade many aspects of the six novels published to date, informing characterisation, plot and setting as well as the variety of intertextual and cultural references that are dispersed throughout the narratives.

The most tangible site of cross-cultural connection and collaboration is to be found in the detecting duo itself, formed by a retired French *commissaire* and a young, energetic American masseuse and striptease dancer, also known as the ‘the fiery temptress’ (*la flamboyante*).<sup>39</sup> Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel meet when their mutual friend Maxime Duchamp, owner of the local bistro is suspected of murder. Ingrid, who is infatuated with Duchamp, asks the reputable Lola Jost to help her find the real murderer. Pierre Verdaguer observes that France has for a long time been perceived as the primary cultural other of America in the Western world.<sup>40</sup> Sylvain exploits this enduring perception in her novels in that the characterisation of her two detectives is built on a principle of opposition: French versus American, professional experience and method versus the amateur’s drive and enthusiasm. Furthermore, Lola’s age is opposed to Ingrid’s youth, so while the former is sedentary, phlegmatic, disillusioned and reclusive, the latter is a dynamic globe-trotter and a loving and trusting optimist. Their respective hobbies underline the characters’ contrasting personalities and their differing approach to detective work; while Lola indulges in jigsaw puzzles to isolate herself from a troublesome outside world, Ingrid turns to combat sports and the gym to counter stress and sorrows. The contrast between Lola’s preference for cerebral activity and Ingrid’s love of physical action is reminiscent of the opposition between the ratiocination of the classical whodunit or puzzle detective story, a genre notoriously associated by Raymond Chandler with old ladies,<sup>41</sup> and the emphasis placed on violent action, vitality and speed in the American hardboiled. Since Sylvain

is addressing French readers in her fiction, and her intention is to combat Franco-American hostility, the major emphasis is placed on celebrating Ingrid's positive qualities: her optimism, loyalty, beauty and her magical massaging fingers charm anyone who comes into contact with her, except for those few self-righteous and disagreeable police agents who disapprove of Lola's and her meddling with their investigations. Even these few tend to overcome their initial scepticism and let go of their animosity to embrace this flamboyant and exceptional character. Significantly, Lola's and Ingrid's complementary qualities are equally important for the investigations; both contribute to the successful solutions but neither is infallible; each one makes mistakes and gets beaten or injured. In *Passage du désir*, Lola nearly perishes in the snow near a ski resort in the French mountains after being lured into the dark and cold night by the killer. Ingrid suffers a similar ordeal in *L'Absence de l'ogre* when she is abducted by a murderess who plans to bury her alive. Mostly they fall victim to such misfortunes together, for instance being assaulted by gangsters in New Orleans,<sup>42</sup> tortured by hired assassins in Abidjan,<sup>43</sup> or made to drive their car into the river Seine.<sup>44</sup> This partnership does not consist of a hero supported by a sidekick, as is so often the case in crime fiction, but of a trusting and mutually supportive friendship based on equality.

In accordance with Sylvain's advocacy of a global, unified world, the Jost and Diesel novels exhibit a striking abundance of globe-trotters, characters with mixed ethnic backgrounds, transcultural marriages as well as other close relationships formed across ethnic, national or religious boundaries. Lola's dead partner Toussaint Kidjo was half French and half Congolese, whereas commander Arnaud Mars has been stationed on various locations in Africa and in Scandinavia before returning to France with his Swedish wife and their daughter to join the *brigade criminelle* in Paris.<sup>45</sup> Born in Brooklyn, Ingrid is Russian on her mother's side and Irish on her father's. This globetrotter is first introduced to the reader as follows:

Elle, la bourlingueuse américaine, qui avait appris à masser balinaï à Bali, thaï à Bangkok, shiatsu à Tokyo, elle qui avait des contacts partout de Sydney à Solo, de Koh Samui à Hongkong, de Luang Prabang à Manille, de Vancouver à New York, cette bourlingueuse-là avait ouvert une parenthèse pour se poser à Paris.<sup>46</sup>

Since Lola is portrayed as being Ingrid's opposite in all things, it is inevitable, therefore, that she has a fixed personality and is reluctant to travel even though her only son lives abroad. The sedentary and fixed nature of this aged character represents an old way of life based on the idea of the nation-state with one distinctive culture as opposed to a globalised world where borders and boundaries are constantly crossed. However, Lola's attitude changes under Ingrid's influence. Ingrid's beloved Maxime Duchamp is a former war photographer who has covered conflicts all over the globe, used to be married to a Japanese artist and presently has a French-Algerian girlfriend. Unexpected friendships or partnerships are formed across ethnic and national boundaries among heroic characters and criminals alike, the best example of which is perhaps offered by the 'Siamese twins' who play a central role in *Passage du désir*. Farid is an Arab originating from Algeria, while his best friend Noah is Jewish, and they refer to each other as brothers.<sup>47</sup> Farid and Noah are ostensibly uninterested in politics and religion, as becomes clear when they quickly change channel as soon as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is mentioned on the radio.<sup>48</sup> Sylvain uses the pair to comment on one of today's most notorious conflicts. Despite the fact that Farid and Noah are ruthless criminals and thus lack moral authority in the narrative, the function of these characters is clearly to demonstrate that religious and ethnic identities ought not to be an obstacle to companionship. In fact, friendship is a central theme in all novels. It is a fundamental feature of the series that Lola's and Ingrid's investigations ordinarily originate from the need to help a friend or the friend of a friend. As France Grenaudier-Klijn argues, the emphasis placed in the novels on friendship as opposed to family ties, marriages and romantic love is part of Sylvain's 'altruistic discourse' and 'humanistic agenda' of 'healing togetherness'.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the characters, the plots are pervaded by similar interconnectedness and transnationalism in such a way that most criminal cases relate to earlier events that have occurred outside France. Incidents that are crucial for the present crimes and investigations have taken place in different places all over the globe, including New Orleans (*L'Absence de l'ogre*), the South Pacific (*Manta Corridor*), Kinshasa, Abidjan and Syria (*Guerre sale et Ombres et soleil*). Consequently, several of Lola's and Ingrid's investigations involve foreign travel. Furthermore, the Parisian milieu

that Sylvain has chosen as the primary setting for her stories is represented as manifestly multicultural and mixed. *Manta Corridor* brings the reader to Lady Mba's beauty salon, the *Féeries de Dakar* in passage Brady off the boulevard de Strasbourg, an area dominated by African immigrants, while Maxime Duchamp's *Les Belles de jour comme de nuit* is the only French *bistrot* in a passage filled with Indian restaurants.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the novels paint a picture of the world as being inevitably connected across geographical and cultural borders.

The examples listed above are but some instances of transnational connections and hybridity to be found in the novels. The overall impression of a multicultural and globalised world is further enhanced by numerous intertextual and cultural references pointing in all directions: references to American rap music alternate with quotations from British pop songs, French literary classics, Senegalese poetry, Japanese manga and African traditional stories, amongst others. In the Jost and Diesel universe, interpersonal relations are no longer restricted by heritage, a family line, a local or national identity. Even Lola is eventually forced to recognise that in a globalised world everything becomes more homogeneous, so that positivity for instance is no longer 'an American thing'.<sup>51</sup> In addition, national and cultural stereotypes are repeatedly denounced and dismantled by way of the humorous dialogue and comical situations that are fundamental characteristics of these novels.

As observed earlier, the Jost and Diesel series combines crime fiction with comedy in order to divert and reassure the reader, which to my mind constitutes an example of the ethical impetus that Denis associates with engaged literature.<sup>52</sup> Readjustment of the crime fiction formula is a crucial aspect of the writer's response to post-9/11 rising hostilities and tensions. When Sylvain talks of comedy (*comédie*) in connection with the Jost and Diesel series, she alludes specifically to the theatrical genre in order to emphasise the importance of dialogue for her narratives and to illustrate her passion for experimenting with genres and stylistics.<sup>53</sup> However, the word comedy is used in a more general sense in this chapter, so that it points to the aforementioned genre (a light play) only occasionally. In most instances it simply refers to comedy in its sense of 'the action or quality of being funny or amusing' or 'humour', as defined by the *OED*, since what is essential is the humoristic function of these dialogues and the comic relief they are intended to

bring to the reader while simultaneously defusing cultural opposition.<sup>54</sup>

Humour is expressed in the texts through proper names, wordplay such as puns and malapropisms, jocular play on cultural stereotypes, reciprocal making fun of clothing and odd appearances, but also through absurd situations. Several proper names have a humorous function. The psychiatrist Antoine Léger's dog, which is said to be the only one who knows all the secrets of Dr Léger's clients, is named Sigmund in an obvious allusion to Sigmund Freud, whereas Ingrid's surname Diesel points to her hyperactivity and energy.<sup>55</sup> The overweight, tired and shapeless Lola, who on her bad days potters around at home for days dressed in a hideous bathrobe, confounds the potential for association with Lolita, although she might once have been attractive and her legs still look good.<sup>56</sup> This play on proper names is brought to the reader's attention when Lola's former colleague Jérôme Barthélemy elaborates his theory that all people called Antoine have curly, golden hair and look like angels.<sup>57</sup> On one occasion, his theory seems to be proved wrong by a beggar called Antoine, but it is soon revealed, to Barthélemy's great relief, that even this scruffy figure was once an adorable gold-haired child.

Most humorous elements in the novels draw upon the opposition between Lola and Ingrid, which causes misunderstandings but also friendly bickering and witty wordplay. For humour to work there needs to be some kind of complicity or mutual understanding between the authors and readers.<sup>58</sup> As became evident from the discussion of Ingrid's and Lola's opposing qualities, the stories reactivate numerous cultural stereotypes with which the reader is supposedly familiar: on the one side American drive, straightforwardness and positivity, on the other French rationality and formal linguistic politeness, to name a few. In addition, Sylvain makes extensive use of malapropisms and puns. Ingrid constantly abuses the French language, mixing words, idioms and syntactic structures, such as when she says 'd'une Toyota' instead of 'd'un iota'.<sup>59</sup> Lola, who conveniently used to be a school teacher before her career in the police force, repeatedly corrects her. However improbable Lola's former occupation might seem, it explains why she is so intent on quoting literature and correcting language mistakes. A typical example of this is given in *La Fille du Samourai* after somebody has broken in to Ingrid's apartment and left a



human hand in her fridge. Ingrid uses the expression 'passage forcé', a literal translation of forced entry, to explain this to Lola. When Lola remarks that the correct expression is 'effraction', Ingrid embarks on linguistic ponderings with great enthusiasm. She uses apparent logic to invent a verb 'effracter' from the stem of the noun 'effraction' that she just learnt, but to her bewilderment and to the French-speaking reader's amusement no such verb exists in the French language. Lola finally begs Ingrid to leave stylistics out of the discussion and to focus on what has happened.<sup>60</sup> This encounter between Lola and Ingrid is a perfect example of how Sylvain inserts elements of comedy (light play) in her novels: the two protagonists engage in a witty dialogue that has no bearing on the plot but makes the reader laugh. The comedy of this scene functions on two levels; it results from the linguistic play and arises from the absurdity of the situation in which the two friends are debating language instead of reacting to the dramatic incident. Ingrid as a rule takes no offence at Lola's comments but defends her neologisms while pointing the finger at the inconsistencies of the French language. In this way, the novels make fun of the French obsession with language and linguistic puritanism, yet another well-known cultural stereotype that has its roots in French centralism and Republicanism.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the narratives insist on the importance of language by bringing attention to it. As Walter Redfern puts it, 'punners love language, are true *philologists*; puns are the lovers *in* language.'<sup>62</sup>

In an attempt to categorise humour, Patrick Charaudeau distinguishes four intended effects of humour which he names critical complicity, derisory complicity, cynical complicity and ludic complicity.<sup>63</sup> The first three types all include some degree of criticism that is directed against false values, against the object or person that is being ridiculed or against the prevailing order. Ludic or jocular complicity, on the contrary, amuses without criticising. According to Maria Vivero García, a narrator may express his or her sympathy for the characters through this last type of humour which reinforces the positive qualities of the characters and brings them closer to the reader.<sup>64</sup> This is the kind of humour that predominates in Sylvain's novels; the comedy manifested through Lola's and other characters' remarks about Ingrid's speech, clothing or behaviour does not amount to ridicule of either Ingrid or Americans in general. Instead it renders the characters endearing

to the reader. In fact, the comical situations or linguistic duels between the two detectives often end up ridiculing or defusing the stereotype in question. This interpretation aligns with Ulrike Erichsen's argument that while humour is often used, in particular in postcolonial narratives, to indicate cultural differences and to reveal cultural stereotypes from a critical perspective, humour and laughter also have a 'productive' potential and may serve as a means to defuse cultural conflicts.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth noting that, despite her recourse to comedy, Sylvain's work remains within the definition of the *roman policier*; the novels are centred on basic crime fiction elements: crime (often murder), central detecting figures, and investigations conducted on the basis of true and false clues that lead to a final solution. Nevertheless, renewal and modification are essential to the crime genre which constitutes a field in constant transformation.<sup>66</sup> Sylvain's use of comedy in her crime novels is one example of how the genre may be reworked without crossing the generic boundary and turning it into something else. Nonetheless, the display of humour and comical situations distinguishes her novels from the way in which *engagement* is generally perceived in the crime genre.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the French *roman noir* and the short-lived but influential *néo-polar* that flourished in the 1970s are famous for their realism and their *engagement* expressed through social criticism.<sup>67</sup> Both in the *noir* genre and the *néo-polar*, *engagement* is understood as political commitment and is associated with a political position, usually leftist, that gives voice to a strong critique of social reality, political corruption and the prevailing system. Therefore, such novels tend to display a negative atmosphere of disillusion and disenchantment. Anissa Belhadjin argues, as do many other scholars, that the *roman noir* presents a pessimistic image of society and its writers frequently aspire to be a witness of social ailments.<sup>68</sup> Jean Pons's description of this realist literature speaks of despair, cynicism or nihilism in a cataclysmic universe.<sup>69</sup> His opinion echoes that of Manchette quoted above. The *roman noir* is offensive and aims to disturb the reader.<sup>70</sup> These descriptions of *noir* and *polar engagement* are quite the opposite of Sylvain's reassuring novels with their comforting images of togetherness and comical elements.

Because of its commitment and social criticism, the *roman noir* has often been contrasted to, and deemed superior to, other kinds

of crime fiction that, like puzzle novels and thrillers, merely aim to entertain the reader. Seeing that the *romans noirs* of the 1940s and 1950s critiqued rampant capitalism and the *polar* and *néo-polar* targeted consumerism, it is hardly surprising that entertainment is placed in opposition to literary worth.<sup>71</sup> The field of French crime fiction is hence characterised by a long-existing hierarchical divide between entertaining lightweight crime literature on the one hand, and serious, engaged *romans noirs* and *polars* on the other. Moreover, Nicola Barfoot's study reveals that one of the reasons why women's crime fiction is often considered to be less important than men's in France is the common misconception that women merely write non-political, entertaining crime novels.<sup>72</sup> In respect of this perceived distinction between engaged *romans noirs* and other inconsequential types of crime novels, it is important to recall that Sylvain's work is classified by her publisher, by herself and by critics and scholars as belonging to the class of *romans policiers* rather than to the *noir* genre. In fact, the writer herself considers the denunciatory *néo-polar* of the 1970s to be outdated and argues that an *a priori* conviction is an obstacle to creative freedom, which is why she rejects that kind of commitment in literature.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, entertainment does not preclude *engagement*. Indeed, Redfern cautions against seeing humour simply as a procurer of comic relief. He writes:

Humour is not a respite, a separate activity from seriousness [...] Many see humour as exclusively companionable, feel-good. It can, however, install a feel-bad factor which is good for you. It can not only settle its audience, but also unsettle them, shame them, make them question their unreflective reflexes.<sup>74</sup>

Humorous wordplay and amusing representations of cultural differences are inoffensive in Sylvain's novels, since the apparent aim is to overcome opposition. This is a different kind of engagement from the pessimist social criticism and 'the kind of negative pleasure' that are usually associated with the *roman noir* and the *néo-polar*, but it can still be read as a form of *engagement*.<sup>75</sup> Vivero García reminds us that even ludic humour does not need to be gratuitous. It may, as is the case with Fred Vargas's crime novels, address and question social norms and conventions.<sup>76</sup> In a similar vein, Sylvain uses humour to combat racism, cultural confrontations and misguided patriotism and nationalism. We can link this

to Denis's argument that one of the principal axioms of engaged literature is that an aesthetic aim is insufficient and must be supported by an ethical ambition.<sup>77</sup> If we accept the idea that an ethical project is essential to the engaged text, it seems justified to interpret Sylvain's Jost and Diesel series as expressing a form of *engagement* through its promotion of multiculturalism and collaboration even though the novels correspond neither to Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of engaged literature nor to the tradition of political commitment in the *roman noir*. In fact, Sylvain's above-mentioned insistence upon creative freedom is quite the opposite of Sartre's militant view of the inevitably engaged writer who chooses to engage in a predetermined (party-based) political combat with his writing and for whom the aesthetic and artistic aspects of literature are subsidiary to its political function.<sup>78</sup> As was shown earlier, Sylvain's decision to create the Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel novels stems from an ethical standpoint, namely the effort to counter cultural oppositions and Franco-American animosity, combined with an attempt to reassure and comfort readers. Sylvain's series furthermore exemplifies in part Denis's argument that *engagement* in literature implies that the writer actively reflects on the connections between literature, politics and society at large as well as on the specific methods which he or she can use to inscribe the political in the work of literature.<sup>79</sup> Attention to language and the form has been an important part of the *noir* genre's striving for recognition as a distinct and worthy kind of serious literature.<sup>80</sup> When Sylvain insists that dialogue is an essential element of comedy, a key feature of her Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel series, she points to her own interest in blending genres and consciously reworking narrative form and structure. For her, experimenting with linguistic expression and literary form is of primary importance. In this respect, Sylvain resembles the *noir* and *polar* writers who embedded their political and social engagement in the form and language of their novels, albeit that she takes this in a rather different direction from that taken by the *noir* genre.

As has already been said, Denis points out that a sense of urgency is fundamental to *engagement*, by which he means that it is moved by acute matters in the present that in the eyes of the engaged writer call for active attention and commentary. Hence, *engagement* is short-lived and context-bound.<sup>81</sup> Reflecting this view, the last two books, *Guerre sale* and *Ombres et soleil*, mark a change in the Jost and

Diesel series. To begin with, the titles are more ominous than those of the previous novels with their allusions to dirty war and darkness, even though placing the sun at the end of the latest title suggests that the final story will take us out of the darkness into the light and that all will end on a positive note, as indeed it does. Both novels open with a funeral cortège that is described from the point of view of a close friend or a family member who does not accept the official version given of the victim's sudden death. The grief-stricken, secondary character objects to the decorations and eulogies bestowed on the deceased, who is being proclaimed a hero by the authorities. The initial scenes set the tone for the novels where the comic elements are less prominent and the atmosphere is darker, more violent and desolate; in short, more *noir*-like. At the end of *Guerre sale*, Ingrid is shot in the street by a motorcyclist driving by, and the reader is left not knowing whether she will survive. Friendship, which was represented as the ultimate healing force in the earlier novels, is challenged as former friends seem to have turned into criminals or disappeared. In *Ombres et soleil*, Ingrid has recovered from her injuries but she has moved back to the United States, so Lola initially questions Ingrid's devotion to her friends and doubts that the American will return to Paris to help clear the name of their mutual friend and Ingrid's former lover Sacha Duguin who is wrongfully accused of murder. One reason for this transformation is undoubtedly the serial nature of the books. Since readers presumably know the Diesel and Jost characters from the earlier novels, the author is compelled to develop their relationship and diminish the descriptions of their idiosyncrasies in order to avoid repetition. Hence, Ingrid's and Lola's respective character traits are mentioned less frequently and in less detail than before. More importantly, the initial shock caused by 9/11 and the negative effects on Franco-American relations of the subsequent counter-terrorist fervour may have worn off, so that Sylvain's wish to comfort her readers is less prominent. Significantly, as mentioned earlier, the first four novels appeared at short intervals, one every year, but then the pace slowed down. The later novels also place less emphasis on the Franco-American opposition, which was the main humorous element in the earlier novels. Instead, France's colonial past and shady Franco-African relations come into focus. The somewhat naïve celebration of multiculturalism as the solution to ethnic and religious oppositions gives way to a less

idealistic view of globalisation as the downsides of international collaboration in the shape of illegal gun trading and political corruption are foregrounded. References to French factories being closed and relocated to Third World countries, to Koreans taking over French nuclear investments, resulting in unemployment, and to troubles in the *banlieue* reinforce this impression.<sup>82</sup> Hence, these two novels strike me as being closer to the typical *roman noir* than the first four although friendship continues to be a main theme.

To conclude, Sylvain's decision to combine crime with comedy suggests a conscious effort to transmit certain values and to represent an encouraging atmosphere to her readers. She expresses a particular kind of *engagement* in the face of troubles and anxieties caused by international terrorism and the rising tension worldwide. Instead of turning terrorists into the main villains, or alternatively, criticizing the corruption, excesses and abuse that might be found within counter-terrorism, she opts for a reassuring and healing approach based on a firm belief in multiculturalism, cultural exchange and cosmopolitanism. Seeing that Sylvain's readership is predominantly French inasmuch as she writes in French and her books are published in Paris, the primary target for her critical scrutiny is French Americanophobia, though the message of coexistence, togetherness and tolerance offered in the novels may appeal to any reader.<sup>83</sup> Even though Sylvain refrains from the idea of a denunciatory politically committed *littérature engagée* typical of the *roman noir* and the *néo-polar*, she writes, in response to one of the most important crises of the twenty-first century, a specific kind of seemingly non-engaged crime fiction comedy which nonetheless addresses serious global events. However as time has passed and the legacy of that traumatic event has evolved, Sylvain's Lola Jost and Ingrid Diesel series appears to be readjusting its focus in the two last novels. Since Sylvain introduces a new pair of detectives in her latest novel, *L'Archange du chaos* (2015; 'The Archangel of Chaos'), it seems as though the series with the Franco-American duo may have run its course just as the *néo-polar* movement did.

## Notes

- 1 See e.g. Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic after 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010); Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative*

- Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (eds), *Literature after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 2 F. Conti, '9/11. Ground Zero en littérature: les «écrivains-écrivains»', in D. Viart and G. Rubino (eds), *Écrire le présent* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), pp. 77–92. See also C. Capone, 'Face au 11 septembre: trouver sa place', in Viart and Rubino, *Écrire le présent*, pp. 105–19.
  - 3 C. Gorrara, 'Post-War French Crime Fiction: The Advent of the Roman Noir', in C. Gorrara (ed.), *French Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 55.
  - 4 S. Lee, 'May 1968, Radical Politics and the *Néo-Polar*', in C. Gorrara (ed.), *French Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 71–85.
  - 5 David Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime: Reading Modern French Crime Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 91–131.
  - 6 Véronique Rohrbach, *Politique du polar. Jean-Bernard Pouy* (Lausanne: Archipel, 2007).
  - 7 'engaged romans noirs'; J. Pons, 'Le roman noir, littérature réelle', *Les Temps Modernes*, 595 (1997), 13. See also V. Desnain, 'Style et idéologie dans le roman noir', *Itinéraires*, 1 (2015), <http://itinéraires.revues.org/2685>.
  - 8 'novel of social intervention'; Jean-Patrick Manchette, *Chroniques* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivage, 1996), p. 12; cited in Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime*, p. 94.
  - 9 Rohrbach, *Politique du polar*, pp. 46–82.
  - 10 Gorrara, 'Post-War French Crime Fiction'. See also Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime*, pp. 91–131.
  - 11 Rohrbach, *Politique du polar*, pp. 24–45.
  - 12 Benoît Denis, *Littérature et engagement de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Points, 2000), p. 41.
  - 13 Dominique Sylvain, *Vox* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2000).
  - 14 Dominique Sylvain, *Sœurs de sang* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 1997).
  - 15 Sylvain, *Vox*, p. 109.
  - 16 Sylvain, *Sœurs de sang*, p. 31.
  - 17 C. Simon and T. Flamerion, 'Interview de Dominique Sylvain: "Dépasser le genre"' (14 May 2007), <http://evene.lefigaro.fr/livres/actualite/interview-de-dominique-sylvain-805.php>.
  - 18 Elisabeth Bouvet, 'Dominique Sylvain ou l'œuvre au noir' (24 May 2007), [http://www1.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/089/article\\_52103.asp](http://www1.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/089/article_52103.asp).
  - 19 Bouvet, 'Dominique Sylvain ou l'œuvre au noir'.
  - 20 Simon and Flamerion, 'Interview de Dominique Sylvain'.
  - 21 Simon and Flamerion, 'Interview de Dominique Sylvain'.
  - 22 Dominique Sylvain, *Passage du Désir* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2004). All further references are to the Points Policier edition, no. P2057.
  - 23 Dominique Sylvain, *The Dark Angel* (London: MacLehose Press, 2013), translated by Nick Caistor.
  - 24 Dominique Sylvain, *La Fille du Samouraï* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2005). All further references are to the Points Policier edition, no. P2292;

- Dominique Sylvain, *Manta Corridor* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2006). All further references are to the Points Policier edition, no. P2526; Dominique Sylvain, *L'Absence de l'ogre* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2007). All further references are to the Points Policier edition, no. P2058.
- 25 Dominique Sylvain, *Guerre sale* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2011). Further references are to this edition. *Guerre sale* is the second novel by Sylvain translated into English: *Dirty War* (London: MacLehose Press, 2015), translated by Nick Caistor.
- 26 Dominique Sylvain, *Ombres et soleil* (Paris: Viviane Hamy, 2014).
- 27 Elfriede Müller and Alexander Ruoff, *Le polar français: crime et histoire* (Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2002). See Claire Gorrara, *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War: Past Crimes, Present Memories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), for a detailed discussion of the connections between French crime fiction and the Second World War. While memories and remembering are central to Gorrara's analysis, a recent study edited by Angela Kimyongür and Amy Wigelsworth (eds), *Rewriting Wrongs: French Crime Fiction and the Palimpsest* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014), places the palimpsest at the core of its exploration of connections between crime fiction and history.
- 28 C. Gorrara, 'Cultural Intersections: The American Hard-Boiled Detective Novel and Early French roman noir', *The Modern Language Review*, 98/3 (2003), 590–4.
- 29 Gorrara, 'Post-War French Crime Fiction', pp. 54–70.
- 30 Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime*, pp. 93–5.
- 31 Cited in S. Lee, 'May 1968, Radical Politics and the *Néo-Polar*', pp. 71–85.
- 32 Tabachnik's *Douze heures pour mourir* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004) refers explicitly to 9/11, as a Jewish school in New York is taken hostage by a group of Islamist extremists who threaten to kill the children and teachers unless the American authorities release their 'Arabic brothers' who were imprisoned after the attacks. (p. 16). In *Ne vous retournez pas* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2010), the city of Milwaukee is simultaneously struck by a psychopathic serial killer and a series of terrorist attacks by Islamist fundamentalists. In fact, Muslim terrorists already appear in Tabachnik's fiction before 9/11, for instance in *Les Cercles de l'Enfer* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).
- 33 Cited in D. Lacorne, 'Anti-Americanism and Americanophobia: A French Perspective', in D. Lacorne and T. Judt (eds), *With Us or Against Us* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 36.
- 34 Gorrara, 'Cultural Intersections'.
- 35 Lacorne, 'Anti-Americanism and Americanophobia', pp. 36–7.
- 36 G. Grunberg, 'Anti-Americanism in French and European Public Opinion', in Lacorne and Judt, *With Us or Against Us*, p. 73
- 37 F. Grenaudier-Klijn, 'An American in Paris or Opposites Attract: Dominique Sylvain's "In-Between" Bicultural Detective Stories', in J. Anderson et al. (eds), *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), pp. 87–96.



- 38 Gray, *After the Fall*, pp. 16–17.
- 39 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 155.
- 40 P. Verdaguer, ‘Borrowed Settings: Frenchness in Anglo-American Detective Fiction’, *Yale French Studies*, 108 (2005), 159.
- 41 Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. 3, 16.
- 42 Sylvain, *L’Absence de l’ogre*, pp. 289–92.
- 43 Sylvain, *Ombres et soleil*, pp. 119–22.
- 44 Sylvain, *Manta corridor*, p. 258.
- 45 Sylvain, *Guerre sale*, pp. 33, 44.
- 46 ‘The American globetrotter, who had learned Balinese massage in Bali, Thai massage in Bangkok and shiatsu in Tokyo, who had contacts from Sydney to Solo, from Koh Samui to Hong Kong, from Luang Prabang to Manila, from Vancouver to New York, had finally taken time out in Paris’; Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 28.
- 47 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 20.
- 48 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 13.
- 49 See Grenaudier-Klijn, ‘An American in Paris’, p. 92.
- 50 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 52.
- 51 Sylvain, *Guerre sale*, p. 116.
- 52 Denis, *Littérature et engagement*, p. 33.
- 53 Simon and Flamerion, ‘Interview de Dominique Sylvain’.
- 54 ‘comedy, n.1’, *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oed.com/>.
- 55 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 128.
- 56 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 39. See also *Ombres et soleil*, p. 47.
- 57 Sylvain, *Passage du désir*, p. 36.
- 58 Walter Redfern, *French Laughter: Literary Humour from Diderot to Tournier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 183.
- 59 ‘– Lola, you have not changed a Toyota. – Neither have you. And that is “changed one *iota*”. Leave the Japanese in peace, will you?’; Sylvain, *Ombres et soleil*, p. 97.
- 60 Sylvain, *La Fille du Samourai*, p. 61.
- 61 Diana Holmes and David Looseley (eds), *Imagining the Popular in Contemporary French Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 13.
- 62 Redfern, *French Laughter*, p. 183.
- 63 P. Charaudeau, ‘Des catégories pour l’humour?’ *Questions de communication*, 10 (2006), pp. 19–41. Critical complicity (*la connivence critique*) attacks the established order through the denunciation of fake values. Cynical complicity (*la connivence cynique*) is of a more destructive nature in that it aims to demolish values that are regarded as positive and universal according to the social norm. Derisory complicity (*la connivence de dérision*) attempts to disqualify the target of the humorous remark, whereas ludic complicity (*la connivence ludique*) procures shared enjoyment without assuming a critical position. Naturally, the actual effect of a humorous element might not correspond to the intended effect.

- 64 M. D. Vivero García, 'L'Humour dans l'enquête criminelle chez Fred Vargas', in G. Menegaldo and M. Petit (eds), *Manières de noir. La fiction policière contemporaine* (Rennes: PUR, 2010), p. 260.
- 65 U. Erichsen, 'Smiling in the face of adversity: How to use humour to defuse cultural conflict', in S. Reichl and M. Stein (eds), *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 29–30.
- 66 R. Saint-Gelais, 'Rudiments de la lecture policière', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 75/3 (1997), 790. See also A. Belhadjin, 'Le jeu entre stéréotypes et narration dans le roman noir', *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 17 (2009), p. 3, <http://narratologie.revues.org/1089>.
- 67 Yves Reuter, *Le roman policier* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), p. 56.
- 68 Belhadjin, 'Le jeu entre stéréotypes et narration', p. 4.
- 69 Pons, 'Le roman noir, littérature réelle', p. 8, p. 12.
- 70 C. Mesplède, 'Littérature contestataire?' *Les Temps Modernes*, 595 (1997), 25.
- 71 Gorrara, 'Post-War French Crime Fiction', pp. 59–60. See also Lee, 'May 1968, Radical Politics and the Néo-Polar', p. 78.
- 72 Nicola Barfoot, *Frauenkrimi/polar féminin: Generic Expectations and the Reception of Recent French and German Crime Novels by Women* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 31.
- 73 Simon and Flamerion, 'Interview de Dominique Sylvain'.
- 74 Redfern, *French Laughter*, pp. 208–9.
- 75 Platten, *The Pleasures of Crime*, p. 15.
- 76 Vivero García, 'L'Humour dans l'enquête criminelle chez Fred Vargas', p. 260.
- 77 Denis, *Littérature et engagement*, p. 33.
- 78 Bouvet, 'Dominique Sylvain ou l'œuvre au noir'. Cf. Denis, *Littérature et engagement*, pp. 34–5, 64–9. See also B. Blanckeman, 'Annie Ernaux: une écriture impliquée', in P.-L. Fort and V. Houdart-Merot (eds), *Annie Ernaux. Un engagement d'écriture* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015), p. 125.
- 79 Denis, *Littérature et engagement*, p. 12.
- 80 Mesplède, 'Littérature contestataire?', pp. 28–9.
- 81 Denis, *Littérature et engagement*, pp. 37–41.
- 82 Sylvain, *Guerre sale*, p. 48.
- 83 *Passage du désir* and *Guerre sale* are available in English translation in the UK, but they have not been published in the US, which makes it impossible to know how American readers might respond to them. Judging by the MacLehose Press website ([www.maclehosepress.com](http://www.maclehosepress.com)) and the reviews cited on the author's personal website (<http://www.dominiquesylvain.com>), the novels have been quite well received in Britain. Since the novels seldom refer directly to 9/11 and the war against Iraq, it is unlikely that present readers recognise the original motivation behind these novels. Interestingly, the geopolitical factor is not mentioned in connection with the English translations, which were published in 2013 and 2015 respectively; instead the author evokes a personal source of inspiration for her characters: her

mother-in-law and a cousin or her mother-in-law. This supports my suggestion that Sylvain's initial ambition to overcome Franco-American antagonism no longer seems relevant. See <http://www.dominiquesylvain.com/site/en/english-interview-for-maclehose-press/>.

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- Grunberg, G., 'Anti-Americanism in French and European Public Opinion', in D. Lacorne and T. Judt (eds), *With Us or Against Us* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 59–73, [www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9781403980854](http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9781403980854).
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## 8

# Michel Houellebecq, Masculinity and the Manipulation of Crisis

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In her seminal *XY – De l'identité masculine*, Élisabeth Badinter aptly observes that until a short while ago it was women who were considered 'le continent noir de l'humanité'<sup>1</sup> and that no one even thought to question white heterosexual men, whose masculinity was seen as self-evident. The last thirty years or so have, however, witnessed a persistent destabilisation of 'ces évidences millénaires'.<sup>2</sup> The discipline of Gender Studies has done much to undermine masculinity's masquerade as biologically determined, universal and unitary, exposing it to be, rather, a historically specific cultural construction composed of many masculinities.<sup>3</sup> Backlash against this sustained scrutiny has taken the form of an insistence by a number of writers and scholars, as well as the media, that masculinity is 'in crisis' and that white heterosexual men are experiencing, as never before, a crisis in terms of what it means to be a man.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a survey of contemporary studies of masculinity would suggest that the white heterosexual male, in spite of his continued dominance in all aspects of cultural and economic life, has come to imagine himself as one of Western society's new persecuted.<sup>5</sup> What distinguishes this most recent wave of announcements of "masculinity in crisis" is that it has been accompanied by a widespread discussion (principally among male scholars) of dominant and non-dominant *white heterosexual* masculinities.<sup>6</sup> Such a rhetorical manoeuvre of de-centring the white heterosexual male might justifiably give cause for scepticism in that, all too conveniently, it would



appear to allow white heterosexual men to dodge criticism by claiming that they are themselves the victims of the prevailing gender order as opposed to its sole beneficiaries.

This same timeframe has witnessed the rise of what might be called the 'white male victim narrative'; that is to say, novels by white male authors that portray their white male protagonists as self-conflicted anti-heroes, displaying their anxieties and insecurities in a very open manner. One need only turn to the works of authors as diverse as Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Eric Reinhardt, Frédéric Beigbeder, Florian Zeller and Michel Rio for evidence of this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> In such texts, the protagonists are invariably presented as incoherent, fragmented and deeply troubled subjects, whose difficult and failed relationships with the opposite sex, social marginalisation, sexual discontent and self-destructive impulses are foregrounded as evidence of their suffering and disenfranchisement. In other words, texts by authors such as these can all be read as reflecting, or as constructing, a crisis in contemporary masculine identity. Where this phenomenon reaches its apogee, however, is in the controversial and provocative works of Michel Houellebecq.

This chapter will consider a previously unexplored aspect of Houellebecq's work, namely how his texts play on and manipulate contemporary discourses of crisis in masculinity. In so doing, it will firstly highlight the double movement that characterises his texts whereby his protagonists appear to transgress normative conceptions of dominant masculinity through a performance of marginalisation and victimhood, and yet, simultaneously, reinscribe those same conceptions of dominant masculinity through a deliberately provocative performance of aggression and (symbolic) violence. Secondly, given the white male's traditional investment in perpetuating a myth of untroubled subjectivity, it will question what such a seemingly counter-intuitive portrayal of crisis in masculinity might conceivably seek to achieve. Drawing on analyses of masculinity in crisis in Sally Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000) and Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (2010), and on Julia Kristeva's elaboration of abjection in her extended essay, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (1980), this chapter will argue that Houellebecq's works manipulate discourses of masculinity in crisis as a strategic response to forces that would seek to precipitate the destabilisation of dominant masculinity.

Right from the outset of Houellebecq's six major novels, his protagonists are self-consciously set up as troubled and marginalised by societal changes in a manner that recalls in an all-too-obvious manner the discourse found in popular works sympathetic to the plight of contemporary men.<sup>8</sup> In the opening passages of *Extension du domaine de la lutte*, for example, a woman performs a provocative striptease at a party, removing her t-shirt, her bra and her skirt, while two female onlookers discuss how a female colleague has recently come to work wearing an extremely short miniskirt. The onlookers agree that their colleague has every right to dress how she pleases, and that it has nothing to do with arousing the interest of men. As the women continue with what the protagonist refers to disparagingly as 'platitudes',<sup>9</sup> he begins to feel increasingly ill. From his marginal positionality – cowering on a pile of cushions behind a sofa – he envisions the silhouettes of these women towering grotesquely on the wall above him. He condemns the discourse that they rehearse as '[I]es ultimes résidus, consternants, de la chute du féminisme',<sup>10</sup> before collapsing into an alcohol-induced and nightmare-ridden slumber, during which he vomits on the carpet. Here, the text makes easy play of the oft-rehearsed connection between feminism and the supposed suffering of the white heterosexual male, the protagonist's apparent disenfranchisement as a man symbolised by the fact that he subsequently loses not only the keys of his car, but also his car itself.

In the opening passages of *Plateforme*, meanwhile, the narrator recounts his father's brutal murder in his own home at the hands of an Arab intruder. It is subsequently revealed that the Arab murdered the narrator's father to avenge the latter's having slept with his sister. In this way, the text evokes imagery of the white heterosexual male as powerless to counter the maniacal masculinism of the Islamic other, even on his own territory. The narrator envisions 'les flux migratoires comme des vaisseaux sanguins qui traversaient l'Europe [...] [et où] les musulmans apparaissaient comme des caillots'.<sup>11</sup> He imagines the European social body – as arguably a symbol of white heterosexual masculine integrity – under threat of being overwhelmed by the cultural other, its constituent outside. Similar imagery is foregrounded at the beginning of *La Carte et le territoire*, where the protagonist's childhood home at Raincy, 'maison bourgeoise, entourée d'un vaste parc',<sup>12</sup> is portrayed as progressively encircled by the ethnically mixed



*banlieues*, 'une zone de plus en plus dangereuse [...] contrôlée par les gangs'.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, at the beginning of *Les Particules élémentaires*, gay men occupying the Quai Anatole-France on the banks of the Seine, lounging semi-naked in the sun, talking in groups of two or three and flirting provoke a palpable sense of unease in Desplechin, Michel's boss, who peers at them through binoculars from his office window as though besieged in a defensive tower. In this way, these early scenes in Houellebecq's texts deliberately evoke a sense of a centre progressively appropriated by the 'formerly' oppressed and, in so doing, toy with a fantasy of the white heterosexual male as the new marginalised.

This pattern continues throughout Houellebecq's novels, where the protagonists begin the texts alone and lonely and end the texts in the same way, scarred by their relationships with women and, all aged around forty years, explicitly portrayed as victims of sexual liberation's supposed breakdown of the traditional family. Houellebecq's works provocatively rehearse the most hackneyed of popular post-feminist discourse that identifies feminism as the prime culprit of (supposed) white heterosexual male marginalisation and malaise. In *Les Particules élémentaires*, the narrative goes so far as to have a *woman* condemn feminism for the damage that it has (apparently) done to men. Christiane tells Bruno that '[j]'ai l'impression que le féminisme les a durement atteints, plus qu'ils n'ont voulu l'avouer'.<sup>14</sup> Christiane proceeds to deride feminists for having succeeded in transforming 'les mecs de leur entourage en névrosés impuissants et grincheux'<sup>15</sup> before experiencing a sudden 'nostalgie de la virilité'.<sup>16</sup> The effect of feminism on men also arises as a topic of conversation between Michel and his lover Valérie in *Plateforme*. As Valérie listens sympathetically, Michel parrots a string of clichés about the impossibility of having a happy life in western society because of the way in which western women have changed. He insists that many men are afraid of modern women and increasingly prefer to take Asian brides. Indeed, he implies that western women have become 'une source de vexation et de problèmes'<sup>17</sup> to the extent that when men reach a certain age, they prefer to pay for sex and to avoid relationships entirely. Valérie, for her part, agrees that modern western women do not appreciate men and do not value traditional family life. Western life is provocatively portrayed as having been made almost unlivable for Houellebecq's protagonists as they lament the apparent denial to them of the privileges

associated with dominant masculinity and the means of proving themselves 'man enough' within socially inherited ideals of what men ought to be. Indeed, we read in *Plateforme* that '[n]ous avons créé un système dans lequel il est devenu simplement impossible de vivre',<sup>18</sup> a contention that appears ideologically blind to the fact that cultural changes may in fact have improved the lives of many and illustrates the problematic conflation of the masculine and the universal perspective at operation in these texts.

The paradox is, however, that while Houellebecq's protagonists perform victimhood and marginalisation, and lament their objectification in a new capitalist sexual economy, they are infamous for the unabashed misogyny, racism, xenophobia and (albeit to a lesser extent) homophobia in which they revel, a performance that self-consciously plays on the most provocative and condemned aspects of dominant masculinity. Coldly and cruelly, they take every opportunity to denigrate women, and to reduce them to mere objects of sexual gratification, examples of which are too many to mention. Houellebecq's protagonists' sexual relations with women map directly and provocatively onto Pierre Bourdieu's theorising of men's conception of the sexual act as a form of domination, appropriation and possession,<sup>19</sup> a postulation exemplified verbatim by Daniel in *La Possibilité d'une île*, when he states that 'il m'était arrivé à plusieurs reprises de baiser des filles dans l'unique but d'assurer mon emprise sur elles et au fond de les *dominer*'.<sup>20</sup> This hammed up misogyny takes on an even more provocative slant in Houellebecq's *Plateforme*, a text widely read as advocating sexual tourism as a solution to the (supposed) sexual malaise of western men. Here, the protagonist Michel travels to Thailand in a kind of neo-colonialist act, exploiting the world's vulnerable in the pursuit of phallic self-validation. While Michel takes great delight in the sexual attentions of submissive Thai prostitutes, the homosocial mentality of the ethnically different sexual encounter is vocalised by Robert, a veteran of sexual tourism in Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Ivory Coast, as well as Thailand. Robert talks of racism as 'une sensation de compétition [...] entre mâles de race différente'<sup>21</sup> which causes, as a corollary, 'une augmentation du désir sexuel pour les femelles de l'autre race'.<sup>22</sup> Racism he declares to be nothing other than something 'biologique et brutal': 'la compétition pour le vagin des jeunes femmes'.<sup>23</sup> The 'conquest' of ethnically different women for conquest's sake is evoked therefore

not merely as misogynistic, but also as racist in that it is perceived as subjugating not only women, but also their racially other menfolk.

In this way, Houellebecq's texts enact dominant masculinity marginalised *and* dominant masculinity performed in an excessively normative manner. While the protagonists appear on the one hand to eschew normative conceptions of dominant masculinity through a masochistic performance of victimhood, they simultaneously reinscribe very normative conceptions of dominant masculinity through a sadistic performance of aggression and (symbolic) violence. This apparent split subjectivity of the white heterosexual male as at once eschewing and embracing victimhood *and* normative conceptions of masculinity directly recalls Freud's theory of 'reflexive sadomasochism',<sup>24</sup> whereby the ego is split between a masochistic half and a sadistic half, producing a subject crippled by self-reproach and self-hatred, at once longing *for* its apparently lost integrity *and* hating the burden that such integrity entails, but in Houellebecq's case, always in a self-conscious manner. Through this double manoeuvre of de-centring the white heterosexual male only to portray his performance of dominant masculinity in ever more extreme ways, Houellebecq's texts evoke a powerful and foreboding sense of masculinity in crisis.

One of the many things that is troubling about this portrayal, however, is that Houellebecq's novels suggest that their self-conflicted anti-heroes are representative of all western men. As Sabine van Wesemael observes, Houellebecq constantly insists on the typicalness of his characters.<sup>25</sup> The first line of *Les Particules élémentaires* asserts that the text is above all 'l'histoire d'un homme [Michel], qui vécut la plus grande partie de sa vie en Europe occidentale, durant la seconde moitié du XXe siècle'<sup>26</sup> and that he is one of a generation of men who spend their lives in solitude and bitterness. Meanwhile, later in the text, his half-brother Bruno is described as 'représentatif de son époque',<sup>27</sup> exhibiting disturbing traits that 'appartenaient à l'ensemble de sa génération'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Bruno's cynical view of life is described as 'typiquement masculine'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in *La Possibilité d'une île*, Daniel is framed as 'représentatif de l'espèce, un homme *parmi tant d'autres*',<sup>30</sup> while the neurotic narrator of *Extension du domaine de la lutte* considers himself to be eighty per cent normal. In this way, Houellebecq's narratives exhibit a problematic conflation of the white heterosexual male (and masculine) subjectivity that illustrates their

ideological blindness to issues of sex, ethnicity and sexuality. While the texts claim that their protagonists are representative of a whole generation of men, their portrayal can in fact only reasonably claim to be representative of a privileged group of white and heterosexual men, and even then Houellebecq's portrayal is profoundly problematic in that it depends for its cultural authority on an appropriation by this privileged group of white and heterosexual men of a marginal positionality within society, something that has no grounding in social or economic reality.

Having explored *how* Houellebecq's texts self-consciously evoke a sense of masculinity in crisis, the remainder of this chapter will question *why* such a performance. What might such a textual performance conceivably seek to achieve? Given the traditional masculine imperative of perpetuating a myth of strength and cohesion, it would seem somewhat counter-intuitive to transgress that imperative by foregrounding troubled and crisis-stricken men. Indeed, one might well imagine that the white heterosexual male stands to gain little and to lose a considerable amount from the transgression of the myth of untroubled subjectivity that allows for the reproduction of his own hegemony. Two notable studies of contemporary masculinity are enlightening in explaining this seemingly counter-intuitive phenomenon, namely Sally Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000) and Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (2010). Both studies emphasise that while performances of crisis in dominant masculinity may seem like a kind of phallic divestiture, such performances may in fact represent a means of reinscribing the discursive limits of dominant masculinity. Robinson contends, for example, that there is 'symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, she suggests that performances of crisis in masculinity are part of 'an identity politics of the dominant'<sup>32</sup> whereby white heterosexual men claim symbolic disenfranchisement in order to compete with the authentically disempowered for cultural authority.<sup>33</sup> Walsh, meanwhile, highlights that existing discussions of masculinity in crisis rarely concede to the reconstitutive power of crisis.<sup>34</sup> Talking of what he calls the 'recuperative strains of masculinity politics',<sup>35</sup> he contends that the performance of crisis in masculinity is not an end in itself, but often represents a period of disorder that precedes and precipitates the re-establishment of the temporarily agitated

norm.<sup>36</sup> But what is this 'symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis'<sup>37</sup> and how might it operate to precipitate the re-establishment of the norm?

Portrayals of a troubled and fragmented self, such as those so readily identifiable in Houellebecq's works, directly recall the concept of abjection, a state often evoked in the context of those more conventionally perceived as marginalised, such as women, people of colour, the poor, the disabled and LGBT people, but almost never in relation to white heterosexual men. Initially employed by Jacques Lacan to describe the violent expulsion of something perceived as a cause of psychosis, abjection largely owes its prominence in discussions of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature to the publication in 1980 of Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*.<sup>38</sup> In this extended essay, Kristeva theorises the abject as a pre-Oedipal component of 'I' that is neither subject nor object but the jettisoned object which is excluded as part of the subject's struggle to articulate its separation from the mother, and which turns on a radical threat to bodily integrity. According to Kristeva, a coherent identity is dependent on casting out certain aspects of self that do not conform to dominant social mores, and to be confronted with those cast out aspects threatens our sense of self by challenging the psychic border between self and other. She posits the abject, therefore, as that which is radically opposed to 'I',<sup>39</sup> and argues that to be confronted with its horrifying dissemblance, 'me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre'<sup>40</sup> and borders dissolve. In this way, she contends that the abject disturbs all identity, system and order and is 'ce que j'écarte en permanence pour vivre'.<sup>41</sup> It might be argued, therefore, that Houellebecq's self-conscious evocation of masculinity in crisis foregrounds the abject in a way that highlights the fragility of the limits of (masculine) subjectivity and, in so doing, deliberately plays on deeply held fears that the fixed borders and clear lines that structure our sense of self and of the world might become undone altogether.

Indeed, this play on fears for (masculine) subjectivity is intensified in Houellebecq's works through a very visceral mirroring of the disintegration of fixed borders and clear lines at the level of the male body itself. While the male body is ideally conceived as inviolable and complete, imagery of the fragmented and fragmenting male body abounds in Houellebecq's texts. The narrator in *Extension du domaine de la lutte* envisions himself as a chimpanzee

executed by a tribe of storks who peck out his eyes, leaving him to die in terrible agony; in *Les Particules élémentaires*, Bruno has a nightmare that he is a pig being taken to slaughter, decapitated and eviscerated; and in *Plateforme*, Michel dreams of a man torn into seven or eight pieces by the articulated arms of diggers and his head crushed like an egg by a bulldozer. Significantly, however, such fragmentation is often represented through imagery of castration and decomposition of the male sexual organ itself. In *Extension du domaine de la lutte*, Michel is possessed by a sudden compulsion to castrate himself with a pair of scissors ('L'idée s'impose: trancher mon sexe. Je m'imagine la paire de ciseaux à la main, la brève résistance des chairs, et soudain le moignon sanguinolent, l'évanouissement probable. Le moignon, sur la moquette. Collé de sang'<sup>42</sup>) and then to stick the scissors in his eyes. In *Les Particules élémentaires*, the text foregrounds Michel's nightmares of 'poubelles gigantesques, remplis de filtres à café, de raviolis en sauce et d'organes sexuels tranchés'.<sup>43</sup> His nightmare continues as '[d]es vers géants, aussi gros que l'oiseau [son canari], armés de becs, attaquaient son cadavre. Ils arrachaient ses pattes, déchiquetaient ses intestins, crevaient ses globes oculaires'.<sup>44</sup> Bruno, meanwhile, describes his own sexual organ as 'un bout de viande suintant et putréfié, dévoré par les vers'<sup>45</sup> and in *Plateforme*, medical students run riot with eyes removed from their sockets and detached penises. This imagery continues in *La Possibilité d'une île*, where Daniel directs a horrific porn film in which the dismembered penis of the male lead is stuffed in the throat of one of the actresses, and on a secondary level in *Les Particules élémentaires*, where David di Meola rips out an eye and cuts off a man's penis with a chain saw in one of his snuff movies. In these various incidents, imagery of ocular destruction self-consciously recalls the myth of Oedipus in which being blinded, likewise, symbolises castration. By focusing on the fragmentation (and castration) of the male body in this way, Houellebecq's texts underline the fragility of male corporeality ('Une bite, on peut toujours la sectionner'<sup>46</sup>) and, in so doing, self-consciously play on fears for masculine integrity.

Houellebecq's texts also foreground imagery of bodily disintegration in their highlighting of the male body subject to ageing, disease and death. *La Carte et le territoire*, for example, recounts the protagonist's father's suffering from rectal cancer, and having to live with the indignity of an artificial anus; 'indignity' in that the

anus – a taboo area of the heterosexual male body – signifies the vulnerability of his corporeal limits (his openness to potential violation) and points to a *lack* of masculine coherence. Ultimately, Jed's father prefers to be euthanized rather than to continue to live like this. *Les Particules élémentaires*, meanwhile, evokes horrifying imagery of the decomposing corpse of Bruno's grandfather ('Le cadavre, sous l'action combinée de bactéries et des sucs digestifs rejetés par les larves, se liquéfie plus ou moins et devient le siège de fermentations butyriques et ammoniacales'<sup>47</sup>); *La Carte et le territoire* foregrounds imagery of the corpse of the brutally murdered Michel Houellebecq, torn to shreds to such an extent as to be virtually unrecognisable ('un cadavre humain c'est de la viande, purement et simplement de la viande; de nouveaux effluves descendirent vers eux, la puanteur était vraiment atroce'<sup>48</sup>); and *Plateforme* evokes yet more horrifying imagery of corpses in the form of Michel's brutally murdered father ('son crâne était fracassé sur le sol [...] Le visage de mon père avait en outre été frotté sur le sol, pratiquement jusqu'à faire jaillir l'oeil de l'orbite'<sup>49</sup>). In this way, the texts foreground the corpse, identified by Kristeva as the ultimate symbol of abjection.<sup>50</sup> Kristeva argues that 'dans cette chose qui ne démarque plus et donc ne signifie plus rien, je contemple l'effondrement d'un monde qui a effacé ses limites.'<sup>51</sup> Here, the imagery of male corpses evokes once again the vulnerability of masculine subjectivity to annihilation.

The focus on the fragmenting limits of white heterosexual male subjectivity – and the play on fears for the integrity of masculinity that it seeks to inspire – reaches its apogee, however, in the final scenes of Houellebecq's texts, scenes that are marked by an overwhelming sense of decomposition, annihilation and dissolution. Sabine van Wesemael astutely observes that '[I]a fin de ses récits exprime à chaque fois l'irréversible, la mort, le néant, une éternité de perte. Presque chacun de ses personnages meurt, est détruit, renvoyé au néant ou plutôt il se détruit.'<sup>52</sup> This is true in that the texts invariably end on what seems like the threshold of death. The significance of the endings of the texts, however, goes beyond a mere confrontation with mortality. Rather, they symbolise very specifically the complete dissolution of the limits of masculine subjectivity. In *Extension du domaine de la lutte*, for example, the narrative concludes with a portrayal of Michel cycling into a forest towards 'les sources de l'Ardèche',<sup>53</sup> the region of his childhood. In

this sense, we see him hurtle toward his own point of origin. As he cycles into 'le paysage [...] de plus en plus doux',<sup>54</sup> he announces that 'j'en ai mal à la peau. Je suis au centre du gouffre. Je ressens ma peau comme une frontière, et le monde extérieur comme un écrasement.'<sup>55</sup> The limits of his body as a desiring subject are undermined entirely as he disappears into the landscape, absorbed into the abyss of Mother Nature in what functions as a symbolic return to the mother.

In *Les Particules élémentaires*, meanwhile, we learn that Michel has in all probability ended his own life; that 'Michel Djerzinski est entré dans la mer'<sup>56</sup> off the west coast of Ireland, where 'le ciel, la lumière et l'eau se confondent'.<sup>57</sup> His body is never found, absorbed entirely into the great body of *la mer*, and symbolically, *la mère*. Bruno, meanwhile, spends the rest of his days in a psychiatric clinic, his medication having killed all sense of desire in him. Infantilised in this way, subject to the mothering of nurses, his sense of masculine identity dissolves entirely. The process of institutionalisation absorbs him into an undifferentiated mass of medicated patients, whose eyes focus in unison on the television before meals. Meanwhile, we read that '[d]ans les cimetières du monde entier, les humains récemment décédés continuèrent à pourrir dans les tombes, à se transformer peu à peu en squelettes.'<sup>58</sup> Once again, the limits of the body are portrayed as dissolving entirely, becoming one with Mother Earth in the dark crevices from which they sprang. Similarly, in *Plateforme*, Michel forecasts his imminent death and the quick decomposition of his body: 'sous ces climats, les cadavres se mettent rapidement à puer.'<sup>59</sup> He presages his fate of a burial 'à la fosse commune';<sup>60</sup> he anticipates his return to Mother Earth as part of an undifferentiated mass of nothingness: the complete annihilation of his limits as an individual and his complete eradication from human memory – 'On m'oubliera. On m'oubliera vite.'<sup>61</sup>

In *La Possibilité d'une île*, meanwhile, the narrative concludes with imagery of the clone-descendant of the protagonist Daniel arriving, after a long passage, at what remains of the sea. He proclaims that '[c]'était donc cela que les hommes appelaient la mer, et qu'ils considéraient comme la grande consolatrice, comme la grande destructrice aussi, celle qui érode, qui met fin avec douceur.'<sup>62</sup> Here, as in *Les Particules élémentaires*, *la mer* symbolises *la mère*. The clone-Daniel enters the salty waters that immediately recall the amniotic fluid of the mother's womb and is cradled by the light



movement of the waves. He says that 'j'étais maintenant entré dans un espace paisible dont seul m'écarterait le processus légal.'<sup>63</sup> Floating in the water, he feels no sensation other than 'une légère sensation obscure et nutritive'.<sup>64</sup> He concludes that '[m]on corps m'appartenait pour un bref laps de temps [...] J'étais, je n'étais plus.'<sup>65</sup> Once again, Houellebecq evokes imagery of a return to the mother that figures the complete annihilation of the limits of masculine subjectivity. Undifferentiated from the mother, the clone-Daniel no longer exists as 'I'.

At the end of *La Carte et le territoire*, similarly, the text foregrounds an abundance of imagery of disintegration and decomposition. Here, artist Jed, his own body suffering the effects of its erosion from inside by intestinal cancer, pursues his final work of art, the filming of 'objets industriels [...] progressivement submergés par la prolifération des couches végétales.'<sup>66</sup> These man-made objects, symbols of man's industrial power, become progressively swallowed up by the forces of Mother Nature, just like Jed's own body. The protagonist creates a collage of photographs that represent his memories, in particular photographs of people who have had an impact upon his life. Exposed to the elements and filmed, they symbolise Jed's own slow decomposition and inevitable reincorporation into Mother Nature: 'les photographies se gondolaient, pourrissaient par places, puis se décomposaient en fragments, et étaient totalement détruites en l'espace de quelques semaines.'<sup>67</sup> Here the text highlights the precarious limits of masculinity and the powerlessness of men subject to the fearsome and destructive powers of Mother Nature, a symbol of the constant threat of the abyss. While figured as the 'anéantissement généralisé de l'espèce humaine',<sup>68</sup> what is also suggested is the symbolic erasure of the masculine 'I' through the contaminating impact of its constitutive exterior. The text evokes the symbolic dissolution of culture (figured as masculine) by nature (figured as feminine).

In this way, Houellebecq's texts end on a note of the foreclosure of hope and possibility for the masculine self. Rather, they point to the abyss in that the protagonists' limits as individuals become irrevocably dissolved. They articulate a symbolic return to the mother/ *la mère* in the form of Mother Nature, Mother Earth or *la mer* as the protagonists become swallowed up, subsumed by and absorbed into the terrifying absence of limits between self and other of the pre-Oedipal chasm (the vagina) from which they

sprang. Just as abjection – according to Kristeva – enacts the primal repudiation of the maternal that founds the masculine subject, so the endings of Houellebecq’s texts symbolically revoke that founding repudiation. The texts subsume the protagonists into the void where ‘I’ am not and where all meaning collapses; a state of being prior to signification (or the Law of the Father) that radiates the horrors of nothingness, meaninglessness and powerlessness. In this way, the conclusions of the texts play on fears of the complete annihilation of the limits of masculine subjectivity through the irrational threat represented by the feminine.

It stands to reason, of course, that not all readers will be susceptible to the ‘horror’ of Houellebecq’s self-conscious manipulation of masculinity in crisis. Many may delight in it, or simply dismiss it as nonsense. While Houellebecq’s narratives lend themselves to multiple readings, it might be argued that their targeted readership is actually quite specific. In *Extension du domaine de la lutte*, for example, the narrator addresses the reader directly, saying ‘[i]l se peut, sympathique ami lecteur, que vous soyez vous-même une femme. Ne vous en faites pas, ce sont des choses qui arrivent,’<sup>69</sup> suggesting that the implied reader is not female, but male. This, together with the overt racism, misogyny and (to a lesser extent) homophobia of the texts would suggest that the reader to whom the texts seek to appeal is in fact the white heterosexual male himself. Moreover, the pornographic nature of much of Houellebecq’s work would appear to suggest this particular target audience almost exclusively, especially those instances that objectify ethnically different women.<sup>70</sup> Beyond this even, the simple assertion that men have a fundamental problem being men finds a ready constituency across a whole swathe of society disorientated and demoralised by changing times and the erosion of traditional masculine certitudes, and the horrifying dissemblance evoked by Houellebecq is at times insidiously seductive. It might be argued, therefore, that Houellebecq’s narratives seek specifically to harness the powers of horror over this receptive audience. Through an overwhelming confrontation with fragmentation on all levels, Houellebecq’s narratives point to the utter impossibility of life for the white heterosexual male in this abject state of social and subjective disintegration. In harnessing the *powers of horror*, they endeavour to put the targeted reader, therefore, in a situation ‘[à] la lisière de l’inexistence et de l’hallucination, d’une réalité qui, si je la reconnais, m’annihile’.<sup>71</sup>

And, in so doing, they seek to incite a radical repudiation of that with which he is confronted in a way that triggers his masculine instincts of self-preservation. Judith Butler associates the repudiation on being confronted with the abject with the verbal response 'I would rather die than be that!'<sup>72</sup> Arguably, therefore, Houellebecq's texts seek to incite a return to a set of what Butler calls 'sheltering norms'<sup>73</sup> in a way that serves to reaffirm the limits of dominant masculinity and male order.

This chapter has explored how Houellebecq's works self-consciously manipulate contemporary discourses of masculinity in crisis through a strategic de-centring of the white heterosexual male as a response to forces that would seek to destabilise dominant masculinity. It has explored how Houellebecq's texts construct a sense of crisis through a double manoeuvre of their protagonists at once performing and eschewing normative conceptions of masculinity. In questioning this seemingly counter-intuitive performance of masculine crisis, it has suggested that such a performance harnesses the power of the abject – 'the symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis'<sup>74</sup> – to play on fears for the traditional certitudes on which a certain readership relies for its sense of self and the world. Ultimately, in suggesting that this textual strategy specifically targets the white heterosexual male reader, it has argued that harnessing the powers of horror over this readership might actually serve as a self-preserving or recuperative strategy that precipitates a reinvestment in, or re-establishment of the clear lines and fixed borders that sustain the prevailing gender order and that privilege the white heterosexual male. In sync with what Walsh calls the 'recuperative strains of masculinity politics',<sup>75</sup> this chapter has elaborated how Houellebecq's self-conscious manipulation of discourses of masculinity in crisis might therefore be read as a masculinising strategy – a clever rhetorical manoeuvre, or subtle tactic of power – to re-centre dominant masculinity by first strategically de-centring it.

### Notes

- 1 'The dark continent of humanity'; Élisabeth Badinter, *XY – De l'identité masculine* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992), p. 10.
- 2 'These age-old certainties'; Badinter, *XY*, p. 10.
- 3 See, in particular, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Robert Connell's

- Masculinities* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995).
- 4 See David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp. 1–2.
  - 5 See, for example, Christine Castelain Meunier, *Les Hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité* (Paris: Belfond, 1988); Robert W Connell, *Masculinities*; and David Savran, *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
  - 6 See in particular, Connell, *Masculinities*; Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R. W. Connell (eds), *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (London: Sage, 2005); and Tim Carrigan, R. W. Connell and John Lee, 'Towards a new sociology of masculinity', *Theory and Society*, 14/5 (1985), 551–604. These texts elaborate the concepts of hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, marginalised and resistant masculinities.
  - 7 See, for example, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, *Monsieur* (Paris: Minuit, 1986); Eric Reinhardt, *Existence* (Paris: Stock, 2004); Florian Zeller, *Les amants de n'importe quoi* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003); Frédéric Beigbeder, *Un roman français* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2009); and Michel Rio, *Mélancolie Nord* (Paris: Ballard, 1982).
  - 8 Here I refer to such texts as Badinter, *XY-De l'identité masculine*; Castelain Meunier, *Les Hommes aujourd'hui*; Élisabeth Roudinesco, *La Famille en désordre* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); and Evelyne Sullerot, *Quels pères? Quels fils?* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).
  - 9 Michel Houellebecq, *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (Paris: Éditions Maurice Nadeau, 1994), p. 6.
  - 10 'The final, distressing residue of the fall of feminism'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 6.
  - 11 'The migratory flows like blood vessels crossing Europe [...] [in which] Muslims appeared as clots'; Michel Houellebecq, *Plateforme* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), p. 27.
  - 12 'Bourgeois residence, surrounded by a vast park'; Michel Houellebecq, *La Carte et le territoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), p. 17.
  - 13 'an increasingly dangerous zone controlled by gangs'; Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 17.
  - 14 '[I] have the impression that feminism has really damaged them, more than they want to admit'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules élémentaires* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 140.
  - 15 'the men of their circle into powerless and grumpy neurosis-stricken cripples'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 146.
  - 16 'nostalgia for virility'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 146.
  - 17 'a source of vexation and problems'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 142.
  - 18 'we have created a system in which it has simply become impossible to live'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 349.
  - 19 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 26.
  - 20 'it has happened a few times that I've slept with girls for the single reason of asserting my hold over them and ultimately to *dominate*

- them'; Michel Houellebecq, *La Possibilité d'une île* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 216.
- 21 'a sense of competition [...] between males of different races'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 114.
- 22 'an increase in sexual desire for the females of the other race'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 114.
- 23 'biological and brutal': 'competition for the vaginas of young women'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 114.
- 24 See Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 63.
- 25 Sabine van Wesemael, *Michel Houellebecq: Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p. 184.
- 26 'the story of a man who lived out the greater part of his life in western Europe, in the latter half of the twentieth century'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 7.
- 27 'representative of his era'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 63.
- 28 'that belonged to the whole of his generation'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, 178.
- 29 'typically masculine'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 205.
- 30 'representative of the species, a man among so many others'; Houellebecq, *La Possibilité*, p.367 (my emphasis.)
- 31 Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 9.
- 32 Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 3.
- 33 Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 12.
- 34 Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 8.
- 35 Walsh, *Male Trouble*, p. 160.
- 36 Walsh, *Male Trouble*, p. 8.
- 37 Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 9.
- 38 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection*, Collection 'Tel Quel' (Paris: Seuil, 1980).
- 39 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 9.
- 40 'pulls me towards that place where meaning collapses'; Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 9.
- 41 'that which I constantly move away from in order to live'; Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 11.
- 42 'The idea plants itself: cut off my penis. I imagine myself with the scissors in my hand, the brief resistance of the flesh, and suddenly the bloody stump, the probable fainting. The stump, on the carpet. Covered in blood'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 143.
- 43 'giant dustbins, filled with coffee filters, ravioli in sauce and severed sexual organs'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 16.
- 44 'giant worms, as big as the bird [his canary], armed with beaks, attacked his corpse. They pulled off his feet, tore out his intestines, crushed his eye balls'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 16.
- 45 'an oozing and putrefying bit of meat, devoured by worms'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 154.
- 46 'a cock can always be cut off'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 47.

- 47 'The corpse, under the combined action of bacteria and digestive juices released by the larvae, more or less liquefies and becomes the seat of ammonia and butyric fermentations'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 39.
- 48 'a human corpse is meat, pure and simple; a new wave of smell came down on them, the stench was truly horrific'; Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 275.
- 49 'his skull was smashed on the ground [...] My father's face had also been rubbed into the ground, almost to the extent of making the eye pop out of its socket'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 25.
- 50 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 11.
- 51 'in this thing without borders and, therefore, no longer signifying anything, I contemplate the collapse of a world which has erased its limits'; Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 11.
- 52 'the end of his narratives expresses at once the irredeemable, death, nothingness, an eternity of perdition. Almost all his characters die, are destroyed, are reduced to nothing or, rather, destroy themselves'; Sabine van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq: Études réunies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 6.
- 53 'the source of the Ardèche'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 156.
- 54 'the countryside [...] softer and softer'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 157.
- 55 'it makes me feel bad in my skin. I'm at the centre of a gulf. I feel my skin like a border, and the world outside crushing it'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, p. 157.
- 56 'Michel Djerzinski went into the sea'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 304.
- 57 'the sky, the light and the water get lost in one another'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 304.
- 58 'in the cemeteries throughout the world, recently deceased humans continue to rot in their graves, to become skeletons little by little'; Houellebecq, *Les Particules*, p. 294.
- 59 'in this climate, corpses begin to stink rapidly'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 350.
- 60 'in the communal pit'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 351.
- 61 'People will forget me. People will forget me quickly'; Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, p. 351.
- 62 'it was what people call the sea, what they consider to be the great consoler, and as well as the great destroyer, the one which erodes, and gently brings an end'; Houellebecq, *La Possibilité*, p. 473.
- 63 'I was now in a quiet place, from which only the lethal process would separate me'; Houellebecq, *La Possibilité*, p. 474.
- 64 'a light sensation, obscure and nourishing'; Houellebecq, *La Possibilité*, p. 474.
- 65 '[m]y body belonged to me for a brief lapse of time [...] I was, I was no longer'; Houellebecq, *La Possibilité*, p. 474.
- 66 'industrial objects [...] progressively overwhelmed by the proliferation of layers of vegetation'; Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 425.

- 67 'the photographs crumpled up, rotting in places, and then decomposing into fragments, and were totally destroyed in the course of a few weeks'; Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 426.
- 68 'the generalised annihilation of humankind'; Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 428.
- 69 '[i]t is possible, dear reader, that you are yourself a woman. Don't worry, such things have been known to happen'; Houellebecq, *Extension*, pp. 15–16.
- 70 See in this respect Murielle Lucie Clément, 'Michel Houellebecq, Erotisme et Pornographie', in van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq: Études réunies*, pp. 99–115.
- 71 '[a]t the edge of non-existence and of hallucination, of a reality which, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me'; Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 10.
- 72 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 243 (n. 2).
- 73 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 34.
- 74 Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 9.
- 75 Walsh, *Male Trouble*, p. 160.

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## 9

# Voicing the Silence: Exposing French Neo-colonial History and Practices in Mathieu Pernot's *Les Migrants*

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SOPHIE WATT

This chapter examines photographer Mathieu Pernot's work on Afghan migrants between 2009 and 2012. His photographic series, *Les Migrants*,<sup>1</sup> transcends the artistic discipline of photography and reinscribes the story of the Afghan refugees within a neo-colonial and global context in which France plays a major role. I argue that the series of photographs goes beyond mere political statement and creates a historical and critical text that resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *savoir engagé*.<sup>2</sup> In *Pour un savoir engagé*, Bourdieu argues in favour of militant analyses and critiques of the 'politics of globalisation' in order to unveil and oppose a process that tends to be considered as a natural phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> For Bourdieu, the 'politics of globalisation' represent a secretive enterprise that requires research and analysis in order to be unmasked and denounced. The research project and narrative techniques disclosed in Mathieu Pernot's artistic production, *Les Migrants*, fall into this category of *savoir engagé* that Bourdieu favours in order to address critically current and dramatic issues such as migration as a direct product of the neo-liberal order. Pernot's narrative technique juxtaposes the photographs with the narration of two migrants Pernot met in Paris in 2012 and discloses the convergence of two sides of French history that are rarely viewed together: French immigration policies and foreign interventions. The

permeability of these two historical narratives via the unaltered and unedited voices of the two Afghan migrants – Jawad and Mansour – provides the reader with an insight into French neo-colonial practices as an institutional keystone of the ‘republicanised’ neo-liberal order.

### Voicing the silence

Between 2009 and 2012 Pernot produced his series, *Les Migrants*, a collection of photographs of illegal Afghan refugees sleeping on benches and on the ground near Square Villemin in Paris, from which they had been expelled. Pernot’s photographs were inspired by an image of four people sleeping on the ground in a forest in northern France that he had seen in a magazine with a caption indicating they were exhausted Afghans trying to get some rest away from ‘prying eyes’.<sup>4</sup> It was the violence of this image that caught Pernot’s attention, the sleeping forms evoked corpses: ‘C’était une image violente, une photographie de guerre. Les corps paraissaient morts et leur façon d’occuper l’espace semblait annoncer la figure tragique du charnier.’<sup>5</sup> Pernot decided to go to the open-air refugee camp, *La Jungle*, near Calais in 2009 to discover more about the living conditions of these people. In 2009, *La Jungle* existed as an improvised settlement for migrants since the closure of the first semi-official centre for refugees, *Sangatte*, in 2002.

*Les Migrants* does not, at first glance, appear to be a book of photography; instead the reader’s first impression is of an old-style French jotter – *le cahier* – a familiar image that associates the work with the French school environment. However, this impression is immediately shaken by the unfamiliarity of the language in the narration. The reader is confronted by ten pages of Farsi with no immediate translation, page numbers, captions or indication of what the book is about, before coming to the first photograph. The story of the protagonists is stripped down to the essentials, and the reader, like the migrant, enters the world of the unknown, complicated by a foreign language. The photographs trace and narrate the story of the migrants, and unveil the violence they have endured during their journey to Europe, as their status is progressively criminalised and they are dehumanised. The images are juxtaposed with the narration of the journey of Jawad and Mansour; the translation of the narrative is located towards the end of the book,

disclosing a double enunciation in which their experience is linked to immigration legislation and foreign policies, two distinct yet interrelated strands of French and European history. Pernot views their narration as the dark side of the history of globalisation:

En 2012 j'ai rencontré Jawad et Mansour, tous les deux Afghans demandeurs d'asile à Paris. J'ai confié à Jawad des cahiers d'écolier pour qu'il y écrive le récit de son voyage de Kaboul à Paris. A chacune de nos rencontres, il me donnait quelques pages de son histoire qu'il traduisait. J'y voyais le récit d'une épopée moderne, l'histoire en négatif de notre mondialisation. Mansour m'a prêté les cahiers qu'il utilisait pour les cours de français.<sup>6</sup>

The photographs that appear within the first ten pages of the narrative are those of *La Jungle*, where Pernot first went to meet the refugees. Pernot did not encounter them there because they had in fact already been expelled from *La Jungle* in October 2009; all he saw were the remains of their stay in the woods: 'Je me suis rendu à plusieurs reprises dans cette forêt "sauvage" de Calais [...] les traces de cabanes et les restes de sacs de couchage en constituaient les signes les plus visibles.'<sup>7</sup>

The first wave of refugees that came to the Calais region and attracted media attention consisted of people fleeing the 1990s Serbo-Croatian conflict<sup>8</sup> who ended up taking shelter in the woods on the northern coast of France.<sup>9</sup> In October 1998, the first young men from Kosovo arrived in Calais and during the winter of 1998–9 took refuge inside the ferry terminal from which they were rapidly expelled in April 1999.<sup>10</sup> They stayed in the woods surrounding the town of Calais, but their situation quickly became untenable. In 1999 an old warehouse used during the building of the Channel Tunnel was transformed by the Red Cross into a refugee centre, commonly known as Sangatte. It was conceived of as a transitory space, 'un espace de transit et de réparation des corps' according to sociologist Smaïn Laacher.<sup>11</sup> Sangatte hosted between 1,500 and 1,800 refugees daily and at 25,000 square metres, the centre could host up to 5,000 people.<sup>12</sup> Olivier Thomas also argues that Sangatte was a space whose temporality was constructed around the life of the port and the tunnel where the refugees spent their nights in the hope of crossing the Channel. This transitory space suddenly shed light on the 'clandestine' migration phenomenon and made it visible to the French public. Discursively, the refugee fleeing a

conflict and its aftermath (mainly from Kosovo at the time) then became 'un immigré clandestin' falling under la Loi Bonnet of January 1980 'relative à la prevention de l'immigration clandestine'.<sup>13</sup> According to Laacher, the 'clandestin' is defined by his/her mobility and quest for a place in a new society:

Le clandestin est à distinguer de l'immigré ordinaire, du demandeur d'asile, du réfugié et du sans-papiers. Certes, des mots tels que migrants, immigrés clandestins, sans-papiers, réfugiés économiques, réfugiés politiques, illégaux, exilés, etc., sont des mots du langage ordinaire qui se substituent en permanence les uns aux autres sans jamais poser de problèmes de compréhension puisque pour tous, ces mots renvoient à une seule et même réalité: la présence de celui qui n'est pas là depuis le début.<sup>14</sup>

Katy Long reminds us that the undocumented migrant and the refugee have only been considered as two distinct categories since the 1951 Geneva Convention and the establishment of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>15</sup> and its French equivalent L'Office français de protection des réfugiés et des apatrides (OFPRA) created between July 1952 and May 1953.<sup>16</sup> Until then, refugees were essentially considered 'a subcategory of migrants'. Long argues that the category of 'refugee' was 'a politically crafted construction of Western States', and represented the manipulation of the language of 'humanitarianism'. 'By 1960', she notes, 'the refugee had been shaped into a figure whose admission to the West was increasingly framed by political-humanitarian interests.'<sup>17</sup> Although created for the legal protection of people fleeing a country for their own safety, this category of 'refugee' is often blurred historically and semantically with the category of 'migrant', which is associated more with economic migration. This instability in the process of categorising these people discloses their vulnerability.<sup>18</sup>

As a symbolic measure to announce the end of illegal immigration to France, the then minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, closed Sangatte on 5 November 2002. In his analysis of the ways in which the refugee camps evolved from offering a spontaneous and temporary response to the emergency of migration to becoming a zone of control in order to prevent the further scattering of refugees, Bertrand Cassaigne draws on the analysis of Olivier Thomas's study to state that Sangatte was closed because it became too visible and made the refugee question too pressing:

tout est fait comme si les camps réveillaient la peur et la mauvaise conscience et qu'il fallait cacher la réalité, mais en même temps du coup les enjeux de ces migrations. On souhaite donc les rendre moins visibles. Sangatte était trop visible. On a préféré qu'ils se dispersent dans des regroupements inorganisés à l'entour de Calais.<sup>19</sup>

After the closure of Sangatte the migrants sought refuge in the nearby forests, which became known as *Les Jungles*. On 22 October 2009, immigration minister Eric Besson closed the camps and expelled the 276 migrants (who were mainly from Afghanistan), 135 of whom were minors. Thus, when Pernot went to Calais, he found the former sites of *Les Jungles* empty of migrants, yet the photographs that he took are witness to their time in the woods. We see the remains of their stay – plastic bags, clothes, the remnants of shacks and sleeping bags:

les traces de cabanes et les restes de sacs de couchage en constituaient les signes les plus visibles. Peu de temps après, j'ai réalisé à Paris des photographies de migrants afghans en train de dormir, entre le lever du jour et la présence des policiers venus les évacuer. Les couvertures abandonnées de la forêt étaient de nouveau habitées par des corps que je ne pouvais qu'imaginer.<sup>20</sup>

Shot in 2009, the photographs are reminiscent of Jean Révillard's previous work, *Les Jungles*.<sup>21</sup> Révillard's collection of photographs also portrays the traces of the migrants, mainly their shacks, in *La Jungle* near Calais, yet those shacks were still standing. The site had not been emptied and the shacks were still inhabited. Révillard's use of flash photography shedding bright light on these shacks places emphasis on the visibility of what had become 'the migrant question'. Pernot's series on *La Jungle*, meanwhile, is less obvious because the shacks are no longer standing; only their remains are still visible. These traces reveal the passage of human beings, but their presence is elusive. The images of the woods are unsettling and create an atmosphere of anxiety, resembling something akin to forensic photography. The photographs of these remains are reminiscent of the clues photographed at the scene of a crime.

The notion of traces is crucial for Pernot; from his work on gypsy communities<sup>22</sup> to his work on migrants, he traces the history of mostly nomadic (by choice, though often by force) people who are silenced within the grand narrative of French national history. This

concept is particularly reminiscent of historian Carlo Ginzburg's notion of 'le paradigme indiciel',<sup>23</sup> as a practice of writing history based on the model of medical semiotics in order to open up diverse interpretations and to refuse a closure of meaning:

This idea, which is the crux of the conjectural or semiotic paradigm, has made progress in the most varied cognitive circles and has deeply influenced the humane sciences. Minute palaeographical details have been adopted as traits permitting the reconstruction of cultural exchanges and transformations.<sup>24</sup>

The methodology of the evidential paradigm is based on 'infinitesimal traces [that] permit the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality'<sup>25</sup>. The realities explored in this book via the juxtaposition of photographs, Jawad's narration and Mansour's vocabulary notebooks, are organised as a collection of traces and clues that appear to link two sides of these people's history: the living conditions of migrants in France and the journey that brought them to France. Pernot uses the traces of the migrants' presence in *La Jungle* as clues to weave these narratives together, yet uses similar techniques to the ones used to track the migrants and control their presence in France. Pernot subverts the very techniques of control that are applied to track down the 'criminalised' migrant. Carlo Ginzburg notes that:

the same conjectural paradigm employed to develop ever more subtle and capillary forms of control can become a device to dissolve the ideological clouds which increasingly obscure such a complex social structure as fully developed capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

These traces of the migrants' presence act as narrative clues that force the reader to think critically and to engage actively with the book's content. The weaving together of the narratives provides the reader with an alternative representation of the migrants. Media coverage of the presence of Afghan refugees in central Paris between 2009 and 2012 is scarce<sup>27</sup> and the connection with France's foreign policy and the presence of French troops in Afghanistan since 2001 is rarely mentioned, let alone questioned.

Following their traces to Paris, Pernot photographs the refugees near Square Villemin (colloquially known as Little Kabul), from where they were expelled. In 2012, Pernot met Jawad and Mansour, Afghan asylum seekers in Paris, and gave Jawad some school exercise books for him to write down the story of his journey from Kabul

to Paris; hence the narration in Farsi that opens the book and its translation in the final pages. The aesthetics of written Farsi divert the reader from the horrific story of the men's journey.

### A systemic violence

Jawad's narration uses the first person but clearly represents a story familiar among Afghan refugees. A long journey characterised by fear, thirst, hunger and sorrow is representative of every migrant's journey to Europe. Jawad's narration also gives the reader a cartographic sense of the journeys of young Afghans; from camps to prisons, from Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, Germany, back to Hungary, Austria, Italy and France. The detailed narration of all these places creates an assemblage of harsh, punitive and disciplinary spaces where people are imprisoned as soon as they enter a country. These places, though varied in the form they take – detention centres, camps, prisons etc. – share the same objective: to keep 'illegal' foreigners confined and away from wider society. They represent the most visible cog in the process of tracking and identifying migrants in order to facilitate sending them back legally to their country of origin. The treatment of the migrants within the camps is barely an improvement on what they suffered during the journey: 'Dans le camp on devait faire la queue juste pour pouvoir manger une banane, une pomme ou une poire.'<sup>28</sup> From each place to the next, the migrant – whether he/she is a refugee, in exile, an asylum seeker or an undocumented migrant – progressively loses his or her legal status via a process of criminalisation. In France, these processes include detention in one of the *Centres d'accueil pour demandeurs d'Asile* (CADA), *Centres de rétention* or, worse, incarceration in a mainstream prison.<sup>29</sup> As Jérôme Valluy observes,

Ces sites peuvent être définis juridiquement ou relever de «régimes» d'exception; refléter une banalisation politique et technocratique de la mise à l'écart des migrants ou bien une extension des «zones grises» de non droit à l'intérieur même des Etats de droit.<sup>30</sup>

In the same analytical vein, Cassaigne remarks that refugee camps are always the tools of a somewhat illusory policy of control: 'Ils sont d'abord les outils d'une politique migratoire, d'une volonté politique (illusoire?) de contrôle.'<sup>31</sup> Although camps used as a form of detention have existed in France's former colonies for centuries,

refugee camps also have a long history in French territory, such as during the Third Republic in response to migrations provoked by conflict.<sup>32</sup> The definition of ‘camps’ here is not understood in the sense of concentration camps, even less of extermination camps, but more as a space of confinement and control imposed upon migrants.<sup>33</sup> They were then, and remain nowadays, an emergency reaction in order to contain a flow of migration. These places, as Jawad’s narration reminds us, do not provide a refuge. A number of these places, such as *Le camp militaire du Larzac*,<sup>34</sup> *Le Centre de la Rye au Vigeant*, *Le camp militaire des Tourelles*, amongst others, have been deployed during different waves of migration to France: Russian, Jewish, colonial, postcolonial.<sup>35</sup> They represent, as Jawad and Mansour’s narration highlights, the need to erect a border zone, a containment space, when national frontiers have been transgressed. In conjunction with these emergency places, the French state began, after the end of the Algerian War of Independence, to use the practice of containment as a step towards legalised deportation within new structures: the *Centres de rétention*. Despite the fact that the practice of ‘retention’ was only legalised in 1981,<sup>36</sup> it was implemented on a large scale long before that. The *Centre d’Arenç* in Marseille was used in this way for a decade before its existence was revealed to the public in 1974.<sup>37</sup> The *Centre d’Arenç* first detained immigrants from Algeria who, despite the free circulation agreements contained in the Evian Agreements, had not been granted entry into French territory and were about to be deported. According to Ed Naylor, as of April 1963, all immigrants from Algeria had to go through a medical examination for sanitary purposes, and the medical examination was used as a means to refuse entry onto French territory to these people. They were therefore retained in Arenç inside the harbour zone in what was invoked as ‘public interest’.<sup>38</sup> Between 1965 and 1971, 50,000 people passed through Arenç and as of the beginning of the 1960s, the centre detained other migrants from former colonies (Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Mali).<sup>39</sup> Since then, these centres have been gradually legalised. The progressive legalisation of the containment of refugees was paramount for the July 2006 law through which Nicolas Sarkozy unearthed and legalised the 1930s concept of ‘immigration choisie’.<sup>40</sup> This law allows the French state to choose who it accepts as immigrants while simultaneously deporting all immigrants who are in contravention of the law – a



process called *la reconduite forcée à la frontière*.<sup>41</sup> This repressive apparatus is thus immediately reinforced by the more regular use of the penitentiary system. According to Marc Bernardot, most foreigners arrested in France are jailed due to an 'infraction à la législation sur les étrangers'<sup>42</sup> (ILE), and they represent around twenty per cent of prisoners in France.<sup>43</sup> Such treatment of refugees is indicative of the shift towards a more bureaucratic and repressive state.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Jawad's journey is his passage through these transitory spaces of circulation, a passage which entails the progressive criminalisation of his status which is made official via successive layers of bureaucracy. The evolution of the official language is testament to these changes: forty years ago such people were called 'réfugiés'. Since the 1970s 'demandeur d'asile'<sup>44</sup> has emerged as an administrative category to which the more transgressively marked 'sans-papiers'<sup>45</sup> was added as a result of 1970s legislation,<sup>46</sup> hence the creation of new camps that deal with the different categories (*centres provisoires d'hébergement* (CPH) for refugees, and *centres d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile* (CADA) specifically for asylum seekers).<sup>47</sup> Jawad's narration discloses the level of violence that is linked to his progressive criminalisation:

On m'emmène alors au commissariat et me présente un document écrit en Dari dans lequel il est indiqué que je suis un criminel, je leur demande pourquoi ils me considèrent comme un criminel alors que je n'ai rien fait de mal. Ils me répondent que le fait d'être entré en Allemagne sans papiers constitue un crime. Comme je n'ai pas le choix je signe ce document. Ma situation empire chaque jour davantage. En Hongrie, je signais un papier pour manger une pomme et en Allemagne, je signe un document pour reconnaître que je suis un criminel. Après les formalités administratives, la police m'envoie dans une prison très dure.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of this cycle of criminalisation Jawad's journey takes him from camps to real prisons:

Nous sommes convoqués chez un juge qui nous demande de payer soixante-dix euros chacun et nous condamne à passer dix jours en prison. En arrivant dans le centre de détention, on nous demande de nous déshabiller devant tout le monde et de subir une fouille au corps, ce qui est très difficile à supporter pour moi. Je reste dix jours en prison parmi des assassins et des trafiquants de drogue. Nous sommes comptés trois fois dans la journée. Ces dix jours furent aussi longs que cent ans pour moi.<sup>49</sup>

Jawad's journey embodies the tension between circulation and confinement, and reveals the tragic reality of population displacement legitimised by layer upon layer of bureaucracy. As Chowra Makaremi notes,

Les pratiques de détention et d'expulsion des étrangers au sein des Etats occidentaux renvoient en effet à des processus d'entrave institutionnalisée de la circulation et à des dispositifs de confinement, qui reconfigurent ensemble la question politique de la gestion migratoire [...] Cette dimension supplémentaire, qui est celle du mouvement, implique ainsi une approche dynamique du confinement, non plus seulement en termes d'«enfermement dans», mais également en termes de déplacements au sein d'un espace parallèle, à la marge.<sup>50</sup>

Once labelled a criminal, the migrant loses any identity and becomes 'l'ennemi de l'intérieur'.<sup>51</sup> The criminalisation of their status is concomitant with a form of systemic violence whereby the migrant progressively loses his/her humanity. The various layers of bureaucracy, such as legislation for seeking asylum, are employed to justify and rationalise the expulsion of an individual. Under the Dublin II agreements, adopted in 2003, refugees have to seek asylum in the first European country they enter, hence Jawad's treatment as a criminal. But the bureaucratic layers also underline the tensions between national policies and co-operation practices at the level of the EU as well as the tensions linked to the integration of Europe within the Schengen area as of 2007. Consider, for example, the new European steer on the concept of 'return' that allows for 'illegal immigrants' to be detained for a maximum of eighteen months, whereas previously in France the maximum permissible period was thirty-two days. The steer was passed by the European parliament on 18 June 2008 and is also applicable to pregnant women and children. This new means of control – containment and expulsion – has had a serious impact on the rights of refugees who have been treated as undesirables and removed legally. It also discloses the advent of a new global security order in which every human being has to fit into a specific category and in which migrants are kept marginalised and practically invisible until they fall into the category of the criminal. After having been arrested by the French police, Jawad says:

Je pense alors que nous sommes réfugiés sans pays. Les agents nous passent les menottes, mains derrière le dos, et nous font monter

dans une voiture avec gyrophare et sirène. Dans la ville, les passants doivent penser que les policiers ont arrêté des gens dangereux, alors que nous ne sommes que des réfugiés!<sup>52</sup>

According to Mathieu Bietlo, these detention centres fulfil a specific function in the postmodern era that is closely linked to the security praxis of the neo-liberal order:

le fonctionnement réel et symbolique des camps s'inscr[it] dans un schéma de société plus global: le néolibéralisme sécuritaire. La société de contrôle sécuritaire succède à la société disciplinaire de Foucault: les mécanismes sécuritaires sont à la mondialisation et à la production post-fordiste ce que les disciplines étaient à l'intégration nationale et à la production fordiste.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, parallel to the adoption of stricter and more precise legislation since 2001 and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, a hardening of the way in which refugees are treated has become increasingly evident and, as a result, refugees have been progressively classified and treated as 'illegal immigrants'. According to Loïc Wacquant, in his sociological study of the punitive nature of the neo-liberal era, the normalisation of the penal institution is reinforced by a profound discrimination against its targets. Wacquant argues that despite the rise of corporate criminality since the 1990s, only the lowest classes of society experience the direct consequences of this punitive turn. Clearly, Wacquant's analysis of the ways in which the poorest are punished can be extended to migrants. For him, this 'socio-ethnic selectivity' is the result of 'state crafting' and represents a pillar of the neo-liberal order that is cleverly legalised via heavy bureaucratic machinery.<sup>54</sup>

Following in the steps of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, Wacquant argues that the bureaucratic apparatus, Bourdieu's 'champ bureaucratique', has operated a colonisation of the welfare component of the state by panoptical and punitive logic which Wacquant sees as a remasculinisation of the state:

La priorité désormais accordée aux devoirs sur les droits, aux sanctions sur le soutien, la rhétorique rigide des 'obligations de la citoyenneté' et la réaffirmation martiale de la capacité de l'Etat à enfermer les 'populations à problèmes' (allocataires d'aides et délinquants) dans un rapport hiérarchique de dépendances et d'obéissance envers les managers d'Etat présentés comme les protecteurs virils de la société contre les membres qui tournent mal.<sup>55</sup>

The migrants, who require help and assistance, are punished for their own living conditions. Jawad concludes his narration with his arrival in Paris and a description of the living conditions he and his companions have had to endure: 'Dans cette ville, nous demandons l'asile et nous dormons dans des cartons. Notre situation est très mauvaise.'<sup>56</sup> The only way to justify such treatment in a 'democratic society' is to trivialise the violence they endure and to detach these people from their history and their humanity.

### The banality of violence

The everyday violence that sums up the lives of such migrants is explored in Pernot's work through two forms: narration and photography. It is conveyed directly via Jawad's narration of his journey and also conveyed in the *cahiers* written by Mansour, used for his French lessons and published alongside the photographs. The *cahiers* exhibit a language of survival which exposes very real problems with everyday communication. The interweaving of the brutality of the lists of words, Jawad's narrative of exile and the violence of the photographs offers a constant reminder of the dreadful conditions experienced by the two men: 'J'ai peur, j'ai mal, je cherche un travail, je prie pour son père, j'ai un peu de fièvre, je tousse beaucoup, je respire mal, il est mal, faux-papiers.'<sup>57</sup> Yet the publication of the unabridged narration of their journey also gives them back their voice, explaining why they are in Paris and what they went through to get there. Reading the translation at the back of the book gives the reader an *a posteriori* perspective on the photographs reviewed thus far.

Halfway through the book appears the first photograph of an Afghan refugee, by which point the reader has probably found the translation of the narration from Farsi and knows part of the story of Jawad and Mansour. What characterises the photographs is their commonplace nature; anyone who lives in a big city will recognise the similarity between these images and visions of homeless people seen, and ignored, during the early morning commute to work. The migrants are wrapped up in whatever material they have to protect themselves. (See figure 1). The level of personal detail disclosed in both Jawad's narration and Mansour's French lessons that allow the reader to see how global and geopolitical dynamics affect the individual, sits awkwardly with the anonymity of the bodies in the images. Pernot confides:



Figure 1. Mathieu Pernot, *Les Migrants*, 2009 (95x135 cm).

Invisibles, silencieux et anonymes, réduits à l'état de simple forme, les individus se reposent et semblent se cacher, comme s'ils voulaient s'isoler d'un monde qui ne veut plus les voir.

J'ai été ému par la présence de ces 'refoulés' de l'histoire, ces figures d'une mondialisation inversée. J'ai été troublé par la beauté ambiguë de ces formes qui rappelaient celles d'une autre Histoire. J'ai pensé que la meilleure image à faire était celle de leur sommeil, de cet ailleurs que l'on ne connaîtra jamais et qui constitue sans doute leur dernière échappée. Je n'ai pas voulu les réveiller. Je n'ai rien vu des migrants.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the most brutal impression one gets from the photographs is not of the terrible living conditions the images disclose but the fact that the readers are already familiar with seeing them. The recognition of the familiarity and banality of these images that could originate in any large city similarly hints at the structural violence conveyed in the photographs. This violence becomes gradually more uncomfortable and the images of the final pages increasingly suggest the notion of the body as a corpse, echoing the term, 'charnier' (mass grave) used by Pernot in his introduction to the book. Towards the end of the book the sleeping bodies are

wrapped in plastic and resemble corpses abandoned following a lethal accident, a murder, or deadly encounter on a battlefield. Similarly, the images evoke the dead bodies and casualties caused by the war ongoing in Afghanistan since 2001. The bodies become a site of narration, reconnecting the migrants with their history and the reasons for their journey, from which they are almost always detached. This tension between life and death produces the extreme violence of the photographs. As Slavoj Žižek observes, 'one of the things alienation means is that distance is woven into the very social texture of everyday life. Even if I live side by side with others, in my normal state I ignore them.'<sup>59</sup> It is this very state of oblivion that Pernot discloses when he says: 'Je n'ai rien vu des migrants' (I saw nothing of the migrants). In the case of these images, the reader's alienation only becomes apparent when confronted with the compilation of photographs and text. Just as the photographs of Abu Ghraib torture represent 'a direct insight into American values',<sup>60</sup> Mathieu Pernot's photographs of these Afghan migrants provide the reader with a direct insight into French neo-colonial culture and practices. They create a semantic link between the migrants' situation in exile and their history in Afghanistan, a photographic violence that finds direct roots and meaning in their everyday life as well as in France's intervention in Afghanistan. Yet it is the normalisation of violence that allows for this semantic link to be broken and which allows for the overlooking of the treatment these migrants receive in democratic societies like France.

The relationship between foreign interventions and domestic affairs is also echoed in Hannah Arendt's study, *On Violence*. For Arendt, there is a correlation between the violence used in international relations as a threat and that used in domestic affairs as a means of oppression: 'The more dubious and uncertain an instrument violence has become in international relations, the more it has gained in reputation and appeal in domestic affairs.'<sup>61</sup> Arendt establishes a clear link between the different forms of coercion and, in the case of Afghan refugees, violence links the two narratives that in the dominant Republican ideology are overwhelmingly kept separate: those of immigration policies and foreign interventions.

It is striking that in conjunction with a hardening of immigration policies and practices at the European level between 2007 and

2010, as referred to earlier, the number of French troops present in Afghanistan doubled to a total of some 4,000 soldiers by 2010. From 2012 the number of soldiers in Afghanistan decreased while other military interventions were launched in Mali and the Central African Republic. The correlation between the international scene and the domestic practices developed in Arendt's analysis of violence is clearly exemplified in the case of the Franco-Afghan relationship, whether in Afghanistan or in France. French forces have been in Afghanistan since 2001 as part of three distinct operations and in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), although France was not part of NATO at the time.<sup>62</sup> As a direct consequence of the military occupation of Afghanistan, 2011 was a record year for requests for asylum from Afghan citizens in the EU (35,700 requests, which is thirty-four per cent more than in 2010).<sup>63</sup> In the same year France was the country in Europe to receive the most asylum requests (56,250 requests, of which 37,605 were rejected).<sup>64</sup> In a more general picture, the number of French military interventions or *OPEX* (*opérations extérieures*) has not declined since 1997, but their affiliation to corporate interests is now legitimised by the endorsement these operations receive from bigger structures such as the EU, the UN or NATO. Between 1997 and 2015, for example, the French government undertook a total of twenty-eight interventions, which fall under four different categories: unilateral interventions, interventions under the EU banner, interventions under the UN banner and interventions under the NATO banner.<sup>65</sup>

The affiliation of military interventions and presence and corporate interests is especially obvious in the Afghan case. Between 2001 and 2014 fifteen powerful corporations, among them Airbus, Thalès and Bouygues, invested in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. As Tony Chafer has noted, the Chirac–Jospin cohabitation of 1997–2002 represented a milestone in reassessing French interests in its former colonies and took new directions marked by a focus on business links and a new policy of cooperation.<sup>66</sup> This coincided with the creation of *Le Mouvement des entreprises de France* (MEDEF) in 1998. This union of the corporate world in France has developed an international branch and holds meetings with different countries with whom they can develop investment and co-operative relationships – especially in countries under French military control such as Mali, the Central African Republic, Iraq,

Haiti and Afghanistan. The scale of natural resources present in Afghanistan – oil, gas, fossil fuels, minerals (iron in particular) and precious and semi-precious stones – explains the interest MEDEF shows in this part of the world. The need for cheap natural resources in western countries, coupled with the French government's geopolitical strategy of seeking to reintegrate into NATO, explains the support given to Operation Enduring Freedom led by the Americans in 2001.

The military occupation of Afghanistan is never directly addressed in Pernot's book, but the constant shift between the individual and personal narrative and the anonymous bodies of the photographs creates a space that allows the reader to see how such global and geopolitical dynamics affect the individual. The violence of the photos and the brutality disclosed by Jawad's narration bring together the two historical narratives of immigration and French foreign intervention which are usually divorced from each other for the purposes of political and ideological manipulation. The merging of these two elements of French history gives Pernot's book coherence and hints at its ambition to be politically *engagé*. But it also pushes the reader towards a metatextual form of reading, allowing for a more critical interpretation of media stories, which are habitually reified and isolated from their historical context. For Genette, metatextuality discloses 'the *critical* relationship par excellence'.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, Pernot is no longer merely a photographer but becomes a historian. As Michel de Certeau reminds us, 'faire de l'histoire c'est une pratique'.<sup>68</sup> He continues, 'en fait, l'écriture historique – ou historiographie – reste contrôlée par les pratiques dont elle résulte; bien plus, elle est elle-même une pratique sociale'.<sup>69</sup> This definition of history ties in with Bourdieu's *savoir engagé* in the sense that they both highlight the need for a critical social practice in line with the need for a deeper understanding of social phenomena. In *Contre-feux 2*, Bourdieu laments the phenomenon of 'Think Tank conservatives' – the thinkers, historians and academics who justify and facilitate the production of neo-liberal ideology.<sup>70</sup> Bourdieu argues that in order to question the tradition of the welfare state, such think tanks have had to organise a symbolic counter-revolution and to produce a 'doxa paradoxale'<sup>71</sup> in which traditional conservatives come to be viewed as progressives. According to Bourdieu, only a new type of committed scholar can oppose this neo-liberal apparatus. These



committed scholars have to be able to think critically in order to make visible these manipulations. This, for Bourdieu, is the definition of *savoir engagé*, or, 'scholarship with commitment'.<sup>72</sup> Like the historian who chooses which material to include and which to discard, Pernot chooses who and what to photograph and how to photograph the person or object. In Pernot's book, the narration is plural and reinserts the unaltered voices of the subjects themselves as the principal narrative voices: 'Je n'ai rien changé à ces écrits, à la brutalité du texte et au récit sur l'exil qu'ils constituaient.'<sup>73</sup> The space between the narrative voices allows for the reader to engage with the work, to connect all the voices and photographs together and ultimately to access a deeper understanding of the 'migrant question'. Pernot's work should thus be read as a form of Bourdieusian 'scholarship with commitment' in that it encourages the reader to reconnect two aspects of French history, in order to understand the ways in which social democracies justify and legalise the treatment and disposal of the most vulnerable. Jawad and Mansour's text and the photographs collated in Pernot's book should be viewed as historical documents.

Ultimately, Pernot's work transcends the concept of artistic production and discipline. It forcefully provides a historical counter-narrative and critical text that re-inscribes the story of refugees within a neo-colonial and global context. It subverts the dominant republican ideology and forces the reader to assess critically the situation of these people within and outside French borders, re-think the notion of 'peace-keeping' operations and ultimately reassess their status as human beings. Jawad's own description of his experience of living in France as a refugee is perhaps the most illustrative and powerful of the entire work: 'Des fois je regrette de ne pas être un chien car en Europe la situation des chiens est meilleure que celle des étrangers comme nous.'<sup>74</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Mathieu Pernot, *Les Migrants* (Paris: GwinZegal, 2012).
- 2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Contre-feux 2, Pour un mouvement social européen* (Paris: Éditions Raisons d'Agir, 2001), pp. 35–41.
- 3 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Pour un savoir engagé', *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February 2002). The same text is also published in *Interventions (1961–2001). Sciences sociales et action politique* (Marseille: Agone 2003).
- 4 Mathieu Pernot, *Les Migrants*, 'Une image se trouve à l'origine de ce travail. Une photographie entrevue dans un magazine associatif qui

- montrait quatre corps allongés à même le sol dans une forêt du nord de la France. La légende indiquait qu'il s'agissait d'Afghans, probablement épuisés, qui se reposaient à l'abri des regards indiscrets' ('This work was inspired by an image. A photograph glimpsed in a community magazine, showing four bodies lying on the ground in a forest in the north of France. The caption indicated that they were Afghans, probably exhausted, taking a nap away from prying eyes'). (All translations into English of Pernot's French text and Jawad's narration are by Dr Amanda Crawley Jackson).
- 5 'It was a violent image, a photograph of war. The bodies looked like corpses, laid out in such a way as to evoke the tragic aspect of a mass grave'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
  - 6 'In 2012 I met Jawad and Mansour, Afghan asylum seekers in Paris. I gave Jawad some school exercise books and asked him to write down the story of his journey from Kabul to Paris. Every time we met he would give me a few pages of his story, which he would translate for me. For me, these stories also contained the story of the modern age, the negative history of globalisation. Mansour lent me the exercise books which he had been using for his French lessons'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
  - 7 'I visited this 'wild' forest in Calais several times ... The traces of what used to be shacks and the remains of sleeping bags are its most visible signs'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
  - 8 M. Morokvasic, 'La guerre et les réfugiés dans l'ex-Yougoslavie', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 8/2 (1992), 5–25.
  - 9 V. Carrère, 'Sangatte, un toit pour des fantômes', *Hommes et Migrations*, 1238 (2002), 13.
  - 10 O. Thomas, 'Des émigrants dans le passage. Une approche géographique de la condition de clandestin à Cherbourg et sur les côtes de la Manche' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université de Caen, 2011), 228.
  - 11 'A transitory space, a space to heal bodies'; Smaïn Laacher, *Après Sangatte... Nouvelles immigrations, nouveaux enjeux* (Paris: La Dispute, 2002), p. 25. (Unless otherwise stated all translations are the author's own.)
  - 12 A very detailed description of Sangatte from the inside is offered in Carrère, 'Sangatte, un toit pour des fantômes', 15.
  - 13 'les lois du 10 janvier 1980 et du 2 février 1981 ont légalisé la pratique de la privation de liberté sur décision administrative en vue de l'exécution forcée d'une mesure d'éloignement' ('The laws of 10 January 1980 and 2 February 1981 legalised the practice of the deprivation of freedom following an administrative decision with a view to forced removal'), <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-773/r13-7733.html>.
  - 14 'The undocumented migrant is different from the average immigrant, asylum seeker or undocumented refugee. Of course, terms like migrant, illegal immigrant, undocumented, economic refugees, political refugees, illegals, exiles, etc., are words of everyday language which can be used interchangeably without inhibiting

- comprehension since everyone understands that they represent a single truth: the presence of those who were not there from the beginning'; Smain Laacher, *Le Peuple des clandestins* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2007), p. 19.
- 15 K. Long, 'When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection', *Migration Studies*, 1 (2013), 5.
  - 16 Anicet Le Pors, *Le Droit d'Asile*, (Paris: PUF, 2005), p. 21.
  - 17 K. Long, 'When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants', 21.
  - 18 The term 'migrant' will be used in this chapter in order to respect the title of Mathieu Pernot's book. For a discussion of this process of 'labelling' see R. Zetter, 'More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20 (2007), 172–92.
  - 19 'everything has been done as if the camps were awakening fear and guilty consciences, and the truth needed to be hidden, but also, at the same time, the stakes of these migrations. They needed to be less visible. Sangatte was too visible. It was preferable to see them dispersed in more improvised settlements around Calais'; B. Cassaigne, 'Ouverture', *Revue Projet*, 308 (2009), 38–40.
  - 20 'The traces of what used to be shacks and the remains of sleeping bags are its most visible signs. Sometime after this, back in Paris, I took photographs of Afghan migrants who were catching a few hours' sleep between daybreak and the arrival of the police, come to move them on. The abandoned blankets I had seen in the forest were once again inhabited by bodies I could only imagine'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
  - 21 Jean Révillard, *Jungles, Abris de fortune aux abords de la Manche* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2009).
  - 22 Mathieu Pernot, *Un camp pour les Bohémiens* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2001).
  - 23 Carlo Ginzburg, '« Signes, traces, pistes » Racines d'un paradigme de l'indice', *Le Débat*, 6 (1980), 3–44. Translated as 'the evidential paradigm', in 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', reprinted in the proceedings of the conference 'Tiziano e Venezia', Venice, 1980, <https://www.princeton.edu/~ereading/Ginzburg%20Clues.pdf>.
  - 24 Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', *Theory and Society*, 7/3 (1979), 123.
  - 25 Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm', 280.
  - 26 Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', 123.
  - 27 For example: 'Les Afghans du square Villemain iront dormir ailleurs', *Libération* (19 August, 2009); 'Exilés afghans Terminus: Jardin Villemain', *Nouvel Observateur* (15 June, 2012).
  - 28 'In the camp, we had to queue just to get a banana, apple or pear'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
  - 29 C. Makaremi and C. Kobelinsky, 'Editorial. Confinement des étrangers: entre circulation et enfermement', *Cultures & Conflits*, 71 (2008), 7–11.
  - 30 'Such places can be defined in legal terms or equally fall outside the normal framework of the law; they reflect a political and technocratic banalisation of the exclusion of migrants, or rather an extension of

- the “grey zones” where people have no rights within states that otherwise uphold the law’; J. Valluy, ‘Introduction: L’Europe des camps. La mise à l’écart des étrangers’, *Cultures & Conflits*, 57 (2005), 3.
- 31 ‘They are first and foremost the tools of a migratory policy, the tools of a somewhat illusory policy of control’; Cassaigne, ‘Ouverture’, 39.
- 32 Denis Peschanski, *La France des camps, l’internement, 1938–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).
- 33 For extensive definitions, see Marc Bernardot, *Camps d’étrangers* (Paris: Éditions du Croquant, 2008).
- 34 M. Bernardot, ‘Être interné à Larzac: les Algériens dans les centres d’assignation à résidence surveillée, 1958–1962’, *Politix*, 69 (2005), 39–61.
- 35 M. Bernardot, ‘Les camps d’étrangers, dispositif colonial au service des sociétés de contrôle’, *Revue Projet*, 308 (2009), 41–50.
- 36 ‘la rétention administrative a véritablement été créée par la loi «Questiaux» du 29 octobre 1981’ (‘administrative retention was put in place by the 29 October 1981 “Questiaux” law’), <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-773/r13-7733.html>.
- 37 E. Naylor, ‘Arenc: Le premier centre de rétention était clandestin’, *Plein droit*, 104 (2015), 32–6; and Mathieu Rigouste, *L’Ennemi Intérieur* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), p. 49.
- 38 Naylor, ‘Arenc: Le premier centre de rétention était clandestin’, 33.
- 39 Naylor, ‘Arenc: Le premier centre de rétention était clandestin’, 34.
- 40 ‘chosen immigration’.
- 41 ‘deportation’.
- 42 ‘violation of the law regarding foreigners’.
- 43 M. Bernardot, ‘Les camps d’étrangers, dispositif colonial au service des sociétés de contrôle’, 49.
- 44 ‘Asylum seeker’.
- 45 ‘undocumented immigrant’.
- 46 Smain Laacher, *Mythologie du Sans-Papiers* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2009), p. 17.
- 47 Since 2004 the co-ordination of these places is no longer left to France Terre d’Asile (FTDA) but to the Office des Migrations Internationales (OMI) which became in 2005 l’Agence Nationale de l’Accueil des Etrangers et des Migrations (ANAEM), recently attached to the Ministry of Labour.
- 48 ‘They took me to a police station and presented me with a document written in Dari that said I was a criminal. I asked them why they considered me a criminal when I hadn’t done anything wrong. They told me that entering Germany without the right papers is a crime. As I didn’t have a choice I signed the document. My situation was getting worse and worse every day. In Hungary, I had to sign a paper to eat an apple and in Germany I signed a paper to acknowledge that I was a criminal. After the administrative formalities were over, the police sent me to a really rough prison’; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
- 49 ‘We were brought to the judge who fined us all 70 euros and sentenced us to ten days in prison. Arriving at the detention centre, we were told to get undressed in front of everyone and then to undergo a body

- search, which I found really difficult to bear. I spent ten days in prison, locked up with murderers and drug mules. There was a head count three times a day. Those ten days felt like a hundred years to me'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
- 50 ('The practices of detention and expulsion of foreigners in Western states relate in fact to processes of institutionalised restriction of movement and to systems of containment which together reconfigure the politics of migration control. This extra dimension of movement thus implies a dynamic approach to containment, no longer merely in terms of "enclosure within", but equally in terms of displacement within a parallel space, on the margins.');
- 51 C. Makaremi and C. Kobelinsky, 'Editorial. Confinement des étrangers: entre circulation et enfermement', 7–11.
- 52 'the enemy within'; see M. Rigouste, 'L'ennemi intérieur, de la guerre coloniale au contrôle sécuritaire', *Cultures & Conflits*, 67 (2007), 157–174.
- 53 'I had the thought at that moment that we were stateless refugees. The police handcuffed us, hands behind our backs, made us get in a police car and put the blues and twos. In town, the passers-by must have thought that the police had arrested some dangerous people, but we're just refugees!'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
- 54 'The everyday and symbolic ruling of the camps finds itself in a more global social scheme: the security praxis of the neo-liberal order. This society of security and control follows on from Foucault's disciplinary society: the mechanisms of security are to globalisation and post-Fordist production what discipline was to national integration and Fordist production'; M. Bietlot, 'Le camp, révélateur d'une politique inquiétante de l'étranger', *Cultures & Conflits*, 57 (2005), 221–50.
- 55 L. Wacquant, 'Foucault, Bourdieu et l'Etat pénal à l'ère néolibérale' in D. Zamora (ed.), *Critiquer Foucault: Les années 80 et la tentation néolibérale* (Brussels: Editions Aden, 2014) 114–33.
- 56 'The new priority given to duties over rights, sanction over support, the stern rhetoric of the "obligations of citizenship," and the martial reaffirmation of the capacity of the state to lock the "troublemaking poor" (welfare recipients and criminals) in a subordinate relation of dependence and obedience toward state managers portrayed as virile protectors of the society against its wayward members'; L. Wacquant, 'Foucault, Bourdieu et l'Etat pénal à l'ère néolibérale', 2. The translation is taken from L. Wacquant, 'Bourdieu, Foucault, and the Penal State in the Neoliberal Era', in D. Zamora and M. C. Behrent (eds), *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 117.
- 57 'In this city, we ask for asylum and we sleep rough on cardboard boxes. Our situation is very bad'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
- 58 'I am scared, It hurts, I am looking for work, I pray for his father, I have a bit of a fever, I cough a lot, I cannot breathe properly, he is not well, fake ID'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.
- 59 'Invisible, silent and anonymous, reduced to a simple outline, the individuals rest and seem to hide as if they wanted to isolate

- themselves from a world that does not want to see them. I was moved by the presence of these souls “forsaken” by history, the figures of an inverse globalisation. I was troubled by the ambiguous beauty of these figures reminiscent of another history. I thought that the best image to take was that of them sleeping, of that elsewhere that we will never see and which without doubt constitutes their last escape. I did not want to wake them. I saw nothing of the migrants’; Mathieu Pernot, ‘Portfolio Migrants’, in *Études photographiques*, 27 (2011), n.p.
- 59 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 51.
- 60 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 150.
- 61 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, (New York: Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc, 1969), p. 11.
- 62 Opération Pamiir under the auspices of NATO was France’s contribution to the ISAF (The International Security Assistance Force). Operation Epidote (in charge of training the Afghan army) and Operation Arès are France’s contribution to the OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom) under American leadership.
- 63 ‘Le dispositif français pour l’Afghanistan; Ministère de la Défense, 2014, [www.defense/operations/autres-operations/operations-achevees/operation-pamiir-2001-2014/dossier-de-presentacion-de-l-operation-pamiir/le-dispositif-francais-pour-l-afghanistan](http://www.defense/operations/autres-operations/operations-achevees/operation-pamiir-2001-2014/dossier-de-presentacion-de-l-operation-pamiir/le-dispositif-francais-pour-l-afghanistan).
- 64 ‘Panorama statistique des demandes d’asile déposées en Europe et dans les pays non-européens’, UNHCR, 2011, [www.unhcr.org/fr/4fbf48729.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/fr/4fbf48729.pdf).
- 65 There have been ten unilateral interventions, two of which took place in Afghanistan – operations Héraclès and Arès – while there were others in Chad, West Africa, the Central African Republic, Liberia, Lebanon, Colombia, Libya and Mali. Since the 1980s there have been four on-going interventions, such as Opération Épervier in Chad and Opération Héraclès in Afghanistan, launched in support of the American intervention, ‘Enduring Freedom’, Opération Serval in Mali (facilitated by Opération Épervier in Chad), which has merged with MINUSMA, and Opération Corymbe in West African in 1990. There were also five interventions under the EU banner (Macedonia, the East Africa Great Lakes region, Bosnia, Chad and CAR), four under the NATO banner (Bosnia, Kosovo, Operation Pamiir in Afghanistan and Libya), and nine interventions under the auspices of the UN: two in Haiti and others in the Ivory Coast, Western Sahara, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo, Kosovo and Liberia.
- 66 T. Chafer, ‘Franco-African Relations: No Longer So Exceptional?’ *African Affairs*, 101 (2002), 343–63.
- 67 Gérard Genette. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 4.
- 68 ‘Making history is a practice’; Michel de Certeau, *L’écriture de l’Histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 95; *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 69.
- 69 ‘In fact, historical writing – or historiography – has been controlled by the practices from which it results; even more, it is itself a social

- practice [...]; de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'Histoire*, p. 121; *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, p. 87.
- 70 Bourdieu, *Contre-feux 2*, pp. 35–41.
- 71 Bourdieu, *Contre-feux 2*, p. 40.
- 72 Bourdieu, *Contre-feux 2*, p. 40.
- 73 ('I have changed nothing of these writings, of the brutality of the text or of the exile narrative that they offered.')
- 74 Sometimes I wish I were a dog because in Europe, dogs have a better life than foreigners like us'; Pernot, *Les Migrants*.

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## 10

# *Engagement au marteau:* Michel Onfray's *Université Populaire*

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JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC HENNUY

'Freedom is conquered and built socially,  
education cannot start from freedom,  
but can lead to it' (Bakhtin)

'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a  
fire' (W.B. Yeats)

'La prise de conscience c'est l'émeute'<sup>1</sup> (May '68  
demonstrator).

In *Anarchism and Education*, Judith Suissa states that 'the basic structural relations between the kind of society we live in and the kind of education we have are, more often than not, taken for granted.'<sup>2</sup> Most of us tend to disregard too easily and too frequently the importance of how specific political aims and values are promoted through the educational systems within our societies. It can be argued that the established educational institutions that exist within capitalist societies, while they purport to be ideologically neutral, in fact seek to reproduce a structure of exploitation and domination. The principle of such a logic is simple: a neutral education is almost an oxymoron. It cannot exist because, as Silvio Gallo explains:

Puisqu'il n'y a pas d'éducation neutre, puisque toute éducation se fonde sur une conception de l'homme et une conception de la société, il s'agit de définir de quel homme et de quelle société nous sommes en train de parler. Comme il n'y a pas de sens à ne pas



penser un individu libre dans la société anarchiste, il s'agit d'éduquer un homme engagé non dans la reproduction de la société d'exploitation, mais dans la lutte et la construction d'une nouvelle société.<sup>3</sup>

It is within such a critical frame of mind and in order to challenge the doxa and dogma of education that the French philosopher Michel Onfray founded the Université Populaire de Caen in 2002. Onfray is a prolific hedonist and anarchist philosopher who became both popular and controversial by publishing a book on atheism in 2005, *Le Traité d'athéologie*<sup>4</sup> and on Freud in 2010, *Le crépuscule d'une idole. L'affabulation freudienne*.<sup>5</sup> More recently some of his comments regarding the migrant crisis and the Paris attacks of November 2015 have also attracted criticism and sparked controversy. He is also known for creating the previously mentioned Université Populaire de Caen. Following the shock of the 2002 presidential elections, in which Jean-Marie Le Pen got through to the second round to oppose Jacques Chirac, Onfray decided to create the Université Populaire as a response to the need for collective education. The project of the Université Populaire is based on anarchist principles. First, seminars, totally free of charge, are offered to anyone regardless of their age, socio-economic background or degree of formal education, and the aim is the democratisation of culture. It started with Onfray's seminar on the counter-history of philosophy and now offers more than twenty subjects. Secondly, this democratisation of culture can only be achieved outside the grip of the state and capitalist society. Nevertheless, Michel Onfray wanted to retain the values which led him to teach in the first place: the pleasure of transmitting knowledge, of giving, generosity, sharing, and, at the same time, resistance to political obscurantism. His ethical approach to pedagogy was, and still is, that by reading and analysing writers and philosophers who allow and help us to understand and dispel the fears that make us, for example, racist or anti-Semitic, it is possible to access a higher level of cultural awareness and political consciousness. As Michel Onfray explains:

Ce n'est pas de dire 'vous êtes antisémite qui est dégueulasse.' Mais c'est de dire 'vous êtes antisémite, je comprends que vous le soyez. Vous avez tort, je vais vous dire pourquoi vous avez tort, mais je vais vous dire pourquoi ça marche comme ça. Je peux vous expliquer pourquoi vous avez peur du noir, vous avez peur du juif, vous avez peur du beur, vous avez peur de l'homosexuel, vous avez peur de l'autre'.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will present the concept of the *Université Populaire* as developed by Michel Onfray, and show how its philosophical, political and pedagogical principles allow the fostering of an epimethean anarchism (an outlook and a stance on collaboration, the potential for autonomous experiences and mutual aid to provide human progress and justice), and therefore it will argue that the creation of the *Université Populaire*, based on anarchist principles of autonomy, co-operation, community, voluntary association, and direct action, is an act of *engagement*, an act of resistance that seeks to bring the general population out of political ignorance and to oppose pervasive neoliberal capitalism. My main purpose will be to analyse how the *Université Populaire* rejects the imposition of a dogmatic form of teaching which estranges students and teachers, and instead offers a 'kind of teaching which is mutual, fraternal, a kind of friendship'.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the focus of this chapter will be an analysis of the ways in which the *Université Populaire* confronts the state's structure of education in order to escape its de facto mission of social reproduction and instead takes on a role which is transformative of the social order.

Noam Chomsky has explained that a

principal critique [of the state structure of education] from anarchist educators has been that the authority relations between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and between schools and the state are part of a formidable hierarchy that seeks to instil and reproduce amenable attitudes toward institutional authorities and deference toward authority as such.<sup>8</sup>

As a form of political engagement opposing this attitude, the *Université Populaire* aims to awaken the people's consciousness or, to put it more bluntly, to generate and instigate what the environmental activist and philosopher Pierre Rabhi calls 'une insurrection des consciences'<sup>9</sup> or exacerbate what Deleuze called 'le devenir révolutionnaire des individus'.<sup>10</sup> Such an education, therefore, seeks to test the permanent elasticity of capitalism, again in Silvio Gallo's words: 'en mettant sous tension en permanence, en cherchant les points de rupture qui permettent l'émergence du nouveau à travers le développement des consciences et des actes qui cherchent à échapper aux limites du capitalisme'.<sup>11</sup>

### The history of an ideal

Onfray did not invent the Université Populaire, and does not present himself as having done so, but rather sees himself as a follower of its creator, Georges Deherm, who set up the first Université Populaire in 1896 in the wake of the wave of anti-Semitism generated by the Dreyfus affair. Deherm believed that anti-Semitism was rampant among the working classes as a consequence of their lack of access to education and knowledge. As a response, his idea was to send the greatest minds of his time (such as Anatole France, Alain, Paul Valéry, Charles Péguy and Henri Bergson) to instruct and educate the working class in culture, philosophy and science, free of charge. The institution lasted until the First World War. It had a very short lifespan owing to a variety of factors, amongst which were the lack of communication skills, issues with pedagogy and internal conflicts, as Onfray explains in *Rendre la raison populaire*:

l'incapacité à créer une véritable dynamique entre les professeurs et le public des assemblées; l'inaptitude des conférenciers à pratiquer une pédagogie qui permette une véritable communication; le défaut d'une ligne claire; les divisions internes sur le statut à laisser aux adversaires [de l'université populaire]: les inviter ou non; l'effacement progressif du dreyfusisme historique qui constituait le ciment de l'alliance des intellectuels scientifiques et de certains socialistes; la démobilisation contemporaine ou consécutive au lâchage des journalistes tournant le dos à ce qui est passé de mode [...] les difficultés financières [...] l'opposition entre la ligne 'effort et rigueur', credo de Georges Deherme, et la ligne 'loisir, amusement, distraction'; la motivation mondaine et non militante d'un certain nombre d'acteurs [...]<sup>12</sup>

And finally it lost its political appeal. It did not manage to contain the wave of militarism, anti-Semitism, racism and nationalism that led to the declaration of war in 1914.

In the light of the 2002 French presidential elections Michel, Onfray saw a historical parallel with the political situation that pertained at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Université Populaire de Caen is based on the Université Populaire established by Deherm in order to try to educate people so that such a disastrous event did not happen again. Onfray's decision to create the Université Populaire in Caen was driven by the same ideas as those

of Deherm. Onfray's initiative was a political reaction to the rise of far-right extremism in the French political landscape, a tendency which was possible, according to Onfray, because the French were kept in ignorance by a neo-liberal economic system presented as the only possibility, the only political alternative, by the right as well as by the left.

Both Onfray's and Deherm's projects were based on the same revolutionary ideals, although some critics have argued that the social conditions in today's world and those existing in the nineteenth century are dramatically different. Onfray's response to this objection is that 'nous sommes encore nombreux à épouser des idées reçues et des opinions qui nous enchaînent; avec le savoir, nous pouvons espérer nous en déprendre.'<sup>13</sup> The ethical tenets of Onfray's *Université Populaire* find their origins in the preamble of the French Declaration of Human Rights (1789) and Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The Preamble starts by stating that 'the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments,'<sup>14</sup> and Article 27 states that 'Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'<sup>15</sup> Onfray sees in these two articles the principles that led to the promotion of human rights by opening the door to the creation and development of a system of education where, in the words of Condorcet, 'la raison devient populaire.'<sup>16</sup> Taking inspiration from Enlightenment philosophy, Onfray views reason as the essential factor leading to individual and collective emancipation. In the context of the contemporary political situation, Onfray considered that preserving and putting into practice such an ideal at the *Université Populaire de Caen* was imperative in the sense that both types of emancipation suppose compliance with two axioms: 'l'ignorance enchaîne et le savoir libère'.<sup>17</sup>

### Epimethean anarchism

Onfray's aim in creating the *Université Populaire* was to establish a type of education based on anarchist principles, and the argument put forward in this chapter is that he developed a form of education which can be conceptualised as a type of epimethean anarchist education. The term epimetheanism comes from Ivan Illich's

*Deschooling Society*.<sup>18</sup> The concept developed by Illich is rooted in the Greek mythology of the two brothers Prometheus (meaning ‘fore-thought’) and Epimetheus (meaning ‘after-thought’). Prometheus stole fire from the gods in order to give it to humankind because his brother was required to give traits to all of the beings of the earth, but lacking any fore-thought, he gave them all away before reaching humanity. The result of Prometheus’ action was his subjection to eternal punishment (Prometheus is chained to a rock, and his liver is eaten daily by an eagle. Because of Prometheus’ immortality, the liver regenerates every night for the torment to start again the next day). Historically, the figure of Prometheus has come

to symbolise humanity’s prophetic, educative and justice-seeking aspects [...] [it] is emblematic of the human potential for daring political deeds, technological ingenuity, and general rebellion against the powers that be to improve human life [...] [and finally it] is also representative of the industrial strivings of modernity to produce solutions to what are perceived to be given problems of natural scarcity and worldly imperfection through the ideology of progress.<sup>19</sup>

Illich did not content himself with the simplistic interpretation of Prometheus which considered him as the saviour and his brother, Epimetheus as the dull-witted one. He revisited the myth in order to pay greater attention to the importance of the role of Pandora (the keeper of the box containing all worldly evils and one good, hope), whom Prometheus advised his brother not to marry because he believed her to be the punishment given by the gods to humanity for the acquisition of fire. Pandora’s action in the opening of her box and the unleashing of all its negative content is instrumental even today in the promotion of the notion that women are the root of all humanity’s troubles, perpetuated in the figures of Lot and Eve. Illich did not perceive Pandora in such a light. He viewed her as ‘the keeper of hope’, and Epimetheus as ‘the ancient archetype of those who freely give and recognise gifts, care for and treasure life, and attend to the conservation of seeds of hope in the world for future others’.<sup>20</sup> Epimethean anarchism can therefore be defined as offering the possibility of a ‘utopian dream of human progress and justice, which attempts to offer faith in humanity’,<sup>21</sup> not just from an ideological standpoint, but also in the potential for autonomous experience and mutual aid.

Such potential for autonomy and mutual aid can be encouraged by the direct action of education in order to change the relations between people and communities. This is where epimethean anarchism can play a pedagogical role because, as Richard Kahn explains:

Epimetheanism represents a counter-pedagogy to both contemporary technocratic forms of institutional social reproduction and the versions of critical pedagogy that oppose technocratic education on behalf of an ethic of social justice that is conceived as the equitable distribution of modern life's benefits.<sup>22</sup>

Epimethean anarchism can, then, counter the misuse of education for the demands of 'global fascism' and 'the inhumane industrial social system' in Kahn's terms.<sup>23</sup> For Illich's epimethean anarchism, the question is not to oppose technology or civilisation but more importantly to defend 'convivial tools'<sup>24</sup> which can counteract the 'obverse of rampant technocracy and the globalisation of corporate development'.<sup>25</sup> Such tools of conviviality are, according to Illich, 'the promoters of learning, sociability, community, autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment'.<sup>26</sup>

### **The principles of the Université Populaire**

Onfray has positioned the Université Populaire within this philosophical ethics which are, as I explain later, also embedded in the name of Université Populaire itself. On the one hand, Onfray's conception of 'university' has nothing to do with the university as a state institution. The Université Populaire goes counter to many notions considered as constitutive of the French education system as we know it today: with qualifications ranging from the *Baccalauréat* to the *Agrégation* and leading to Masters and Doctoral degrees. These are codified exercises that measure the effect of received teaching/learning in any specific field. In order to explain his approach Onfray takes an example close to his heart, that of philosophy: within the Université Populaire, the curriculum would contain a legitimate corpus that favours the study of specific texts, ideas and concepts from philosophers belonging to the academic canon but also from philosophers excluded from the traditional university curriculum, which is too often solely based on biography

and history. As Onfray explains: ‘L’Université institutionnelle, pour ce qui est de la philosophie, ne forme pas des philosophes, mais des historiens de la philosophie.’<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the Université Populaire should not be mistaken for a philosophy café. It is not a place for social, informal conversation where one of the participants, out of the blue, identifies a subject to discuss which will be elaborated upon by the philosopher-tutor for two hours and embellished with a few quotations and references to well-known philosophers. Unlike these two pedagogical conceptions, the Université Populaire functions in accordance with the anarchist principle: ‘ni dieu ni maître’ (‘no god, no master’). In other words, it operates in opposition to the hijacking of the transmission of knowledge by a small elitist group of academics and to the demagoguery of taking knowledge down to the people or, in Onfray’s words: ‘le mettre sur le trottoir.’<sup>28</sup>

Onfray’s Université Populaire has the study of practical philosophy in everyday life as its guiding principle. As he explains, the Université Populaire and its teaching aspire to be anchored in the concrete world:

elle [the Université Populaire] ne se réfère à aucun centre philosophique de façon partisane, et ne privilégie pas les marges par principe. Elle place l’édification existentielle au premier rang des préoccupations. Elle ne se soucie pas d’une quelconque évaluation, elle laisse à chacun le soin de cheminer à son rythme.<sup>29</sup>

Every question is worth consideration as a philosophical subject, each individual evolves at his or her own pace and rhythm towards wisdom. There is no formal assessment. Teaching is based on the interaction between theory and practice, between life and the works of authors studied. The pedagogy of the Université Populaire is anchored in the hedonistic principle of the body’s implication in the creation of one’s own existential reason.

According to Tanguy Wuillème, the adjective *populaire* has three meanings: it can have a quantitative sense, meaning something common, widespread or well known; it can also mean something ‘non-sophisticated’, conceived with a certain economy of means and simplicity of intention; and finally, it can cover the cultural habits of a particular social class, the most disadvantaged and underprivileged in the social organisation.<sup>30</sup> Although the aim of the Université Populaire is to circulate within these three spheres



of meaning, the adjective 'populaire' does not solely refer to either 'workers' or 'proletariat'. According to Onfray, the oligarchic French intellectual elite is antipathetic to 'le peuple' (common people/the working class), because it considers them to be an uncouth, vulgar, proletarian category of society, associated with brutality, stupidity and spinelessness.<sup>31</sup> From this ideological perspective, the collocation of *université* and *populaire* can only be conceived of as an oxymoron. Indeed the first word refers to intellectual refinement while the second would tend to refer to triviality.<sup>32</sup> Such an understanding leads to potential confusion between the terms *populaire* and populist. Onfray's *Université Populaire* is *populaire* in the sense of *plébéienne*<sup>33</sup> (plebeian) because it promotes an altruistic model in opposition to the capitalist one; it offers a space of resistance to the constraints and hierarchy of the traditional university; its independence is the guarantor of its public service mission; it aims to transfer knowledge that does not require the recipient to have been immersed in culture from birth, and 'elle a pour but de faire le lien entre des savoirs disséminés, éclatés, et un savoir d'avantage construit et élaboré'.<sup>34</sup> It is conceived as a space where everything can be questioned and criticised in an non-authoritarian atmosphere but it is also in Wuillème's term a 'machine de bataille [...] un lieu protégé pour des contre-pouvoirs aux forces de l'histoire ou de la société. Il s'agit d'une microcommunauté résistante'.<sup>35</sup>

Taking this framework as a starting point, the *Université Populaire* is based upon two anarchist principles: autonomy and the questioning of authority. First, in an article on the purpose of the *Université Populaire*, Philippe Corcuff explains that the 'élargissement de l'autonomie individuelle au sein d'une cité favorisant des sociabilités polyphoniques appelle l'adoption de certaines méthodes plus ajustées à ce projet'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore the seminars favour critical thinking, they challenge all sorts of bias and provoke students to reflect upon themselves and the world, and they encourage autonomous learning rather than the imposition of dogmatic truths and solutions. In other words the pedagogical practice consists of providing a map and a compass with which anybody following a seminar at the *Université Populaire* can investigate by him/herself, trace his/her own route, invent his/her own map. Corcuff mentions the influence of critical thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu. Indeed the value accorded to autonomy echoes

the Bourdieusian notion of the autonomous intellectual as a rebel who asserts his or her radical independence from all institutions and from external and internal rules such as those coming from university or the state.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, Corcuff remains perfectly conscious that there are pitfalls of which the tutor must be aware: 'l'enseigné peut facilement être tenté de transformer la carte et la boussole en route quasi obligatoire [...] et l'enseignant peut prendre plaisir à ce que des adeptes le suivent de trop près dans ses pérégrinations, ou peut manifester quelque agacement à l'égard des récalcitrants.'<sup>38</sup> The role of the tutor is not only to facilitate the transmission of knowledge and to dispel spontaneous bias but also to create a space for criticism so that the emerging relationship between the tutor and tutee is not one based on power.<sup>39</sup>

Although he is not immune to it, the anarchist tutor must avoid taking on the position of the guru, as Michel explains: 'Le pédagogue libertaire travaille à son effacement personnel et cultive la puissance interrogative.'<sup>40</sup> This attitude reinforces the pedagogical importance of fostering autonomy and of another anarchist principle: the need always to enable self-criticism. For Illich, a 'renewal of education [needs] an institutional framework which constantly educates for action, participation and self-help',<sup>41</sup> and in common with the principles of intellectual mobility, imagination, dialogues transcending borders and interdisciplinary co-operation, the Université Populaire seeks to reinvent education, building on the anarchist principles of freedom, equality and community. It enables a specific and particular connection to political criticism, and, as such, provides tools for the understanding of contemporary society.

### Epimethean anarchist pedagogy

In order to step away from what Onfray views as an education that is authoritarian and castrating, and to make education a constructive experience that enables an awakening of each individual's philosophical potential, what can be considered to be the principles of traditional conventional higher education do not have to be thrown away. Indeed, there are aspects of the institutional university system which Onfray decided to keep, such as the explicit link between research and content where the course content solely derives from the tutor's research projects.

Certain notions that recall those of the philosophy café are also important to the concept of the *Université Populaire*: the right to come and go freely, the absence of assessment and selection, and the absence of fees. Each session is run in the same way, constructed around blocks of two hours. The first hour is dedicated to a lecture, a presentation on the current research project of the tutor, where arguments, readings and ideas are presented. These are then explained and analysed from the point of view of the tutor whose purpose is to offer an alternative history of ideas. The second hour is organised around public participation, intended as an exchange not only with the tutor but also with the other members of the public. This pedagogical situation is not created with the purpose of creating a distinction – in the Bourdieusean sense: ‘Il ne s’agit pas de hiérarchiser les propos tenus par les auditeurs afin de reconstituer une figure d’*homo academicus*.’<sup>42</sup> The *Université Populaire* seeks to offer a space in which communication is fostered by interactive spoken exchange. Justin Mueller defines such a pedagogical approach as the

act of rendering the hegemonic or the sacred questionable and open to dissection, and extending to students an invitation to this sacrilege and represents anarchism’s primary pedagogical distinction. That it is an open *invitation* [...] allows anarchism to (at least partially) resolve the problematic paradox of attempting to develop free and critical minds without extensive coercion in instruction.<sup>43</sup>

The *Université Populaire*’s pedagogical structure, based on what Onfray calls ‘un dispositif pédagogique interactif’<sup>44</sup> allows students/ participants to work in common, each according to his or her means, rhythm and interests. In so doing the *Université Populaire* does not offer models to follow blindly but offers existential outlines to meditate and explore.

Out of such a dynamic arises the possibility of a contract, as Onfray explains, an epicurean contract, between the members of the community: ‘[un] contrat entre individus librement consentants, la liberté d’aller et venir, l’examen des thèses à la lumière des confrontations ouvertes, la considération du savoir théorique comme occasion d’effets pratiques’.<sup>45</sup> Such a contract establishes one of the core anarchist principles, freedom: freedom from assessment, freedom for everyone to develop at his or her own pace ; but

there is also freedom for the tutor to discuss any subject without being subjugated to any political, cultural, social or academic ideology. The Université Populaire is the realisation of what Pierre Bourdieu called in *Contre-feux*<sup>46</sup> a collective of individuals. And such a learning collectivity or community works and functions as such because its pedagogy is founded on the principle of conviviality or friendship central to Illich's epimetheanism: 'I remain certain the quest for truth cannot thrive outside the nourishment of mutual trust flowering into a commitment to friendship.'<sup>47</sup> Conviviality allows people to meet and enrich each other not only through their differences and divergence of opinion but also through their points of complementarity. In other words the content of the seminars is also the vehicle that enables them to come together. By establishing this unspoken contract, the convivial community formed by the Université Populaire allows, on the one hand, the development of active networks that have the purpose of enabling participants to think differently about mainstream ideas and about contemporary society, and, on the other, the emancipation of individuals through freely transmitted knowledge.

Such an anarchist pedagogy aims, firstly, to discuss and question everything, to think and analyse without having to succumb to any form or condition of authority, and, secondly, to offer the best transmission of knowledge there is to the greatest number of people. Everyone has the right to education, and working towards one's own education helps to resolve specific existential problems such as 'le rapport de soi à soi, de soi aux autres et de soi au monde'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, Epimethean anarchist pedagogy opens up a space for the elaboration of a project, a Socratic project for a philosophical life, within which it is possible to construct an identity for oneself, to develop an ethics, to find one's place in the real world, and finally and possibly most significantly, to know oneself.

### Epimethean anarchist politics

Onfray attributes the success of the Université Populaire – which can be measured by the number of seminars offering a wide range of subjects, and by the hundreds of people trying to attend these seminars – to the fact that traditional ideologies do not fit contemporary paradigms; instead they offer a totalising, totalitarian vision of the world. As Onfray shows, Christianity and the concept of God

are no longer relevant: 'le christianisme ne fait plus recette et, même chez les chrétiens, le dogme persiste sous forme allégée, à la carte.'<sup>49</sup> Marxism, which once had global appeal, found itself with a serious 'ontological hangover' in Onfray's words,<sup>50</sup> following Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, the treachery of François Mitterrand's 1983 U-turn, and the fall of the Berlin wall. And finally, liberalism or neo-liberalism, defined by Onfray as the market ruling all aspects of life, education, health and culture,<sup>51</sup> is now triumphing globally. Onfray believes western civilisation to be crumbling, and in a climate where values, ethics and political alternatives are difficult to find, the *Université Populaire* aims to provide a path to some answers.

Onfray seeks to offer an anarchist and epimethean answer to this new demand for alternatives. His main tenet is to provide for everyone what Jacques Derrida describes, in *L'Université sans condition*, as

[la] liberté *inconditionnelle* de questionnement et de proposition, plus encore le droit de dire publiquement tout ce qu'exigent une recherche, un savoir et une pensée de la *vérité* [...] elle devrait rester un ultime lieu de résistance critique [...] à tous les pouvoirs d'appropriation dogmatiques et injustes.<sup>52</sup>

This assertion by Derrida mirrors with great accuracy not only the political engagement of, but also the pedagogical direct action undertaken by, the *Université Populaire*. In order to maintain this capacity to question, resist and even to disrupt, the *Université Populaire* must remain free from the constraints and power games symptomatic of the state institution. This means that it must offer not a demagogic access to education, but a democratic access to knowledge and to criticism based on an ascending dialectic that starts from concrete, daily, lived experience and progresses towards intellectual complexity in order for everyone to attain as much as possible, according to their capacities and desires. The idea is not to become a wise woman or man, but to distil as much wisdom as possible in one's own existence.<sup>53</sup> It is an immanent and permanent work on oneself, an individual, personal, subjective and existential adventure. Nietzsche, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, identified the objective of such a philosophical journey as: 'Se créer liberté' ('to create freedom for oneself').

The political values and ethics of the *Université Populaire* are close to the ideal university perceived by Derrida as an 'ultime lieu

de résistance critique', a resistance based on 'une sorte de désobéissance civile, voire dissidence au nom d'une loi supérieure et d'une justice de la pensée', one which seeks to oppose power such as 'pouvoirs d'Etat, pouvoirs économiques, pouvoirs médiatiques, idéologiques, religieux et culturels, etc.', or, in other words 'tous les pouvoirs qui limitent la démocratie à venir'.<sup>54</sup> The Université Populaire does not offer a path towards utopian global revolution; it is not revolutionary in the Marxist sense of the word, but rather in the anarchist sense because it is, in Colin Ward's definition of anarchism, 'far from being a speculative vision of a future society, it is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society'.<sup>55</sup> Onfray likes to evoke its purpose by using the metaphor of the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly that creates a tsunami on the other side of the world, or the Gulliver principle whereby multiple small actions can take down the neo-liberal giant. Onfray's epimethean anarchism, like that of Ivan Illich, lies in the fact that both the Université Populaire and the people – students and tutors – who participate in it have the desire to embody the change that some people want from the world. Embedded in epimethean anarchism, the Université Populaire is politically rooted in everyday life, and as such it fosters the creation of new types of relationship between people, and the renewal of political engagement. Such an engagement will certainly not take place within the sphere of traditional politics where many people feel that right and left have merged, and as such do not have anything more to offer; instead, it will be through the teachings of the Université Populaire that direct action will ensue and real change will be achieved. Changing the world can only start to happen at the local level with micro-revolutions and micro-resistance. The Université Populaire does not offer an ideal political state as an end in itself, but seeks to engage in the construction of micro-societies to resist the contemporary neo-liberal world, and oppose and abolish voluntary servitude. The commitment is simply, as John Holloway claimed, to aim to 'change the world without taking power'.<sup>56</sup>

### Notes

- 1 'consciousness raising is insurrection'. All translations are the author's own.

- 2 Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education* (London: PM Press, 2010), p. 3.
- 3 'Because there is no neutral education, because all education is based on a conception of humanity and a conception of society, it is necessary to define which humanity and which society we are talking about. As there is no sense in failing to imagine a free individual in anarchist society, it is necessary to educate an engaged individual not in the reproduction of the society of exploitation but in the struggle for and the construction of a new society.'; S. Gallo, 'Anarchisme et philosophie de l'éducation' (24 April 2015), <http://raforum.info/spip.php?article2977>.
- 4 *In Defence of Atheism* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2008).
- 5 'The Twilight of an Idol' (not yet translated into English).
- 6 'the point is not to say "You are an anti-Semite, it's disgusting" but to be able to say "You are anti-Semitic, and I understand that you are. You are wrong, I am going to tell you why you are wrong and why this has come about. I can explain to you why you are afraid of black people, of Jews, of *beurs*, of homosexuals, of the other'; Olivier Brunet, *Le Plaisir d'Exister: Michel Onfray et les Universités Populaires* (Paris: France 3 Normandie, 2010).
- 7 Gabriel Séailles, *Education et révolution* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1904), p. 67.
- 8 Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Miseducation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 17.
- 9 'an insurrection of conscience'.
- 10 'The revolutionary evolution of individuals'; Michel Onfray, *La communauté philosophique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), p. 27.
- 11 'by putting the idea of capitalism under constant pressure, by seeking the breaking points that enable something new to emerge through the development of consciousness and acts which seek to escape the limits of capitalism'; Gallo, 'Anarchisme et philosophie de l'éducation'.
- 12 'the inability to create a true dynamic between teachers and the public; the inability of lecturers to put into practice a pedagogy that would allow true communication; the lack of a clear programme; internal divisions over the status to be accorded to the opponents [of the université populaire] and whether they should be invited or not; the slow disappearance of historical *dreyfusism* which cemented the alliance between scientists, intellectuals and some socialists; the contemporary demobilisation or consecutive disinterest of journalists who turn their back on anything that is not fashionable [...] financial difficulties [...] the opposition between Deleuze's approach of "effort and rigour", and the approach of leisure and entertainment; the frivolous and non-militant motivation of some participants'; Michel Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire* (Paris: Autrement, 2012), pp. 88–9.
- 13 'there are still many of us who embrace received ideas and opinions which enslave us; with knowledge we can hope to unchain ourselves'; M. Onfray, 'Populaire et polyphonique ...', p. 20.
- 14 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 August 1789, preamble, [http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/units/downloads/pdf/dec\\_of\\_rights.pdf](http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/units/downloads/pdf/dec_of_rights.pdf).

- 15 Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme, Article 27, [https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/D%C3%A9claration\\_des\\_Droits\\_de\\_l%E2%80%99Homme\\_et\\_du\\_Citoyen](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/D%C3%A9claration_des_Droits_de_l%E2%80%99Homme_et_du_Citoyen).
- 16 'reason becomes popular'; Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, pp. 8–9.
- 17 'firstly, ignorance enslaves and, secondly, knowledge liberates'; Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, p. 9.
- 18 Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, [1970] 2012).
- 19 R. Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', in Amster, Randall et al. (eds), *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 127.
- 20 Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 127.
- 21 Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 128.
- 22 Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 128.
- 23 Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 128.
- 24 Ivan Illich, *Tools of Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 27, quoted in Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 129.
- 25 Illich, *Deschooling Society*, quoted in Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 129.
- 26 Illich, *Tools of Conviviality*, p. 27.
- 27 'The university as institution does not create philosophers but rather historians of philosophy'; Onfray, 'Populaire et polyphonique ...', p. 21.
- 28 'To prostitute knowledge'; Olivier L. Brunet, *Le Plaisir d'Exister: Michel Onfray et les Universités Populaires*.
- 29 'it does not refer to any philosophical school in a partisan way, nor does it favour the margins on principle. It places existential construction at the core of its preoccupations. It does not concern itself with any kind of assessment, it gives everyone the freedom to create their own path, at their own pace'; Onfray, 'Populaire et polyphonique...', p. 20.
- 30 T. Wuillème, 'L'Université populaire de Lyon (1899–2008): enseignements et engagements', in Gérard Poulouin, *Universités populaires hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Autrement, 2012), pp. 72–3.
- 31 Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, pp. 75–6.
- 32 Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, pp. 75–6.
- 33 Tanguy Wuillème borrows the term from Alain Brossat, *La Résistance infinie* (Paris: Lignes et manifestes, 2006).
- 34 'The aim is to create links between the knowledge from diverse aspects of life and more theoretical academic knowledge'; Wuillème, 'L'Université populaire de Lyon', p. 73.
- 35 'a fighting machine, a protected space to allow the possibility of challenging the authority of historical or social forces. It is in fact a resisting community in miniature'; Wuillème, 'L'Université populaire de Lyon', p. 74.
- 36 'the widening of individual autonomy in a world favouring polyphonic sociabilities calls for the adoption of better-suited methods'; P.



- Corcuff, 'Enjeux des universités populaires, entre les Lumières d'hier et les défis d'aujourd'hui', in Poulouin, *Universités populaires hier et aujourd'hui*, p. 27.
- 37 See G. de Lagasnerie, 'Exister socialement. La vie au-delà de la reconnaissance', in Édouard Louis (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu. L'insoumission en héritage* (Paris: PUF, 2013), pp. 55–73.
- 38 'the learner can easily transform the map and the compass into an almost compulsory route [...] and the tutor may take pleasure in seeing people following his/her intellectual peregrinations too closely or s/he may also manifest annoyance towards recalcitrant ones'; Corcuff, 'Enjeux des universités populaires, entre les Lumières d'hier et les défis d'aujourd'hui', p. 27.
- 39 Corcuff, 'Enjeux des universités populaires, entre les Lumières d'hier et les défis d'aujourd'hui', p. 27.
- 40 'The libertarian tutor works towards her personal self-effacement and cultivates her powers of inquiry'; Corcuff, 'Enjeux des universités populaires, entre les Lumières d'hier et les défis d'aujourd'hui', p. 28.
- 41 Illich, *Deschooling Society*, p. 64.
- 42 'It is not a question of classing and ranking the words of the participants in order to recreate some kind of [Bourdieuian] *homo academicus* figure'; Onfray, 'Populaire et polyphonique ...', p. 21.
- 43 J. Mueller, 'Anarchism, the State, and the Role of Education', in Robert H. Haworth (ed.), *Anarchist Pedagogies* (London, PM Press, 2012), p. 23.
- 44 'an interactive pedagogical system'; Onfray, 'Populaire et polyphonique ...', p. 31.
- 45 'a contract between freely consenting individuals, the freedom to come and go, the analysis of subjects through open debate and the consideration of theoretical knowledge as an opportunity to bring about practical results'; Onfray, *La communauté philosophique*, p. 129.
- 46 Pierre Bourdieu, *Contre-Feux* (Paris: Raison d'Agir, 1998).
- 47 Kahn, 'Anarchic Epimetheanism: The Pedagogy of Ivan Illich', p. 132.
- 48 'the relationship with oneself, the relationship between oneself and others, and between oneself and the world'; Onfray, *La communauté philosophique*, p. 100.
- 49 'Christianity has lost its appeal, and even for Christians dogma only persists in a watered-down, à la carte, version'; Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, p. 37.
- 50 Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, p. 38.
- 51 Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, p. 38.
- 52 'the *unconditional* freedom to question and to suggest, plus the right to publicly say anything required by the search for, knowledge of and thinking about *truth* [...] University should remain an ultimate space for critical resistance [...] to dogmatic and unjust powers of appropriation'; Jacques Derrida, *L'Université sans condition* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), pp. 11–12, 14.
- 53 Onfray, *Rendre la raison populaire*, p. 73.
- 54 'ultimate space for critical resistance'; 'a kind of civil disobedience, even dissent in the name of a superior law and of a justice of thought';

- 'state power, economic power, media, ideological, religious and cultural power, etc.>'; 'power that restricts the coming democracy'; Derrida, *L'Université sans condition*, pp. 14, 16, 21.
- 55 Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1973), p. 18.
- 56 John Holloway, *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

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# 11

## New Aesthetics of *Engagement*: Fatou Diome's *Kétala*<sup>1</sup>

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CHARLOTTE BAKER

'On sera riches ensemble ou on va se noyer tous ensemble'  
(Fatou Diome)<sup>2</sup>

*Engagement* has defined Europhone African literature almost since its inception, leading African writers creatively during colonialism, in the anti-colonial struggle and through the early years of independence. In 1956, the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris established that 'African literature is a committed literature, destined from its origins to fight against colonisation and all forms of oppression of the "black race".'<sup>3</sup> This assertion finds its echo in Jean-Paul Sartre, who contends that the committed writer is one who knows that 'to speak is to act.'<sup>4</sup> Yet, as writer and academic Alain Mabanckou asserts, the consequence for contemporary African writers is that they have been expected to speak in the name of Africa, in defence of the African people:

They had a mission, which was not the case for French writers ... Accepting or rejecting this mandate once meant being considered *committed* or being dubbed a *traitor* working for the West ... The new generation's approach is to depict the world in all its cruelty, in all its metamorphoses, refusing to compromise even if this outrages those who dream of a single-tone and unidirectional African literature designed to tout a far-away and indeed artificial Africa, a papier-mâché Africa that no-one recognizes.<sup>5</sup>

For Mabanckou, contrasting attitudes towards that mission assigned to Francophone African writers have created divisions between

those who proclaim their roots in the African continent and writers who seek openings elsewhere.

The 1990s and early twenty-first century increasingly saw African writers shifting their gaze to the realities faced by African immigrants living in France, and immigration became one of the prevalent themes in the work of what has come to be known as the *Afrique sur Seine* generation.<sup>6</sup> The representation of immigration is not new to the African novel, with narratives such as Ousmane Sembène's *Le Docker noir* (1956) and Bernard Dadié's *Un nègre à Paris* (1959) testifying to the experience of migration as one defined by a sense of alienation and the struggle to find a balance between two different cultural worlds, values and modes of thinking.<sup>7</sup> However, as Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier observe, the *Afrique sur Seine* writers approached questions of migration and displacement from a different perspective, creating a proliferation of viewpoints to challenge readers to examine contemporary values and the discourses that sustain them.<sup>8</sup> The writers belonging to this generation, including Fatou Diome, Calixthe Beyala, Bessora, Natalie Etoke and Léonora Miano, use humour and irony to subvert stereotypical representations of the African immigrant, and explore the place of migrant women and young people within the postcolonial urban environment.<sup>9</sup> This chapter proposes that Diome points to the very real concerns at issue in contemporary Senegal that previous generations of migrant writers in France have sidelined.

Diome was born in Niodior on the island of the same name in the Siné-Saloum delta in the south-west of Senegal. She developed her interest in French literature while at school, and later studied at the University of Dakar, supporting herself by working as a housekeeper. Diome married a Frenchman and they settled in France in 1990, but were divorced two years later. In 1994, Diome moved to Alsace to study at the University of Strasbourg and thereafter dedicated herself to writing. She published her first short-story collection, *La Préférence Nationale*, in 2001. The six short stories explore different aspects of migration from Africa and the struggle for integration in contemporary France, reflecting Diome's own trajectory. Diome's title immediately evokes the difficulties of immigrant life in France as she reminds her readers of the campaign of *préférence nationale*,<sup>10</sup> articulated by the Front National, to reserve jobs, financial aid and public housing for French citizens. Drawing

on personal experience, Diome presents a series of short stories that reveal the trials of student life and the challenges and injustices faced by educated migrants to France. The publication of *La Préférence Nationale* was followed by Diome's widely acclaimed first novel, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* in 2003, which addresses many of the same issues. The protagonist Salie is a Senegalese migrant living in Strasbourg, and the novel traces her negotiation of relationships with her family on the Senegalese island of Niodior and with her community in France. For Salie's brother Madické, France is a land of opportunity where he will be able to realise his dream of becoming a professional soccer player but, as Salie knows only too well, the stark reality is that success in France comes at a high personal cost. As Dominic Thomas remarks, 'The relationship between the socioeconomic realities in France and the distorted projections from Africa concerning those circumstances provides the central disconnect that Diome proposes to analyse.'<sup>11</sup> Eventually Salie convinces Madické to remain in Niodior and to start a small business with money that she sends from France.

While Diome's emphasis on the socioeconomic realities confronting migrants to France characterises her earlier fictional work, there is a marked shift of focus in Diome's second novel, *Kétala*, which she published in 2006 in France.<sup>12</sup> *Mémoria*, the strikingly named protagonist, had a happy childhood in Senegal and entered into an arranged marriage with Makhou, before they travelled together to France to seek a life away from the control of her family and the prejudices of Senegalese society. For *Mémoria*, France promised freedom from the constraints placed upon her as a young woman in Senegal, while France offered Makhou the opportunity to live openly as a gay man:

C'était donc décidé, il irait en France, avec elle. Là-bas, loin de tout, ils apprendraient à mener une vraie vie matrimoniale.

– C'était donc pour cette raison et non à cause de la situation économique qu'ils débarquèrent en France, nous emportant dans leur aventure! fit Masque. (p. 128)<sup>13</sup>

Diome is careful to distinguish her protagonists from the economic migrants who go to France to escape their material conditions in Senegal. Providing a more nuanced portrayal, she highlights the personal stories of migrants, human motivations such as love, as well as the political and social conditions that drive people from

their homeland to seek new opportunities elsewhere. Having separated from her husband, we learn that Mémoria became a nightclub dancer, descended into prostitution and drug use, and then contracted HIV and AIDS.

### New forms of embodiment

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Kétala* is the personification of the objects that have each played a role in the protagonist's life. The novel begins after Mémoria's death, giving voice to her different belongings. These objects recount their observations and memories of her life in anticipation of their separation as they are divided up for the *kétala*, the Muslim tradition of distributing a person's material possessions amongst their family at the end of the eight-day period of mourning after his or her death. As Porte informs the other objects:

Les humains avaient décidé de faire le *Kétala* de Mémoria, le partage de son héritage. Le huitième jour après son enterrement, selon la tradition musulmane, on devait, sous l'œil vigilant de l'imam, distribuer les affaires de la défunte aux différents membres de sa famille. (p. 14)<sup>14</sup>

We are reminded by the omniscient narrator of the prologue that, 'Pendant qu'on s'occupe des corps, on oublie le décor, mais, après les corps, on en revient pitoyablement aux objets. *Pourtant, lorsque quelqu'un meurt, nul ne se soucie de la tristesse de ses meubles*' (p. 8).<sup>15</sup> This phrase is repeated at the close of the novel as if to reassert the importance of the objects and the varied perspectives they offer on the protagonist's life. In *Kétala* we thus see a revaluing of mundane objects, whether this is in recognition of the simple role of the door in protecting the other objects from the storm raging outside, or of the significance of the plank of wood, on which the body of the protagonist is laid out and which becomes her 'ultime trône' (p. 9).<sup>16</sup>

In an interview with Wandia Nicot, Diome describes her choice to narrate the text through objects as an effort to remind readers of the place of animism in West African culture:

Dans le livre, le vieux masque africain dit que dans sa culture, parce qu'on ne peut pas emporter les siens avec soi, on emporte toujours sa mémoire. L'esprit du mari de la défunte exprime ses

états d'âme sous l'œil des objets animés. Il y a comme un retour à l'animisme. Les objets philosophent sur les êtres humains, le caractère dérisoire de la vie, l'absence et notre manière d'affronter tout ça.<sup>17</sup>

Animism is often understood in very simplistic terms as a belief in objects in which animist gods and spirits are located or embodied, thus imbuing them with spiritual and social meaning in excess of their natural properties and use value. However, as Harry Garuba points out, the structural implantation of animist thought within processes of economic activity, culture and social life means that animism is 'no longer just an epiphenomenon or simply an effect, but becomes a producer of effects'.<sup>18</sup> From this implantation of animist thought emerges what Garuba describes as the animist unconscious; a collective form of subjectivity that structures being and consciousness in predominantly animist societies and cultures. 'Animist logic subverts binarism and destabilizes established hierarchies – of science over magic or modernity over tradition, for example – opening up a different kind of historical consciousness and a world of possibility.'<sup>19</sup> The animist worldview presents Diome with strategies to construct a narrative universe in which transgressions of boundaries and identities predominate, notably in the investment of *Mémoria*'s material belongings with distinctive voices and personalities.

Diome places the emphasis on discourse in the narrative as each object takes up its account in a discussion that is arbitrated by the character *Masque*. Highlighting the value of oral traditions, *Masque* reveals that he comes from a civilisation where men transmit their family history, traditions and culture orally, from generation to generation. *Masque* realises that each object plays a particular role in *Mémoria*'s life and that no one object can tell the whole story, and so he proposes that each individual item recount in turn its personalised memory of the protagonist:

Ainsi, pendant les six nuits et les cinq jours qui nous séparent du kétala, nous allons tous, ensemble, reconstituer le puzzle de sa vie. Nous saurons alors ce qu'elle faisait dans cet appartement où elle nous a rassemblés, comment elle a vécu, et de quoi elle est morte. Alors, chacun de nous pourra partir vers n'importe quel horizon mais avec l'histoire complète de notre défunte maîtresse. (pp. 22–3)<sup>20</sup>



Some objects, such as *Porte* and *Valise*, serve important but rather mundane roles in *Mémoria*'s life, while others including *Bêhtio*,<sup>21</sup> 'l'oreiller' [the pillow] and 'le châle de prière' [the prayer shawl] are able to offer more intimate perspectives. Between them, the objects reconstruct the legacy of *Mémoria*, taking the reader through her youth, her schooling in Senegal, her marriage to *Makhou*, their move to Alsace, *Mémoria*'s separation from *Makhou*, and her struggle to make a life for herself. They remember how she was forced to resort to prostitution to support her family in Senegal, describe her eventual return to Africa with *Makhou*, and reflect on her lonely and premature death. Diome remarks on the role of objects in their reconstruction of *Mémoria*'s life:

La logique, c'est que les objets ont une mémoire empirique, vive et palpable. Ils n'arrivent ni au même moment, ni de la même façon dans notre vie. Ils peuvent chacun raconter une part de notre vie et aussi la leur. Ce fut pour moi une manière de m'interroger sur l'absence et le vide.<sup>22</sup>

Even when *Mémoria*'s life was without meaning or direction, her experiences were shared by the objects that have now taken on the role of reconstructing her life story.

A growing body of scholarship on materiality has drawn attention to the inadequacy of the traditional (western) subject–object divide. As Lynn Meskell and Robert Preucel remark, objectification is usually defined as the process by which people constitute themselves through things: 'This means more than simply objects signifying a particular kind of social distinction. Rather it implies that the meanings we give to things are intimately bound up in how we give meaning to our lives.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the objects with which people surround themselves become an extension of themselves and their identity. Therefore, in giving voice to the objects that represent various aspects of the protagonist's life, Diome's material corpus of things operates as a new form of embodiment that fulfils the fantasy of animating and giving voice to objects. They remind the characters of where they have come from and where they have been, and are thus intimately associated with their lives and, indeed, their legacies. In this sense, migration and death both become associated with passing and are made to coincide. In this way Diome also reminds us, as *Njoya* remarks, 'that the tragedy of migration takes place on a world stage and presents migrants'

suffering as a malady that affects the entire universe, even non-human actors'.<sup>24</sup>

### Memory–Mémoria

The act of remembering and memorialisation undertaken by the objects – and, indeed, the protagonist's name – invite us to read *Kétala* in the broader context of Diome's *œuvre*, which draws parallels between postcolonial migration and the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>25</sup> The title of Diome's 2003 novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* implicitly refers to the slave trade, while the narrative expresses the tragedy of young Africans who are forced to cross borders and frontiers in order to survive. Read in these terms, *Kétala* highlights the importance of the transmission of memory which the geographic dispersal of people and objects threatens to extinguish. It seems appropriate to recall Sartre here, for whom the text is committed not when it adopts a particular ideological content, but when it attempts to realise that it is swept along by historical conditions:

Suspended between total ignorance and all-knowingness, [the reader] has a definite stock of knowledge which varies from moment to moment and which is enough to reveal his historicity. In actual fact, he is not an instantaneous consciousness, a pure timeless affirmation of freedom, nor does he soar above history; he is involved in it.<sup>26</sup>

Diome builds her narrative around a collection of singular voices that present us, in characteristic Sartrean fashion, with the complex, alienated situation of the individual in history. It is a narrative strategy that 'commits' Diome's text to the tangled truth of the realities of immigration from Senegal to France. Through the different perspectives of the various objects who take up the narration, polyphony functions to move the narrative beyond the personal experience of the migrant to explore the relationship between Senegal and France (and Africa and the West more generally) in a globalising context. In so doing, it reveals the assumptions about French and Senegalese identity to which this relationship has given rise. Pointing humorously to practical differences between France and Senegal, for example, the objects argue about whether French baggage handlers are nicer than Senegalese baggage handlers, or if luggage is simply handled more gently in France because of the technology that makes the luggage handlers'

jobs easier. Valise remarks: 'Même si les machines faisaient l'essentiel du travail à leur place, les bagagistes parisiens me traitèrent mieux que les Dakarois' (p. 134),<sup>27</sup> leading Bèhtio to ask if he is insinuating that black baggage handlers are more careless than whites. Montre responds:

On s'en fout de la couleur du bras qui soulève une valise, c'est toujours un bras humain. La seule différence que le récit de Valise souligne, ici, c'est que les moyens techniques facilitent la tâche aux bagagistes français, tandis qu'à Dakar, leurs collègues besognent comme des charretiers du Moyen Age pour servir la même clientèle. (p. 134)<sup>28</sup>

While much of the substance of the novel consists of such amusing arguments between the various objects, Mahriana Rofheart observes that some aspects of *Mémoria's* situation are not discussed in this way, therefore highlighting the issues with which Diome is primarily concerned and which she insists on taking seriously.<sup>29</sup> For example, there are no arguments about whether *Mémoria's* parents are right to reject her when she returns to Senegal with AIDS only to encounter the same patriarchal attitudes that led to her departure to France, as her father tells her, 'Ma fille, que j'ai bien éduquée, ne peut être devenue une dépravée qui nous apporte de surcroît cette saleté contagieuse. Dorénavant, je t'interdis tout contact avec ma famille et que tous eux qui obéissent à ma loi se le tiennent pour dit' (p. 267).<sup>30</sup> There is no disagreement between the objects on this matter, for they all judge the parents to be in the wrong.

Similarly, there are no arguments about whether or not it is acceptable that Makhou is gay, for none of the objects judge him negatively.<sup>31</sup> Instead, the narrative explores the effects of the hostile attitudes towards homosexuality in Senegal that draw Makhou into an arranged marriage with his distant cousin *Mémoria*, interrupting his secret romance with his gay lover:

Il se soumettait docilement au cirque organisé autour de lui, mais on ne peut pas dire qu'il y prenait vraiment plaisir. D'ailleurs il ne semblait pas tenir à *Mémoria*, il était resté avec elle une seule fois en tête-à-tête ... De son attitude, on pouvait déduire qu'il n'était pas complètement à la merci des événements. Si piège il y avait, il en détenait les clefs. (p. 68)<sup>32</sup>

In an interview at the PEN World Voices Festival in 2008, Diome remarks that she decided to write *Kétala* as a response to having seen a gay man harassed on the street in Dakar.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, while the novel focuses on Mémoria, other important characters include Makhou's partner, Tamsir-Tamara, a celebrated dance instructor who dresses as a woman in order to live as he wishes. Born in Gambia, Tamsir grew up with the disappointment of his father:

Son père, militaire de carrière, désespérait d'avoir un enfant mâle. D'une ancienne lignée de griots, mais ayant acquis la respectabilité dans l'armée, l'officier qui n'avait pu marier ses six filles hors de sa caste, attendait de son fils qu'il le secondât dans la fondation d'une nouvelle légende familiale, où les siens ne seraient plus considérés comme de simples courtisans mais admirés en tant que guerriers des temps modernes, ennoblis par leur courage, leurs grades militaires. Sa déception fut immense lorsque Tamsir, adolescent, délaissa ses études à Gambia High School pour suivre une troupe de musiciens qui célébraient mariages et baptêmes à travers le pays... Ce qui chagrinait l'officier par-dessus tout, c'était de voir son unique fils, de plus en plus efféminé, fréquentant des garçons de mauvaise réputation. (pp. 98–9)<sup>34</sup>

Refusing to accept his son's homosexuality, his father first has Tamsir interned in a military hospital and then attempts to integrate him into the military, where he is bullied mercilessly. After several months, Tamsir meets Makhou and eventually follows him to Senegal where, although constrained to live on the margins of society, he finds relative happiness: 'D'une certaine manière, ceux qui condamnaient les amours de Makhou et Tamsir leur avaient tissé le confortable hamac dans lequel ils berçaient tranquillement leur romance, une romance atypique, certes, mais douce, joyeuse, émouvante, innocente' (p. 105).<sup>35</sup> Thus, through Makhou and Tamsir's stories, Diome gives an insight into Senegalese lives and attitudes that moves beyond the immediate contours of a novel of immigration. In so doing, she reflects the complexities of individual stories and the processes of negotiation that inform and result from migration.

### Postcolonial universalism

Although Diome is frequently grouped together with other contemporary African women writers such as Beyala and Bessora,

there are important distinctions to be drawn between their backgrounds and their literary work. Beyala is Cameroonian, while Bessora was born in Belgium to a Swiss mother and Gabonese father, and their works share focus on migrant life in France. Pius Adesanmi and others have labelled the *Afrique sur Seine* writers as nomadic and identified primarily by a freedom accorded by their lack of affiliation to a specific nation, in either Africa or Europe.<sup>36</sup> Cazenave's *Afrique sur Seine* is characteristic of this approach. Her study contains analyses of texts by African writers living in Paris, but she insists of these new writers that 'Theirs is a gaze no longer necessarily turned towards Africa, but rather towards themselves and their own experience, their writing taking a more personal turn.'<sup>37</sup> To some extent, Diome contradicts this trend, because her fictional work remains concerned with Senegal. Her set of short stories *La Préférence Nationale*, and two novels *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Kétala*, depict Senegalese people who live in France. In *Kétala*, Diome continues the examination of France as a *terre d'accueil* that she initiated in *La Préférence Nationale*. However, as Rofheart remarks, even when depicting life in France, Diome uses narrative structure to return her novels' focus to Africa, inscribing her work in a revised geography in which Senegal is central, despite the emigration of her characters to France.<sup>38</sup>

The novel's protagonists continue to see Senegal as home despite the time they have spent away from the country, and indeed they all return there. Mémoria also returns to Senegal to die, and it is Makhou who takes her. She tells him: 'Ramène-moi chez nous ... Je t'en prie, Makhou, ne me laisse pas mourir ici, rends mon corps à mes parents, à la terre qui m'a vue naître' (p. 250).<sup>39</sup> Diome points to the importance of Senegal as home through the narration of certain pieces of furniture and belongings that associate themselves with Senegal and Mémoria's life there. Bèthio plays a particular role in Senegalese culture as the cloth wrapper that women wear around their waists; a short underskirt that will be seen only in intimate meetings with a husband or lover. Coumba Djiguène is a statue of a large-bosomed black woman carved from ebony. Diome remarks that she has the name Coumba Djiguène because in her language it designates the maturity of a woman of an age to marry and become a mother.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as Rofheart remarks, 'Because all the furniture, in all of its diversity – Masque, shawl, and computer alike – remains in the apartment, the novel

insists on Senegal as a site of beneficial return.<sup>41</sup> The *kétala* never takes place. Makhou stands up against the greed and duplicity of Mémoria's family, preferring to leave the furniture in Mémoria's apartment in Dakar as a testament to her life and the mistakes that led to her death:

Le Kétala n'eut jamais lieu. Les meubles ne furent jamais dispersés. Ils croupissaient ensemble, rongés par la nostalgie de leur propriétaire. Le manque d'usage les déprimait, car l'honneur d'un meuble, c'est de servir, mais ils ne se plaignent guère. Ils savaient tous que, lorsque les humains voient unealebasse brisée ou une vieille assiette ébréchée, ils ne songent jamais aux mets succulents qu'elle a pu contenir. Voilà pourquoi, *lorsque quelqu'un meurt, nul ne se soucie de la tristesse de ses meubles.* (p. 287)<sup>42</sup>

Makhou decides that by keeping the objects together, he will be able to keep Mémoria's memory alive and recall her traits of character. Rather than fixating on the African immigrant question in France or its consequences for Senegal, Diome thus moves between the two, emphasising the emergence of a global yet African culture. Katherine Farley Galvagni suggests that Diome's novel better fits with Benetta Jules-Rosette's notion of 'postcolonial universalism' as it holds a distinct regard for Africa but is acutely aware of global issues.<sup>43</sup> As Jules-Rosette expresses it, 'In postcolonial universalism, Africa is a hybridized concept, reflecting the combined influences of the Antilles, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.'<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

In an interview with Mbaye Diouf, Diome remarks that she is often described by her readers as a 'porte-parole' who speaks for others.<sup>45</sup> Asked directly in the same interview whether she considers herself to be an engaged writer though, Diome responds:

Quand j'écris, je souligne aussi les problèmes que je vois, je parle de ce qui me touche. Mes lecteurs, que ce soit en Afrique, en Europe où ailleurs qui se reconnaissent vraiment dans mes livres m'écrivent des lettres en disant: 'Ah ! Tu as parlé pour nous, tu es vraiment une porte parole !' Je suis à chaque fois surprise et amusée, mais je me sens en même temps honorée et ravie de pouvoir prêter ma voix à cette attente.<sup>46</sup>

Living in France, Diome writes from a context of often hyperbolic public and official discourses surrounding migration. As an

educated and documented migrant, she is unlike many of the irregular migrants she speaks for, who are often uneducated, with limited employment prospects, mostly male and usually very young. It is precisely Diome's education and legal status as a documented migrant that have enabled her to become a spokeswoman on the subject of irregular migration. She recently spoke out on prime time French television during a debate on the France 2 programme *Ce Soir ou Jamais*, organised in response to the drowning of 700 migrants who were trying to reach Europe.<sup>47</sup> Diome vehemently criticised the hypocrisy of Europe in response to the drowning of these and many other refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean. In *Kétala*, though, it is Diome's use of non-human narrators that enables her to move beyond the story of an alienated immigrant abroad or a rejection of origins to raise questions about the complexity of migration in the early twenty-first century. As Anna-Leena Toivanen acknowledges, 'Sa vision artistique et son engagement social sont guidés par la reconnaissance de l'inégalité et la nécessité de chercher des solutions.'<sup>48</sup>

Drawing on her own experiences of immigration from Senegal to France, Diome generates critical awareness of the complexity of the immigrant experience in contemporary globalising France, at the same time deconstructing the myth of France in the Senegalese imagination. Diome points to the very real concerns at issue in contemporary Senegal; precisely the concerns on the African continent that previous generations of migrant writers in France have sidelined. For instance, while Diome challenges assumptions that life in France is easy for migrants and that it is easy to earn a living there, she also acknowledges that income from abroad can be essential to the quality of life of those left behind in Senegal. Similarly, while she offers harsh criticisms of arranged marriages, attitudes towards gay men, and the stigma of HIV/AIDS, she reminds the reader that human weaknesses are not necessarily culturally or historically grounded, but are often the consequence of individual flaws. In *Kétala*, the objects take on the role of 'porte-parole', placing emphasis on the visibility and orality of the representative writer who is reconstituted through a body of objects, which in turn draws into question Diome's own role in relation to the text. Certainly the autobiographical element to *Kétala* is much less obvious than in her other works, such as *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, but the privileging of the voices of the objects that

stand in for the author as ‘porte-parole’ ensure that Diome is still very much present in the text. Rather than expressing *engagement* through the political ideals that characterise earlier African writing, the reconstituted authorial body and voice are at the heart of *Kétala*. Diome’s *engagement* is thus both personal and political.

### Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Rebecca Braun and Delphine Grass for their comments on drafts of this chapter.
- 2 F. Diome, ‘Ce Soir ou Jamais’, *France 2*, 26 April, 2015; ‘We will grow rich together, or we will drown together.’
- 3 G. Ossito Midiohouan, ‘Lilyan Kesteloot and the History of African Literature’, *Research in African Literatures*, 33/4 (2002), 184.
- 4 Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 14.
- 5 A. Mabanckou, ‘Immigration, Littérature-Monde, and Universality: The Strange Fate of the African Writer’, *Yale French Studies*, 120 (2011), 75, 82.
- 6 Odile Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris* (Lanham: Lexington, 2007).
- 7 Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 2011), p. 116.
- 8 Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*, p. 119.
- 9 Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*, p. 118.
- 10 ‘National preference’; Mahriana Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film and Social Media* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014), p. 89.
- 11 D. Thomas, ‘African youth in the global economy: Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 26/2 (2006), 246.
- 12 D. Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration and Transnationalism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 187.
- 13 ‘And so it was decided that he would go to France with her. Over there, away from everything, they would learn to lead a married life. “So it was for this reason, and not for financial reasons, that they left for France, taking us with them on their adventure,” said Masque.’
- 14 ‘The humans decided to undertake Memoria’s *ketala*, the sharing out of her worldly belongings. According to Islamic tradition, on the eighth day after her burial, they had to distribute the belongings of the deceased to the different members of the family under the vigilant eye of the Imam.’
- 15 ‘While the focus is on the body, the decor is forgotten, but after the body, attention returns pitifully to the objects. *Yet, when someone dies, no one suspects the sadness of his belongings.*’



- 16 'Ultimate throne'.
- 17 'In the book, the old African mask explains that in his culture, because we cannot take our family with us, we always carry memories of them. The spirit of the husband of the deceased expresses his state of mind under the gaze of the animated objects. There is a kind of return to animism. The objects philosophise on the human beings, the derisory character of life, loss, and our way of facing up to all that'; W. Nicot, 'Interview with Fatou Diome', *Amina*, 434 (2006), 34.
- 18 H. Garuba, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society', *Public Culture*, 15/2 (2003), 269.
- 19 Garuba, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism', 271.
- 20 'So, for the six nights and five days between us and the ketala, we will all piece together the puzzle of her life. We will know what she did in this apartment where we are all assembled, how she lived, and the cause of her death. Then each one of us can leave in any direction, but with the complete story of our deceased mistress.'
- 21 Bêhtio explains that he is 'le petit pagne coquin que les Sénégalaises portent le soir, avant de rejoindre leur époux impatient' (p. 76); 'the saucy little loincloth worn by Senegalese women in the evening before they join their impatient husbands.'
- 22 'The logic is that these objects have an empirical memory, vivid and palpable. They do not arrive at the same time or the same moment, nor in the same way in our lives. They can each recount a part of our life and also their own. For me, this was a way of wondering about absence and emptiness'; Nicot, 'Interview with Fatou Diome', 34.
- 23 Lynn Meskell and Robert W. Preucel, *A Companion to Social Archaeology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 14.
- 24 Wandia Nicot, *In Search of El Dorado: Immigration, French Ideals, and the African Experience in Contemporary African Novels* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Muller, 2008), p. 58.
- 25 Thomas, *Black France*, p. 196.
- 26 Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 69.
- 27 'Even if the machines did the bulk of the work in their place, the Parisian baggage handlers treated me better than those in Dakar.'
- 28 'Who gives a damn about the colour of the arm that lifts a suitcase! It is still a human arm. The only difference that Valise's story underlines here is that technical means make the job of the French baggage handlers easier, while in Dakar, their colleagues toil like carters in the Middle Ages to serve the same customers.'
- 29 Mahriana Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film and Social Media* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014), p. 90.
- 30 'My daughter, whom I have educated well, cannot have become this depraved woman who, moreover, brings us this contagious filth. From now on, I forbid you all contact with my family and all those who obey me will take it as said.'
- 31 Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration*, p. 90.
- 32 'He meekly gave in to the circus around him, but one cannot say that he truly took pleasure in it. Besides, he did not seem to be fond of

- Mémoria, meeting with her only once [...] From his attitude, we could see that he was not completely at the mercy of events. If there were indeed a trap, then he held the keys for it.'
- 33 F. Diome with P. Muñoz-Ryan, 'Writing Out Loud: The Importance of Storytelling in Growing up as a Writer', PEN World Voices Festival, 2008, cited in Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration*, p. 98.
- 34 'His father, a military man, longed for a male child. From a long line of *griots*, but having acquired respectability in the army, the officer who had not been able to marry off his six daughters outside his own clan, expected his son to aid him in the founding of a new family legend, where his family would no longer be considered as simple courtesans, but admired as modern-day warriors, ennobled by their courage and their military status. His disappointment was profound when, as a teenager, Tamsir dropped his studies at Gambia High School to join a group of musicians who celebrated marriages and baptisms across the country [...] What grieved the officer above all was to see his only son becoming more and more effeminate and frequenting boys of poor reputation.'
- 35 'In a way, those who condemned the love of Makhou and Tamsir had woven them a comfortable hammock in which they peacefully cradled their romance; an unusual romance, certainly, but sweet, joyful, moving, innocent.'
- 36 P. Adesanmi, 'Redefining Paris: Trans-Modernity and Francophone African Migrant Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51/4 (Winter 2005), 958–75.
- 37 Odile Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine*, p. 1.
- 38 Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration*, p. 73.
- 39 'Take me home, I beg you Makhou. Do not leave me to die here. Take my body back to my parents, to the country of my birth.'
- 40 Nicot, 'Interview with Fatou Diome', 34.
- 41 Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration*, p. 91.
- 42 'The ketala never took place. The pieces of furniture were never dispersed. They languished together, eaten away by nostalgia for their owner. The lack of use depressed them, because the pride of a piece of furniture comes from serving, but they never complained. They all knew that when humans see a broken gourd or a broken old plate they don't contemplate the tasty dish it might have contained. That is why *when someone dies, no one suspects the sadness of his belongings*.'
- 43 K. Farley Galvagni, 'Fatou Diome's Black Atlantic: Reinscribing Anti-Imperialism', in Walter P. Collins (ed.), *Emerging African Voices: A Study of Contemporary African Literature* (Amherst and New York: Cambria Press, 2010), p. 86.
- 44 Benetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writer's Landscape* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 7.
- 45 M. Diouf, 'J'écris pour apprendre à vivre. Entretien avec Fatou Diome', *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 17/9 (2009), 142.
- 46 'When I write, I underline the problems that I see; I speak about the things that affect me. My readers, in Africa, in Europe or elsewhere,

who recognise themselves in my books, write me letters saying: “Ah! You have spoken for us, you are on our side, you are truly our spokes-woman!” Each time, I am surprised and amused, but at the same time I feel honoured and delighted to be able to lend my voice to this expectation’; ‘J’écris pour apprendre à vivre’; Diouf, ‘Entretien avec Fatou Diome’, p. 142.

- 47 F. Diome, ‘Ce Soir ou Jamais’, *France 2*, 26 April 2015.  
 48 ‘Her artistic vision and her social engagement are guided by the recognition of inequality and the need to look for solutions’; A.-L. Toivanen, ‘Retour au local: Celles qui attendent et l’engagement diasporique de Fatou Diome’, *RELIEF Revue Electronique de Littérature Française*, 5/1 (2011), 76.

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