

**THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS:
NATION, REGION AND IMMIGRATION
IN CONTEMPORARY “FRENCH” CULTURE**

by

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This dissertation examines the tensions at work in contemporary French cultural politics between, on the one hand, homogenizing/assimilating hegemonic tendencies and, on the other hand, performances of heterogeneity/disharmony especially in literature but also in other artistic forms such as music. “Regional literature/culture” and “banlieue (ghetto) literature/culture” are studied as two major phenomena that performatively go against France’s “state monolingualism,” here understood as much as a “one-language policy” as the enforcement of “one discourse about Frenchness” (mono-logos). I rely on Jacques Rancière’s notions of “archipolitics” and “aesthetic regimes” to suggest that May 1968 has constituted an epistemological shift which has made it possible for alternate French discourses to emerge and become perceptible. Literatures displaying such discourses (either regional-related or immigration-related or both) are termed “accented literatures,” with “accent” being defined both as “variation from the linguistic norm” and “variation from the discursive norm.” These “accented literatures” become a distinctive trait of “democracy,” or “agonistic community,” allowing space for disharmonic representations of the “French” “nation.” Regarding regional (Alsatian) literature, I focus on André Weckmann’s literary use of magical surrealism and of a dialogic “Germanic French language”; regarding immigrant identity and *banlieue* literature, I first explicate the profound implications, for *banlieue* literature as a whole, of the “two-

generation theory” developed by Algeria-born French rapper and writer Mounsi, with Azouz Begag’s literary production as a case study. Then turning to Abd al Malik, a French rapper/writer/filmmaker of Congolese origin, I pinpoint his concept of “pacific, new French revolution” as an ultimate form of accentuation of French discourse, scrutinizing the ways in which his art performs Frenchness as well as Islam. Because the notion of “accent” is closely linked to those of “prestige” and “legitimacy vs. lack thereof,” this dissertation eventually leads to a redefinition of “legitimate culture” in France. As a practical consequence of these literary-political debates, I advocate for the teaching, within the French public school system, of both regional languages and immigrant languages such as Arabic as a way to address identity challenges specific to the contemporary postcolonial era.

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INTRODUCTION:

WHAT IS THE “POLITICS OF AESTHETICS”?

JACQUES RANCIÈRE, ANDRÉ WECKMANN AND

ABD AL MALIK

“France today is the only nation in the world
with legislation requiring (since 1794)
the exclusive use of the national language
in all public and private acts [...].
France is the most extreme case [*le cas limite*]
of a nation totally identified with one language,
but which goes beyond this to defend
the integrity of this linguistic personality in all aspects of social life
against the claims and encroachments of any and all languages
from inside or outside its borders”

Renée Balibar

(quoted by Harold Schiffman, *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*, 75)

“Rather than repeating the initial choices
(nationalism and cosmopolitanism, sovereigntism and federalism, and so on)
we will then broach the problem of a ‘citizenship without community’
or a ‘citizenship beyond community’
and try to assess the political pertinence of such a notion”

Étienne Balibar

We, the People of Europe? (66)

1.1 “French Monolingualism” in Question

This dissertation analyzes contemporary forms of political and cultural activism around regional identity and immigration in France, questioning, in terms of both internal struggles and postcolonial realities, the notion of “French nation” as a hegemonically monolingual construct.

Drawing upon the literary texts of the Algeria-born Mounsi and the Alsatian poet-novelist André Weckmann, as well as the musical production of the French, Congolese-origin rapper-writer Abd al Malik, I call attention to important emerging trends in French cultural politics that move beyond the politics of minority, and concomitant questions of assimilation, to rethink narratives of French universalism. What is at stake in the works that I am studying is an unprecedented challenge to conceptions of French national identity based on linguistic uniformity.

The timeliness of this kind of inquiry is apparent in the ongoing debates about the ideological supremacy of the French language in France.¹ In December 2013, the French government of then Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault announced, under popular pressure, that it might “*finally*” ratify the European Union Charter of Minority Languages, designed to save threatened dialects like Occitan, Breton, or Alsatian from extinction –save them, indeed, through a variety of measures that each ratifying state is free to pick-and-choose from, but, arguably most importantly through the heightened prestige such ratification would grant these minority languages.² The move was met locally with great skepticism, given the historical importance granted to the French language by the state.³ The same month, the government received a “report

¹ While this dissertation focuses exclusively on France, it inscribes itself definitely, however, as much in “French and Francophone Studies” as in broader “European Union Studies.” The “regionalist phenomenon,” indeed, is far from being restricted to France, as it is on the contrary gaining traction in many other parts of the EU as well –see for instance the demonstration which took the form of a 400 kilometer-long “human chain” in Catalonia this past September 2013 to claim independence from Spain. Regionalist activism in France is however not necessarily fueled by the same “will-for-political-independence” as in the Catalanian example, and “autonomism” may here just be another word for “defense of one’s particularism”

² Concerning Alsatian, for example, the numbers are quite striking: while, in 1970, the proportion of “truly dialectophones” children, able to truly understand and speak Alsatian, was still of 80%, that rate fell down to 5% (!) in 1990, according to a study quoted by Jean Petit in *L’Alsace à la reconquête de son plurilinguisme* (59). This collapse is widely seen as the result of France’s overt and covert language policies such as the post-World War Two slogan “C’est-chic-de-parler-français” –see the section on “Schiffman’s ‘Linguistic Culture’ Hypothesis” below– which caused the dialect’s definite loss of prestige

³ A true paradox given that the European Union demands from Turkey adhesion to the principles of the European Union Charter of Minority Languages *before engaging in any talks* to join the EU; France however, a well-established member of the EU, while it has signed the Charter in 1999, *never ratified it*, which means that it has

on integration” advocating, as a way of addressing the “identity crisis” experienced by second- and third-generation immigrants, the teaching of Arabic for French youth of North-African descent. President Hollande was compelled to hurriedly dismiss the report and reaffirm that French, here again, was the sole “language of the Republic.”⁴

These political debates find their expression in the cultural sphere by, on the one hand, anti-acculturation, “regionalist” writers committed to the preservation of minority languages, like the French-Alsatian author André Weckmann, and, on the other hand, by French-Maghrebi/French-African writers and musical performers such as Mounsi and Abd al Malik. Through a study of cultural forms that engage with questions of “regional literature” and “banlieue (ghetto) literature,” my work strives to parse the diverse representations of the nation present in contemporary discourses about French national identity –discourses that display strategies against homogenization and performatively introduce *disharmony* into the imagined linguistic and discursive harmony of the nation.

Questioning the validity, for the contemporary period, of Pascale Casanova’s argument in *The World Republic of Letters* about Paris –and representations of Paris– representing the gravitational center or “Greenwich meridian” of (French) literature, I also examine the status of these “marginal,” “minor literatures” and the conditions of possibility for their integration or non-integration into a recognizably French national literary canon. This issue matters even more

stayed *lettre morte* to this day. A compromise was struck in July 2008, after an initial refusal by the Senate in June, when the following sentence was eventually added into the Constitution: “Regional languages are part of France’s heritage” –“Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France” (Article 75-1). A good example of the reasoning behind France’s long-standing opposition to ratify the Charter (France-is-the-country-of-freedom-“liberté”-so-how-could-it-oppress-its-regional-‘minorities’-therefore-we-do-not-need-to-protect-them-furthermore-we-do-not-want-to-lose-our-sovereignty-to-the-European-Union) can be found in the figure of right-wing (Gaullist, UMP) politician Robert Grossmann

⁴ Article 2 of the current (Fifth Republic) French Constitution

in a multi-lingual European context which Etienne Balibar rightly identified, already in his 2001 *We, The People of Europe?*, as less and less state-centered.

My work, therefore, is rooted in and contributes to French Studies, Francophone Postcolonial Studies, Creole Studies, Subaltern Studies, Cultural Studies and Political Philosophy. It also connects in important ways with German Studies since the archetypical French region I particularly focus on, Alsace, in the north-east of the country, has developed a “dual French-German identity” as a result of being in the middle of and the winner’s prize of – literally– the “tug-of-war” that we know between the two European powers.

Regarding French Studies specifically, I build upon the directions for research called for in the 2010 edited volume *French Global* (eds. Christie McDonald and Susan Suleiman), whose contributors questioned the idea of an essentializing “*esprit français*” – “French spirit” – and emphasized “multiplicity” rather than “unity” in canonic French literature itself.⁵ While much Francophone Postcolonial Studies has had, arguably, the tendency to assert “francophone” over “French,” leaving unexamined the fundamental question of what exactly is meant by the

⁵ In “The National and the Global,” which is their introduction to the volume, the two co-editors put forward that a notion of “*esprit français*” has, historically, determined the canon of French literature. Taking up the examples of several nineteenth-century anthologies, they note: “[These anthologies shared] [...] a firm belief in the existence of *l’esprit français*, a spirit of rationality and a regard for universal truths that France’s greatest writers have embodied. In the works of these writers, French readers recognize themselves as in a mirror. The argument is foolproof, if not circular: the great writer is the one who expresses *l’esprit français*, so that readers recognize themselves in his works; and if readers recognize themselves in a writer’s works, he is great. The resulting roster is unchanging and permanent, like *l’esprit français* itself” (xii). *This circular process indeed is what has kept strengthening the Archipolitics from the Middle Ages through the modern era* (see below for a definition of the “Archipolitics” in Rancière’s sense). The guiding principle behind the collection of essays “French Global,” however, completely departs from this tradition, as it seeks to emphasize “multiplicity” rather than “unity”: “Our contention is that such questions –about the tensions between multiplicity and unity, between diversity and uniformity, between ‘same’ and ‘other,’ have informed every period of French literature, starting from its most canonical texts” (xi). In our perspective, Stendhal is a good example of such canonical text” both in and out of the Archipolitics, as *Le Rouge et le Noir* on the one hand does develop a mind-structuring “Paris-Province” dichotomy, yet at the same time also deconstructs it. The two types of “French literature”/“literatures in French” which I identify, i.e. “minority regional literature” and “minority banlieue literature,” will only further the deconstruction of “French discourse” as they do render “multiplicity” even more acute than *French Global* envisions it

category “France” or “French,” my study stresses the heteroglossic/dialogic multiplicity⁶ which “regional literature” and “banlieue literature” bring to “French literature” both in terms of style (e.g. André Weckmann’s “Germanic French”) and content (e.g. Abd al Malik’s highly controversial conception of the central place of Islam in the French Republic). Moreover, in line with Gramsci’s “Southern Question” and Michael Hechter’s notion of “*internal colonialism*,” I importantly *redefine postcoloniality* in terms of internal contradictions *within* France itself.

My analytical framework adapts key concepts developed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose notion of “aesthetic regimes” redefines the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Rancière, who, from his theorization of May 1968 to his 1995 *La Méésentente* (translated as “Disagreement”) to his 2000 *Le Partage du Sensible*, has developed a compelling account of the relation between politics and aesthetics, contends that the production of art is a form of politics insofar as any polity that strives towards homogeneity will necessarily produce art conducive to the enforcement of harmonic monolingualism, both literally (one-language) and metaphorically (one-*discourse*-about-language-and/or-about-the-nation).⁷ From

⁶ cf. Bakhtin’s definition of “dialogism” as summarized by Michael Holquist in *Bakhtin and his World*: “Dialogism assumes that at any given time, in any given place, there is a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions at work that will give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and in other places” (67). Diverse as they are, all of the authors in this dissertation, through their displacement of the “French” language and thus their radical redefinitions of “Frenchness,” are, henceforth, powerful examples of such “dialogism.” Where talking about “second-generation immigrants” would be deemed politically *incorrect* by a certain “French” left (on the basis that immigrants are “French”, aren’t they?), Mounsi consciously/proudly (in a négritude-like movement) reclaims the term “*seconde génération*” for the sake of what I call his “two-generation theory” and the assertion of difference. The same is true for Abd al Malik’s notion of “*nouvelle révolution française*,” obviously in *dialogue* with the sacrosanct “French” 1789 foundational event. As for André Weckmann, his use of a unique “Germanic French” language is a stereophonic response to/reaction against historical “traces” contained in both the French *and* in the German languages (“traces” of French universalism vs. “traces” of German Nazism), which is why Weckmann may occasionally use words/concepts akin to “*Blut*” (blood) and “*Boden*” (soil) *without being*, not at all, a “*Blut-und-Boden*” (racistly identitarian) author. In a way, then, Bakhtin’s “dialogism,” integral to the general functioning of literature, is in dialogue with my own concept of *political* “accented literature.”

⁷ The fact that literature/cultural production would have had, over the centuries, only *one* tendency to produce only *one* discourse about “Frenchness,” is of course a highly debatable argument; this view is in fact very much “anti-*French Global*.” The work of the academic, after all, is of course not only to study how canonical literature has, synchronically and diachronically, constructed an official discourse about “Frenchness,” *but also* to discern the

Rancière's French term "archipolitique," we can derive two terms in English: first, the "Archipolity" as the homogeneity-driven polity, and, second, "Archipolitics" as the *process* leading towards this "Archipolity," through the production of homogeneous literature and culture and their assimilation by the members of the "Archipolity." "Archipolity" for Rancière, then, stands in sheer opposition to true "democracy," which he characterizes in terms of "equality through language" and "disagreement" (i.e. the possibility of fundamentally *not* understanding the same thing through the same signifier, e.g. "France"). I expand Rancière's theory of "regimes" to suggest that after May 1968 a "hyper-aesthetic" regime allowed *disagreeing* regionalist voices and immigrant voices alike to become more audible. Importantly, I posit that this shift completely modifies the conventional definition of "democracy," displacing it, to quote political theorist Chantal Mouffe, from the "realization of perfect harmony and transparency," into a vision of democratic politics as marked by "agonistic pluralism."

All chapters in this dissertation engage, in different yet also similar ways, with a concept of "*minority literature*" as "*accented literature*" in the contemporary French context. I indeed develop the notion of "accent," taken out of the sociolinguistic field and applied to the discursive/politico-literary field, to mean both "linguistic variation" *and* "discursive variation." I thus analyze how both "regional minority literature" (André Weckmann, in Chapter 1) and "immigrant minority literature" (Mounsi, Azouz Begag in Chapter 2, Abd al Malik in Chapter 3) break the national unison, both politically and literarily. Regarding specifically André Weckmann and Abd al Malik, I end up suggesting that while the two authors may pragmatically uphold different political projects (a federal European Union privileging "regions" over

"discursive differences" present even in canonical literature itself. What I am concerned with here however is the *general trajectory*: while, for example, Christine de Pisan, for the medieval period, can certainly be said to have added a "proto-feminist voice" to a generally male ambient political discourse, she nonetheless *also contributes*, in the last analysis, to the literary construction of the "French nation" as something "natural," hence "undeniable," much like the other –male– authors of her time such as Alain Chartier and Philippe de Mézières

“nations” vs. a new, pacific “French Revolution”), they do *perform* the same Rancierian egalitarian vision of the political.

1.2 Jacques Rancière, “The Great Philosopher of Aesthetics and Equality”

While concerns about “harmony vs. disharmony” (so-called “Beautifulness of the fixed *Forme-Nation*”⁸ vs. “Anything-that-goes-against-it”) definitely hint at one possible aspect of “aesthetics,” what needs to be clear is that this problematic is only the *result* of a much deeper (originally Kantian) interrogation of the Greek concept of “aesthetics.”

The phrase “politics of aesthetics” was coined by Rancière to think politics precisely in Kantian aesthetic terms, i.e. in terms of *perception*. Hence, the “politics of aesthetics” is concerned with “the delimitation of the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the thinkable and the unthinkable, the possible and the impossible.”⁹ Another favorite Rancierian phrase which Rancière uses to problematize this “delimitation” is the phrase “distribution of the sensible.”

The question, then, is how, concretely, politics would consist in a “delimitation between [the perceptible and the un-perceptible],” thus “between the thinkable and the unthinkable,” and how this all relates to literature and to cultural production in general. For this, we have to take a short detour through Rancière’s own doctoral dissertation, in which his interest for the “distribution of the sensible” is already quite present. The thesis, titled “*La Nuit des Prolétaires*”

⁸ cf. Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, esp. the section titled “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” (p. 86 sq)

⁹ *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, note to the English edition

–“*The Workers’ Night*”– and published as a book in 1981, explores European nineteenth-century (especially Saint-Simonian) workers’ lives from an unusual perspective, i.e. their *literary activity*, at a time when workers were definitely *not supposed to be writers*.¹⁰ And yet Rancière focuses on them as *écrivants*¹¹ (vs. *écrivains*) –“writers” nonetheless, or rather “*writing people*.” The crux of the matter, to Rancière, is to determine *why* what workers did write, regardless of quality and profoundness, *could not* possibly be considered –*perceived as*– literature.

I will tackle this fundamental “why” shortly. Already, it is becoming clear that “aesthetics,” understood as the “delimitation between perceptible and un-perceptible, thinkable and unthinkable,” is indeed closely linked to the study of the *conditions of possibility* for the integration or non-integration of “minor literatures” into a recognizably French literary canon. But first, we have to look at another paramount feature of *La Nuit des Proletaires* –a correlate of “aesthetics” which will prove to be, in Rancière’s philosophy (as much as in my dissertation’s taking up of Rancière), as extremely important as “aesthetics” itself: *equality*. Already initiating the reflection on themes he will later develop in his other book *Le Maître Ignorant (The Ignorant Schoolmaster)* in 2004, Rancière notes that, in a pre-Jules Ferry –even pre-Guizot– law context, “there is no educational system to guarantee the unity of knowledge and style”¹²; as a consequence, these male and female workers/artisans (“ouvriers/artisans”) were all “autodidactes,” which could be generally translated as “self-taught” or “*non-institutionally*

¹⁰ Focused as they were supposed to be on *work* to ensure the good working condition of the capitalist machine of domination, and serving as “factory fodder” (“chair à usine”) when not “cannon fodder” (“chair à canon”)

¹¹ The expression is from Michelle Perrot, taken from the book review she wrote about *La Nuit des Proletaires* the same year it was published into the “Histoire de l’Éducation” journal, vol. 13, issue 13 (80): http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/hedu_0221-6280_1981_num_13_1_3114

¹² Perrot (ibid). See Grossmann’s *Main-Basse sur ma langue* for a personal, concrete example of how systematized education (made possible through Jules Ferry’s 1881/1882 law on free and compulsory education) enabled “French discourse” to thoroughly and effectively permeate French society

taught” (emphasis mine). This phrase “autodidacte” carries out a lot more philosophical meaning here than it could seem at first sight. After noting the influence of Rousseau on these “workers-writers,” both in terms of the style and ideas¹³ they will adopt, what catches especially Rancière’s attention is the way how quite a few of them got their “education”: “Others had had their more or less illiterate mothers as instructors –their mothers who themselves had received the rudiments of education through the Jacotot method” (81),¹⁴ from the name of Jean Joseph Jacotot, an eighteenth century Frenchman, teacher of French in a non-Francophone part of Belgium, who found himself in a situation to teach the French language to students whose Flemish language he himself did not know. His method proved to be –at first sight peculiarly– *a lot* more “student-centered” than the “communicative method” we know –consisting in assigning a book to read in French alongside its Flemish translation *without any explanations from the master*. At the end of their time with Jacotot, students were reported to have a good grasp of the way the French sentence works and to be able to summarize in French what they had understood from a text. Perrot thus underlines,

“Mutual teaching gives, in [Rancière’s] own words, ‘the means to instruct oneself alone and *without a master*, and consequently the means to teach others what one does not know, in full accordance with the principle of intellectual equality’” (ibid, emphasis added)¹⁵

¹³ “As much as these workers are heirs of the [French] Revolution, they are also heirs of this ‘Declaration of the Rights of Self’ which constitutes the preface to the *Confession*” –“Autant que de la Révolution, ces ouvriers sont les fils de cette ‘déclaration des droits du moi’ que constitue la préface des *Confessions*” (Perrot, ibid)

¹⁴ “D’autres s’instruisent par le truchement de mères plus ou moins illettrées, auxquelles la méthode Jacotot permet pourtant d’enseigner les rudiments” (Perrot, 81)

¹⁵ “L’enseignement mutuel donne, selon sa propre formule, ‘le moyen de s’instruire seul et sans maître et par conséquent celui d’enseigner aux autres ce qu’on ignore, d’après le principe de l’égalité intellectuelle’”

She then concludes with an implicit comparison between this and the French Revolution and especially its foundational event known as “Prise de la Bastille” (“Storming of the Bastille” or “Taking of the Bastille”):

“Saint-Simonism equated, for these Parisian workers, storming into the realm of speech and into the realm of writing [“prise de parole, prise d’écriture”];¹⁶ it proved to be, for them, a remarkable learning experience and the realization, though partial and temporary, of a great dream: access to the world of words and language. In sum, a cultural revolution”¹⁷ (83)

These two concepts of “aesthetics” and “equality” will hereafter occupy a central place in all of Rancière’s philosophical reflection. As for “equality,” insofar as it is a fundamental *postulate*, meaning that linguistic and aesthetic equality is *always-already-there* and therefore does never need to be implemented but only *verified*,¹⁸ it is, all in all, very reminiscent of Edouard Glissant’s idea of “Relation,” which opens up tremendous postcolonial perspectives of criticism in which “nations” or, rather, “communities,” are being re-defined, re-imagined, through literature, by equality rather than universality.¹⁹ As for “aesthetics,” in a famous passage of his 2004 article titled “Politique de la Littérature,” he provides us for instance with a good

¹⁶ Note the reactivation of the common verbal phrase “prendre la parole” –“to start speaking”– into “to take a hold of speech,” or “to seize speech” –“to storm into speech”

¹⁷ “Prise de parole, prise d’écriture, le saint-simonisme a été pour ces ouvriers parisiens un remarquable apprentissage et la réalisation, même provisoire et partielle, d’un grand rêve: l’accès au monde du langage et des mots. Une révolution culturelle en somme”

¹⁸ From *La Méésentente*: “A situation may be called ‘political’ only on the condition that these machineries [(kingly power, vicariate of the divinity, commandment of armies, management of interest...)] are stopped by the effect [of the] presupposition that anybody is equal to anybody, which, in the last analysis, amounts to [...] [recognizing] the pure contingency of any hierarchy” –“Il n’y a de la politique que lorsque ces machineries [(exercice de la majesté, vicariat de la divinité, commandement des armées, gestion des intérêts...)] sont interrompues par l’effet [de la] présupposition [...] de l’égalité de n’importe qui avec n’importe qui, soit, en définitive, [...] la pure contingence de tout ordre” (37). See also Balibar’s concept of “equaliberty”

¹⁹ Cf Glissant’s notion of rhizomatic “connaissance partagée” (“shared knowledge”) in *Poétique de la Relation*

example of “aesthetics-as-science-of-the-perceptible” and the theory according to which, within a given “aesthetic regime,” certain types of literatures are going to be either utterly impossible/unthinkable, or, if they do exist *malgré tout*, they will be inaudible, invisible, literally *imperceptible* –precisely to bolster harmony-unity-uniformity: he thus puts forward the idea that before the French Revolution, literature as a whole could only treat topics that were reputed to be “noble,” whereas after that watershed moment which was the French Revolution, any topic, whether noble or not noble, could be treated. A new “regime” was just being ushered in.

1.3 “Regimes” and “Archipolity/Archipolitics”

I use Rancière’s categorization of art production into different “regimes” in order to conduct a reflection on the historicity of both “regional literature” and “banlieue literature.” In other words, what makes these two artistic manifestations *possible* in the here and now of the 20th and 21st century French context?

Rancière maintains that “art forms” are never independent from the political milieu / climate / institutions in which artistic “creation” takes place. In fact, “art forms” *systematically* reflect “political forms” to such an extent that the aesthetic can never be separated from the political. Not unlike Foucault and his delineation of a “history of sexuality,” Rancière strives to uncover a “history of aesthetic politics” made up of different “regimes” *determining* what is “visible” / “seen” / “audible” at a given point in time –hence the key phrase “distribution of the sensible.”²⁰

²⁰ Rancière definitely draws upon Kantian notions of “*a priori* forms determining what presents itself to experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics [and, I would argue, art] revolves

Put differently, in the same way that, in Kantian philosophy of transcendental aesthetics, the subject is able to perceive objects through his or her senses –themselves a function of time and space– and through the “categories of the understanding” but is never able to access the unknowable *Ding-an-sich*, “la chose en soi,” what gets seen / recognized in the field of literature obeys to similar rules: the *same work of art* might be acknowledged as “speech” or reduced to / despised as “noise” depending on the paradigm one finds herself in.²¹ Rancière’s philosophy is indeed all about “conditions of possibility.”

Regarding these “conditions of possibility,” Rancière thus identifies three different paradigms, which he terms “regimes” and which Gabriel Rockhill summarizes as follows:

“[1.] The *ethical regime* [...] characteristic of Platonism is primarily concerned with the origin and the telos of imagery in relationship to the ethos of the community, [where] [...] ‘true art’ [is] used to educate the citizenry concerning their role in the communal body.

[2.] The *representative regime* is an artistic system of Aristotelian heritage that liberates imitation from the constraints of ethical utility and isolates a normatively autonomous domain with its own rules for fabrication and criteria of evaluation.

[3.] The *aesthetic regime* of art puts the entire system of norms into question [...]. It [...] provokes a transformation in the distribution of the sensible established by the representative regime, which leads [...] from

around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time” *The Distribution of the Sensible* (13).

²¹ ... which explains why Abd al Malik’s work is often found on the “Société” shelf rather than in the “Littérature” section

the hierarchical organization of genres to the equality of represented subjects, from the principle of appropriate discourse to the indifference of style with regard to subject matter [...].”

The Politics of Aesthetics, “Translator’s Introduction” (4-5)

Let us first spend some time unpacking what Rancière means with “ethical regime.” To understand this well, we have to associate it with another concept of his, i.e. the “Archipolitics,” thus defined:

“This archi-politics might as well be called ‘archi-police’; it causes to conform, absolutely and without any leeway, ways of being and ways of doing, ways of feeling and ways of thinking. [...] Plato [...] is the one who invented this regime of interiority in which the law is the harmony of the *ethos*, the accord of the individual’s *character* with the *mores* of collectivity. [...] The order of *kosmos* manifests itself as the temperament of an organism. [...] Community [is] conceived as a body animated by one soul –one soul for all: [...] unity of ethical tropisms,²² and unison of fables and refrains”²³

La Mésestente (102-104, emphasis in original)

²² Compare Rancière’s concept of “tropism” –in biology, the growth of a plant in a certain direction in response to an environmental stimulus– with Deleuze and Guattari’s famous distinction between “root-tree structure” and “rhizome”

²³ “Cette archi-politique est donc aussi bien une archi-police qui accorde sans reste les manières d’être et les manières de faire, les manières de sentir et les manières de penser. [...] Platon [...] invente le régime d’intériorité de la communauté où la loi est l’harmonie de l’*ethos*, l’accord du *caractère* des individus aux *mœurs* de la collectivité. [...] L’ordre du *kosmos* se manifeste comme tempérament d’un organisme [...]. La communauté [est] conçue comme corps animé par l’âme une du tout : [...] unité des tropismes éthiques, unisson des fables et des refrains”

It is the “good polis,” Rancière continues, –“la cité bonne”–, “in which the citizen acts not according to the law but according to the spirit of the law” –“où le citoyen agit non selon la loi mais selon l’esprit de la loi [...]” (102) like a French pre-defined, homogenous essence defining everything for everyone –everything down to “one’s opinion on the beautiful and the ugly” –“son opinion sur le beau et le laid” (103).

“Archipolitics,” Rancière still goes on, “is the thorough realization of *phusis* into *nomos*, community law made sensible through and through” –“L’archipolitique, c’est la réalisation intégrale de la *phusis* en *nomos*, le devenir sensible total de la loi communautaire”–, and, through the French school system, it is “the Republican formation of *harmony* –harmony of characters and mores” –“la formation républicaine de l’*harmonie* des caractères et des mœurs” (104, emphasis added).

Rancière, implicitly yet powerfully, makes no mystery about the fact that, to him, *France is/historically gradually became an Archipolitics*. The philosopher, indeed, conflates Plato-like “Archipolitics” with so-called “modern-day democracies,” (i.e. “not-democracies-at-all” according to what “democracy” is really supposed to be and the definition of which we will examine shortly), such as France –France viewed diachronically as much as contemporary France. In *La Méésentente*, he thus states: “[...] Platonist Archipolitics transposes itself, in the modern era, as the sociology of social cement and of commonly-shared beliefs which correct democratic *laisser-aller* and give its cohesion to the republican body [...]” (111)²⁴. Earlier in the book, nineteenth-century France was equally equated with Archipolitics: “Jules Ferry’s republic, so-called lost paradise of citizen-based universalism, was an offshoot human and social sciences,

²⁴ “[...] L’archi-politique platonicienne se transpose, à l’âge moderne, en sociologie du lien social et des croyances communes qui corrigent le laisser-aller démocratique et donnent sa cohésion au corps républicain [...]”

themselves born out of the archi-political project” (104)²⁵. Through the reference to Jules Ferry, Rancière hints that it is indeed through the French school *system* –note the emphasis on the word “*system*”– that “the Republican formation of *harmony* –harmony of characters and mores” could be achieved.²⁶

Focusing on “regimes” bears important consequences in terms of choice of genres, or rather modes of expression being available to artists. Rancière indeed distinguishes “choreography” on the one hand from “writing and theater” on the other hand. The choreographic art form is associated by Rancière to the “ethical regime” *à la* Plato, in that “the community [...] sings and dances its own unity” (14), and all movements are synchronized –all cultural productions, with their diverse means yet harmoniously, tend towards and motion towards the same goal. Choreography thus reinforces the “archi-politics” defined in *La Méésentente*, as we have seen, as an “organic community” (131).

I would argue that the term “choreography” can be taken either literally or metaphorically, since quite obviously “writing and theater”, which are supposed to be the opposite of “choreography,” have historically also been used “choreographically” as it were, and quite explicitly so, with a view to first creating, constructing the nation, and then bolstering it; there is no question that “writing and theater” have also taken part in the ethical and representative regimes²⁷. What Rancière implies here, however, by linking “writing and theater” to the “aesthetic regime of art” and opposing it to choreography *qua* Archipolitics, is that

²⁵ “La république de Jules Ferry, paradis supposé perdu de l’universalisme citoyen, est née à l’ombre de sciences humaines et sociales, elles-mêmes héritées du projet archi-politique”

²⁶ cf. Mortimer Guiney’s monograph on *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*

²⁷ Rancière would quite readily agree that the regimes can overlap, as he does in the “Interview for the English edition” for *The Politics of Aesthetics*: “At a given point in time, several regimes coexist and intermingle in the works themselves” (50)

“writing and theater” have intrinsic *potential* “democratic” properties (“democracy” in a Rancierian sense which will be expounded below). Indeed, in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière underscores that “writing and theater” have the *potentiality* to work towards “the indetermination of identities [and] the delegitimation of positions of speech” (14) which are characteristic of the aesthetic regime of art.

My dissertation, in all three of its chapters, will examine the different ways in which this theory relates to notions of “heteroglossia” –by showing how “regional literature” and “banlieue literature” are in essence “democratically heteroglossic” *through the effective “multiplicity” they bring into the imagined “unity.”* In archipolitical France, “regional literature” and “banlieue literature” are thus *pushing for “democracy.”* But what exactly, according to Rancière, is “democracy”?

1.4 “Democracy”

Rancière links the “aesthetic regime of art” with “democracy.” The aesthetic regime of art, indeed, he says in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, emerged when literature became distinct from “*les belles-lettres*” (“Translator’s Introduction,” 5) and when “the status of the written word [had begun to] freely [circulate] outside any system of legitimation” (ibid). The aesthetic regime of art, Rancière continues, corresponds to an “aesthetic regime of politics [...] strictly identical with the regime of democracy” (14). As already noted, the shift from “the hierarchical organization of genres” to “the equality of represented subjects” could not have been possible in France, historically speaking, without the French Revolution. However, this does not mean that the initial “French Revolution event” can be simply equated with “democracy.”

“Democracy” for Rancière is fundamentally characterized by “disagreement” (“*mésentente*”) and “disagreement,” deriving from and being directly based on the notion of “equality,” refers to allowing the absolute possibility of polysemy in politics: “Disagreement is not the conflict between someone who would say ‘white’ and another person who would say ‘black.’ It is the conflict between someone who says ‘white’ and someone else who says ‘white’ but does not understand the same thing or does not understand that the other person is saying the same thing by using the noun ‘whiteness’” (12)²⁸. A conceptual “space,” or interstice, is here acknowledged between the Signifier and a *plurality* of Signifieds in ways that may remind one of Derrida’s *différance*. In other words, the framework/straightjacket of Foucauldian discourse is loosened up by Rancière from the very opening pages, as it follows from equality that there is no “exclusive knowledge” – “*savoir réservé*” (13). Such wiggle room, aka “*mésentente*” thus understood as the *impossibility* of having just one single definition or signified for signifiers such as “people,” is what makes the essence of “democracy.”

Put differently, in order to have a “democracy,” the “demos” can never be totally true to itself, that is, form a totality; the “people” can never really be “*the* people.” Any polity that would imagine itself whole, homogenous and harmonious cannot be said, paradoxically, to be truly political, or “democratic,” insofar as “real politics,” or “democracy,” according to Rancière, is defined by the “attribution of a part to those who have no part” – other places, the philosopher calls this inadequacy – this “having-no-part” – “*mécompte*” (“miscount”). Therefore, it follows that “Archipolitics” is the antithesis of “democracy.”

²⁸ “La *mésentente* n’est pas le conflit entre celui qui dit blanc et celui qui dit noir. Elle est le conflit entre celui qui dit blanc et celui qui dit blanc mais n’entend point la même chose ou n’entend point que l’autre dit la même chose sous le nom de la blancheur”

In the context of my dissertation, I define “regional literature” and “banlieue literature” as two such literary “have-nots.” I put forward that “politics” and “democracy” happen, are *realized*, when these two literatures are being given a part, or more accurately when they *take* a part, through “disagreement,” i.e. through introducing disharmony into the harmony of the nation.

As already hinted at, to Rancière’s three-regime system, I propose to add a fourth regime. As one might recall, on a gradient ranging from “ethical +++” to “aesthetic +,” the French Revolution had opened the possibility of “aesthetic +” by allowing the literary treatment of all subjects/topics. Of course, as we have also already noted, regimes can overlap and certainly a lot of the literary and art production post-French Revolution contributed to stress the uniqueness and genius of the French people which, according to “French discourse,” had led to such a great idea(l) as the French Revolution. In that sense, it largely stayed within “French discourse” and, consequently, also within the “ethical regime.”

1.5 May 1968 Inaugurates a New, Postcolonial, “Hyper-Aesthetic” Regime

The fourth regime which I am suggesting flows from my interpretation of May 1968 as a similar historical break for France and of equal magnitude as the French Revolution, if not greater. I call this fourth regime “aesthetic ++” or “*hyper-aesthetic regime*.” There is, thus, an overlapping progression going from the “ethical regime”, to the “representative regime”, to the “aesthetic regime of art”, to this “hyper-aesthetic regime” consecutive to the events of May 1968. I argue, indeed, that the social and discursive revolutions entailed by May 1968 did make works

such as Weckmann's and Mounsi's possible or audible as "speech" rather than "noise." How so? And why May 1968 in the first place?

First of all, as Suleiman and McDonald themselves acknowledge in their introduction to *French Global*, May 1968 was an important milestone in the transition from a France that thinks itself as "national" to a France explicitly "global" / internally multiple: "Barthes credits General De Gaulle himself with the latest definition of what is French: '*regular, normal, national*'. [...] Barthes wrote [...] in the aftermath of May 1968, the historical event that shook De Gaulle's definition of Frenchness to its core. Barthes and other theorists of the 1960s and 1970s saw the multiplicity of textual meanings (what they called the polysemy of texts) as profoundly linked to a multiple, dynamic vision of language and society" (xv).

This focus on the "multiplicity of textual meanings," and on a "multiple, dynamic vision of language of society" leads us directly to post-structuralism, and to the second major reason why May 1968 is so paramount in the displacement from France to the global, which is that May 1968's epicenter in terms of impetus was, arguably, at least conceptually speaking, actually *not* France/Paris but: Algeria. Pal Ahluwalia, in his 2010 book *Out of Africa: Post-Structuralism's Colonial Roots*, paradoxically puts forward the Algerian "origin" of Derrida –paradoxically indeed, for any notion of "origin" or "identity" would have been suspect to Derrida himself!– to argue that "Derridian deconstruction" was intrinsically *political* from the beginning, if by "political" we mean here "strongly affected or determined by the material conditions" of-a-concrete-situation-which-happened-to-be-colonization ("worldliness"). Identities produced by this *specific situation* necessarily had to be hybrid ("Franco-judeo-maghrebi," in Derrida's case), which in turn reflected back on the hybridity of any identity, and the "illusion of [any kind of] authenticity" –"l'illusion de [toute] authenticité" (96). Thus Pal Ahluwalia, in a certain way, "re-

provincializes” Paris/France, highlighting the fact that May 1968, without Algeria/the Algerian experience, could never have happened.²⁹

Thirdly, after this displacement we just saw, Kristin Ross, in her influential 2002 monograph titled *May 68 and its Afterlives*, underscores another displacement, which contributes to turn “France” (unity) into “French Global” (multiplicity-within-unity) even more so. The thrust behind Ross’ book is her assessment that May 1968 has been “depoliticized” and therefore needs to be “repoliticized.” “The political dimensions of the event,” she states, “have been, for the most part, dissolved or dissipated by commentary and interpretations” (1). Her argument rests on her criticism of some monopolizing “interpretations” which distill a “unified and singular,” hence distorted, view of the essence of May 1968 – “interpretations” provided by some former key players of May 1968 to whom priority is systematically given over equally as important, but silenced, other key players. Ross argues that, as a result, the common interpretation of May 1968 is in fact a reduction of May 1968, which is to say an “exclusively sociology-focused interpretation” (“interprétation sociologisante”) which insists first and foremost on the *cultural* aspects of May 1968, such as sexual revolution and ‘moral modernization,’ rather than on its intrinsically *political* dimension. Not only does Ross point to this reasoning as intellectual fraud, for such “modernization” has occurred in other countries as well, whether they experienced a “May 1968” or not (13), but what is even more disturbing, and serious, in her opinion, is that this “official history” of May 1968 – this hegemonic interpretation – is “erasing,” “obscuring,” “liquidating,” “confiscating,” “detracting from”³⁰ the true nature of

²⁹ What is more, Kristin Ross describes the “political culture” around May 1968 as marked by the growth of a small but significant opposition to the Algerian War and [...] the embrace by many French of a ‘third-worldist’ north/south analysis of global politics in the wake of the enormous successes of the colonial revolutions” (8) – another reason why May 1968 would not have been possible without Algeria/decolonization

³⁰ Note the very strong verbs Ross is using

May 1968 which, to her, was essentially *political*. The academic's job, in this context, she argues, is to "*repoliticize*" what had been deliberately depoliticized. In particular, she says, "the clear ideological targets of the May movement in France" need to be brought back to the forefront. "These were three: capitalism, American imperialism, and Gaullism" (8). Very crucially, this change of perspective leads Ross to displace the center of May 1968 conceptually, *but also geographically* from Paris to "provincial France" (9). Quoting Elisabeth Salvaresi, Ross notes that "the deepest political resonance of '68 today is found more frequently in the provinces than in Paris" (ibid). "A new optic unto '68 [opens up] that [makes] the legendary status of [...] a Daniel Cohn-Bendit recede, allowing other figures to become more visible in the theoretical and political roles they played during May and afterward" (ibid). While Ross gives as an example José Bové's anti-GMO "Confédération Paysanne" movement, I suggest in this dissertation that André Weckmann, who happens to be both "anticapitaliste" and an opponent of Gaullism's *C'est-chic-de-parler-français*, is another one of these *regional* figures which Ross's approach helps to make "more visible." Ross concludes by saying that while the "official history" of May 1968 –again, the "sociologized history," the overly focused on the "génération étudiante" kind of history– likes to remember "freedom" as the main motto for May 1968, repoliticizing the event moves the cursor back to where lies the most important feature of May 1968 according to Ross – namely, *not* "freedom," but, very importantly with regard to this dissertation: "equality" (10).

Regarding Alsace and Weckmann, it is certainly no coincidence that May 68, and the years leading up to May 1968, marked the beginning of Weckmann's political consciousness ("political" this time around again in Rancière's sense). Weckmann's first book, *Les Nuits de Fastov*, was published that very same year –1968. Born in 1924, he was, in 1968, not a young university student but a German high school teacher in his forties in Strasbourg. Dominique

Huck, in the “Introduction” to his 1989 anthology of Weckmann’s works, *André Weckmann, Un Écrivain de Son Temps*, –in English, *André Weckmann, A Writer Anchored in His Time*– (again the idea of “worldliness”), writes:

“It is in his high school that he experienced the month of May 1968. These events, he experienced them intensely, welcoming them as a true liberation, on several accounts: it represented, for him, a collective rise to awareness that ‘consumption society’ (as it was then called) could not end up being a real project for society and that society as it was functioning estranged humans. For him, it represented a taking up of speech [‘prise de –parole’]³¹ by those who had never had it –at long last, the ‘voice-less’ [‘les ‘sans-voix’] were finally speaking” (6)³²

Highlighting the links between ecology and linguistic/cultural ecology, Huck thus continues his account of Weckmann’s “1968 years”:

“In his lucidity and defiance towards any kind of recuperation, he thought that the ‘revolution’ which was happening was too Parisian and that this was not the type of revolution Alsace needed. Alsace certainly was in need of profound changes, but these changes had to be specific to Alsace.

This reflection on May 68 will find its way into his novel *Fonse*, in quite strong terms.

³¹ Compare with Rancière’s notions, mentioned earlier, of “prise de parole” and “prise d’écriture”

³² “[...] C’est dans son lycée qu’il vivra le mois de mai 1968: ces événements, il les vivra intensément, les ressentant comme une véritable libération, à plusieurs titres: c’est, pour lui, une prise de conscience collective que la ‘société de consommation’ (comme l’on disait alors) ne peut déboucher sur un vrai projet de société et que la société telle qu’elle fonctionne aliène les hommes; c’est pour lui une prise de parole par ceux qui ne l’ont jamais eue: enfin, les ‘sans-voix’ parlent”

One of the consequences of the events of 68 will be a wide interest, all along the Upper Rhine region, for ‘alternative’ movements seeking to defend the people’s right to decide for themselves what is good for them – defend their environment, not only their economic and industrial environment, but also their linguistic and cultural environment, that is to say their identity.

This is the reason why Weckmann will be engaged, particularly in the mid-seventies, in struggles against nuclear plants and also against the chemical plants of Marckolsheim (1975), Why! (1975), Gerstheim (1977)... This defense of identity and of the right to self-determination will be present in numerous texts and will be the major theme of *Die Fahrt nach Why!* (6)

With this “natural” consequence:

“Throughout the nineteen seventies, André Weckmann will be engaged in a professional project which does not appear in his works, but which is, in a way, the logical corollary thereof. He has been working, indeed, [...] to help reintroduce the German language into elementary school³³ and crafted a method of German learning especially designed for young dialectophones for the middle school and high school levels. [...]

³³ Relate to Robert Grossmann’s (former Mayor of Strasbourg/Strassburg) visceral anti-German position, and thus visceral opposition to Weckmann. Grossmann’s detestation of the German language, I argue, cannot be only explained by Grossmann’s experience of Nazi oppression, as Weckmann experienced this oppression just as much as Grossmann. I suggest that it can be explained, however, by the fact that Grossmann was, more than Weckmann, a pure product of the “French archipolity” (cf. the numerous passages in *Main-basse sur ma langue* which deal with “French” education –mother and school–, resulting in his love for French letters and disgust for German)

Weckmann devoted to this project all his talents as a writer, story-teller and magician of words” (7)³⁴

In another collection of excerpts and interviews edited, this time, in 2000 by Peter André Bloch, and titled *Littérature Régionale et Contexte International. Regionalliteratur und Internationalität*, Weckmann himself depicts the influence May 1968 had on him. He explicitly traces these influences back to “the rebellious wind coming from North American university campuses” and which “had started to blow with force 8 on German universities.” “In Alsace, it was still a gentle swell which [I and some others] [...] interpreted in our own way and which we learnt to surf on, in an idiosyncratically Alsatian way [‘à l’alsacienne’]”:

“Mai 68. The big break. The liberation of the word. The rejection of finicky paternalism. The emancipation of anything that felt itself minoritarian, crushed by political and social taboo. How did the forty-year old man experience it? The poet I was would have liked to be in his twenties to be able to fully inhale the high wind which was dispersing the ‘damp, rotting smell of a thousand years’ [in German: ‘den Muff von

³⁴ “Mais, dans sa lucidité et sa défiance à l’égard de toute récupération, il s’aperçoit que la ‘révolution’ qui s’opère est trop parisienne et que ce n’est pas de cette forme dont a besoin l’Alsace. Il lui faut certes des modifications profondes, mais des modifications qui seront propres à l’Alsace.

Cette réflexion sur mai 68 se retrouvera d’ailleurs, dans des termes écrits au vitriol, dans son roman *Fonse*.

L’une des conséquences des événements de 68 sera le large écho que rencontrent les mouvements ‘alternatifs’ tout le long du Rhin supérieur, mouvements qui veulent défendre le droit des gens à décider eux-mêmes de ce qui est bon pour eux, défendre leur environnement non seulement économique et industriel, mais aussi linguistique et culturel, c’est-à-dire leur identité.

C’est la raison pour laquelle Weckmann s’engagera, particulièrement au milieu des années soixante-dix, dans les combats contre les centrales et les usines de Marckolsheim (1975), Whyl (1975), Gerstheim (1977)... Cette défense de l’identité, du droit à disposer de soi-même est présente dans de nombreux textes et sera le thème majeur de *Die Fahrt nach Whyl*.

Tout le long des années soixante-dix, André Weckmann aura un engagement professionnel qui n’apparaît pas dans son œuvre, mais qui en est, en quelque sorte, le corollaire logique: il travaille [...] à la réintroduction de l’allemand à l’école élémentaire et à un enseignement spécifique de l’allemand aux jeunes dialectophones du collège et du lycée. [...] Weckmann y a mis tout son talent d’écrivain, de conteur et de magicien des mots”

tausend Jahren']. I took part in one demonstration and felt all at once carried away by this collective enthusiasm and threatened by it, as though it was threatening my capacity to judge by myself. I then decided to carry out my own May 68, and occupied with my students and a few of my colleagues the Neudorf Cultural Center, which at the time was paradoxically doing nothing for 'culture,' and organized there [...] artistic and poetical shows in French and in the Alsatian dialect [...]" (230-231)³⁵

Weckmann goes on, describing May 1968 in ways very close to Mounsi's jarring *postcolonial* "hurlement" –"shout"– in *Territoire d'Outre-Ville*, which will be dealt with in Chapter 2:

"Out, then, with May 68? No! For it had waken up an entire generation of young Alsations who stormed into the Franco-centric University ['Université franchouillarde'] and Alsations songs soon filled the University's reception hall. Then began the revolt against totalitarian

³⁵ "Les années soixante-dix [...] commencèrent [...], pour moi, dès 1967. Le vent rebelle parti des campus américains avait atteint en force 8 les universités allemandes. En Alsace, ce n'était encore qu'une légère houle que nous [...] interprétâmes à notre façon et sur laquelle nous apprîmes à surfer, à l'alsacienne.[...] Entre-temps, le poète dialectal s'était approprié la langue française comme expression littéraire. [...] En 1968 parut ce qu'on peut appeler mon grand travail de deuil, le récit traitant de mon traumatisme personnel et du traumatisme collectif alsacien *Les Nuits de Fastov*. Suivit, en 1969, le récit en langue allemande *Sechs Briefe aus Berlin*. Car entre-temps aussi, je m'étais réconcilié avec cette langue, grâce surtout à la littérature allemande d'après-guerre, les Grass, Böll, Lenz et autres membres de la fameuse 'Gruppe 47' [...]. [Tout cela] me fit découvrir la nouvelle et jeune Allemagne, débarrassée du masque nazi. Après l'appropriation du français littéraire, ce fut donc la réappropriation de l'expression standard de ma langue maternelle. J'avais trouvé enfin mon équilibre littéraire, ancré ma personnalité dans les trois composantes linguistiques et culturelles qui ont façonné l'Alsace. Ce fut jouissif, ça l'est resté.

Mai 68. La grande césure. La libération du verbe. Le rejet du paternalisme tâtilon. L'émancipation de tout ce qui se sentait minoritaire, écrasé par les tabous politiques et sociaux. Comment le quadragénaire l'a-t-il vécu? Le poète aurait aimé avoir vingt ans à cette époque-là, se désaltérer au grand vent qui secouait 'den Muff von tausend Jahren.' Il suivit une manif, se sentit à la fois emporté par l'enthousiasme collectif et en même temps menacé par lui, qui le privait de son libre arbitre. Il fit alors son Mai 68 personnel, occupa avec ses élèves et quelques collègues le Centre culturel de Neudorf, qui n'avait d'ailleurs de culturel que le nom, y organisa [...] des soirées artistiques et poétiques en français et en dialecte [...]"

Jacobinism, against intellectual bourgeois elites, against the spinelessness and abdication of fathers,³⁶ in sum against a politico-social system which had been destroying our cultural values. We called this time period the “Alsatian renaissance” –it was the time when a different kind of poetry in Alsatian was born, a sort of protest poetry, often violent-sounding, almost like a shout” (232-233)³⁷

³⁶ A reference, certainly among other things, to Jean Petit’s “three-generation model” to account for the dramatic decrease in the practice of the Alsatian dialect in Alsace? “1. Grandparents are dialectophones or bilingual dialect-French. They speak the dialect among themselves, but do not transmit it to their children any more. 2. The parents can still understand the dialect but are not speaking it any more and therefore are unable to transmit it. 3. The grandchildren are French monolinguals. Their knowledge of the dialect is limited to knowing that their grandparents are still using it” –“1. Les grands-parents sont dialectophones ou bilingues dialecte-français. Ils parlent le dialecte entre eux, mais ne le transmettent plus à leurs enfants. 2. Les parents comprennent encore le dialecte mais ne le parlent plus et ne peuvent donc le transmettre. 3. Les petits enfants sont francophones monolingues. Leur connaissance du dialecte se borne à savoir que les grands-parents l’utilisent encore” (48)

³⁷ “Exit donc Mai 68? Non! Car il avait réveillé toute une jeune génération alsacienne qui prit d’assaut l’Université franchouillarde et l’aula résonna bientôt de chants alsaciens. Ce fut alors la révolte contre le jacobinisme totalitaire, contre les élites intellectuelles et bourgeoises, contre la veulerie et la démission des pères, bref contre un système politico-social destructeur de nos valeurs culturelles. Ce fut l’époque de ce qu’on appela la ‘renaissance alsacienne,’ l’éclosion d’une poésie dialectale différente, revendicative, aux accents souvent violents, proches du cri” Peter André Bloch, editor of the anthology, inserted here a poem by Weckmann in Alsatian precisely entitled “E Schrej” –“A Shout”: “*e schrej esch ebs gaches/e schrej macht weh/dam wo ne üsstôsst/dam wonr d ohre verriest/e schrej esch net gschlackt/e schrej esch net gewasche/net gstraalt net gepüdert/e schrej derfsch netmetnamme/uf e party bi s bourgeois’ s/ e schrej esch ebs wêldes/e füscht ens mäujekiddel/e gebällti sprôch wo verknellt/e schrej weckt uf/wàs dôst was schlôft/ ufem sâmmetkêsse/vâm verdoddelte gewêsse/e schrej/esch s letscht/wàs dr ewriblît/vor àss de s schnüfe ufstecksch/wann d die längs àm rhin ànnestrecksch/un d vogese di/met roschtigem läub züedecke/e schrej*” –followed by its translation in French: “un cri/c’est violent/il fait mal/à celui qui le pousse/aux oreilles qu’il déchire/un cri n’est pas léché/n’est pas lavé/pas coiffé pas poudré/tu ne peux pas l’emmener dans les salons bourgeois/un cri c’est quelque chose de sauvage/un coup de poing au creux de l’estomac/une langue en charge concentrée qui explose soudain/un cri ça réveille/tout ce qui somnole/sur le mol oreiller/de la conscience abêtie/un cri/c’est tout ce qui te restera/lorsque tu te coucheras/pour ton dernier souffle/sur la rive du rhin/et que les vosges te/recouvrirent de feuilles mortes/un cri” (233-234)

Among Weckmann’s many other writings written around May 1968 or dealing directly with May 1968, one can also mention *Damals im Mai. Vom Sinn und Unsinn einer Revolution* (written in German to powerfully signify the non-Frenchness of the event, and which may be translated in English as: *Back in May –On the Sense and Nonsense of a Revolution*)

1.6 “Democracy” as “Polemical Communities”

As we have underlined, “democracy” for Rancière is fundamentally characterized by “disagreement” (“*mésentente*”) and “disagreement” is directly based on the notion of “linguistic equality”/“equality of intelligence.” As we have also said, “democracy” *qua* “disagreement” implies the “attribution of a part to those who have no part,” and we suggested considering “regional literature” and “banlieue literature” as two such literary “have-nots.”

What we have also said is that the “Archipolity” was the antithesis of “democracy”; since we additionally determined that France was such an “Archipolity,” does this entail that France is the absolute antithesis of “democracy”?

Not exactly, if we take into consideration that *postcolonial* “regional literature” (indeed postcolonial)³⁸ and *postcolonial* “banlieue literature” are two types of literature the *very existence* of which (meaning that they do not need to be legitimized by any political or literary authorities) helps to maintain in contemporary France a truly “political” dimension –with, again, “the political” being defined here as the manifestation of “disagreement.” There are, in other words, *anti*-“archipolitical” tendencies, or forces, within the French Archipolity which make it *not a hundred percent* archipolitical –and that is *thanks to* “Region” and “Immigration,” the double focus of this dissertation. On the other hand, because France still has, obviously, archipolitical tendencies, and is still resistant to “equality” (as epitomized by the two December 2013 events exposed at the very beginning of this Introduction), it surely cannot be perfectly “democratic” in Rancière’s sense.

³⁸ For a justification of the term “postcolonial” associated with the “region,” see Michael Hechter’s notion of “internal colonialism” and Gramsci’s “Southern Question”

Rancière has a name for such polities finding themselves in a state of flux between “Archipolity” and “democracy” – “polemical communities”:

“Democracy thus establishes *polemical communities* in which comes into play the very opposition of two logics –the policing logic of the distribution of places [the ethical regime of art], and the political logic of the egalitarian trait”³⁹

La Mésestente, “Démocratie ou Consensus” (141, emphasis added)

The fact that the above quotation begins with the word “democracy,” despite “polemical communities” technically being in-between, as it were, “democracy” and “Archipolity,” leads us to believe that, in Rancière’s mind, the simple presence of “disagreement,” i.e. of “the political,” i.e. of “equality,” is enough to be able to speak of “democracy” as long as we find ourselves in the “aesthetic regime of art.” The purpose of this dissertation, thus, is to provide a concrete illustration of “democracy” *à la* Rancière by showing two of its manifestations: “France *vis-à-vis* regional literature” and “France *vis-à-vis* banlieue literature.”

Focusing on “regional literature” and “banlieue literature,” therefore, and analyzing them in terms of “voices of disagreement,” means a lot more than just discerning “discontent” on the part of regionalists and of immigrants, as expressed in literature, relative to the nation. It means more, even, than “just” discussing how the legitimacy of French national/nationalist discourse is undermined through the dissonant “voices” –counter-discourses, counter-arguments, counter-weights, *counter-styles*– of Region and Immigration. One can now see, hopefully, that such a

³⁹ “La démocratie institue donc des *communautés polémiques* qui mettent en jeu l’opposition même de deux logiques, la logique policière de la distribution des places [the ethical regime of art], et la logique politique du trait égalitaire”

study on the “aesthetics of plurivocality,” understood as “hyper-aesthetic *regime* of plurivocality,” enables us, in fact, to get to the core of “the political” *à la* Rancière.

1.7 Schiffman’s “Linguistic Culture” Hypothesis

Before we proceed, we still need to tackle the puzzling “big why” –*why is there, even, a “politics of aesthetics”* in contemporary France? *Why*, in other words, should there even be, in contemporary French literature and culture, a problematic of “perceived vs. unperceived,” “thinkable vs. unthinkable”? We have started to offer the beginning of some answers through the Rancierian concepts of “Archipolitics vs. democracy” and “ethical vs. aesthetic regimes.” If we were to dig –conceptually speaking– under the archipolitical edifice, though, what kind of foundations may we find? What, “on earth,” may sustain this –if we think of it, incredible– construction? For how can people be convinced to conform to national norms so easily, allowing the national archipolitical monster to develop and thrive, first feeding on harmony to then be able to better vomit war and hate of others? How does ideology acquire such a gigantic, compelling power of interpellation? Certainly, in order to account for the mystifying growth of the French politico-literary Leviathan, a notion of “joint co-evolution of Literature and Politics” is helpful.⁴⁰ Another factor must however be introduced here to try and explain France’s archipolitical tendencies, i.e. to account for the historical repression, in France, of anything non-standard, non-harmonic, non-harmonious. This other factor is what Harold Schiffman terms “linguistic culture.”

⁴⁰ That is, has political power alone strived to diachronically create a “harmonious,” monolingual “France” (e.g. through political decisions such as the ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts), or was this “harmony” discursively created through literature (e.g. through works such as Du Bellay’s *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*)? While Literature and Politics never really coincide, they may be said to nevertheless “jointly co-evolve”

The self-avowed purpose of Harold Schiffman's 1996 book titled *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*, is to look beyond specific instances of language policy –such as France's *de jure* constant refusal, up to this day, to ratify the European Union Charter of Minority Languages– and consider instead the broader “linguistic culture” which sustains said language policy. This approach, according to Schiffman, proves to be a lot more fruitful in order to better grasp the entire phenomenon:

“Contrary to viewing language policy as the specific, overt and explicit embodiment of rules, this book examines how these policies are formed within a broader framework and are heavily influenced by the covert and implicit grass-roots of its own linguistic culture. By seeing language policy as culture-specific, we can understand why language policies evolve the way they do, why they work, or not, and how people's lives are affected by them” (i)

So what, then, is a “linguistic culture”?

“[...] Language policy is primarily a social construct that rests on other conceptual elements such as belief systems, attitudes and myths [which make up] the *linguistic culture* of a society” (ibid, emphasis in original)

Schiffman thus defines “linguistic culture” as a set of “belief systems, attitudes and myths” regarding language and proper to each culture. He makes his point even clearer a little later on:

“It should be clear by now that the basic tenet of this book is that language policy is ultimately grounded in *linguistic culture*, that is, the set of

behaviors, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language. That is, the beliefs (one might even use the term myths) that a speech community has about language (and this includes literacy) in general and its language in particular (from which it usually derives its attitudes towards other languages) are part of the social conditions that affect maintenance and transmission of its language” (5, emphasis in original)

In the case of France, what may this superstructural “linguistic culture” look like? Schiffman broaches this topic in several places in his book, such as the following section dedicated to “Myths about French”:

“In France, attitudes about language [...] can be observed with little or no searching; they are overt and widely disseminated. This has been observed and discussed in monograph-length studies such as those of Gordon (1978) and Flaitz (1988). Many observers have noted that the French see their language as having a mission in the world: it is seen as universal, pure and lucid, the proper and appropriate medium of the values of humanism –the language of civilization *par excellence*”⁴¹ (22)

⁴¹ See for instance Robert Grossmann’s ode to the “French language” in *Main-Basse sur Ma Langue. Mini Sproch Heisst Freiheit*: “The French nation is republican: the French language conveys the ideals and virtues of the Republic. Liberté Égalité Fraternité is a French motto, and it is proclaimed in French, even though these three terms need to be daily fought for and the outcome of the battle is never guaranteed. The Rights of man, while not a permanent reality, are nonetheless a French concept” –“La nation française est républicaine: la langue française véhicule les idéaux et les vertus de la République. Liberté Égalité Fraternité est une devise française, proclamée en français, même si ces trois termes impliquent un combat quotidien qui n’est jamais gagné. Les Droits de l’homme sont un concept français, à défaut d’être en permanence une réalité” (115). In the quotation below, Grossmann does not completely deny the existence of the Archipolitics; but, rather than a

While, as a rule, in Schiffman's analysis, the "language policy" is said to be typically "overt" by contrast with the "linguistic culture" which should be "covert," it is in my opinion quite revealing that the author is here using the adjective "overt" even for France's linguistic culture. Such a "[wide dissemination]," we think, indicates normalization and uniformization and, therefore, is a trait of the Archipolitics. It shows that the "language essentialism" view according to which "French-is-pure-lucid-and-clear" is not limited to a certain particular discourse that would be present or confined only in a few authors in the literary realm, like, famously, Boileau's "ce-que-l'on-conçoit-bien-s'annonce-clairement" –"what-is-clear-conceptually-shall-be-clearly-expressed," i.e. in the French language;⁴² on the contrary, it is a transversal belief *in society*, a discourse adamantly upheld, whether consciously or unconsciously, by "Monsieur-et-Madame-tout-le-monde" (French Joe Schmo, male and female). In the quotation below, the second sentence is in this respect particularly interesting:

"French language policy is a construct that rests on many assumptions [i.e. pertaining to linguistic culture], including the superiority of the French

politico-literary one, what Grossmann's acknowledges is a sort of "cultural Archipolitics" which *de facto*, for him, greatly alleviates –annuls– the responsibility of "France" in the process of homogenization: "In reality, the opportunity of individual freedom in a peaceful State [post-WW2 France] led an ever-growing number of our fellow-citizens to *freely* practice the French language. One might argue that this was due to *mimetism*, to a *will-to-be-fashionable* at a given time, no doubt, but it is wrong to say that the [French] State exerted any kind of terroristic pressure and that the successive [French] governments would be, alone, responsible for the decline in the practice of the Alsatian dialect. Each and every Alsatian individual bears a portion of this responsibility. And if someone would absolutely want to designate 'who's responsible,' [...] that shall be [...] the Nazi regime" –"En réalité, l'exercice de la liberté individuelle dans un Etat en paix a conduit un nombre croissant de nos concitoyens à pratiquer *volontairement* le français. On pourra dire qu'il y avait là du *mimétisme*, la *volonté d'être dans le vent* de l'époque, sans doute, mais il est faux de dire qu'il y aurait eu terrorisme d'Etat et que les gouvernements de l'époque seraient seuls responsables de la diminution de la pratique de l'alsacien. Chaque Alsacien a eu sa part de responsabilité. Si certains veulent absolument que l'on désigne un responsable, [...] il y en a un, indiscutable, responsable et coupable: c'est le régime nazi" (25-26, emphases added). The ternary rhythm of the cataphora in "-able" ("*indiscutable, responsable et coupable*"), in which one can hear the "bl" of "blâme," typographically followed by the colon, shifts the weight of the sentence (and of the blame) towards "nazi Germany" –the responsibility of "France" is relegated to the very-very background. This dissertation, while not denying the huge responsibility of "Nazi Germany" for that matter, still aims at complexifying Grossmann's assertions, notably by putting to the foreground a concept of "French Archipolitics"

⁴² *Art Poétique*, Chant I.

language [...]. Many French scholars have tried to demythologize this construct, but the French themselves remained unmoved by such efforts. What we will see is that the myths about French are not simply hoary legends from the past, but are constantly being reconstructed. Mythologizing about the French language is an ongoing process, though few within French society recognize it” (72)

What Schiffman means here with “French myth-making” (22), the gerund of which indicates an active, almost mechanical always-happening process, indeed an “ongoing enterprise” (ibid), needs now to be carefully unpacked.

Very interestingly, there is one feature of France’s linguistic culture –somewhat surprising at first– which comes up, time and again, throughout Schiffman’s analysis, that is: *grammar and spelling* –“orthographe,” in French (i.e. “right” way of writing: the word itself tends to gesture towards Archipolitics.) It repeatedly pops up in Schiffman’s book, in an almost *unheimlich* –Freud’s “uncanny”– way, so much so that I believe this to be profoundly signifying. Here are a few selected passages:

“[...] Most attempts at reform of French spelling in the last two centuries have drawn protests, and many well-meaning reforms have failed” (118)

“[...] Most French citizens are not troubled by the effects of their official language policy; what they *are* troubled by are attempts to ‘democratize’ access to the language by reforming spelling [...]” (289, emphasis in original)

“One of the most vexatious factors in dealing with language policy in France today is that many notions that the French have about their language, especially its orthography, are based on myths that appear to have risen in the nineteenth century, and concern the legal status of the orthography and the role of the *Académie française* in setting rules” (115, emphasis in original)

“French orthography is the language, warts and all: though it may sometimes be illogical, that is its beauty, and to learn its rules imparts a kind of discipline that is good for people. One submits oneself to it for the greater glory of France (this view may be held by the same people who claim that the French language is inherently logical.) This ‘love of spelling’ above all else is attacked by reformers as *le fétichisme de l’orthographe*” (116, emphasis in original)

“Phoneticism, or writing things the way they ‘sound’ is tantamount to chaos, disorder, *le déluge*, and will bring forth anarchy, riots, the breakdown of society, morals, and the end of civilization. Not one change must be allowed in this direction” (116)

“[...] Only written French is capable of maintaining the *certitude, clarté, précision*, and *pureté* that the French consider to be the inherent qualities of their language, and thus French spelling must not be allowed to descend into phoneticism” (118)

“Attempts to change orthography, modernize or simplify spelling, are linked (inexplicably) to another bugaboo, the dangers of *franglais*. Defense of orthography and defense of the French language from pressures *outré-Manche*, that is from Anglo-America, are one and the same” (116, emphasis in original)

“Yet a myth has evolved, according to which there is an ordained standard, and everyone must learn it. As anyone who has ever studied French can recall, an inordinate amount of time is spent on dictations (*dictées*) where sentences are read to students who must write them down without error. These *dictées*, of course, are full of traps [...]” (120, emphasis in original)

In a section titled “Construction of the modern myth,” Schiffman takes up again points laid out by Nina Catach, a CNRS specialist of the “history of French orthography”:

“She [Catach] focuses on a part of the mythology, the ‘imaginary decree of 1832.’ When many of the opponents of reform want to defend their opposition to reform, they invoke this *décret*, which has supposedly never been abrogated, and which supposedly⁴³ authorized the spelling norms of the Académie française as a ‘state orthography’ [...], which alone is valid. [...] As Catach points out, the myth of the imaginary decree is recent –it does not receive explicit mention before 1970. [...] Catach outlines a

⁴³ Note the repetition of the adverb “supposedly”

number of assumptions contained in this myth:

1. Spelling can be ‘fixed’ once and for all. She refers to this as *fixisme*.⁴⁴
2. It is forbidden for anyone other than the *Académie française* to meddle with French spelling (judicial argument).
3. Any attack on this state (of the language), which is taken as definitive and untouchable, whether it concerns spelling errors or attempts to let the language evolve, is scandalous.

No denial of factual errors involved in this myth, nor of what Catach calls the ‘moral’ errors (because the language is usually thought of as belonging to the ‘people’), have ever been undertaken by competent authorities, but rather are accepted and reproduced” (119)

While Schiffman has obviously chosen his side in this matter, and could be criticized for entertaining his own agenda –a teleological, entropy-driven, agenda (“the-law-of-least-effort-is-going-to-win-and-this-is-the-*sens-de-l’Histoire*”)⁴⁵, and while-of-course-spelling-is-important-

⁴⁴ Compare with Benedict Anderson’s “politico-economic” explanation, in *Imagined Communities*, for “fixity” (which needs, though, to be distinguished from “fixism,” “fixity-promoted-into-belief-in-fixity”): “print-capitalism gave a new *fixity* to the language” (emphasis added): “[...] The printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially. It was no longer subject to the individualizing and ‘unconsciously modernizing’ habits of monastic scribes. Thus, while twelfth-century French differed markedly from that written by Villon in the fifteenth, the rate of change slowed decisively in the sixteenth. By the seventeenth century languages in Europe had generally assumed their modern forms” (44)

⁴⁵ cf. his (questionable?) value judgements such as, in a footnote to his section “What did *not* happen during the French Revolution?” (103 sq, emphasis in original): “Ironically, some spellings of the [Revolutionary] period are more ‘modern’ (i.e. phonetic) than present-day spellings, for example the spelling *tems* for *temps* ‘time, weather.’ Many ‘silent’ letters no longer written in 1789 have subsequently been reintroduced. [...]” Does that mean that, according to Schiffman, we “should” do away with etymology altogether? Or perhaps the etymologist of the twenty-second century could still study etymology, but as a past object of study? At any rate, Schiffman thus continues: “This is not to say that other languages, such as English, have done a better job of modernizing their spelling. But if revolutionary changes were going to be made, the Revolution of 1789 was a perfect time to do it. In effect, it left the corpus of the language alone, and only tried to change its status” (295) –i.e. implement for good, under the retrospectively twisted pretexts of “liberté-égalité-fraternité,” the “one-nation-one-language” Villers-

to-get-a-job, I nonetheless argue that Schiffman's close-to-nevrotic obsession with French grammar and spelling –consistently viewed in the prism of their tediousness and difficulty⁴⁶– is profoundly signifying in regard to the definition of France as Archipolitics, in a number of ways:

Number one, *décentralisation*, i.e. decentralization or devolution of power from the centralized state to the regions, a process begun by Mitterand in 1982, is nothing but a smoke screen, *a diversion from the reality of the Archipolitics*. While it is correct to say that the *Conseils Régionaux* –Regional Councils– of Haut-Rhin ad Bas-Rhin, to take Alsace's example, do currently have the power to implement, in competition with France's pro-French language overt policy, a pro-Alsatian dialect policy equally as overt as France's, with close to two million euros of the budget allotted to bilingual education in 2014,⁴⁷ it is clear that the power of the "linguistic culture"/of the "language-as-text"/of the "language-as-discourse," as Schiffman says (56) still remains in effect. Decentralization is thus definitely *not* what would make the Archipolitics waiver; through the power of "linguistic culture," France's language policy is *de jure* as much as it is *de facto*.⁴⁸

Cotterêts precept, thereby also implementing a "*terreur linguistique*" (102, 112, emphasis in original) for instance in Alsace with schemes of sending non-French speakers off to the guillotine or deport them to other regions of France so that they eventually lose their "idiome"/"patois" (cf. Barère's famous-infamous speech associating German/Alsatian to "emigration and hatred of the Republic" –"l'émigration et la haine de la République parlent allemand"– etc...)

⁴⁶ Like, in psycho-analytical terms, a "reverse Grossmannian trauma," which tends to suggest that all is relative! Robert Grossmann's trauma, as a child, was linked to the complexity *not* of the French language, but of the *German* language, contrasted with the perceived "easy flow" of the French language! The latter, however, can of course be interpreted as a sign that Grossmann's brain had already been, at that point, formatted by the Archipolitics

⁴⁷ Since the government announced, on July 15, 2014, its project of an administrative fusion of Alsace with Lorraine and Champagne-Ardenne (!) –on the basis that, what? Champagne also makes wine?–, whether this policy will even continue to be possible remains to be seen

⁴⁸ This remark enables us to remove Schiffman's last scruples to defines "French language policy" as "centrist policy par excellence, that is, a unilingual policy decreed from above, handed down and strictly controlled by a highly centralized state (multilingual, but refusing to recognize it)" (1). In a continuum ranging from the USA ("*laissez-faire* policy [...] of a supposedly monolingual state that is actually multilingual") to India ("an admittedly

Number two, Schiffman does identify, rightly so I believe, France's –especially postcolonial France's– anxiety around spelling with *anxiety around immigration* and the fear that immigrants, lacking proper French skills yet attending French schools, would “égaliser-par-le-bas” –“substandardize” as it were– both the language and the “nation” epitomized by said language. As Schiffman notes, addressing “the furore over the orthography reform of 1989-90” (118): “Even a team of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* [CNRS] that attempted to study the impact of the proposed reforms found itself the object of revulsion: some of its questionnaires were returned defaced with right-wing slogans or soiled with excrement by people who found even the idea of *discussing* spelling reform to be a left-wing attack on the sanctity of the language” (298, emphasis in original).⁴⁹ Spelling may thus be seen as a deliberate roadblock

multilingual nation to which the Soviet policy model has been transplanted, but with unhappy results”), France appears to Schiffman as truly one-of-a-kind (see Renée Balibar's liminal quote). To demonstrate France's “uniqueness,” and put things in perspective, Schiffman devotes a section to situations where language policies are “in conflict with observable [sociolinguistic] reality” (48 sq) in his chapter titled “Typologies of Multilingualism and Typologies of Language Policy” (26 sq):

– Policies with a (near) perfect fit: *Japan, Portugal, Iceland*. (These turn out to be monolingual speech communities that also have a monolingual policy)

- [...] Policies that establish rights for varieties that few users have any proficiency in: *Finland* (for Swedish)

- [...] Policies that place two (or more) H [High]-variety codes on an equal basis, but ignore L [Low]-variety repertoires: *Belgium* (for Flemish); *Canada* (federally, for French)

- Policies that recognize territorial rights for certain languages, with gradience in the distribution of registers (and assumed repertoires) based on the size of the populations: *the former Soviet Union* (and other polities using the Soviet policy model); *Switzerland* (*de facto*, but not *de jure*)

- Policies that establish a monopoly on all registers for one variety, ignoring the registers and repertoires of L-varieties and their speakers, and thwarting the development of H-variety registers in competition with the monopolistic language: *France*” (49-50)

Note that the last list contains only one item: France

Schiffman thus further writes: “Such a policy is self-assuredly centrist and all powerful: it recognizes no equals for the language (or culture, which are equated) on French territory; it brooks no opposition. Given the continued centralization of French power in Paris, with little regional autonomy or authority (including school policy), it is no wonder that regional languages in France feel trampled under the weight [juggernaut] of *la langue nationale*” (77)

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that, indeed, as Maurice Druon writes in his report on behalf of the *Académie française*, the proposed reform was no “bouleversement” –“upheaval”– at all, and while the new rules would be taught at school, the old rules would still concomitantly apply: “il ne peut être évidemment demandé aux générations antérieures de désapprendre ce qu'elles ont appris [...]” –“one cannot ask from older generations to unlearn what they have learnt [...]” So what were these proposed “rectifications” aiming at “[correcting]” certain “anomalies” which “the *Académie* [had] previously missed”? An emblematic example is the word “événement,” written with two “accents aigus” but *spoken*, in regular, practical utterances, with one “accent aigu” and one “accent grave”; the reform proposed to follow the spoken pattern, and write: “èvenement”... No big upheaval indeed!

For more, please refer to http://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/rectifications_1990.pdf

—and the traps of the *dictée* real booby traps— relatively unconsciously set up by the majority to hinder the immigrant minority on their way to integration; a rite of passage made to include —but also exclude— newcomers into the imagined community of “fellow-French-spellers.”⁵⁰

Number three, a space for freedom from the Archipolitics seems to be situated, for Schiffman, in the space between the “official, *de jure*, overt” policy and “covert, *de facto*, grass-roots” policy/practice; it is possible, according to Schiffman, to make the two not match up and perfectly coincide, allowing the “people” to affirm their “equality” in Rancière’s sense and seize power —linguistic *and* literary power, the two being closely linked together. The “people” may seize power linguistically, by speaking freely, spontaneously in everyday life, *performing the language* without taking heed of any official language policy; and also literarily, for writers, by writing outside the norms, with “accents” as it were, “*une littérature accentée, ou accentuée*” (cf. my double definition of “accent” as both “language variation” and “discourse variation”). Of course, as we have already seen with the concept of “linguistic culture” as magnetic discourse, and as Pascale Casanova showed in her influential monograph *The World Republic of Letters* by retracing how, historically, “literary prestige” has been associated with “France,” it does take tremendous, heroic mental strength to pull oneself away from the archipolitics.⁵¹ At the same

⁵⁰ In an effort to try and alleviate this obstacle, Benoit Hamon, Minister of Education, proposed, in April 2014, a compromise solution: while the rules and usage of orthography would obviously stay the same, and while points would still be taken off for each mistake, bonus points would now be added to reward the child for each word she is getting “right” —“positive grading” to avoid students getting too discouraged. In France’s postcolonial context, this may be interpreted indeed as a possible compensation for the government’s refusal to give space to Arabic in the public school system (see the very beginning of this Introduction)

⁵¹ The same document from the *Académie française* as above recognizes, in a self-advertizing move, that “la langue appartient à ses usagers, qui ne se font pas faute de prendre chaque jour des libertés avec les normes établies” —with a play on the word “faute”: “Language users do not refrain from taking liberties relative to established norms [‘ne pas se faire faute de faire quelque chose’ = ‘to not refrain from doing something’] and that certainly is no mistake [‘faute’], as languages belong to their users.” That, however, as we have seen, is only true in some measure because it does not take into account the power of “linguistic culture” and the symbolic hold it has on people

time, again, Schiffman makes it sound like perfectly possible: “We see that French language policy, believed by some (e.g. Balibar 1985) to be the most explicit and restrictive in the world, is more of a cultural construct than an explicit policy. Its power rests in what people imagine it to consist of, rather than on actual statutes or rigid codes. In other words, policy is not as explicit as French people think it is –but it is every bit as restrictive as they believe it is, as long as they think it is” (123). Incidentally, one such hero in Schiffman’s view is... André Weckmann, whose poem *s büchnawela* he quotes in full and in Alsatian to show that “the search for an identity that could include at least Alsatian dialect (if not *Hochdeutsch* as well) along with French has not ended in Alsace” (126). In the face of these two extraordinary powers which are on the one hand “capitalism”⁵² and “linguistic culture” on the other hand, Schiffman rehabilitates “the power of a poem [e.g. Weckmann’s poem] to move another human being” (xi). Quoting Schiffman: “Political scientists and sociologists of language (with some notable exceptions), have concentrated on quantifiable, empirically verifiable data, and have little patience with such things as the power of a poem to move another human being, or the love of one’s language that might impel someone to give up one’s life for it. Such expressions are usually dismissed as ‘primordialism,’ or are explained away with such axioms as ‘every man has his price,’ meaning that primordialism can usually be bought off” (x-xi).⁵³

⁵² Both in Anderson’s sense of print-capitalism and in the sense of “capitalism-as-drive-for-economic-standardization-also-leading-to-linguistic-standardization” (“consumption society”)

⁵³ This remark takes on a particular meaning when related to “creolity.” One aspect of “creolity” noted by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*, indeed, will be a common rejection of “intellectualism”: “‘Ordinary terrorism,’ the three Caribbean writers [Bernabé-Chamoiseau-Confiand] claimed, ‘supported distinguished theory, both powerless to save the least light-hearted song from oblivion. Thus went our world, steeped in intellectualist piety, completely cut off from the roots of its orality.’ In Ramuz one finds a similar preference for ‘sensibility’ and ‘emotion,’ a return to basic things in opposition to academicism in texts and language: ‘Ought we not therefore to break at last with our intellectualism, if that is what it is called, as I suppose, and to unleash instinct?’” (299) Whether Casanova’s point that Caribbean “creolity” has indeed been “bought off” by “French” “national” archipolitics is valid or not, I do propose the notion of “accented literature” as a sort of “radical creolity”

“Regional literature” (chapter 1) and “banlieue literature” (chapters 2 and 3), to whose study we now turn, may be seen, in the context of this dissertation, as two such literary expressions of “primordialist” resistance against the Archipolitics, bringing disharmony into the harmony of the “nation” and performing “equality” *à la* Rancière. More specifically, chapter 1 explores André Weckmann’s notion of “Germanic French,” and also his use of magical realism, as ways to bring, in his novels, hetero-glossia (i.e; a different *logos*, a different discourse) into competition with “French supremacist discourse”; chapter 2 analyzes how Mounsi’s “two-generation theory,” which we can infer from both his rap lyrics and his 1995 essay *Territoire d’outre-ville*, is helpful to understand “banlieue literature” as a whole (e.g. Azouz Begag’s novels), also as a contestation of “French supremacist discourse.” Chapter 3, for its part, is devoted to Abd al Malik’s performance of disharmony both in his rap and his writings such as *Le Dernier Français* and *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, where he develops his unique position both relative to “France/Frenchness” and Islam/Islam in France.

CHAPTER ONE:

ANDRÉ WECKMANN, A LITERARY GIANT IN RANCIÈRE’S SENSE: HIS PERSONAL AND NOVELISTIC ÉPOPÉE FROM *LES NUITS DE FASTOV* (1968) TO *LA ROUE DU PAON* (1988), *SIMON HERTZOG* (1992) AND *FONSE OU L’ÉDUCATION ALSACIENNE* (1975)

“[...] [Alsace,] a non-French piece of land, a-French, disharmonic –impossible”⁵⁴
André Weckmann, *La Roue du Paon* (11)

2.1 Introduction: The Biographical André Weckmann and the Importance of “Polyphony”

Born in 1924 in Steinbourg (*Steiweri*, in Alsatian), André Weckmann died in 2012 in Strasbourg/*Strassburg* after a life deeply marked by the historical events of his time and an acute sense, from early on, of the “worldliness” of languages, i.e. the inscription of languages in the materiality of historical contingencies. His parents were the innkeepers of the village, the inn being *par excellence* a meeting place for different people and different languages, especially in a village located on the Paris-Strasbourg train route and alongside a canal linking the Marne to the Rhine River. Hence the inn was not only frequented by train machinists, but also by sailors from

⁵⁴ “[...] bref un pays non-français, a-français, disharmonique, impossible”

different national backgrounds (France, Belgium, Germany or Switzerland) who would speak various languages and forms of languages (dialects). Of course, with the Second World War, the inn did also fill itself with the voices of French soldiers (1939-40), followed by German/Nazi soldiers, then American soldiers, then again French soldiers. In an interview featured in a 2011 documentary titled *André Weckmann, À mains nues – Mit blossen Händen* (in English: *With Bare Hands*) by Alain Jomy, Weckmann underlines that the one permanent language in all this flux was Alsatian, especially through the “*Stammtisch*” (convivial group meeting) regularly held at the inn, and which brought together the young and the old: “And the youth would be asking questions, such as, *Was esch gsen früher?* [How was it, earlier?] What did you experience in your life? [...] And this is how, [at the time,] culture and memory were transmitted.”⁵⁵

Expounding on his relationship with languages during his childhood, Weckmann adds: “[In our family circle], we spoke only Alsatian [...]. Languages, here, were not a problem. I spoke Alsatian; at church, the priest preached in German, the hymns were sung either in Latin or in German, so German was for me just another expression of my mother tongue [...], and I learnt French at the age of six, very naturally. There was no problem; I did not experience a split within myself. I considered these languages as ‘linguistic sisters,’ despite the difference between the Germanic and the Romanic; it was as though I was speaking only *one* language, but with three different melodies, three different harmonies, so: a polyphony...”⁵⁶ The recurrence of the term

⁵⁵ “Et les jeunes posaient des questions: *Was esch gsen früher?* [Comment c’était, avant?] Qu’est-ce que vous avez vécu? [...] Et c’est comme ça que la culture et la mémoire s’est transmise”

⁵⁶ “Ici, on ne parlait que l’alsacien [...] [et l’alsacien est resté, encore aujourd’hui, notre langue de famille. [...] Les langues, ici, c’était pas un problème: je parlais l’alsacien; à l’église, le curé prêchait en allemand, les chants étaient soit en latin, soit en allemand, donc l’allemand était pour moi une autre expression de la langue maternelle [...]. Et le français, il est arrivé à l’âge de six ans, j’ai appris le français tout naturellement. Oui, j’ai pas eu de problème, il n’y a pas eu de scission en moi. Les langues, je les considérais comme des langues sœurs, malgré la différence entre le Germain et le Romain. C’est comme si je ne parlais qu’une seule langue, avec trois musiques, trois harmonies différentes; donc: une polyphonie...”

“polyphony” later in the documentary, albeit in a different context,⁵⁷ indicates the importance of this concept to Weckmann: “My culture is Judeo-Christian; I am a practicing Catholic; but fully geared towards oecumenism and the idea of ‘sister communities’ –*from unison to polyphony*.”⁵⁸

As far as languages are concerned (experiential languages, his relationship to languages in general), Weckmann further stresses that: “In Steinbourg, I was already exposed to the world, through the train and the canal. [In 1936], when I went to Strasbourg to study, however, it was the city and not the countryside any more –I truly became exposed to the world also *culture-wise*. Here I discovered the entire French literature, but also German literature –always side by side. This opened up my world.”⁵⁹ In 1940, Alsace was annexed by Nazi Germany: “[...] They did lay their hands –or rather, their fists– on Alsace [...]. Everything that made our previous life needed to disappear –the French language in particular needed to disappear.”⁶⁰ Two years later, in 1942, Weckmann was forcibly enrolled into the Nazi army and sent to the Russian front –a traumatic experience which he would later recount in his first novel, *Les Nuits de Fastov*, in 1968. He was wounded, finally managed to desert and was caught by the Russians. After the war, back in Strasbourg, he resumed his studies and became a German teacher; he also began to

⁵⁷ That of Catholicism as a historical “religious archipolity” of sorts, and religious dissenters/minority voices as expressions of “religious democracy”?

⁵⁸ “Je suis de culture judéo-chrétienne; catholique pratiquant; mais pleinement tourné vers l’œcuménisme, les communautés sœurs; de l’unison à la polyphonie”

⁵⁹ “[Quand je suis arrivé à Strasbourg pour étudier,] là, c’est un tout autre monde que je découvre: là, c’est tout à fait différent de la campagne, c’est le monde citadin... Et donc il y a vite cette ouverture sur un monde; et j’en avais déjà une ici, par le train, par aussi le canal, mais là, c’est une ouverture culturelle. Et je découvre donc toute la littérature française, et aussi la littérature allemande, toujours côte à côte. Bon... c’est le monde qui s’ouvre!”

⁶⁰ “[...] Ils ont mis la main –ou plutôt, le poing– sur l’Alsace [...]. Tout ce qui faisait notre vie d’avant doit disparaître; le français doit disparaître”

write in “[his] three languages.”⁶¹ In the documentary, Weckmann explains the modalities of this “literary trilingualism,” stressing, in the end, the “*non-naturalness*” of languages and their intrinsic political dimension:

“Regarding French, I needed to reappropriate for myself the French language, which had disappeared for four years. So this is when I did literally immerse myself into French literature –deeply and completely [à fond].⁶² Regarding German, going back to the German language was neither unconscious nor conscious: it was just normal, natural. [...] It was however just as natural that I would eliminate from that German language what the Nazis had made dirty. I reconnected with German *pre-Nazi* literature, although not quite, since in the meantime, the world had changed; Europe was now in ruins. It was thus impossible for me to write in German, even with the ‘serenity of a Romantic.’ [...] Thus I found in the ‘new German literature’ –that of the *Gruppe 47*–⁶³ the language that I needed.⁶⁴ I also transposed this ‘new language’ into my literary use of the dialect. [...] When I wrote my first essays and poetry, the [Alsatian] environment [had been turned into an] entirely francophone

⁶¹ The cognitive benefits of bilingualism (trilingualism?) notwithstanding, the question needs to be asked: “Why necessarily *three* languages?” For the beginning of an answer, see Frédéric Hoffet’s inscription, in *Psychanalyse de l’Alsace*, of the Alsatian into a peace-oriented “Rhenanic culture” as a sign of his “healing” from “complexes” (see also Weckmann’s poem “La Triade Alsacienne”)

⁶² Note the similarity with Robert Grossmann’s experience, at least initially

⁶³ See Introduction, Weckmann’s interview about May 68: “In the meantime, I had reconciled myself with this language [German], especially thanks to the post-war German literature embodied by Grass, Böll, Lenz and other members of the famous ‘Gruppe 47.’ [...] I was to discover and love the new and young Germany which had thrown away the Nazi mask. After making literary French my own, I thus also made [German] again my own –German, the standard language associated with my native tongue [the Alsatian dialect]”

⁶⁴ Compare with Robert Grossmann who, obviously, did *not* go through this stage of *overcoming* the Alsatian’s dilemma presented by the Nazis’ use/perversion of the German language

environment. Strangely enough, what came out of my pen was in German, and in Alsatian. In 1940, [when the environment had been entirely German], how strange, my very, very first poems had been in French! (and Alsatian, too, always Alsatian, for continuity). Looking back, I think that what was happening here is that I wanted to support, and put in practice, the minored language [la langue minorée], the language that had no part. [...] In my current literary practice, sometimes I have a preference for German because German is nowadays in the process of disappearing from Alsace as original language [en tant que langue d'origine], not as the neighbor's language, but as Alsatian language [langue d'Alsace].”⁶⁵

In this chapter, though, my approach is to analyze Weckmann's novelistic works not under the lens of “why-did-the-author-choose-here-German-or-Alsatian-rather-than-French” (which would be the perhaps legitimate but somewhat simplistic “justice-based” or “*ré-équilibrage*” problematic of “minored language” raised by Weckmann himself), but, rather, to scrutinize his very works in “*French*,” with the aim of conducting a thorough examination of the linguistico-discursive properties of that “French language” which he uses. My emphasis is therefore not so much on “literature in a minored language” as it is on “minor literature,” or,

⁶⁵ “Il fallait que je me réapproprie la langue française, qui avait disparu pendant quatre ans. Donc, et là, je me suis plongé dans la littérature française, à fond. Le retour à l'allemand, ce n'était ni inconscient, ni voulu: c'était normal, c'était naturel. [...] Il était tout à fait naturel que j'élimine de l'allemand ce que les Nazis avaient sali, donc, et je renoue avec ce qui était avant, pas tout à fait, parce que, entre-temps, le monde avait changé. Entre-temps, le monde est devenu un champ de ruines, donc on ne pouvait plus écrire avec la sérénité même d'un romantique; [...] Et c'est là que j'ai trouvé, dans la nouvelle littérature allemande, de la *Gruppe 47*, j'ai trouvé le langage qu'il me fallait. Et voilà; et j'ai reporté cela aussi dans mon dialecte. [...] En territoire totalement francophone, j'ai commencé à écrire mes premiers essais, poésies, ou autres, et, curieusement, c'était en allemand. Et en alsacien. En 40, je suis bien sûr revenu ici, nous étions devenus Allemands, et là, miracle! Je n'ai écrit qu'en français, mes poésies, mes premières, et toujours l'alsacien à côté. Ça, c'était la continuité. Et en réfléchissant, qu'est-ce qui a joué là? Je pense que je tenais à soutenir, et à pratiquer, la langue minorée, celle qui ne faisait pas partie. [...] Et là, je pratique encore aujourd'hui; quelquefois, j'ai des préférences pour l'allemand, parce que, l'allemand est en voie de disparaître d'Alsace, en tant que 'langue d'origine.' Pas en tant que langue du voisin, mais en [tant que] langue d'Alsace”

following the terminology I use in this dissertation, “accented literature” –and the politico-literary significance of such a concept for Weckmannian Studies and, beyond, for the study of *anti-archipolitical literatures qua polyphonic literatures*, which is to say anti-monolingual/monologic literatures.

2.2 Weckmann’s Performance of a Dialogic “Germanic French Language” in *Fonse ou l’Éducation Alsacienne* and *Simon Hertzog*

Weckmann’s use of a “Germanic French language” (“français alémanique”) is one important way in which his literature is indeed polyphonic, anti-monologic, thus anti-archipolitical. Saying that Weckmann’s way of writing is “anti-monologic” means more than if it were just “anti-monolingual.” It is one thing, indeed, to “go beyond” the “French language”; it is another thing to go beyond the “French logos” (“logos” being defined as “*language + discourse*,” the two feeding each other). Weckmann’s “Germanic French language,” which as we shall see is an extremely broad concept, is therefore what makes his work “dialogical” –hence truly, resolutely, irrevocably *anti-archipolitical*.

To put things in context, in July 2012, the regional newspaper *L’Alsace* devoted an article to the recently deceased writer –much in the way of a eulogy–, titled “André Weckmann, écrivain trilingue et éveilleur de conscience.” In this article, Armand Peter, founder of Bf Éditions which had published some of his works, was quoted to have said, “He [André Weckmann] was the greatest Alsatian poet since the Middle Ages [...].”⁶⁶ Even before his death, in 2007, the BNU (Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire) of Strasbourg dedicated an exhibit to

⁶⁶ “C’est le plus grand poète que nous ayons eu en Alsace depuis le Moyen-Âge [...].”

Weckmann –an exhibit which was thus introduced to the press: “André Weckmann is one of the greatest writers and poets of the twentieth century, without a doubt the writer and poet whose œuvre is one of the most important ones of the entire Alsatian literature, from the points of view of thematic wealth, engagement, linguistic playfulness and creativity” (excerpt from the BNU’s press dossier).⁶⁷ And as early as 1989, the first line of Dominique Huck’s “Avant-Propos” for the CRDP⁶⁸ educational publication *André Weckmann, écrivain de son temps*, stated that Weckmann was “[...] one of the most important Alsatian writers of our time [...]” (3).⁶⁹ While I hope to demonstrate, in this study, that Weckmann’s experimentation with language does make him indeed a “great French/German/Alsatian writer,” the above string of superlatives forces us to pause a little to ask ourselves about the origins of such Weckmannian “legend.” Certainly, it does not stem from experimentation with language *only*; certainly, the fact that such experimentation is intrinsically linked, in Weckmann’s books, with an ambitious supranational/postnational political project (the European Union as a federation of Euroregions with especially a Euroregion encompassing Alsace and Baden-Württemberg),⁷⁰ infused with humanistic thought and centered around the underlying fight for the preservation of the Alsatian dialect (a cause generally deemed noble and worthy), did all together contribute to the elevation of Weckmann, in Alsatian consciousness, as “one of the greatest”/“the greatest.”

⁶⁷ “André Weckmann est l’un des plus grands écrivains et poètes du XX^e siècle, sans doute celui dont l’œuvre est l’une des plus importantes de toute la littérature alsacienne tant par la richesse de ses thèmes, ses engagements, son jeu linguistique, sa créativité”

⁶⁸ Centre Régional de Documentation Pédagogique

⁶⁹ “[...] l’un des écrivains alsaciens les plus importants de notre temps”

⁷⁰ Utopian as it may seem, it is worthwhile to note that Ernest Renan, whose essay “What is a Nation?” is often quoted in academia for sentences like “a nation’s existence is [...] a daily plebiscite” (19), also said (prophesized?) that “human wills change. [...] The nations are not something eternal. [...] A European confederation will very probably replace them” (20). The horizon of such a political project is rendered, in *La Roue du Paon*, by the image of an “emancipated Alsace [finally able to navigate] on the sea” (184), free from all ports

In what follows, I am by no means suggesting that Weckmann consciously sought after being “the greatest” as a vain title of glory (although, since “great, prestigious languages” need “great writers,” he could have considered his consecration as a “great writer” as *good for the cause* of making Alsatian a “prestigious language” again). What I am saying however is that his literary invention of a “Germanic French language” *created, at the level of discourse, the conditions* for this contemporary “pedestalization of Weckmann” to happen *due to his heroic implementation of dialogism*. This concept of Weckmannian *dialogic* “Germanic French language” needs to be now fully investigated, in its many dimensions, both stylistic and discursive. I propose that it deeply structures the meaning of especially three novels: *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne* (1975), *La Roue du Paon* (1988), and *Simon Hertzog. Fragments de substance* (1992).

Let us begin with *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne*, where the phrase “Germanic French language” explicitly appears. The subtitle of this novel unambiguously reads: “*Roman alsacien en français alémanique*” –“Alsatian novel, written in Germanic French” (3). The syntagm “*roman alsacien*,” I argue, is in itself interesting through the implicit/explicit “anti-French-superiority” statement it contains: *no*, “France” does not have the monopoly of culture and literature –there *can* also be *Alsatian* novels and an “Alsatian literature.” Similarly, Weckmann will later describe *La Roue du Paon* as a “fantastic Alsatian tale” –“*un conte fantastique alsacien*” (3). The association of the words “Alsatian” + “literature,” “*Alsatian literature*,” is heroically made (made again) into a collocation, or at least into *a possibility* of collocation; doing so, Weckmann is *de facto* performatively participating in the “decolonization” (cf. Ngugi wa Thiongo’s famous phrase) and emancipation of Alsatian minds from “Alsatian complexes of inferiority” (cf. Frédéric HOFFET’s seminal 1955 *Psychanalyse de l'Alsace*). In a context marked

by the sociolinguistic notion of “prestige,” which as we have seen is also a literary-politico-discursive one, Weckmann is indeed stating that, in the same way that Alsatians may be *proud* of their “older literature in German/Alsatian” (cf. Hoffet and Jean Petit’s⁷¹ focus on the *Minnesänger*, *Tristan un Isolde*, and especially the Renaissance authors Johann Fischart and Sebastian Brant), they can be proud of their *current* “Alsatian literature,” and, therefore, of their *current* Alsatian dialect –not at all outdated, not at all “language of the elderly,” but on the contrary *language of contemporary literary expression*.⁷² In some ways, then, including, as Weckmann does, “regional literature” into “*contemporary* French and Francophone literature” is a political act –political in Rancière’s sense of “equality-through-language” and “*attribution d’une part aux sans-parts*.” Significantly, although *Fonse ou l’Éducation Alsacienne* was published by a Parisian publisher, namely “les éditions Pierre-Jean Oswald,” it was published in this publisher’s “*J’exige la parole*” series –“I demand to be able to speak”; “I-demand-to-speak-even-if/or-actually-*because*-this-speech-or-jarring-discourse-shall-introduce-profound-disharmony-into-the-imagined-harmony-of-the-nation.” Weckmann’s Paris can no longer be said to be “the Greenwich meridian of French literature.”

Concentrating now on the second part of the phrase (“*en français alémanique*” –“in a Germanic French language”), what needs to be examined is both what this is and what it means. Why, in other words, did Weckmann not “simply” use the subtitle “Alsatian novel in French”? Admittedly, this would have been sufficient for the purpose of the “prestige statement”

⁷¹ *L’Alsace à la reconquête de son plurilinguisme* (10)

⁷² Note that the argument is therefore different from the typical *economic* argument used more recently by associations in defense of the Alsatian dialect: “the-Alsatian-dialect-is-modern-because-it-can-help-you-find-a-job-in-Germany,-whose-economy-fares-a-lot-better-than-the-French-one” –another kind of interpellation...

(“Alsatian”-is-worth-no-less-than-“French”); so why did he feel compelled to specifically add: “Alsatian novel in a Germanic French language”?

To understand, let us begin with what “Germanic French” *is not*: in *Psychanalyse de l’Alsace*, Hoffet had argued that one could *essentially* recognize an Alsatian writing in French through the length and “circumvolutedness” of the author’s sentences and the absence of clarity of his thought. “Good Alsatian literature in French,” Hoffet had concluded, was thus bound to inexistence. Before invalidating Hoffet’s narrative too quickly, though, on the grounds that it would be (and is) naively essentializing, I suggest that it is fruitful to recognize it as a seminal *discourse* which, consciously or not, has informed later Alsatian debates *if only* for the mere sake, I argue, of affirming “discourse variation” as a deliberate marker of *literary/cultural independence*, in discourse however rather than in real “literary deed.” A brief detour through Martin Graff, the Alsatian essayist from the Munster valley, is here instructive. Although, as a whole, Graff’s sentences, in his 1988 pamphlet evocatively titled *Mange ta choucroute et tais-toi*, (“Eat Your Sauerkraut and Shut Up”), cannot be said to be particularly obscure or circumvoluted, he nonetheless chooses to write, in the very incipit (thus setting the tone for the pamphlet), an *eleven-line long, one-sentence* paragraph,⁷³ after which he seizes this opportunity to gloss –in a strikingly Hoffetian manner or at least metaphorically Hoffetian manner:⁷⁴

⁷³ Incidentally, this sentence is, among other topics, about Albert Schweitzer, thus echoing Hoffet’s insistent portrayal of Albert Schweitzer as a champion of humanistic Rhenanic culture unjustly silenced by the hegemony of French culture

⁷⁴ Compare also this line from Hoffet: “For three centuries, the Alsatian heard *some* say that *they* were all good and the others all bad, and then heard *the others* say exactly the same” (128) with this excerpt from Graff’s incipit: “My duty, as a smuggler of ideas, is to break down borders, and thus to outsmart the Besserwissers of the entire world. I should clarify [...] that Besserwissers are the lesson-givers, those who claim to know everything better than the others. *Besser*, better, *wissen*, to know” –“Mon devoir de contrebandier d’idées est de casser les frontières, en me jouant des Besserwisser du monde entier. Je précise [...] que les Besserwisser sont les donneurs de leçons, ceux qui prétendent tout savoir mieux que les autres. *Besser*, mieux, *wissen*, savoir” (7-8)

“This Germanic sentence, which may appear to be unusually unrefined [d’une lourdeur inhabituelle] to a Parisian [Parisot] mind, is meant on purpose to relax, make more flexible [assouplir] the muscles of those readers who might not be much informed about Alsace –Alsace, this ‘beautiful turf’ which did fascinate so much the Sun King, when he stumbled over a pebble of pink sandstone [grès rose] which had been maliciously put there at the Saverne Pass by my second-cousin Emile, a lumberjack from Otterswiller”⁷⁵ (8)

The “muscles” in question that need to be “relaxed and made more flexible” are undoubtedly, here, the *brain* muscles of Jacobine French people/politicians who get uptight whenever the words “Alsatian identity” are uttered, as though the slightest affirmation of “Germanity” (e.g. a supposedly emblematic “Germanic sentence”) was automatically an attack against “French identity” and “France.” Ignorance is pointed out as the cause of Parisian Jacobinism (“[not being informed about Alsace]”) –although Grossmann’s own form of Jacobinism for example, as we have seen, couldn’t be accounted for by ignorance since he himself is –deeply– Alsatian, but rather stems from the power of the “Archipolitics”/“French discourse.” Graff’s call for “[more relaxed brain muscles]” is a call for intellectual open-mindedness –an open-mindedness felt especially needed in the context of “French” official, monologic historiography.⁷⁶ Graff, through literature, develops here a fantasy historiography – *accented historiography* to the extreme– to demonstrate the invalidity of “official” narratives.

⁷⁵ “Cette phrase germane, d’une lourdeur inhabituelle pour un esprit parisot, est destinée à assouplir les muscles de la lectrice ou du lecteur, peu informés des choses de l’Alsace, cette ‘belle pelouse’ qui fascina tant le Roi-Soleil, lorsqu’il trébucha sur un caillou de grès rose déposé malicieusement au col de Saverne par mon arrière-cousin Emile, un bûcheron d’Otterswiller”

⁷⁶ cf. Bernard Wittmann’s “alternative historiography” (“une autre histoire de l’Alsace”) in *Marianne m’a tuer*

For example, in the case of the 1648 annexation of Alsace by “France,” Louis XIV is commonly reported to have said, as he was discovering his new province: “*Quel beau jardin!*” –“What a beautiful garden!”⁷⁷ Through the expression “beautiful turf” (“*belle pelouse*”), “beautiful turf” that has now become “the king’s turf” or “*terrain réservé*,” Graff is evidently taking up again this history/legendary episode –to subvert it. The fact that the mountains of Alsace, the Vosges mountains, are made of pink sandstone (“*grès rose*”), makes the reference to a “pebble of pink sandstone” in the quotation especially meaningful, as that “pebble of pink sandstone” which makes the Sun-King stumble, therefore, is made to ironically and metonymically represent the symbolic resistance of the entire Alsace region to the “French” conquering enterprise. It also enables Graff to introduce the theme of the “trickster”⁷⁸ in the person of Emile, his fictional seventeenth-century “second-cousin”⁷⁹ who “maliciously”⁸⁰ put the stone right on the Sun-King’s path. Importantly, this use of fantasy brings Graff onto the terrain of “magical realism” –a common feature with Weckmann, as we shall see.

While Weckmann’s understanding and literary practice of “Germanic French” is not necessarily going to be Hoffetian, there are connections between Weckmann and Hoffet-influenced Graff. In addition, I suggest that Graff’s central notion of “linguistic smuggling” will also help us in our endeavor to delineate Weckmann’s concept of “Germanic French,” thanks to

⁷⁷ See for instance page 5 of the online promotional brochure “L’Alsace, s’Elsass, en quelques lignes”: http://www.region-alsace.eu/sites/default/files/fichiers/institution/alsace_en_quelques_lignes_fr.pdf (accessed October 22, 2014)

⁷⁸ Note the similarities with trickster figures found in African-American literature (cf. Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s seminal concept of the “Signifying Monkey”; see also Riggins Earl Jr. and Trudier Harris’ respective scholarships on tricksters as ways to deconstruct slavery-based societal systems through literature)

⁷⁹ Fictional indeed because in the next quotation, “Emile,” not a “second-cousin” any more, will “magically” transform himself into the author’s no less fictional “grandfather Emile”

⁸⁰ The French adverb “malicieusement” does not necessarily imply malice (evil intention), but rather childish pleasure in minor mischief

the ideas of (linguistic) space protected by (ideological) borders, word intrusion and transgression vis-à-vis supposed linguistic purity it contains. This notion of “linguistic smuggling,” or “linguistic piracy” signals porosity and creolity,⁸¹ and also contributes to create a maverick-like status, or aura, for the “Alsatian regional(ist) writer” who becomes transfigured as a sort of “outlaw” (outside the laws of the Archipolitics) and “freedom-fighter” (freedom of the written word). The figure of Emile, who this time takes on the mythical traits of the author’s “grandfather,” is summoned once again:

“Here I am once again obliged to play for you the role of a dictionary, to clarify that the word ‘Parisot’ was invented by my grandfather Emile, following a short trip he did to Pigalle. Since he did not speak French well at all, he transformed the word ‘Parigot,’ which is a slang expression for ‘Parisian,’ into ‘Parisot.’ This confusion would be, later on, at the origin of several original creations: ‘Parisot = French’ (both the citizen of France and the language); ‘Parisottise = stupidity’ of the Parisians or of the French in general; ‘Parisotter = to imitate’ the Parisians and the French in general. I decided, in honor of Emile, to smuggle [introduire en contrebande] these words into my book”⁸² (8-9)

Graff’s ironic tone must be underlined here: he first metaphorically acknowledges the existence of a “Parisian power of attraction” –an expression/phenomenon meant to subliminally

⁸¹ “Creolity” here implying that it is okay to use the dominator’s language as long as it is subverted

⁸² “Je suis à nouveau obligé de jouer au dictionnaire pour vous préciser que le mot ‘Parisot’ a été inventé par mon grand-père Emile, à la suite d’un bref séjour à Pigalle. Parlant très mal le français, il transforma le mot Parigot, expression argotique pour Parisien, en Parisot. La confusion fut à la source de plusieurs créations originales: Parisot = Français (le citoyen ou la langue); Parisottise = bêtise des Parisiens ou des Français en général; Parisotter = imiter les Parisiens et Français en général. J’ai décidé, en hommage à Emile, d’introduire ces mots en contrebande dans l’ouvrage”

remind the reader of “France’s” centralized political and archipolitical model, much along the lines of, indeed, theses such as Pascale Casanova’s on Paris’ irresistible centripetal force (cf. *The World Republic of Letters*). However, in a second movement, the origin of the “attraction” is derided and mocked as having nothing to do with art and literature (as Casanova would have it), but with prostitution, as the one thing Paris seems to be famous for, and actually causes Emile to go to Paris, is “Pigalle” (note that the two “P words” are conflated, as Emile, literally, does not take a trip to Paris, but indeed “a trip to Pigalle”). The slippage from “Parigot” to “Parisot,” of course Graff’s own literary creation but presented as heritage from an illustrious witty ancestor, enables the author to craft a series of “*mots-valises*” from which the reader may deduct an intrinsic association between “Paris” and “sot” (stupid) or “sottise” (stupidity). While “sotter” is not a French word *per se*, it is meant to mean “acting stupid” or “being stupid”: to imitate Paris, to imitate the center (cf. Casanova and Hoffet) is stupid –there-is-just-no-other-word-for-it. Graff’s criticism, incidentally, does not only concern “imitation of Paris,” but “imitation of France” –of “France” as a concept–, as the parallelism “[...] of the Parisians or *of the French in general* // [...] the Parisians and *the French in general*” (emphases added) indicates. The “*mots-valises*” (“Parisot, Parisottise, Parisotter”) thus enable Graff to conduct a criticism not just of limited phenomena of observable acculturation here and there, but of broader mechanisms related to the Archipolitics *in general*. Graff’s art of creating neologisms, i.e. new words, *anti-archipolitical words*, leads him to create indeed a *new language* (neo-logos): a language of resistance in the very use and subversion of the dominant language –in sum, a “minor literature” marked by what Lise Gauvin, in a different context, famously called “langagement.”

This, I argue, is the framework within which Weckmann’s notion of “Germanic French language” needs to be understood, rather than a strictly Hoffetian one.

This being said, *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne*, as a novel, does seem at first sight to be voluntarily “obscure”⁸³ from a diagetic point of view, in ways which, I argue, are reminiscent of what happens in *Nedjma* by Kateb Yacine, in terms of fragmentation and non-linearity – literary features with a political significance: anti-“French” colonialism. The fact that *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne* is relatively difficult to read makes this assessment by Dominique Huck, in *André Weckmann, écrivain de son temps*, all the more surprising: “[With *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne*,] subtitled ‘Alsatian novel written in a Germanic French language,’ [...] Weckmann intended, once again, to be pedagogical *vis-à-vis* a non-Alsatian, Francophone audience” (11).⁸⁴ What triggers this comment from Dominique Huck is perhaps the fact that all Alsatian words in the text are going to be translated into French, in footnotes, making the text indeed linguistically accessible to all; another possible explanation for Huck’s comment is Weckmann’s “Foreword” (“En guise d’avant-propos: l’état de la question,” 7-10), which presents itself not as text, but as a series of chronological dates associated with a short paragraph that subtly evaluates (*teaching* the non-Alsatian Francophone public?) whether the event in question was “good or bad” for Alsace, through the connotations of the words used.⁸⁵ The section of the “Foreword” dealing specifically with “post-1945 linguistic and cultural policy”

⁸³ As blatantly opposed to supposed French essential “clarity”

⁸⁴ “[Avec *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne*,] sous-titré ‘roman alsacien en français alémanique,’ [...] André Weckmann veut à nouveau faire œuvre pédagogique vis-à-vis du public francophone non-averti”

⁸⁵ e.g. “1914-1918: military dictatorship in Alsace. 250,000 people from Alsace-Lorraine enrolled into the German army. 30,000 killed” – “1914-1918: dictature militaire en Alsace. 250.000 Alsaciens-Lorrains mobilisés dans l’armée allemande. 30.000 tués” (8). Other examples, to be related, discourse-wise, to Hoffet’s psychological explanations for Alsations’ blind admiration for Napoléon, include: “1800: Napoléon 1^{er}, first great idol for Alsations. 1851: Napoléon III, second great idol for Alsations. [...] 1945-1969: Charles de Gaulle, third great idol for Alsations” – “1800: Napoléon 1^{er}, première grande idole des Alsaciens. 1851: Napoléon III, deuxième grande idole des Alsaciens. [...] 1945-1969: Charles de Gaulle, troisième grande idole des Alsaciens” (7-8). The association between Napoléon and the word “idole” is undoubtedly linked to a criticism of “French” militarism. As for the association between De Gaulle and the word “idole,” this has to be linked, retrospectively, to the entire Weckmann-Grossmann dispute

(so, after Alsace became “French” again), presents itself not as a series of dates but as a succession of bullet points (hence also very “teacher-like”):

- “● The political and cultural history of Alsace is not taught at school.
- The Alsatian dialect has been removed from schools and from official culture.
- The literary German language, a language of culture and common denominator of all Germanic dialects, is considered as a foreign language. The teaching of German was eliminated from primary schools curricula in 1945 and reintroduced under the pressure of public opinion in 1972.
- [This policy] deprives the Alsatian people from their history and from their literature.
- It educates young Alsations into despising anything which, in his familiar environment, is not of francophone origin.
- It brings about the depersonalization of Alsace. It uproots Alsations from their own land.
- By hastening linguistic assimilation, it prevents Alsace from realizing its natural vocation as a bilingual land”^{86 87} (9-10)

This accumulation of short sentences in the present tense, presented as bullet points, and with dates, may reinforce indeed the impression of a pedagogical enterprise on Weckmann’s part

⁸⁶ “● L’histoire politique et culturelle de l’Alsace n’est pas enseignée. ● Le dialecte alsacien est évincé de la vie scolaire et de la vie culturelle officielle. ● L’allemand littéraire, langue de culture et dénominateur commun de tous les dialectes allemands, est considéré comme une langue étrangère. Son enseignement à l’école élémentaire a été supprimé en 1945 et réintroduit sous la pression de l’opinion publique à partir de 1972. ● Elle prive le peuple alsacien de son histoire et de sa littérature. ● Elle inculque au jeune Alsacien le mépris de tout ce qui, dans son environnement familial, n’est pas d’origine francophone. ● Elle provoque la dépersonnalisation de l’Alsace. Elle fait des Alsaciens des déracinés sur leur propre terre. ● En précipitant l’assimilation linguistique, elle empêche l’Alsace de réaliser sa vocation naturelle de terre bilingue”

⁸⁷ cf. Hoffet’s discourse on the “vocation of the healed Alsatian”

(Weckmann the German teacher) to *inform* readers about Alsatian reality in the face of French hegemony: France's assimilationist, homogenizing and standardizing force is hinted at through the noun "depersonalization" (complemented by the drawing on the book cover, standing for a typical Alsatian village blatantly crossed out as though it no longer existed or was in danger of no longer existing); as for the verb "to educate" ("inculquer"), it suggests that Alsatian youth, led into believing that the Alsatian dialect is not prestigious, are being lobotomized, transformed into robots –human beings that can be deprogrammed (de-souled) and reprogrammed (re-souled) at will– or into zombies: the author uses the phrase "living cadaver" –"*cadavre vivant*"– (113). Viewed this way, Weckmann's book may indeed be characterized as a "pedagogical work."⁸⁸

In a book, however, that has the word "education" in its title, it would seem that the fact that a "teacher" ("brofasser," "professeur") is a recurring interlocutor for *all* the characters would be significant enough that we should know *with clarity* who this "brofasser" is. This character's identity is however never completely revealed. As an example of this deliberate confusion, after we learn that one of the characters, René, has become a classroom supervisor, we could think that *he* might be the "teacher" –an interpretation that is however immediately contradicted by René himself saying:

"I cannot stand it here any more, professeur. Over there, [i.e. in Austria, a country of Germanic culture and respect for authority being ingrained in

⁸⁸ "pedagogical work" indeed, and, in some ways, a literary *doppelgänger* for Hoffet's *Psychanalyse de l'Alsace*: compare, indeed, Hoffet's recurring notion of the "*Alsatian's fear to be who he really is*" and this excerpts from *Fonse*: "Force de l'habitude. Inertie. Veulerie. Peur mythique. Peur du qu'en dira-t-on. Que dira Monsieur le Directeur. Monsieur le Sous-Préfet. Monsieur le Touriste. [...] Peur d'être traité d'autonomiste. Peur de vexer la mère-patrie. *Peur d'être*. Puis de temps à autre, quand même un sursaut: Vous voulez que che vous casse la gueule? Et l'inertie nous reprend. A quoi bon, à quoi bon. L'évolution est dans l'ordre des choses, et l'évolution, chez nous, c'est l'assimilation. Demain il n'y aura plus d'Alsace. [...] Demain l'Hexagone sera enfin entièrement monolingue. Égalité. Il n'y aura plus d'Alsaciens, plus de Bretons, plus de Basques. Il n'y aura plus que des Hexagonaux moyens, calibrés, standardisés, stérilisés" (emphasis added)

said Germanic culture, cf Hoffet], they call me ‘Herr Professor’ [‘Mister Professor’], it tickles me”⁸⁹ (20)

Logically, René cannot be the “teacher” *and* address the “teacher” at the same time, so the “professor’s” identity remains shrouded with mystery throughout the book and is not resolved at the end. One possibility is that this indeterminacy is meant to underline, in a strikingly Rancierian (Jacotot) fashion, *everyone’s teacher status* and equality of intelligence – i.e. language equality. This is further reinforced through the very structure of the book, which is eminently *dialogic* from beginning to end, and needs to be contrasted with “French monologism” (cf. “monologic historiography”). For example:

“Fonse? Who’s that?

- It’s Fonse. We used to want to do May 68 together, but then we said, fuck, that’s not for people of the land [pecquenauds] like us, we can’t do this revolution, it’s too Parisian for us [...]

- But who is this Fonse?

- It’s hard to explain who he is like this, in two or three minutes. I will write to you...”⁹⁰ (21)

Regarding the plot of *Fonse ou l’Éducation Alsacienne*, here is how Weckmann himself summarizes it, in ways reminiscent, again, of my analysis of the “French education system” in

⁸⁹ “Je ne tiens plus le coup ici, professeur. Tiens, là-bas on me nomme ‘Herr Professor,’ ça me fait tout drôle”

⁹⁰ “Fonse? Qui est-ce?

- C’est Fonse. On avait voulu faire Mai 68 ensemble, puis zut qu’on s’est dit, c’est pas pour des pecquenauds comme nous, cette révolution à la parisienne [...].

- Mais qui est-ce, Fonse?

- On ne peut pas expliquer qui il est, comme ça en deux trois minutes. Je t’écirai...”

terms of “educating education” through discourse, and taking René Waedelé, one of the characters, as a prototype of Alsatianity:

“René Waedelé is a bastard, like all native Alsations: he is the product of multiracial chromosomes, his language and sensibility⁹¹ are Germanic, he was Frenchified and cut off from his cultural roots by official education. And, just as any other young Alsatian today, he has been programmed by the national cultural ideology and led onto the path of total assimilation. ‘Do speak French, my son,’ his papa Waedelé would tell him, crouched in the depths of his Alsatian reservation, ‘We need to forget that we were, once, a different people.’ But René ends up realizing that he is the victim of a lie and of an insidious policy of alienation”⁹² (from the summary on the back cover)

Despite this self-characterization, it appears that that the main character in the novel is actually not René Waedelé but “Fonse,” the mysterious character through which René’s realization of his alienation is brought about. Although this is never clarified, the reader is left on his own to assume that “Fonse” is an Alsatian abbreviation or diminutive for the French first name “Alphonse” (Alphonse -> d’r Alfonse -> d’r Fonse -> mythologized into just “Fonse”).

Still quoting from the summary on the back cover:

⁹¹ Even though Hoffet’s definition of “Germanic French language,” as we have seen, has to be eventually absolutely distinguished from Weckmann’s, note how Hoffet’s discourse of “Alsatian (Germanic) sensibility” still underlays Weckmann’s *acte d’écrire*

⁹² “René Waedelé est un bâtard, comme tous les Alsaciens d’origine: il est issu de chromosomes multiraciaux, il est de langue et de sensibilité germaniques, il a été francisé et coupé de ses racines culturelles par l’enseignement officiel. Et, comme tous les jeunes Alsaciens d’aujourd’hui, il a été programmé par l’idéologie culturelle nationale et dirigé sur la voie de l’assimilation totale. ‘Parle français, mon fils, il faut que l’on oublie que nous avons été autre chose jadis,’ lui dit son papa Waedelé tapi au fond de sa réserve alsacienne. Mais René finit par s’apercevoir qu’il est victime d’un mensonge et d’une politique d’aliénation insidieuse”

“Fonse, mephisto, prophet and Alsatian dissenter, leads him [René Waedelé] through the hell of Alsatian resignations and tragedies”⁹³ (ibid)

This characterization of Fonse as “méphisto,” Mephisto (with capital M, without diacritic) being a staple of German culture and literature since Goethe’s 1808 tragedy *Faust*, is interesting, I suggest, as it leads us to one essential aspect of Weckmann’s “Germanic French language”: before being a “Germanic French language” from a strictly linguistic point of view (which it also will), I argue that it is so from a *dialogically topical* point of view. By “topical,” I mean something along the lines of Xavier Garnier’s concept of “*la topique*” as “*la pensée du lieu*” (from the Greek “*topos*”) which he defined, in his 2008 article “Les Littératures en Langues Africaines ou l’Inconscient des Théories Postcoloniales,” as the literary act of “catching the uniqueness of a place through the unique words [I would add: “and the unique cultural aspects”] attached to that place.” The uniqueness of Alsace as a geographical place, as is well known, is to be at the junction of French and German cultures; a “Germanic French language,” then, is going to be a language which *dialogically* incorporates, to make a politico-literary statement, elements of both cultures, and especially elements of the “minored culture,” i.e., here, the German culture –beginning with Mephisto.

Goethe’s Faust is a philosopher-scientist whose dreams of universal knowledge, together with the awareness that he will never be able to achieve it, bring him to the verge of suicide. This is when Mephistopheles, one of the incarnations of the devil, offers him a pact –all of his wishes shall be granted to him, until he finds happiness, in exchange however for his soul. Faust’s severe existential depression may be related here to the “Alsatian condition” as diagnosed by

⁹³ “Fonse, méphisto, prophète et contestataire alsacien, lui fait traverser l’enfer des démissions et des tragédies alsaciennes ”

Hoffet (Alsations being so sick of the constant external pressure to choose between the two elements of their duality that they eventually *renounce* their duality and sometimes deliberately *flee* to different areas of France and even the world in order to escape and forget their Alsacianity).

The parallels between Fonse and Mephisto are striking indeed. As I have already hinted, Fonse is a character that keeps being shrouded with mystery until the very end, “[...] this Fonse whom I practically don’t know and about whom he [René] talks to me all the time. Do you know who this Fonse is?” (37)⁹⁴ His physical description is also interestingly devilish:

“Then I found Fonse again, one evening in a wynstub.”⁹⁵ ‘Here you are, at last,’ he said. ‘We’ll have to redo your education all over again. Kumm, Rennè.’

Fonse and his great big nose like a saber, Fonse and his green eyes, Fonse and his sacrilegious laughter. You know the rest, professeur.”⁹⁷ (85)

The phrase “*Viens! Me dis-tu Fonse*” or “*Viens, René! Me dis-tu Fonse*” –“Come! You said to me, Fonse”– comes back like a nagging leitmotiv in several sections of the book (39, 59...), for instance in the section called “L’Œil” –“The Eye”:

“Come, René!

You told me, Fonse.

⁹⁴ “[...] ce Fonse que je ne connais guère et dont il me parle tout le temps. Le connais-tu, ce Fonse?”

⁹⁵ “Wine bar,” in Alsatian

⁹⁶ “Come,” in Alsatian

⁹⁷ “Puis je retrouvai Fonse, un soir dans une wynstub. Te voici enfin enfin, me dit-il. Il va falloir qu’on refasse ton éducation. Kumm, Rennè. Fonse et son grand nez-sabre, Fonse et ses yeux verts, Fonse et son rire sacrilège. Tu connais la suite, professeur”

[...]

We walked in the streets and arrived at a horse whose nostrils were
smoking

The horse was black.

Hop on! You told me, Fonse.

[...]

Look!

You told me, Fonse

All this I am giving to you.

[...]

In front of us unknown lands were unfolding

One after the other.

Where do you come from?

You told me, Fonse.

From no where Fonse

And from every where.

That's right!

You shouted, Fonse.

[...]

Finally we made it back to our mother Alsace

mother hen, cackling in pidgin-French

Hen with a big-black-knot⁹⁸ on top

⁹⁸ The Alsatian “coiffe” (head covering part of the traditional female attire)

That big-black-knot with the eye on it
 Eye-cockade with three colors [tricolore]⁹⁹
 [...] Jealous eye
 Eye even more an eye than the one that chased after
 Cain¹⁰⁰
 And that will chase us [...]

 Even into the darkness of post-mortem
 in saecula
 saeculorum”¹⁰¹ (39-41)

The biblical overtones (the reference to Cain and the Latin phrase “in saecula saeculorum” to designate eternity, literally: “for ever and ever”) confirm Fonse’s ambiguous status as both messianic eye-opener (“That’s right! [Now you can see clearly]”) *and* devilish figure (cf. “Look! [...] All this I am giving to you,” to be related to the devil tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:8: “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’”) The initiatic trip on

⁹⁹ A sign of Alsace’s attachment to France

¹⁰⁰ A reference to Genesis 4:10-14: “The Lord said, ‘Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground. [...] You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.’ Cain said to the Lord, ‘My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me’”

¹⁰¹ “Viens, René! // me dis-tu Fonse. [...] Des naseaux fumaient au détour d’une rue // le cheval était noir. // Monte! Me dis-tu Fonse // [...] Regarde! // me dis-tu Fonse // tout cela je te le donne. // Devant nous s’ouvraient les terres inconnues // l’une après l’autre. // D’où viens-tu? Me dis-tu Fonse. // De nulle part Fonse // et de partout. // C’est bien mon gars! // me crias-tu Fonse. [...] // Et c’est ainsi que nous retrouvâmes // mère Alsace // mère poule caquetant en pidgin-french // poule au grand-nœud-noir qui porte l’œil // l’œil-cocard tricolore // [...] œil jaloux // œil plus œil encore que celui qui traqua // Caïn // Et qui nous poursuivra [...] // Jusque dans les ténèbres post-funéraires // in saecula // saeculorum”

which Fonse takes René teaches René a first lesson, that is that Alsatians “come from no where [...] and from every where” –Weckmann likes to talk about Alsatians as a “homeopathic dilution” of many races and peoples, an expression that comes around both in the aforementioned documentary and in *Simon Hertzog* (28). Alsatians are not “French” and cannot be “French” (“We are nobody’s descendants // A product of the wind [pondus par le vent] // [...] Despite the long theory of supposed ancestors // that are attributed to us,” 73) –yet the curse of the “French eye” will never let them free, a concept which tends to characterize the “French Archipolitics” not just as discourse, but indeed as *panopticon*.

This ambivalence between “messiah” and “devil” is further reinforced by Fonse’s intermediary status between “prophet” and “false poet, false prophet” (153). According to rabbinic tradition, the Hebrew word for “prophet” (*navi*, נָבִיא) comes from an old root that means “to shout,”¹⁰² and the fact is that Fonse, throughout the book, “shouts”:

“Come on, come in, ladies and gentlemen,
You *shouted*, Fonse
Come in and take this unique opportunity
to watch something unique in the world
that thing is more mysterious than an Egyptian tomb:

¹⁰² While different Jewish commentators have proposed, over time, different possibilities, the Encyclopedia Britannica does follow the “shout” etymology: “The Hebrew word for prophet is *navi*, usually considered to be a loanword from Akkadian *nabu* [...], ‘to proclaim, [...] call, summon’” (shout), cf. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479082/prophecy/34063/Origins-and-development-of-Hebrew-prophecy#ref410426> (accessed 3/29/2015)

it is a reliquary, made in Romanic style, surmounted by a Gothic turret¹⁰³
 enhanced by Renaissance bas-reliefs¹⁰⁴
 and other features that were added from one Empire to the next Empire
 and in this reliquary ladies and gentlemen
 you will discover a very tiny little soul
 a Franco-Germanic soul
 buried under a thick layer of thread
 spun by our domestic spiders.¹⁰⁵
 Friends, do not touch it!
 That tiny little thing could come to life again
 which already happened once or twice
 and every time this caused us only
 trouble”¹⁰⁶ (74-75, emphasis added)

Fonse’s status as “prophet” finds another expression in the section titled “La Grande Lamentation Alsacienne” (149-158), which is not without reminding of Jeremiah’s *Book of*

¹⁰³ A metonymy for Alsatian “double culture” (the adjective “Romanic” standing for French influences and the adjective “Gothic” for German ones)

¹⁰⁴ See below for more about the crucial role played by the Renaissance in Alsatian discourse and imagination

¹⁰⁵ In a remarkable fantasy animal transmutation from spider (death) to butterfly (life), the reliquary spun by the spiders is later transformed into a cocoon, preparing for Alsatian rebirth and metamorphosis: “Fonse Fonse! // le cocon il faut sauver le cocon! // Le cocon dans son reliquaire historique! // Fonse! // Les extincteurs où sont les extincteurs! // Mais toi Fonse tu te mis à rire // ta main plongea dans ta poche // et tu en sortis une toute petite chose: // une minuscule âme franco-alémanique // enfouie dans un cocon de belle taille. // Et tu nous dis Fonse: [...] sait-on jamais? // peut-être en sortira-t-il un jour // un joli papillon?” (77)

¹⁰⁶ “Allez entrez messieurs-dames // as-tu crié Fonse // entrez et profitez de l’occasion unique // de voir quelque chose d’unique au monde // chose plus mystérieuse qu’une tombe égyptienne: // un reliquaire roman surmonté d’une tourelle gothique // muni de bas-reliefs Renaissance // et d’autres ajouts plastiques d’Empire à Empire // et dans ce reliquaire mesdames et messieurs // vous découvrirez une toute petite âme // franco-alémanique // enfouie dans une épaisse pelote de fils // tissés par nos araignées domestiques. // N’y touchez pas les amis! // Elle pourrait reprendre vie la petite chose // ce qui est déjà arrivé l’une ou l’autre fois // et chaque fois cela nous a valu des // embêtements”

Lamentations in the Bible, and prefigures his death while continuing to draw on the ambiguity between messiah/prophet and devil, with the Alsatian iconic (religious) monument of the Cathedral of Strasbourg as backdrop –a Cathedral which we get to understand, although it is not clearly indicated diagetically, that he climbed up:

“Fonse
Spider in your web, with all four limbs spread apart
White bat clinging to the pipes
Fonse against the sandstone against the cathedral
You yourself became sandstone
Saint and devil and gargoye
[...] From your mouth [gueule] chants are flowing out like a string
[chapelet] of
grenades
that the wind rips apart and the grenades fall
like wet farts
onto the old roofs of Schdroosbouri Strasbourg Strassburg Stratisburgum
Argentoratum¹⁰⁷
[...] You, Fonse
Standing up between the pipes of the scaffolding
Fonse naked and extatic
Fonse naked and sacrilegious

¹⁰⁷ A backward gradation going from the current name of the city in Alsatian, French and German, to the Latin name from when Strasbourg was a Roman military outpost

Fonse naked and madly laughing
 [...] You, holding up your underpants above your head like a flag
 As a crime of lèse-majesté
 Defiant provocation against the tricolore [one]
 [...] Freedom diverted from its original vocation
 to legitimize the murder of a language
 [...] Listen ô my people
 When will you arise
 When will you stand up
 When will you free yourself?”¹⁰⁸ (149-151)

This ranting, or harangue with the majestic cathedral as soap-box, is interrupted by “Kwatsch kwatsch kwatsch kwatsch” –“kwatsch” being an Alsatian word meaning “nonsense,” “rubbish.” Then, brutally, and quite unexpectedly for the reader, the lament in poetical/verse form stops and this text (in paragraph form for sharp contrast) follows:

“You crashed into the square in front of the cathedral. The big disarticulated puppet was put to the morgue. We buried you in secret. The local newspapers talked very little about it. [...] I told [the police] that we had been discussing the impact which an Alsatian hara-kiri could have on public opinion. The policemen shrugged. They however stayed to drink [at

¹⁰⁸ “Fonse // araignée dans ta toile les quatre membres écartés // chauve-souris blanche accrochée dans la tubulure // Fonse toi sur fond de grès sur fond de cathédrale // devenu grès toi-même // et saint et diable et gargouille // [...] ta gueule dégorge les psalmodes en chapelets // de grenades // que le vent déchiquette et laisse retomber // en pets mouillés // sur les vieux toits de Schroosbouri Strasbourg Strassburg Stratisburgum Argentoratum // [...] toi Fonse // dressé entre les tubes de l’échafaudage // Fonse nu et extatique // Fonse nu et sacrilège // Fonse nu et rigolard // Et ton falzard claquant au-dessus de ta tête // en crime de lèse-majesté // défi provocateur lancé à la brave tricolore // là-haut sur la croix // tricolore de liberté détournée de sa vocation première // pour légitimer le meurtre d’une langue // [...] Ecoute ô mon peuple // quand te lèveras-tu // quand te dresseras-tu // quand te libèreras-tu?”

the bistro] a little longer. Just like the journalists did. [...] They, the journalists, had shrugged as well. One doesn't kill oneself for a patois"¹⁰⁹

(158)

Fonse's suicide/supreme sacrifice, then, turns out as being just another "wet fart" just like his "word-grenades" had been¹¹⁰ –nothing at this point can seem to save the Alsatian dialect from extinction if even *this* leaves Alsatians undisturbed, eating, drinking and slumbering in their comfortable lives. Additionally, we discover that Fonse, in the end neither angel nor devil, nor real Mephisto, was just another regular mortal when it would take "magic" to reverse the situation.

Importantly, I suggest that Weckmann's insistence on "Alsatian eating and drinking" as a metaphorical cause –or perhaps not so metaphorical–¹¹¹ for Alsatian slumbering and Alsace letting itself absorbed too easily into French homogeneous culture¹¹² *is another way through*

¹⁰⁹ "Tu t'es écrasé sur le parvis. On mit le grand pantin désarticulé à la morgue. On t'enterra à la sauvette. Il y eut juste un entre-filet dans la presse locale. [...] Je dis [à la police] que nous avions discuté de l'impact que pourrait avoir sur l'opinion publique un hara-kiri alsacien. Les policiers haussèrent les épaules. Ils restèrent plus longtemps chez Perche. Les journalistes aussi d'ailleurs. [...] Ils haussèrent les épaules. On ne se tue pas pour un patois"

¹¹⁰ Was he, then, retrospectively, a "real prophet" or a "false prophet"? The question remains open at the end since prophets, in the Old Testament, did indeed prophesy by performing their prophecies (e.g. Jeremiah breaking a vase to symbolize the future fate of the Israelites in Jeremiah 19:10), so his death could be understood as such. "False prophets," on the other hand, were punished by death according to Deuteronomy 13:5 –which could be Fonse's self-inflicted punishment for his own false prophecies after realizing that he had been wrong and that Alsatian rebirth will not happen

¹¹¹ If one considers that material prosperity entails fewer concerns for identity issues, cf. Weckmann's anticapitalistic overtones (which will sound remarkably close to Abd al Malik's): e.g. Weckmann's criticism of "la Finance marchécommune" (20), or this other excerpt from the section of *Fonse* titled "La Grande Lamentation Alsacienne": "Alsaciens sans Alsace // Alsace sans Alsaciens // Alsace déracinée triturée bâillonnée // par le beau monde des nantis // des nantis de pouvoir // des nantis de fric // des capitalistes cérébraux" (150)

¹¹² No doubt that, at a liminally political level of analysis, Weckmann does mention heavy-to-digest traditional Alsatian cuisine to criticize Alsatians for their lack of reaction in the face of "French" hegemony, at a time when it is time to wake up –*not* time to slumber. This theme, incidentally, is really transversal to Weckmann's literary production as, in *La Roue du Paon* as well, the author will urge Alsatians to stop being "bourgeois," "[only preoccupied by their digestion of Alsatian food]," "[happy and satisfied and ready to go to sleep as soon as officials

which his language is a “*Germanic French* language” from a *topical* standpoint, since this focus on (excessive) eating and drinking enables Weckmann to situate himself literarily, *dialogically*, hence *anti-archipolitically*, at the junction of two sets of influences: a “French” one (Rabelais) and a “Germanic” one (Sebastian Brant and Johann Fischart).¹¹³

While, indeed, Weckmann’s mention of traditional Alsatian cuisine may seem trivial, I could not stress enough that *his treatment* of this apparently banal topic is, as I see it, *at the crux of his dialogism* (Rabelais-Brant/Fischart, “French-Germanic”), hence *at the crux of his implementation of the anti-archipolity*. Sauerkraut (with lots of meat and very good beer and wine) is famous for being “scatologically” heavy to digest; it is this popular belief which Weckmann plays upon and *integrates into his literature à la sauce franco-germanique*, i.e. *à la sauce égalitaire ranciérienne*, i.e. through subtle *dialogic* references to *both* Rabelais *and* Brant/Fischart.

In *La Roue du Paon*, Weckmann coins this interesting “*mot-valise*,” “*fressaille*”: “Fressaille: the Franco-Alsatian equivalent of Pantagruel-like eating excesses” – “*La fressaille: équivalent franco-alsacien de la bouffe pantagruélique*” (181), a (in fact very Rabelaisian) coinage in which we recognize the German verb “*fressen*” (the Alsatian verb would have been “*frassa*”) and the French suffix “*-aille*”, as in “*mangeaille*.” Related to Graff’s notion of “literary piracy,” this illustrates the transnational –one might also say “smuggling” or “maverick”– aspect of Weckmann’s writing.

titillate their –clitorises with empty promises]” (18). The problem with Alsatians “[cadavres vivants],” is then that they are too “*bons vivants*”...

¹¹³ Fischart is for example explicitly mentioned in *La Roue du Paon*, thus confirming Weckmann’s knowledge of and deference to this precursor author: “[...] Fischart, the pre-dadaist explosion of Alsatian linguistic extravaganza” – “[...] Fischart, l’explosion pré-dadaïste du verbe alsacien” (49)

In order now to be able to discern Brant and Fischart's influences, it is necessary to be familiar, even succinctly, with their respective masterpieces. Sebastian Brant is known for being the author of *Das Narrenschiff* (*La Nef des Fous –The Ship of Fools*), first published in Basel in 1494, and a moralizing satire of his contemporaries' faults and foolishness. He is thus credited with the creation of a new literary genre, "*the buffoon genre*," extremely influential in the European Renaissance as it spurred the Protestant Reformation.¹¹⁴ As for Johann Fischart, he equally wrote satires and translated Rabelais into German, adapting Rabelais' style by being just as creative –and his "verbal inventions" being this time "at the service of the German language."¹¹⁵

The section of *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne* titled "Küeh" is a good example of Weckmann's use of a Rabelais-Brant-Fischartian (hence "Germanic French") satirical tone. The word "*Küeh*" as a noun, in the Alsatian dialect, means "cow," and is here taken to refer to someone's last name in this piece meant to be a satire of precisely those Alsations more concerned about eating and drinking than about language preservation:

"Once upon a time,

Fonse

¹¹⁴ Written around the same time as Faustino Perisauli's *De Triumpho Stultitiae*, Brant's 1494 *Narrenschiff* thus predates Erasmus' 1511 *In Praise of Folly*. In her 1966 *Sebastian Brant: Das Narrenschiff. Interpretationen zum Deutschunterricht*, Barbara Könniker writes: "What Brant did was to connect together 1) the Christian, biblical representations of the *stultus* [fool] as the one who hasn't yet received the light and is blind to the Christian faith, with 2) the 'type' of the courtly fool/jester, or the Carnival fool. [...] As a prototype of bodily/mental abnormality, and as grotesque deformity, the fool did not convey, before Brant, any notion of value; it thus stood in no relation whatsoever with the biblical *stultus*. Brant's true and decisive contribution is that he is the one who intimately and lastingly connected together these two at first very different areas of representations" –"Diese biblisch christliche Vorstellung vom dem *stultus* als dem Unerleuchteten und Heilsblinden brachte Brant nun in Verbindung mit dem Typus des Hof- bzw. Fasnachtarren [...]. Als Prototyp körperlich geistiger Abnormalität, als Verrückter oder grotesk Missgestalteter stellte der Narr hier eine durchaus wertfrei Grösse dar, stand also zu dem biblischen *stultus* in keinerlei Beziehung. Diese Verknüpfung nun, die zwei zunächst völlig getrennte Vorstellungskreise zusammenzwang, ist als das eigentlich und entscheidend Neue bei Brant anzusehen" (13-14)

¹¹⁵ cf. Ferdinand Adolf Gelbcke's still valid analysis in his 1874 *Johann Fischart und Rabelais' Gargantua*

as ésch amolä xén Fonsi¹¹⁶
 there was a man called Küeh
 his name was sometimes pronounced like a long “cu” [cu long]
 sometimes like a short “cuä” [cuä bref]
 sometimes like a long “queux” [queux longue]
 and still some other times like “cu-ée,” both long and short
 depending on whether the speaker was
 from Zornwiller Colmar Strasbourg or Paris
 but it was never pronounced like a short “cul” [cul bref]
 no one would have dared
 since the man was heavily respectable [respectabilité de poids]
 and was eminently fat.
 [...] He was the symbol –the walking and sputtering symbol–
 of our political good sense based on equilibrium
 [...] Alsatian of any obedience
 as long as
 by obeying he could make substantial profits
 [...] hey young lads, [cheunots]
 when I was your age
 young people did not meddle with politics
 [...] if, by any chance, one of us would open his mouth
 he would be kicked in the ass

¹¹⁶ “once upon a time there was” (in Alsatian)

trétt én de norsch¹¹⁷
 and that was well deserved
 for
 young people [les cheunes]
 are not supposed to talk about politics [bolitique]
 politics [bolitique] in Alsace was always the business
 of the Wise and the Elders
 understood?
 So, young lads [les cheunots]
 no scruples please
 no excessive demonstrations of
 pride
 we don't care about our pride
 it brings us only shit and trouble [emmerdements]
 let's bow down and bend, friends,
 like the reed, let us bend
 whatever the source of our domination is
 [...] as long as mannah continues to fall down
 mannah mannah mannah
 and as long as we keep prospering
 for when Kùeh is going well,

¹¹⁷ “kick in the ass” (in Alsatian)

Alsace is going well too¹¹⁸

[...] Do you remember

Fonse

[...] This nice man called Kùeh

[...] Mister Kùeh well installed at the feeders

[...] And you Fonse

You stabbed your fork into his stomach

And you planted it deep inside

Saying:

Here I am tearing your guts out

You pig [...]!

He chuckled burped farted

And slid under the table

[...] amidst puddles of riesling wine

[...] amidst the grease of ham [waedelä]"¹¹⁹ (105-112)

¹¹⁸ “*Quand Kùeh va, l’Alsace va*” –a simplistic and egocentric rephrasing of the famous principle in economics: “*Quand le bâtiment va, tout va*”

¹¹⁹ “Il était une fois // Fonse // as ésch amolä xén Fonsi // un homme nommé Kùeh // qui se prononçait tantôt cul long // tantôt cuä bref // tantôt queux longue // ou encore cu-ée brève et longue // selon que le locuteur était // zornwillerois colmarien strasbourgeois ou parisien // mais jamais cul bref // ce que personne d’ailleurs n’eût osé // vu la respectabilité de poids // et la rondeur éminente du personnage // [...] le symbole ambulant et postillonnant // de notre bon sens politique basé sur l’équilibre // Alsacien de toute obédience // pourvu // qu’elle garantisse des bénéfices substantiels // cheunots // de mon temps // à votre âge // on ne se mettait pas en tête // de discuter politique avec les Anciens // [...] et quand on se hasardait à ouvrir le bec // on recevait un coup de pied au cul // trétt én de norsch // et c’était bien fait // car // les cheunes // n’ont pas à penser bolitique // la bolitique en Alsace a toujours été faite // par les Sages et les Anciens // compris? // [...] Donc les cheunots // pas de scrupules s’il vous plaît // et pas d’excessives manifestations de // fierté // on n’a que faire de notre fierté // elle ne nous attire que des emmerdements // plions nos amis plions // comme le roseau plions // et qu’importe l’étiquette // qu’importe la couleur // [...] pourvu que la manne tombe // manna manna manna // et que nos affaires marchent // car quand Kùeh va // l’Alsace va // [...] Monsieur Kùeh installé aux // mangeoires [...] // et toi Fonse // tu lui mis la fourchette sur le ventre // et l’y enfonças // en lui disant: // Je t’étripe [...] // porc [...]! // Mais lui gloussa rota péta // et glissa sous la table // [...] dans les flaques de riesling // dans la graisse des waedelä”

The satirical aspects of Mister Kùeh are fairly obvious in the above portrait: his name means “cow,” his pragmatic capitalistic views (I-don’t-care-being-an-Alsatian-as-long-as-I-am-rich-being-French-or-German-for-that-matter) made him fat like a cow (note the reactivation of the locution “*de poids*” in “*respectabilité de poids*,” meaning “very respectable” in standard French language, but, in this context, meant to mean “*heavily* respectable”); he is affluent and flatulent. Furthermore, his name, although not ridiculous at all when pronounced with the Alsatian accent, does become ridiculous when pronounced the French way, as it sounds like “cul” (“ass” –in this case “fat ass,” “cow’s ass”). His repressed Alsatianity comes back every time he means “*jeunots*” and what comes out of his mouth is “*cheunots*,” which derides this very repression as useless. The satire is also perceptible through the abundance of alliterations, such as: “Alsacien *bedonnant* de toute *obedience*” –“big-belly obedient-to-all Alsatian”– (112) or this other double alliteration in /g/ and /s/, complemented by an assonance in /a/: “gloussa [...] glissa [...] graisse” (“Mais lui gloussa rota péta // et glissa sous la table // [...] dans la graisse des waedelä”).

Weckmann’s thus explicit, performative filiation with “French” author Rabelais^{120 121} – sixteenth-century *Renaissance* author, a detail which will soon have its importance– is valid both linguistically, since Rabelais unashamedly used a profusion of provincialisms in his cornucopian

¹²⁰ cf. also this other “Gargantuesque” accumulation: “I miss you [Fonse] // For you know everything // You know how to make sense of things, you know how to clarify things // you have a logical mind and you have a good appetite too // choucroute cassoulet potée bouillabaisse // marinated herring hamburger with pineapple jelly // and swallows nests // you do have an appetite and a liver that assimilates everything // and God! what a stomach! // the stomach of our province as you are wont to say” –“N’empêche que tu me manques // car tu sais tout toi // tu sais ordonner tu sais clarifier // tu as de la logique tu as de l’appétit aussi // la choucroute le cassoulet la potée la bouillabaisse // le harang marine le hamburger à la gelée d’ananas // et les nids d’hirondelle // tu as de l’appétit et un foie qui assimile tout // et Dieu! quel estomac! // l’estomac de notre region comme tu le dis souvent” (31) –the prophet who “[knows] everything” is also an oger

¹²¹ From the point of view of onomastics, René’s last name –and his father Antwann’s last name–, Waedele, “[means] [...], quite simply and Germanically, ‘ham roast’” –“[signifie] tout bêtement et alémaniquement jambonneau” (35)

prose, and thematically through the presence of Rabelaisian scatology and bawdiness (*paillardise*). Additionally, we have seen that Rabelais' influence is complemented by definite references to Sebastian Brant and Johann Fischart, *Germanic Renaissance* authors and representatives of a period when Alsace, *within the Germanic politico-cultural sphere*, used to shine, literarily speaking, and was a major center of European literature –not at all “French” literature. In his “*Germanic French* language” therefore, Weckmann is going to *blend the two Renaissances*, i.e. the “French” one and the “Germanic” one –with the hope to perform, through this literary operation, a *Renaissance of* (literary, linguistic) *Alsace*. Because of the special place of the Germanic Renaissance period in “Alsatian collective imagination” and in “Alsatian pride discourse,”¹²² the fact that Weckmann situates himself so obviously in the continuation of Brant and Fischart (via Rabelais), from the point of view of language creative use and tone, certainly contributed, I argue, to the building-up of Weckmann's reputation as a “new Brant,” or a “new Fischart,” and hence “a new great Alsatian author” –although, again, what would be most important to Weckmann would not be his own reputation but the “reputation” of the dialect (i.e. its “prestige”), needing to be enhanced, it is true, by contemporary Alsatian “great authors.”

Weckmann's performance of “dialogic” literature, “*great*” dialogic literature, then amounts to a *bold* anti-archipolitical affirmation that “prestige,” “literary/linguistic greatness” does not reside in monologism but in dialogism; it is, *in fine*, a tremendous (Rancierian) “democratic” and “political” statement.

¹²² cf. Hoffet: “We have seen that the *golden age of Alsatian civilization* took place in the middle ages as well as during the Renaissance period. Alsace, then, did have *its own culture* [sa culture propre] and *was able to* unleash its creativity. Writers such as *Fischart and Sebastian Brant*, [as well as] painters [...], [and composers] made out of Alsace one of the most vibrant centers of Germanic civilization” (190, emphases added), and: “The names of Alsace's most illustrious writers are Fischart, Sebastian Brant, and today Albert Schweitzer. These are all writers writing in German” (193)

One additional key aspect of the “Germanic French language” found in *Fonse ou l’Éducation Alsacienne* needs to be addressed, that is the purely linguistic one. The “French language” used by Weckmann is indeed made (linguistically) “Germanic” from the very incipit:

“My name is [che m’appelle] Waedelé, howi’m gsaed,¹²³ Waedelé
Antwann, Waedelé with an ‘accent tégu’ because that sounds more
French”,¹²⁴ (11)

The opening pages (here the very first sentence of the novel) thus have Antoine (Antwann), René’s father, introduce himself as part of a conversation he is having with that mysterious “professeur.” As was the case with other passages we have already seen, entire clauses all in the Alsatian language are inserted in the middle of an otherwise “French” sentence: here, “*howi’m gsaed*” (“I told him”) –without italics in the original text, without any markers that would conventionally indicate that it is a different language, because in effect it is *not* a “different language” (cf. Weckmann’s notion of “polyphony”: one language and three melodies): more than mere code-switching, it all makes one language, which is “Germanic French.” What is interesting, here, I argue, is that the “melody” of the Alsatian dialect takes over the entire “French” sentence, as “*je m’appelle*” is spelt “*che m’appelle*,” *with the Alsatian accent*, which means (since it is the very first sentence of the novel) that the reader is invited, encouraged, to not be ashamed to read French (mentally or out aloud) with an Alsatian accent –hence not ashamed to speak Alsatian. Antoine/Antwann’s own shame (Antoine who wants to write his last name with an “accent aigu/accent tégu” “because it sounds more French”) is defused through this

¹²³ “howi’m gsaed”: I told him (in Alsatian)

¹²⁴ “Che m’appelle Waedelé, howi’m gsaed, Waedelé Antwann, Waedelé avec un accent tégu parce que ça fait plus français”

“elicited reader response performance of Alsatian” which on the contrary deliberately makes “French” sound “*less French*” instead of “more French.”

This “howi’m gsaed” (“I told him”), is reinforced, in the pages to come, by numerous variations of the same verb, like a mini-“grammar lesson” through literature: “hetr gsaed” –“he said”– (12), “saewi” –“I’m saying”– (ibid)... Regarding my previous comment concerning the novel being “relatively difficult to read,” there is, in this respect, another explanation for this voluntary lack of diagetic coherence: the *entire* novel is indeed *entirely* made up either of direct speech, or indirect speech, or free indirect speech –without real narration– precisely because, I argue, we need to hear the characters *speak*, freely speak their “less French, Germanic French” language. “French” words are consistently “Alsatianized,” “creolized” –one might say “desacralized”: “Aurvar” for “Au revoir” (13), “bababa-mamama” for “grand-papa et grand-maman” (14), “bolitique” for “politique” (107), “batrie, batriote, batriotique” for “patrie, patriote, patriotique” (91, 14, 12)... Especially this last series of words is interesting, as it performatively demonstrates the illusory aspects of Antoine/Antwann’s generational desire to “be more French” and “sound more French” (cf. the Alsatian denial of his duality in Hoffet):

“[In 1918, i.e. when Alsace became French again], we closed the shutters of our eastern windows and we opened the shutters of our western windows. I know that may sound weird, but that’s how we are in Alsace. We like to be one-eyed, or one-armed, or one-legged. So we closed our

right eye and from then on we look at the world only from the left eye, the eye from the heart, the batriotic eye [l'œil batriote]"¹²⁵ (14)

Some contraction processes, or laxisms vis-à-vis strict “French” grammar, may also be interpreted as “piracy literature” as they performatively set Alsace *outside* a “French linguistic culture,” stressed by Harold Schiffman (cf. Introduction), as based on language purity and rigidity. Examples of such laxisms include contractions of “*qui*” into “*qu’*,” e.g. “qu’est parti” instead of “qui est parti” (17) –which, interestingly, will also be found in Abd al Malik– or the very typical “alsacianisme” which consists in using the “wrong” auxiliary in the *passé composé*: “a passé à la télé” instead of “est passé” (25).

Weckmann’s sacrilegious playfulness with language takes on yet another profound political meaning, when the author playfully yet seriously points to the *mistakes* contained in French translations of Alsatians words, in standard French language, thus finding *in philology* reasons to denounce a lack of respect for Alsatian reality: in such conditions, how can we expect “France” to ever *understand* regional specificities? The example showcased by Weckmann is, indeed, thought-provoking:

“Why was sürkrütt translated as choucroute, professeur? Croute comes from krütt and krütt means chou –whereas sür means saur [...]; the juxtaposition chouchou [as sign of phonetic assimilation].¹²⁶ Choucroute:

¹²⁵ “On a fermé les volets côté est et on les a ouverts côté ouest. Que veux-tu, on est comme ça, nous autres. On aime être borgne ou manchot ou unijambiste. On a donc fermé l’œil droit et on ne regardait le monde plus que du gauche, celui du cœur, l’œil batriote”

¹²⁶ The same criticism could not be made, for example, against the English language (however imperialistic this language might otherwise be) –an English language which was able to keep linguistically intact the specificity of its Germanic-origin population by keeping the word “sauerkraut”

a keyword for Franco-Alsatian relationships [rapports francalsaciens]: a new worldview based on a wrong analysis”¹²⁷ (89)

Note the neologism “francalsacien” (the “right” “French” compound adjective would have been “franco-alsacien”), signaling the supposed union/fusion of “France” with “its Alsace region,” and in fact designating a “worldview,” or “world order,” based on a dominator-dominated relationship. “Chouchou” here is no cute children’s word; it symbolizes, beyond “phonetic assimilation,” cultural assimilation by the archipolitics on a mass scale. The Archipolitics is the “wrong analysis.” Once again, though, Weckmann denounces, in a Rabelaisian manner, not only the “French archipolitics” but also “Alsatian apathy/slumberiness” in the face of the Archipolitics:

“But, as bababa [grandpa] would say, why should we care about it? What really matters is the facts that choucroute is good to eat, and that [we] make the best choucroute around”¹²⁸ (ibid)

Significantly, i.e. to signify the need to wake up, the novel’s last words are in the Alsatian dialect: “eyera schissfrédde,” which literally means “your shitpeace,” “your shitty peace”: “So, go on, [...] and continue to leisurely sip [your drink]: peace, your cowardly peace, your spineless peace, eyera schissfrédde” (167).¹²⁹ The fact however that the *last words* are in Alsatian does leave the door open for the dialect to, in the end, “have the last word,” i.e. to

¹²⁷ “Pourquoi a-t-on traduit sürkrütt par choucroute, professeur? Croute vient de krütt et krütt c’est chou alors que sür c’est saur. Choucroute, [...] la juxtaposition chouchou devient amalgame sous l’effet de l’assimilation phonétique. Choucroute: mot clé des rapports francalsaciens: la vision nouvelle des choses se base sur une analyse fausse”

¹²⁸ “Mais comme dirait bababa, qu’est-ce que cela peut faire, l’essentiel est que la choucroute soit bonne, et la meilleure choucroute est celle des Mangus”

¹²⁹ “Alors [...] sirotez votre sureau. La paix, votre paix molle, votre paix veule, eyera schissfrédde”

survive. The presence of explicit, sometimes crude sexual vocabulary, in line with Rabelaisian style, also reinforces this hope and faith in life, and in the future.¹³⁰

Weckmann's "Germanic French," a new kind of language and discourse through its engagement with "dialogism," is yet another kind of "other language and discourse," I argue, because of its constant, direct engagement with an explicitly literarily staged monolingual "archipolity." Against archipolitical linguistic diktats, Weckmann's politically subversive *use of neologisms*, already present in *Fonse ou l'Éducation Alsacienne* as we have seen with the adjective "francalsacien," will in effect become, in his 1992 novel *Simon Hertzog. Fragments de Substance*, a real "Newspeak" ("Novlangue") which he will indeed use to criticize the "French Archipolitics" as an Orwellian polity. Not *strictly* "a Germanic French language" except of course in terms of "discourse variation in favor of French-German-Alsatian equality," this ultimate form of "accented literature" creates, in an at least equally revolutionary move, a new system of signifiers, hence a new language, to target the Archipolitics (since the Archipolitics is still here and operating, it means that obviously criticism in regular language was not enough: a new –literary– world must, radically, be created).

Simon Hertzog. Fragments de Substance may be considered at first as a dystopia,¹³¹ actually combining elements of *1984* by George Orwell (e.g. television as surveillance device,

¹³⁰ e.g. the references to nipples (very importantly in *Alsatian* in the text: "détla," 11) or "evening sperm" –"sperme vespéral"– (16), the erotic account of René's conception at the *brétsch* (in Alsatian in the text), i.e. "washhouse" (33)... Playing on the popular image that Alsatian Vosges mountain tops are round and look like breasts, Weckmann also sexualizes the Alsatian landscape, as this poetical description of sunset shows: "[...] the sun with his tongue licked, one last time, the space between two mountain breasts and there he went to bed" –"dernier coup de langue du soleil couché dans un creux entre deux seins vosgiens" (95). In recent years the OLCA (Office pour la Langue et la Culture d'Alsace) has similarly been trying to convince young people that the Alsatian dialect is modern (and able to express everything, including sensual love) through their motto "*Elsässisch esch bombisch*" –"Alsatian is sexy"

¹³¹ The dystopian register seems to be, if not a staple, at least a recurring trend in contemporary Alsatian literature. Compare with this excerpt from *Mange ta choucroute et tais-toi* by Martin Graff, further developing the already mentioned theme of the modern acculturated subject as zombie/robot: "Organ transplants, as is a well known fact, are not posing any problems any more these days. 'Tongue transplants are routine operations,' says Professor

cf. “The new Governor [...] was on TV: he loves us,” 23)¹³² and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. The section titled “The Unknown Poet” –“Le poète inconnu”– presents itself as a newspaper article recounting how “the Keeper of the Consensus” sends a servant to the “Library of the Council” with the mission to select, with no specific criteria [“au hasard”], “half a dozen volumes which would be then incinerated in secret by the same servant” (61). “[...] He ordered him to help himself to any books on shelf 3 from the bottom left, to wrap the books in paper, to bring them to the baker’s oven, to burn them and put the ashes in an urn which he gave him” (ibid)¹³³ –in a random ritual of cultural destruction that seems to be common practice.

Parisot, from the Center of Linguistic Transplant in Illkirch-Graffenstaden. Plastic surgery makes wonders. One of the causes for the secret mutation of Alsatians lies, incidentally, in the quality of Parisotte plastic surgery, which is way more efficient than the Germanic one. Tongue transplants have absolutely no incidence on how the person looks. People wanting to be operated on do not even need to be under anesthesia. ‘The subject, of course, needs to be willing. What makes the Alsatian a really good subject, incidentally, is his positive attitude regarding the transplant,’ adds the Professor. Unlike all other, more traditional, kinds of liftings, [...] linguistic transplants do not leave a single scar. Several foreign governments have expressed interest in this high-tech procedure which avoids classic expensive bloodsheds [...]’ –“Les greffes, c’est bien connu, ne posent plus de problèmes de nos jours. ‘Une greffe de langue est une opération de routine,’ dit le professeur Parisot, du centre de transplantation linguistique d’Illkirch-Graffenstaden. La chirurgie esthétique fait des merveilles. Une des causes de la mutation secrète des Alsaciens est d’ailleurs la qualité de la chirurgie esthétique parisotte, bien plus performante que celle des Germains. Quand on transplante une langue, il n’y a strictement aucune incidence sur le physique du candidat. On peut même se passer de narcose. ‘Il faut naturellement que le sujet soit consentant. La qualité du sujet alsacien réside d’ailleurs dans son attitude positive à l’égard de la greffe,’ précise le professeur. A l’inverse des liftings traditionnels, [...] la transplantation linguistique ne laisse pas la moindre cicatrice. Plusieurs gouvernements étrangers sont d’ailleurs intéressés par cette technologie de pointe qui évite les effusions de sang classiques et coûteuses [...]’ (19-20). The reader is made to believe that, in this dystopia (or rather, for Graff, metaphorical depiction of reality), the only reason why the French government privileges “tongue transplant” over more “traditional” forms of ethnic cleansing is that the former is more cost-efficient, in plain economic terms, than the latter. Compare this “tongue transplant” theme, which presupposes, in vividly graphic terms, the *cutting off* of the original tongue, with the perception, in Alsatian discourse, that while “France,” during the French Revolution period, contemplated yet failed to deport and/or guillotine “non-French speaking Alsatian traitors” (cf. Vogler), it however *succeeded in guillotining the dialects* of France (the “Sprochmühle” sculpture in Ungersheim, representing an actual guillotine and severed tongues lying in a basket)

¹³² “Le nouveau Gouverneur [...] est passé à la télé. Il nous aime”

¹³³ “Le Gardien du Consensus [...] [envoya son factotum prendre] au hasard dans la bibliothèque du Conseil une demi-douzaine de volumes qui seraient ensuite incinérés en secret [...]. Il lui ordonna de se servir dans le rayonnage 3 à partir de la base gauche [...] d’envelopper les livres dans un papier, de les porter au four du boulanger, de les y crêmer et de mettre les cendres dans l’urne qu’il lui remit”

From this excerpt it is already possible to discern some of Weckmann's "new language": "Consensus" is the "Archipolitics," and it is enforced by powerful officials with the title of "Keeper of the Consensus." *Stricto sensu*, this dystopia is in fact a *uchronia* rather than a dystopia, in the sense that we quickly realize that Weckmann's literary world in *Simon Hertzog* is not that fictional after all: the 14th of July is the day of its national festival. In tune with the satirical/Rabelaisian tone of *Fonse et l'Éducation Alsacienne*, "the Village," on this occasion, "is celebrating": "The air, full of the strong smells of merguez, sauerkraut, beer and warm wine, pervades all the streets. Everyone's face is shiny with grease and sweat. The Council Members are swimming in gargantuesque consensus" (53).¹³⁴ This *uchronia*, then, is a world divided into two well-separated entities: on the one hand, "the Village" – "le Village" –, and, on the other hand, "la Capitale" – "the Capital" – (31), which remains strangely abstract and absent yet loomingly, overwhelmingly present. The language spoken in this polity is "le patrien" – "patrian" – (15), a universalist language "made exclusive international language" – "promu langue internationale exclusive" (30):

"[...] The Village is part of a large ensemble, the Motherfatherland [la Mèrepatrie], of which it is the eastern appendix. The monomaniac attachment of the inhabitants of the Village to the Motherfatherland has generated an important mutation of socio-cultural behaviors. This is how patrian, the national language, imposed itself as the dominant idiom at the expense of the vernac"¹³⁵ (15)

¹³⁴ "14 juillet. Le Village est en fête. Ça pue les merguez, la choucroute, la bière et le vin tiède à tous les coins de rue. Les visages sont luisants de graisse et de sueur. Les Conseillers nagent dans le consensus gargantuesque"

¹³⁵ "[...] Le Village fait partie d'un grand ensemble, la Mèrepatrie, dont il constitue l'appendice oriental. L'attachement monomaniac des Villageois à la Mèrepatrie a généré une importante mutation des comportements

Concerning this other language, the “vernac” language, Weckmann writes, with verbs in the present tense of general truth, i.e. in the manner of an ethno-anthropologist:

“[...] The inhabitants of the Village speak since immemorial times an idiom which they call ‘le vernaculaire,’ abbreviated into ‘le vernac’; thus they call themselves –somewhat shamefully– vernacularophones, or, more simply, vernacophones. This vernacular is in fact an offshoot from the language of the Neighbor.¹³⁶ This fact however the inhabitants of the Village are obstinately refusing to recognize, for they feel not attracted to their family of origin. Said family, indeed, was in the past a cause of much trouble and trauma¹³⁷ which perturbed the psychology of the tribe^{138,,139}

(15)

The dramatic decrease in the number of “vernac” speakers is rendered through the following striking news report:

socioculturels. C’est ainsi que le patien, langue nationale, s’est imposé comme idiome dominant au détriment du vernac”

¹³⁶ While the capital “V” could indicate that “Voisin” is, like “Village” or “Keeper of the Consensus,” part of Weckmann’s “Newspeak,” the syntagm “langue du Voisin,” however, is a well-known concept in Alsatian debates: thus Weckmann figures among the people who regret that German is being relegated as the “neighbor’s language,” Germany’s language, and not an Alsatian language which it has historically been, alongside French and of course alongside Alsatian

¹³⁷ Another intertextual reference to Hoffet

¹³⁸ Although the word “tribe,” here, is used by Weckmann in the context of the protagonist’s professional activity (Simon Hertzog, indeed, is an ethnologist and archeologist by trade), this is also an ironical intertext with Robert Grossmann’s criticism against Weckmann’s supposed project to dismantle the Republic and privilege the “tribe” over the “nation”

¹³⁹ “[...] Les Villageois parlent depuis des temps immémoriaux un idiome qu’ils appellent ‘le vernaculaire,’ en abréviation ‘le vernac’ et qu’ils se disent eux-mêmes –un peu honteusement– vernacularophones, ou plus simplement vernacophones. Ce vernaculaire est en fait une branche de la langue du Voisin. Ce que les Villageois se refusent obstinément à reconnaître, car ils n’éprouvent aucune sympathie pour leur famille d’origine. En effet, celle-ci a été dans le passé la cause de quelques traumatismes qui ont perturbé le psychisme de la tribu”

“July 11. We have just learnt that the kindgarten of the Center Village has registered the very last little vernacophone child. The Education Official [Inspecteur d’Académie]¹⁴⁰ has made formal promises that every effort will be made so that he does not lose his native language. He will be allowed to have ten minutes of vernac practice [pratique vernacque] per day”¹⁴¹ (53)

This hyperbolic variation around playwright and humorist Germain Muller’s famous phrase “*Mer sen die letschta*” –“We are the last ones (to speak Alsatian)”– is most interesting because literature is made to mirror “real-life” continuous contentions between, on the one hand, the associations in favor of bilingual schooling in the Alsatian dialect, which have been asking, at minimum, for the application of a “13/13 principle” –13 hours taught in French, 13 hours in Alsatian/German– (ideally, for the sake of “*ré-équilibrage*,” even more time should be devoted to Alsatian/German, since French is so overwhelmingly predominant outside school), and, on the other hand, the “French” Éducation Nationale whose discrepancy between word and deed has been frequently denounced by the aforementioned associations. This –discrepancy is here represented through the sharp contrast between “*tout sera fait*” –“every effort will be made”– (emphasis added) and the actual time amount: “ten minutes” –to be of course compared to the *minimum* of 13 hours recommended by sociolinguist Jean Petit for bilingual education to actually work in the context of a minor language such as Alsatian. At a time when the concept of “right, for speakers of minority languages, to keep their minority language alive” is being discussed in

¹⁴⁰ Same remark as with the phrase “langue du Voisin”: the title “Inspecteur d’Académie” belongs to both the uchronia and real-life Alsatian debates

¹⁴¹ “11 juillet. Nous apprenons l’inscription à l’école maternelle du Centre Village du dernier petit enfant vernacophone. Promesse a été faite par l’Inspecteur d’Académie que tout sera mis en œuvre pour que ce petit ne perde pas l’usage de sa langue maternelle. Il aura droit à dix minutes de pratique vernacque par jour”

terms of “human rights” (cf. *Simon Hertzog* was published the same year –1992– as *Les Minorités en Europe, Droits linguistiques et Droits de l’Homme*, ed. by Henri Giordan), the sentence “He will be allowed to have ten minutes” –“il aura *droit* à dix minutes”– (emphasis added) takes on a special resonance.

Significantly, this news report is followed, three pages later (and two months of “literary time” later), by another news report staging, in a remarkable personification, the dialect’s *funeral*:

“[...] September 21. The sidewalks, on both sides of the street, are crowded with people. [In the crowd], S.H. [Simon Hertzog] expresses his feeling of surprise [to his neighbor] –so, could it be that there would be more vernacophones left than what the statistics had told us? [His neighbor] however replies that, from what he can see, most people in this crowd are grey-haired: no young people, not even one. [...]

3 pm. Sounding of the trumpet and drum roll: the parade starts moving.

Leading the parade are dancers dancing on folkloric music, and wearing flower wreaths and sad looks on their faces. The crowd gets teary.

After them, here come the acrobats, the charlatans, the firebreathers, automats, clowns, jugglers, contortionists and people in carnival clothing.

The crowd throws confetti into the air.

Then come the guitarists, the tambourine-players, then the flutes, the accordions, the hurdy gurdies, and the bagpipes. The crowd dances.

Then the illusionists, magicians, card-readers and astrologists, all of them surrounding the Oracle who had predicted the dead’s death. The crowd

claps.

Then here are the lyrical poets moving forward, with the oniric poets and the pastoral poets, the joke-tellers, the bards, the composers of rhapsodies, the crazy authors and the novelists, the dramatists, the feuilletonists, the historians, critics and writers of all sorts and kinds. In admiration, the crowd exclaims oh and ah.

Finally, here he comes, the Dead, in his urn, carried like an ostensor by the Keeper of the Consensus, who, as he walks, alternatively shows it to the crowd on the right, then to the crowd on the left. All make the sign of the cross. [...]

The parade reaches the Community Center. All go in. The crowd goes in as well. [...]

Inside, the Village gets to see a show which will remain unforgettable. The Dead's dances are being danced, his music is being played, his songs are being sung, his poems are being read, his jokes are being told, excerpts of his theater plays are being performed [...].

Then it's time for speeches. [...] The Oracle talks in philosophical terms about death –death which inevitably threatens any human creation, death which, also, is necessary to human progress, quoting the Gospels: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...' [...]

Lastly, here is the Keeper of the Consensus speaking for the eulogy, and speaking in old vernac, mind you, and with much emotion. He lived a long, good life... He passed away peacefully... And before he would close

his eyes for ever, we swore that the funeral in his honor would be grandiose...”¹⁴² (57-58)

This passage, of course, needs to be related to the fatalistic viewpoint expressed by Robert Grossmann in *Main-basse sur ma langue*: “Shall we keep weeping? On the contrary let us get ready for a memorable funeral, for dying is an art!” (20).¹⁴³ If *Simon Hertzog* were to be a *roman à clef*, the character of the “Keeper of the Consensus” could be Robert Grossmann himself since said “Keeper of the Consensus” in the novel is, to begin with, not an envoy of the Capital, but a true member of the Village, cf. he is able to speak in “old vernac” and, while he is indeed among those who have considered the death of the Dead inevitable, he is also overwhelmed by emotion –compare with Grossmann’s declaration of love towards the Alsatian dialect in *Main-basse sur ma langue*.

Furthermore, what is notable in the passage above is its carnivalesque aspect –the word “carnavaliers,” translated as “people in carnival clothing,” but which may also refer to a mode of

¹⁴² “21 septembre. La foule borde les rues. S.H. s’étonne qu’elle soit si nombreuse, resterait-il donc plus de vernacophones que les statistiques n’en ont comptés ? Mais Lach lui fait remarquer que cette foule est plutôt grisonnante: pas un jeune, pas un gosse. [...] 15 heures. Coup de trompette, roulement de tambour: le cortège s’ébranle. En tête, les groupes folkloriques portant les gerbes et couronnes, mines compassées et pas sautillants. La foule a la larme à l’œil. // Suivent les saltimbanques, bonimenteurs, cracheurs de feu, automates, clowns, jongleurs, contorsionnistes et carnavaliers. La foule jette des confettis. // Viennent ensuite les guitaristes, les tambourineurs, les flûtistes, les accordéonistes, les vielleux et les cornemuseux. La foule danse. // Suivent les illusionnistes, magiciens, cartomanciennes et astrologues entourant l’Oracle qui avait prédit la mort. La foule applaudit. // Puis s’avancent les poètes lyriques, les poètes oniriques, les poètes champêtres, les conteurs de blague, les bardes, les rhapsodes, les métromanes et les romanciers, les dramaturges, les feuilletonistes, les historiens, les critiques et les plumitifs de tout poil. La foule pousse des ah et des oh d’admiration. // Et enfin lui, le Mort, dans son urne portée par le Gardien du Consensus comme un ostensor, présentée à droite, présentée à gauche. La foule se signe. // [...] Le cortège s’engouffre dans la Salle Polyvalente, suivi du public. [...] // Et le village assiste à un show qui restera inoubliable. On danse les danses du mort, on joue ses musiques, on chante ses chansons, on lit ses poèmes, on raconte ses blagues, on représente des extraits de ses pièces [...]. // Puis c’est l’heure des discours. [...] La parole est [...] donnée à l’Oracle qui parle en termes philosophiques de la mort qui guette inéluctablement toute œuvre humaine, mais qui est indispensable aussi au progrès de l’humanité, citant les Évangiles: Si le grain ne meurt... [...] // Enfin le Gardien du Consensus prononce l’oraison funèbre, en vernac ancien, s’il vous plaît, la gorge serrée par l’émotion. Il a vécu une longue et belle vie... Il s’est éteint paisiblement... Et avant qu’il ne ferme définitivement les yeux, nous avons juré de lui faire de grandioses funérailles...”

¹⁴³ “Faut-il continuer à pleurer ? Préparons-nous à des funérailles mémorables, car mourir est tout un art!”

being, is even mentioned. Interestingly, *this* carnivalesque is however completely *anti-Bakhtinian* and perhaps then, meaningfully, not completely Rabelaisian. In his famous study of Rabelais, Bakhtine had identified the “carnavalesque” as an inversion of power relations through laughter, expressed *via* the (of course, mock)-election, by the lowly people, of a temporary “*roi du rire*” –king of laughter–, and, more generally, *via* a “*déchaînement dyonisiaque*” –“Dyonisiac unleashing.” There are, certainly, in Weckmann’s narration of the “parade” expressions of laughter (cf. “The crowd throws confetti into the air,” “The crowd claps”...) but these expressions are counterbalanced by “The crowd gets teary,” an emotion that should normally have no place in Carnival. In terms of affect, it may however remind the reader of Gargantua “not knowing if he should cry [like a cow] because of his wife’s death [Badebec] or laugh [like a calf] because of his son’s birth [Pantagruel]” (*Pantagruel*, chapter 3), except that there is no birth here –just death. The association between Carnival and a funeral, therefore, is purely out of place. It is, literally, “crazy”: Alsations are being “fools”; put differently, this narration of the dialect’s funeral is a “Narr-ation” (from German “*Narr*,” which means “fool,” “crazy”). We are in the presence of a new *Narrenschiff* (cf. Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* and the fact that parades may have “floats”).

The rest of the funeral’s account provides us with some true “Dyonisiac unleashing” indeed, as the following passage testifies:

“People in the audience blow their noses with much noise, the emotion is at its peak. The rolling of the funeral drums makes the windows shake... But all of a sudden the rhythm becomes more joyful, and, in a frenzy, the artists begin to dance [une ronde endiablée] around the altar, guitars and accordions are unleashed, bocks and knacks magically and massively

appear from nowhere. People laugh, people stamp their feet, people joyfully overreact to jokes [on se tape sur les cuisses] and everyone thinks, Ah, how much he would have liked this party!”¹⁴⁴ (59)

The tertiary rhythm “*On rit, on trépigne, on se tape sur les cuisses*,” also a paroxysmic gradation both from the point of view of meaning and from the point of view of prosodic increasing intensity (from one-syllable “*rit*” to two-syllable “*trépigne*” to six-syllable “*se tape sur les cuisses*”) may be initially interpreted as a “sign of Carnival.” The same goes for the indeterminacy of the “party” which seems to be both sacred (cf. the “altar”) and fringing with the devilish (cf. “ronde endiablée”). But here is why, in the end, Weckmann’s carnivalesque is anti-Bakhtinian: never, at any moment of the funeral, not even temporarily as in Bakhtin, is the established order challenged by the crowd of the performers. On the contrary, the “Oracle” who predicted the death of the dialect is being “applauded,” which indicates total submission to the Order. During the ceremony itself, both speeches –that of the Oracle and that of the Keeper of the Consensus– characterize themselves by their totalitarian affirmation of the Archipolitics through pseudo-Biblical admonitions and justifications that “minor cultures” shall surrender to their fate of being spiritually absorbed by the hegemonic, dominant one, as the Oracle elliptically says: “*Si le grain ne meurt...*” –a “happy resignation” reinforced by the Keeper of the Consensus who repeats that the only purpose of “minor cultures” is to “fertilize” (hence, give way to) the “new” culture: “[The Deceased’s] ashes shall be deposited on this dolmen erected in front of this very building; [...] may they fertilize *our new Patrian culture* [...]! [notre nouvelle culture

¹⁴⁴ “L’assistance se mouche bruyamment, l’émotion est à son comble. Le roulement funèbre des tambours fait vibrer les vitres... Mais voici que le rythme devient plus allègre, les artistes entament une ronde endiablée autour de l’autel, les guitares et accordéons se déchaînent, les bocks et les knacks font une apparition massive, on rit, on trépigne, on se tape sur les cuisses et tout le monde se dit: Ah, qu’il aurait aimé cette fête!”

patrienne]” (58-59, emphasis added).¹⁴⁵ Both speeches are only minimally –and absolutely not significantly– disrupted or contested. Thus Weckmann denounces Alsatian Carnival as “Anti-Carnival” in that it reinforces the Order instead of bringing it topsy-turvy.

Further, the characteristics of this “Alsatian Anti-Carnival” are interesting to highlight. The contrast, indeed, between the banality of the final comment (a commonplace of real-life funerals: “Ah, how much he would have liked this party!”) with precisely the *nature* of this specific literary “party” needs to be noted. Arguably, what makes it above all most problematic, I argue, is that it is a *real party*, in all its (again) “eating-and-drinking” materiality. It is once again through an alliteration that Weckmann chooses to denote his disgust of materiality, as materiality fetishistically diverts Alsatians from their true identity (“real substance”), this time through the evocation of an inappropriate, shocking, careless profusion of beer glasses –“bocks”– and Strasbourg sausages –“knacks”–: “les bocks et les **knacks**,” which causes Simon Hertzog, Weckmann’s literary *alter ego*, to hurriedly leave the place of the funeral, “nauseated” (59).¹⁴⁶ The gap between this outrageous merriment and the seriousness expected at a funeral further highlights Weckmann’s criticism against those Alsatians “*embourgeoisés*,” happily and naively focused on folklore, easily satisfied when France has just slightly “[titillated their clitoris],” and who are not taking the full measure of the linguistic disaster.

There is one last “detail,” which is that the funeral we have been witnessing all along was, with a little bit of insight, the funeral of someone *being buried alive*... While the death of the Dead seems to be making no doubt, as the Keeper of the Consensus is indeed carrying an urn

¹⁴⁵ “Ses cendres seront déposées sur le dolmen érigé devant cette salle, [...] qu’elles fertilisent notre nouvelle culture patrienne [...]!”

¹⁴⁶ “Lach et S.H. quittent la salle, écœurés”

with the Dead inside, it turns out that the Dead, burnt down to ashes, was *not really dead to begin with* since at his very funeral, “[his] dances are [still] being danced, [his music still being played, his songs still being sung, his poems still being read, his jokes still being told, and excerpts of his theater plays still being performed]” –which, for a dialect, would seem to be able to count as as many signs of *liveliness*. To paraphrase Weckmann from an earlier poem written using the English word “Dixieland” as a verbal basis,¹⁴⁷ the dialect is here made to follow the same path as historical *Malgré-Nous* Alsatians sent to war to be crushed and “destroyed by Moloch” as they went from “*Ebesland*” (“Somethingland”) to “*Nixland*” (“Nothingland”). While the depiction of the Alsatian dialect, in “*La Triade Alsacienne*,” another poem, as a “*Sproch fer nix*” (“language for nothing”) could seem to starkly, grimly confirm a certain predisposition for funeral and disappearance into nothingness, in that only “useful languages” would be naturally meant to survive, Weckmann however goes further than Hagège and Fishman’s “language-diversity-is-useful ethnosemantics argument”¹⁴⁸ by rhetorically denying the “useful” as a relevant category for “language preservation” discussions and thus rejects the very distinction

¹⁴⁷ Note that Weckmann’s attraction to the English language, consecutive to American soldiers being stationed in Alsace after 1945, is not to be interpreted as an attraction to another hegemon (after French). In the already mentioned *À mains nues – Mit blossen Händen* documentary, Weckmann explains that “American literature did indeed play an important role in [his] life. It all started with Caldwell, and it continued with Steinbeck, Hemingway... and then I was also exposed to something I would never forget: [negro] spirituals –*this other language*” –“ce qui a été très important pour moi, c’est l’arrivée de la littérature américaine. Ça a commencé par Caldwell, ça a continué par Steinbeck, par Hemingway, et puis il y a eu, ce qu’aujourd’hui encore, je ne peux pas oublier, c’est les negro spirituals, *cet autre langage*” (emphasis added). In addition to spirituals being “another language” certainly because of its link with slavery and resistance to slavery, the reference to Caldwell is interesting because Erskin Caldwell, an author of Southern (Dixie) American culture, wrote about rather controversial topics such as poverty, racism and social problems in the South (e.g. his 1932 novel *Tobacco Road*)

¹⁴⁸ Hagège mentions for example the “five ways of running and of being seated” (195) that some languages have, while Fishman recalls the “several words for various different types of snow” (wet and dry, thick and thin...) that Eskimo has (21). “What one linguistic community deems worthy of naming, another ignores, denying it any direct access to the sayable” (201). Fishman refers to this field of research as “ethnosemantics” (25). This tends to prove that indeed, you are not going to be exactly the same person, reasoning with the same concepts, whether you are “Xman with Xish” or “Xman with Yish”: it is not even quite exactly the same “Xman”

between “languages for something” and “languages for nothing”: “Is the useful really useful, and is the everything not contained in the nothing?”¹⁴⁹

The intrinsic immorality of the burying-alive act may be connected to another important aspect of Weckmann’s uchronia, which is that it inscribes itself in a post-Christian era:

“Here arrives a [Villager], staggering, a bottle in his hand. He sprinkles the monument with wine, like, *formerly*, people *used to* sprinkle tombs with holy water, at All-Saints Day”¹⁵⁰ (59, emphasis added)

While it is, by definition, impossible to locate a uchronia in time, it is certainly interesting that the only date –however still abstract– from which a calculation of “real date” may be attempted is the reference, towards the beginning of the book, of “the festivities of Year 40” – “*les festivités de l’An 40*” (17). These festivities are first mentioned in the future: “Tomorrow Sunday will be a joyful day –the Anniversary shall be celebrated. Nice coincidence this year: the Anniversary is right in the middle of Carnival” (16).¹⁵¹ This quotation provides us with the feeling of a burlesque, “omnipresent carnivalesque” since there was already Carnival during the funeral and also now for this mysterious “Anniversary”: Carnival is everywhere. The reader learns of what the “Anniversary” is the anniversary in the form of a newspaper article dated “Monday, February 18” (no year), and titled: “The festivities of Year 40”:

¹⁴⁹ “Nos trois langues... Deux se disent utiles, la troisième ne sert à rien... Mais l’utile l’est-il vraiment? Et ce rien ne renferme-t-il pas le tout?”

¹⁵⁰ “Un quidam arrive en titubant, une bouteille à la main. Il asperge le monument de vin comme on aspergeait les tombes d’eau bénite, jadis à la Toussaint”

¹⁵¹ “Demain dimanche, ce sera jour de fête. On célébrera l’Anniversaire. Il tombe bien, cette année, en plein carnaval”

“The Village celebrated yesterday the commemoration of the most important event in our history. It is indeed the 40th anniversary of our Denaming [Débaptisation] that was being celebrated. It shall be remembered that forty years ago, the then Governor decided to take our province out of its linguistic marginality and to fully integrate it into the national context. That was a February 17. From this day onwards, the ex-SDORF would now be called LE VILLAGE”¹⁵² (17)

The word “*Débaptisation*” may, interestingly, be translated as “Denaming” or “Dechristening”; either way, the entity “ex-SDORF” (“s’Dorf” means “village,” in Alsatian) is de-souled –and happily and voluntarily so, as the positive joint lexical fields of “celebration” and “history” show. The phrase “most important event in our history” *de facto* diminishes and in fact *erases* anything “non-French,” any traces of preceding Germanity: “SDORF surreptitiously disappeared” –“*SDORF disparut subrepticement*” (ibid). Because it then unmistakably refers to the French Archipolitics, all we know about this “event,” thus, is that it must have happened some time after 1945. However, efforts to identify with precision the “event” and/or when the uchronia is taking place are nullified by the symbolic value of the number “40”: I suggest that, in this particular case, the number “40” may be related to the French phrase “*s’en foutre comme de l’an 40*,” which means “to care about something as much as one would care about Year 40,” i.e. “to not care at all.” And this, again, is the problem with Alsations: so great is the power of the Archipolitics that they ended up not caring about their own assimilation –and they need to be

¹⁵² “Le Village a célébré hier la commémoration de l’événement le plus important de notre histoire. On y fêtait en effet le 40^e anniversaire de la Débaptisation. On se souvient qu’il y a quarante ans, le Gouverneur d’alors décida de sortir notre canton de la marginalité linguistique et de l’intégrer pleinement dans le contexte national. Ce fut un 17 février. Depuis cette date donc, l’ex-SDORF s’appelle LE VILLAGE”

awoken.

2.3 Surrealism, “Surrealist Style” or Magical Realism in *La Roue du Paon* and *Les Nuits de Fastov*? Political Implications.

André Weckmann, because of his well-known activism to save the Alsatian dialect from extinction and because of his œuvre (the two being interlinked), has been the target of fierce personal attacks. Most notoriously, Robert Grossmann, former Mayor of Strasbourg/Strassburg, derogatorily depicted him, in his 1999 pamphlet *Main-basse sur ma langue*, as a “pan-germanist” and a “crusader for the sake of German.”¹⁵³ Grossmann noted for example that Weckmann’s 1991 *Plaidoyer pour une Zone Bilingue Franco-Allemande. Plädoyer für eine Deutsch-Französische Bilingua-Zone* was published with SALDE, a publishing company associated with the “Cercle René Schickelé,” a lobbying group which he suspected to have financial ties with the Herrmann-Niermann-Stiftung, “an *openly pan-germanist* German foundation” (46, emphasis added).¹⁵⁴ This charge of “pan-germanism” was, evidently, not neutral at all. In the post-World War Two Alsatian context, it was inevitably linked with another accusation: that of Nazi sympathies. In a confrontational move, Grossmann did in fact not hesitate to bring these two concepts together (pan-germanism and Nazism) regarding Weckmann and other regionalist authors. In a section of his book titled “Nostalgies *Blut und Boden*” (“Blood and Soil Nostalgias”), he wrote: “*Blut und Boden!* As in a bad nightmare, these very words – blood and soil– which plagued the twentieth century and so deeply scarred Europe are springing

¹⁵³ Since the “bilingual” education promoted by Weckmann is not only French-Alsatian but also French-Alsatian-German –which only makes sense since Alsatian is a dialect of German

¹⁵⁴ “La Schickele-Gesellschaft édite une revue, *Land un Sproch*, avec le soutien d’une fondation allemande ouvertement pangermaniste, la Herrmann-Niermann-Stiftung”

back to life” (59).¹⁵⁵ Weckmann’s name was *explicitly mentioned* in this infamous, defamatory section which accuses contemporary regionalist Alsatian authors of entertaining nostalgias of “*Blut und Boden*” –i.e. ethnicist and “anti-republican”– conceptions of citizenship and identity. Grossman writes:

“André Weckmann, too, is full of this same aggressive nostalgia [nostalgie combative]:

wir sind diejenigen

die das sein müssten

was wir nicht sein dürfen

um endlich

zu sein

(We are the ones who should be what we are not allowed to be in order to, finally, really be)” (57)¹⁵⁶

By integrating into the “*Blut und Boden*” section of his pamphlet a poem by Weckmann dealing with the theme of identity (cf. “sein,” “being”), Grossmann clearly foregrounds his own interpretation of the poem. While this poem by Weckmann could well have been a criticism of the “French” archipolitics that forcibly¹⁵⁷ construes Alsations as “*French beings*,”¹⁵⁸ Grossmann on the contrary chooses to conclude that, according to a supposedly “[nostalgic]” Weckmann

¹⁵⁵ “*Blut und Boden!* Comme dans un mauvais cauchemar, voilà que resurgissent les mots –le sang et la terre– qui ont meurtri l’Europe et le vingtième siècle”

¹⁵⁶ “André Weckmann lui aussi est plein de la même nostalgie combative: *wir sind diejenigen // die das sein müssten // was wir nicht sein dürfen // um endlich // zu sein* (Nous sommes ceux-là qui devraient être ce qu’ils n’ont pas le droit d’être pour être enfin)”

¹⁵⁷ cf. “*nicht dürfen*”

¹⁵⁸ Being a product of the archipolitics, Grossmann however could not possibly subscribe to *this* interpretation

monster-writer which his interpretation alone does create, for an “Alsatian being” to be “whole” again, it must necessarily be, *again* (as in the “good old days” of Nazism!), a “*German/Germanic being*.” Such an interpretation, of course, could not be farther from Weckmann’s beliefs.

Weckmann, through his *incorporation de force* into the Nazi army, suffered *in his flesh* from the evils of Nazism. In fact, these accusations of Nazism, in the Alsatian context, were so grave and serious that even after Grossmann later regretted his attacks, Weckmann was unable to forgive and resume a normal relationship with him.¹⁵⁹ These attacks have nonetheless existed; because they were so grave and serious, they need to be addressed, and it belongs to the critic to explain why Grossmann’s political criticism 1) was epistemologically *possible* and 2) why despite its apparent “plausibility” (from a “French archipolitical” perspective) it however does not hold in light of a thorough and patient analysis of Weckmann’s œuvre. I argue that the answer lies in *style* and, more precisely, in *the politics of style*.

Thanks to the previous section on Weckmann’s use of “Germanic French,” we have already been able to observe that style matters; style is political. The meaning I however give here to “style” is, quite specifically, *the kind(s) of relationship(s) which the author’s writing entertains with “reality.”* As it turns out, we need to accurately distinguish, across Weckmann’s works, especially novels, what I call “*true surrealism*” from “*surrealist style*” (i.e. “*strategic surrealism*”) and from “*magical realism*.” Each one of these three “styles,” or writing modalities, present as they are in different novels, will then help us discern and truly understand the *political meaning* of Weckmann’s œuvre as a whole.¹⁶⁰ While the presence of “surrealism,” or “surrealist-

¹⁵⁹ Information gathered from my interviews with Robert Grossmann in May 2008 and with André Weckmann in June 2010

¹⁶⁰ The fact that the use of “surrealism” or “surrealist techniques” may have *political* implications should not surprise us too much: in contrast with structured/colonial thought, Aimé Césaire in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, for instance, clearly resorts to Breton’s concept of “pensée parlée” (“spoken thought”), exposed in his

like” *écriture*, especially in the 1968 *Les Nuits de Fastov*, will highlight a fundamental “one-humanity” principle consecutive to Weckmann’s first-hand experience with war, the equally important presence of “magical realism” as a major feature of especially the 1988 *La Roue du Paon* will, for its part, re-reinforce the separation of humanity along cultural/political lines (“French” vs. “Alsatian”) –as a necessary step towards the ultimate denunciation of the archipolitics. Such an ebb-and-flow conceptual movement between unity and division, “one-humanity” vs. bold affirmation of “discrete identities,” I eventually suggest, certainly contributed to cause Grossmann’s misguided conclusions about Weckmann’s alleged “anti-republicanism.”

Beginning with surrealism and the 1968 novel *Les Nuits de Fastov*, it is indeed possible to maintain that surrealist aspects may be found in this piece. As we shall see, these surrealist aspects are closely linked with the direct experience of the nonsensical brutality of war, and the inferred absurdity of nationalism. Rather than being artificially divided along national lines, *humanity is one*.¹⁶¹

Les Nuits de Fastov is a sort of autofiction that poignantly narrates the traumatic experience of the author, sent to the Russian front in 1943 as a *Malgré-Nous* (i.e. Alsatian enrolled by force into the Nazi army). “Weckmannian surrealism” features what very much looks like *automatic writing* in a quasi-André Breton sense, i.e. the aesthetic recuperation of human unconscious desire, seen in true surrealist fashion as an antidote to the post-industrial moment and as a reaction against the mechanization of war –and against war period. If war may be said to

Manifeste du Surréalisme (22) to give voice and expression to Black suffering, repressed yet still present, stored as it were in the unconscious. More than logical grammatically sound sentences, what matters to Césaire is the juxtaposition of minimal units of meaning, or “semes.” These juxtapositions of potentially only remotely related semes give rise to (politically) *powerful* “images,” another key term in Breton’s *Manifeste* –despite the fact that the unconscious may seem, at first, to have little to do with politics

¹⁶¹ During my June 2010 interview of him, Weckmann expressed the wish to one day personally meet the Russian soldier who permanently wounded his leg. As I asked if it was to “forgive him,” Weckmann replied: “No, because he was just obeying orders. He shot because he had been told to.” Underneath the uniform, another human being: *one humanity*.

“have causes,” and is thus in a certain way “logical,” we shall be better off by liberating and giving a voice to the powers of the unconscious, however “illogical” the unconscious might be. In Weckmann’s specific case, the unconscious is also a traumatized unconscious as a result of war: *Les Nuits de Fastov*, published in 1968, is thus a book that was written more than twenty years after the trauma, therefore written in a “resurgence of the unconscious” kind of mode (cf. Larry Kritzman’s “ontology-hauntology” conceptual pair). This does not however exclude an *immediate, unmediated* intervention of the unconscious at the very writing moment.

Numerous passages, in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, are then surrealist *or may remind the reader of surrealism* –a distinction (and eventual undecidability) which will have its importance. One striking example is certainly the chapter entitled “The Blue Stork” –“La Cigogne Bleue”–, this red-legged, black and white wading bird being one of the symbols of Alsace. In this chapter, which is set far, very far away from the author’s native land, namely in Ukraine near the town of Fastov, “panes” of reality which are totally different and discordant are being juxtaposed, in the same sentence, to the point that Weckmann’s style is here not merely poetical, but truly surrealist, creating, in true surrealist fashion, “powerful images.”¹⁶² The stork “appears,” as though in a hallucinating vision that pertains to the *merveilleux* tone and register,¹⁶³ in what seems to be initially a quite nostalgic, bucolic frame of reference. This frame of reference may even look at first extremely cliché, because of the lexical field of lust which, in a first step, sexualizes “Mother Nature,” the *Heimat*, in a quotation where the adjective “gras” (“fatty”), applied to meadows, is idiomatically related to the “herbe grasse” (“very green grass”)

¹⁶² “The more the relationships between the two realities brought together by the image will be distant and correct, the stronger the image will be” –“Plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l’image sera forte” (*Manifeste du Surréalisme*, 21)

¹⁶³ “[...] ‘le merveilleux,’ a code word for the thrill of chance encounter where a frisson or epiphany is sparked by the clash between subjectivity and the objective world of things and other people” (Wilson, 70)

collocation, but also suggests a chubby, plump, attractive woman: “How fatty is this meadow, how voluptuous, so swollen with milk, so wet and shiny still from the many passionate kisses it received –how shameless under the sun’s tongue” (42).¹⁶⁴ While this quotation is strangely similar to the landscape described in *Fonse ou l’éducation alsacienne* (cf. “[...] the sun with his tongue licked, one last time, the space between two mountain breasts and there he went to bed “), and may thus at first sight subliminally participate in this eroticization effort of Alsace and the Alsatian dialect, the specifically linguistic problematic is however notoriously absent from this first book, *Les Nuits de Fastov*, centered on the identity problematic more generally and, more importantly still, on the cataclysmic horror of the war –“Holocaust” for the Jews, “sacrifice to Moloch” for *Malgré-Nous* Alsatians and others. This erotic vision, in the absolutely non-erotic setting of the war, is continued through the indeed hallucinatory sheer multiplying of “nipples” (“mamelons”) found in the very next sentence: “The vine branches twist themselves around the nipples” –“les pampres s’enroulent autour des mamelons”– (42), a possible reference to *not* the round, breast-shaped Vosges mountain summits this time, but to the equally round, breast-shaped lower hills geographically located between the plain and the mountains, and indeed covered with vineyards. Interestingly, the phrase “autour des mamelons” –“around the nipples”– would imply, through the use of the *definite* article “the” (or “les” since “des” is the contraction of “de + les”) that we know which “nipples” exactly the author means. There is however no such context, which means that “the nipples” are literally everywhere. What is interesting in this quotation, too, I suggest, is Weckmann’s use of the word “pampre,” in French, instead of “vigne” – “pampre” being the artistic representation of vines, with leaves and grapes, notably as carved bas-reliefs on buildings. This detour through architecture enables the mental description of

¹⁶⁴ “Qu’il est gras, ce pré, qu’il est voluptueux, tout gonflé de lait, tout brillant de baisers humides. Qu’il est impudique sous la langue du soleil”

Alsatian imagined scenery to be more stylized, and, importantly I argue, blends the natural with the architectural, jumping from one to the other. The Ill River, for instance, i.e. the river flowing through Alsace all the way up to Strasbourg, is described as irrigating the whole region with its “venelles” – “narrow streets” – (ibid). Yet in the next sentence, to the two already present liquids which are water and milk, a third one is quickly added: “blood” (“l’eau, le lait et le sang,” ibid). Beyond the reference to the topos of Alsace as “dark and bloody ground” (i.e. locus of many conquests and invasions), what is important to note is that from then on, the text *builds itself*, almost architecturally but anarchistically, with literally no apparent order. Further down, Weckmann mentions a village, whose “church wears a Swedish helmet” – “l’église porte un casque suédois” – (43), a subliminal reference, beyond the hypothetically characteristic shape of said helmet, to Alsace’s martyrdom during the 1618-1648 Thirty-Year War. It would only be logical, in this context, that the “bourdons” in the next paragraphs would refer to “church bells,” yet Weckmann once again displaces the referent of the term:

“In the sky, the [bourdons] are flying –their flight heavy and their stomachs full. In about an hour or less, ten thousand Wurtembergers will meet their ancestors again. Let us drink to their departure. What the hell, is this war, or is it not?”¹⁶⁵ (44)

What happened here, clearly, is a slippage of meaning between the church bells (“bourdons”) and the flying insect by the same name (“bourdons”), followed by yet another slippage between the flying insect and a squad of buzzing warplanes, painfully and ungracefully flying until their deadly destination, (over)loaded with tons of destructive bombs. The reference

¹⁶⁵ “Dans le ciel passent les bourdons, le vol lourd et le ventre plein. D’ici une heure, dix mille Wurtembergeois auront rejoint leurs ancêtres. Buvons à leur départ. Que diantre, c’est la guerre, non?”

to the imminent death of “ten thousand Wurttembergers,” i.e. “ten thousand Germans,” among whom, certainly, some *Malgré-Nous* Alsatians, forcefully brings the narrative back into the present reality of the Russian front, after the imaginary spatio-temporal divagation. Discordant signifiers and panes of reality are clashing with each other in an uttermost confusion. Here is, thus, how the chapter continues (47):

“But here is the stork timidly venturing out of the woods. [...]

-Isn't that strange? Give me the binoculars, sentinel. See this tuft of grass, [over there]? [...] Doesn't it look like some kind of bird, [...] either a

heron or a stork? Now close your eyes. [...] Now open your eyes. [...]

These are mushrooms, I'm telling you. At one in the morning, that tuft of grass will be on you, behind you. [...] And at ten past one it will strike.

Just before I come to wake you up. For you were dreaming, soldier. [...]

-But, sergeant, it's only a stork on its way to the south!

-Optical illusion, sentinel. This is definitely a ferocious carnivorous plant.

[...] Which distance, sentinel?

-150 meters.

-Adjust your gun sight.

-But, sergeant...!

-Fire!”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ “Mais voici la cigogne qui se hasarde hors du bois. [...] - Curieux, non? Passez-moi les jumelles, sentinelle. Voyez-vous cette touffe à six heures? [...] Ne dirait-on pas que c'est un oiseau, [...] héron ou cigogne? Fermez les yeux maintenant. [...] Ouvrez les yeux maintenant. [...] Ce sont des champignons, vous dis-je. A une heure du matin la touffe sera sur vous, derrière vous. [...] Et à une heure dix elle frappera. Juste avant que je ne vienne vous réveiller. Car vous étiez en train de rêver, soldat. [...] - Mais, sergent, ce n'est qu'une cigogne qui s'en va vers le sud! - Illusion d'optique, sentinelle. C'est bel et bien une plante carnassière. [...] Quelle distance, sentinelle? -150 mètres. - Réglez votre viseur. - Mais, sergent...! - Feu!”

This passage is characterized by more slippages of meaning, to the point that signifiers end up losing all connection with their signifieds, and are even equated with other, absolutely unrelated, signifiers. Thus the “stork” becomes “tuft,” “carnivorous plant” and threatening “mushroom” –a threat that needs to be killed, as the brutal military order to shoot indicates: “*Fire!*” The brutality of the order, given by a German superior, is only matched, in terms of tragicality, by the inescapable injunction to obey made to the Alsatian, who, paradoxically, illogically, *surrealistically*, is being forced to metonymically *kill Alsace* –entailing that the characters, in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, are groping and barely surviving in a world devoid of any meaning.

The sentence “For you were dreaming, soldier” indicates already a first level of clash between dream and reality. It is however only at the very end of the chapter (“Someone kicks me into my ribs with his stinky boot. [...] It’s daytime, guys, it’s daytime,” 48),¹⁶⁷ that the reader finally understands that *even this dream*, was in fact, an interpolated dream, a dream within a dream, *mis en abyme*, in which the narrator dreamt that he was dreaming, and dreamt that he was waking up. Henceforth, the “reality-within-the-dream” was itself nothing but another dream! There are thus two kinds of imbrications going on: first of all, an imbrication of reality into the dream, and then, secondly, a realization that this very imbrication was in fact an imbrication of a dream into another dream.

Such a confusion between “dream” and “reality” could, *a priori*, perfectly corroborate a hypothetical adherence of Weckmann to surrealism as understood by André Breton in his

¹⁶⁷ “Quelqu’un me bourre les côtes d’une botte malodorante. [...] Il fait jour, camarades, il fait jour”

Manifeste du Surréalisme, i.e. making the unconscious equal to the conscious.¹⁶⁸ Realism, in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, is as “broken” as the language is “broken,” as we have seen. These aspects *may* indeed make Weckmann’s text a surrealist text, according to two possible scenarios: either the author is remembering, as he writes, a truly surrealist experience which he might have had, in the anguish of the battlefield, some twenty years before the writing act –an experience which might have periodically resurfaced through trauma–, or the text could be the result of a truly literary surrealist experience (i.e. automatic writing), happening just once, during one specific writing session, but at any rate still governed –obviously– by the unconscious and the resurgence of trauma.

From a theoretical point of view, though, these hypotheses are faced with a considerable potential problem, which is that “pure” surrealist theory¹⁶⁹ defines the “surrealist experience” as sitting-down-at-a-café-and-letting-the-unconscious-express-itself-freely, without restraints, when, on the contrary, the “surrealist” passages in *Les Nuits de Fastov* are, in the last analysis, only “flashes of surrealism” as it were, and inscribe themselves in a perfectly *conscious* literary project. *De facto*, they serve a very clear purpose, which is to emphasize the horror of lived reality. Schematically and diagetically speaking, the final wake-up scene serves to indeed illustrate (utilitarian function) that the horror of reality is so extreme that it cannot limit itself to

¹⁶⁸ According to the following equation: “dream” + “reality” = “more complete reality” = “absolute reality” = “surreality” (with “dream” and “reality” being *equally* as important)

¹⁶⁹ Wilson notes that Breton, often referred to as surrealism’s “pope,” did not hesitate to excommunicate: if even Desnos, who did believe in “self-induced trances as a means of liberating the unconscious” was “publicly expelled [...] in [Breton’s] 1929 second surrealist manifesto” (68-69), one can only imagine Breton’s reaction vis-à-vis an oxymoronic, heretical “conscious surrealism.” To be fair, Breton himself seems to admit in his *Manifeste* that “[these strange forces from the depths of our spirit]” need to be “first [captured],” “then controlled by reason, *if need be*” – “[ces étranges forces des profondeurs de notre esprit [se doivent d’être captées] d’abord, [...] pour [être soumises] ensuite, *s’il y a lieu*, au contrôle de notre raison” (13, emphasis added). “If need be” does not mean “necessarily”; however, Breton seems to leave open the two possibilities: either a form of surrealism based solely on the unconscious, without any touch-up from the conscious, or a form of surrealism in two stages, unconscious writing reworked by the conscious

“reality” and thus seeps into “non-reality” (dreams), so much so that even dreams cannot be a refuge against this reality –a refuge function that dreams may have had at the beginning through the eroticization of the scenery, but that they definitely cannot claim any longer to have after the stork’s assassination. Significantly, what follows the “It’s daytime, guys, it’s daytime” is an immediate return to the very material dimension of combat. If, therefore, Weckmann’s surrealism is a “useful” surrealism in the general economy of the novel, can it still be “surrealism”? Put differently, Weckmann’s surrealism may very well be a “pseudo-surrealism” instead, *meant to* stress the “real” and more particularly its horrible aspects –in sum, a “strategic surrealism,” or, in other words, a “*surrealist style*” rather than surrealism *stricto sensu*. We are left with the odd question of whether there is *any* “surrealism” in “Weckmann’s surrealism,” a politically, hence consciously, recuperated kind of “surrealism.”¹⁷⁰

It is indeed ideologically necessary for Weckmann, in this novel, to put this horrendous “war reality” to the forefront, for one fundamental reason, which is that the *real material reality* of his *Malgré-Nous* experience during World War Two lays at the basis of his future political involvement. His advocacy for a “Franco-German bilingual zone” officially uniting Alsace with Baden-Württemberg, within the framework of a federalist “*Europe des Régions*,” flows from his fundamentally postnational perspective, itself the direct consequence of his empirical, first-hand experience of the evils of nationalism. What transpires from *Les Nuits de Fastov* is that all

¹⁷⁰ It is unknown whether/dubious that Weckmann himself would have accepted the term “surrealism.” Perhaps that, for political reasons (in which case, again, there is no surrealism), would he have preferred a filiation with “Dadaism,” an arguably *Alsatian* movement in origin. An acknowledged influence of surrealism over Weckmann would, indeed, to some extent, make Weckmann one of these “Alsatian writers and artists” about whom Hoffet was saying that they were “[massively surrendering to the French/Parisian models/style/thought because of complexes of inferiority and uniformity],” *contra* “Alsatian artistic independence” from the center (128). *Stricto sensu*, then, the hypothesis of a Dada influence may be more accurate since the Dada movement also emerged from the wrecks of a World War (WW1), but, unlike surrealism, has its roots in Alsace/Switzerland and has Jean Harp/Hans Harp, *an Alsatian*, as one of its prominent leaders. Furthermore, we have textual evidence that Weckmann was definitely familiar with dadaism (*not* surrealism) when he thus characterizes Renaissance author Fischart, in *La Roue du Paon*: “[...] Fischart, the pre-dadaist explosion of Alsatian linguistic extravaganza” – “[...] Fischart, l’explosion pré-dadaïste du verbe alsacien” (49)

people –whether French, German, Alsatian or Russian or whichever “belonging” there might be– form *a* transnational people (“le peuple”) which nationalism literally puts *in deep shit* (“dans la merde”). Weckmann, perhaps simplistically, seems to imply a profound disconnect between, on the one hand, the ruling elites and the lower-class people on the other hand –the ruling people who supposedly are the ones who are the most fervently nationalistic yet are never going to find themselves on any battlefield and experience the most horrific, concrete consequences of nationalism, while the lower-class people, supposedly less naturally convinced about nationalism, will be the ones to be massacred and blindly butchered. Consequently, the book is permeated by a raw scatological register. “*Merde*” (“shit”), both in French and in its German equivalent “*Scheisse*,” is a recurring word in Weckmann’s works, the common denominator for all forms of nationalism, not only in *Les Nuits de Fastov* but also in the shorter yet still central (haunting) rendering of the *Malgré-Nous* experience in *La Roue du Paon*: “Merde à tous, aux Français, aux Allemands, et aux Alsaciens” –“merde” which, in this case, would be translated as “fuck” in English; “Fuck you, all of you, French, Germans, Alsatians” (61), but which, in the French language, is meant to also really mean, at face value, “*merde*.” Very ironically, Weckmann derides the so-called “prestige and beauty of the uniform” by calling the yellow color of the “gilded” parts [“dorures”] of said uniform “fecal yellow” –“jaune fécal” (43); this is further evidenced by the similarly-functioning quotation “*merde* ma France” –“Fuck my France”– (60, emphasis added) and by the following crude and powerful depiction of the soldier-in-combat condition, not at all ironically this time but very prosaically:

“[...] Here I am schlepping around my bruised limbs and my scarred soul
through all the shit of this shitty war, *verdamnte Scheisse*, *proklatnaïa*
voïna, and with my entire intellectual faculties solely focused on the

primary functioning of my intestine [...]”¹⁷¹ (ibid, German and Ukrainian phrases in the original)

The very *real* experience of war represents, for Weckmann, the epiphany for a “one-humanity” principle, and the ideological foundation for transnationalism. In his fiction-autofiction *Les Nuits de Fastov*, this formative but traumatizing experience appears under surrealist traits, in order to transcribe, very consciously, both the horror of the experience and the absurdity of nationalism.

As an intermediary conclusion, let us note that the fundamental indeterminacy, in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, between “true surrealism” and “surrealist style” is an indeterminacy which the reader may well be, *in fine*, unable to sort out and disentangle, and which even the author may not be mastering a hundred percent, the border line between the conscious and the unconscious being anyway, by nature, porous and tenuous. Politically, this indeterminacy is signifying because it enabled us to shed light on the importance, for Weckmann, of the “one-humanity” principle.

In contrast, *La Roue du Paon*, published in 1988, and whose title immediately brings about themes of linguistic and cultural prestige/pride vs. supposed lack thereof,¹⁷² is an altogether fantastic novel which stages the fictional kidnapping of the French *Président de la République* by Odile, an Alsatian sorceress and seductress –the end objective of this radical, anti-

¹⁷¹ “[...] je traîne [...] mes chairs bleuies et mon âme balafrée dans toutes les saletés de cette sale guerre, *verdammt Scheisse*, *proklatnaïa voïna*, et tout l’intellect concentré sur les manifestations primaires du fonctionnement intestinal [...]”

¹⁷² cf. the French President, as a representative of “French” “high culture,” being able to be, within the framework of the Archipolitics, “proud as a peacock” vs. the shame associated with the Alsatian dialect, called by Weckmann “a German patois, pasty and stinky like an old Munster cheese,” an expression which, in French, has a lot of poignancy thanks to the alliteration in [p]: “un patois allemand pâteux et puant comme un Munster en bout de course” (11)

achipolitical literary action being to convince the President (and, beyond, “France” as a whole) to better respect Alsatian specificities.

In *La Roue du Paon*, Weckmann does, on the one hand, reinforce this same “one-humanity” principle affirmed in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, this time through his insistence on *hybridity* –thematically but also arguably linguistically as we shall see. On the other hand, in the sort of historic rivalry which opposed surrealism and magical realism,¹⁷³ I suggest that *La Roue du Paon* appears as an exemplary manifestation of magical realism. This critical statement, of course, is loaded with political consequences, since magical realism will eventually reinstate “discrete identities” and therefore cast a particular light on Weckmann’s views on “Alsatian identity,” however not at all in the conservative/reactionary sense denounced by Grossmann.

Regarding *hybridity*, first, and more particularly thematic hybridity, Alsatian identity is presented as being in a constant state of “in-betweenness” or flux (obviously “in-betweenness” between France and Germany, but also always evolving “in-betweenness” between France and itself, see below) while, linguistically, this intrinsic “in-betweenness” is rendered through the use of code-switching between French and Alsatian, i.e. the use of a hybrid language. Thus hybridity according to Weckmann may be, at least initially, conceptualized in ways akin to Homi Bhabha’s notion of “third space” in which identities and cultures get mixed together, although not peacefully but through phenomena of resistance: for this reason hybridity, for Bhabha, remains of course “somewhat political.” One approach is to take this hybridity one step further and suggest, as the undeniable “one-humanity” principle would seem to allow us to do, that Weckmann’s literary praxis of “hybridity” is even closer to Leslie Adelson’s understanding of it

¹⁷³ A rivalry expounded by Wilson in his article on Alejo Carpentier

than to Bhabha's. Leslie Adelson, in her 2001 article "Against Between: A Manifesto," rejects the idea that there should even be "third spaces" in the postcolonial era, given that the two initial spaces have, *grosso modo*, lost their respective irreducible substances and that we all live, so to speak, in the "same house" (6). If everyone is *inside* the house, this makes the problematization of the relationship between self and other, between inside and outside, remarkably out-of-date and a false problem. Such an *adifferential* conclusion (*one* humanity), tending to neutralize differences, or tending towards an ultimate *apoliticization* of differences through the endlessly ongoing process of hybridity culturally at work in the postcolonial context, would contribute to an attenuation of Weckmann's controversial character. While this is true to some extent in the sense that Robert Grossmann's charges against Weckmann's alleged "dangerosity" for the integrity of the French Republic are obviously unfounded (nowhere does Weckmann state as an objective a re-germanification of Alsace or even political reunification of Alsace with Germany as Grossmann feared in *Main-basse sur ma langue*), we have to be careful, at the same time, not to take the presence of "hybridity" in Weckmann's books as a pretext to offer a watered-down interpretation of his œuvre –the one main reason for this being, I argue, Weckmann's equally as notable *anti-hybridity* "magical realism" as a characteristic writing technique of his.

La Roue du Paon, published in 1988, is not a surrealist book, nor is it even written in a "surrealist style"; one will thus be unable to find in *La Roue du Paon* any "merveilleux" in Breton's sense, that is in the sense of powerful images stemming –solely, as the claim goes– from the unconscious. Instead of "merveilleux," what dominates in *La Roue du Paon* is the fantastic. The novel's story line is the fantasy kidnapping and sequestration of the French *Président de la République* –just mentioned by his title and never by his name– by Odile, an Alsatian "sorceress" who is going to try and use her natural powers (i.e. sexual attraction) and

supernatural powers (i.e. mental attraction) so that the President, after this forced therapy (and perhaps, through him, France as a whole), may have a better understanding of the specificities of the Alsace region and show more respect. To kidnap the President –the President who happens to be hunting in an Alsatian forest near the Rhine River–,¹⁷⁴ Odile, a Dienesque Odile, transforms herself into a doe: “[...] I had put on my most beautiful gilded, white-spotted *robe*” (23, emphasis added)¹⁷⁵ –in French, the noun “*robe*” is polysemic and refers both to an animal’s coat and to a woman’s dress –already a hint of the operation of seduction that is going to take place. Upon meeting the powerful gaze of that particular doe, the President can only lower his rifle (a

¹⁷⁴ Regarding the hunting theme, it is interesting to note how, for Weckmann, it (metaphorically?) relates to “internal colonization/imperialism” and the subjugation of the region by the capitalist (for that matter, not necessarily Parisian) center. The fact that the President, also called, significantly, “CEO of France Enterprise” –“Patron [...] [de] l’Entreprise France”– (35) is kidnapped *while hunting* is thus far from being a mere coincidence. See for instance this passage from *Fonse ou l’éducation alsacienne*: “Where do all the pheasants of Alsace come from? It is the big business tycoons of the Rhône-Alpes area who buy them, as eggs –tons and tons of eggs–, which they then brood on their CEO chairs. After the eggs have hatched, they come here and release them between Saverne and Hochfelden so that they may get fatter in our Alsatian corn. And in September, here they arrive with their long rifles, decorated with coats of arms. Bang, bang, bang, the shooters shoot with joyful bullets, bang bang bang get this nice hen or this nice rooster. Sure, these could have slaughtered in a farm [in the Rhône-Alpes area], and it would have been so much less expensive. But, you see, in certain upper-class milieux, bang-bang makes you an important person [...]. Now, for the rabbits, we, inhabitants of Zornwiller, are the ones who are voluntarily driving [nous rabattons] the rabbits towards the long rifles, we became a people of beaters [un peuple de rabatteurs] [...] since the commonmarketist Finance has started to be interested in our hunting paradise, which used to be our pride, back in the time when we ourselves used to be hunters [...] ô magnificent Germanic stereotype, real hunters, as opposed to these snobbish killers who kill more than they can keep and eat” – “[Les faisans], ce sont les patrons de la région Rhône-Alpes qui les achètent par clayettes pleines d’œufs, les couvent sous leurs fauteuils de Pdg et les lâchent ensuite entre Saverne et Hochfelden pour qu’ils aillent s’engraisser dans notre maïs alsacien. Puis en septembre ils arrivent avec les longs fusils armoriés. [...] Peng, peng, peng les mitrailleurs s’en donnent à plomb joie, peng peng peng sur les belles poules et les beaux coqs qu’on aurait pu égorger à moindre frais dans les élevages du Creusot, de Lyon et de Saint-Etienne. Mais que veux-tu, le peng-peng ça vous classe, dans les milieux huppés [...]. [Les hases], nous [les] leur rabattons devant les longs fusils, nous autres braves Zornwillerois, car ne sommes-nous pas devenus un peuple de rabatteurs [...] depuis que la Finance marchécommune s’intéresse à nos paradis de chasse, jadis notre orgueil à nous autres quand nous étions encore nous-mêmes chasseurs, [...] ô splendides clichés germaniques, de vrais chasseurs et pas des viandards ou des snobinards” (19-20).

From a linguistic/“Germanic French” point of view, note the neologism “Finance marchécommune” or the creative phrase “s’en donner à *plomb* joie” (emphasis added) subverting the French language expression “s’en donner à *cœur* joie”; I suggest that it is also meaningful that Weckmann uses here the word “hase” instead of “lapin” or “lièvre” since, although all three words are perfectly “French,” “hase” definitely sounds like the Alsatian word “*haas*” (“*Hase*” in German). The depiction of the “Alsatian writer writing in Germanic French” as “maverick” (in French: “*franc-tireur*”) becomes especially interesting in this hunting context, as it is meant to help *empower* Alsations: their metaphorical subaltern status as “*un peuple de rabatteurs*” is not definitive; they are called to win their pride back, including through literature

¹⁷⁵ “Je m’étais métamorphosée en daine et j’avais mis ma plus belle robe vieil or tachetée de blanc”

phallic symbol *par excellence*),¹⁷⁶ and, without a protest, as hypnotized, is going to follow Odile-the-doe all the way to her house, where she transforms herself back into Odile-the-(attractive)-Alsatian-woman, and now jail keeper, although the subjugated President, will, at no point during the novel, express any wish to escape.

The *abduction* is first and foremost *seduction*: Odile needs to further entice the President to come toward the middle: “One morning, he *got out* of his room without notice and surprised me [Odile] as I was naked. A little light *turned itself on* in his eyes, but very quickly Monsieur *turned it off*, excused himself, and *went back* into his room” (5, emphases added).¹⁷⁷ This double game of getting out/going back, turning on/turning off, represents the difficulty of artificially re-creating, in order to politically optimize it, the natural cultural process described by Bhabha. Indeed, what Odile is striving for is “hybridity,” but “hybridity” with a purpose: what must happen in the middle of the bridge is a better understanding of the Alsatian specificity on the part of the French government. Through a succession of subtle prolepses, e.g. the brushing against Odile’s breast (76), the reader is made to keep wondering whether this sublime epiphany is going to occur when the two (Odile and the President, “Alsace” and “France”) are both sufficiently in the middle in order to make love.

Weckmann, for his narrative mode in *La Roue du Paon*, thus uses the *fable* –a literary choice which is not without reminding the techniques used by “magical realism.” Jason Wilson,

¹⁷⁶ Also, possibly, already a stance in favor of pacifism that clearly sets the framework of action once and for all, cf. Ittel, a member of Odile’s circle of friends, saying, from the beginning of the novel, “We have excluded violence from our tactics” –“Nous avons exclu la violence de notre tactique” (14). As a result, France’s fears, relayed by Grossmann, of violent separatism are not justified when it comes to the Alsace. The President’s abduction, in *La Roue du Paon*, is only a symbolic way of *representing* the two cultures moving toward the center of the bridge in order to finally dialogue and mingle

¹⁷⁷ “Un matin, il sortit à l’improviste et me surprit ainsi en costume d’Eve. Son regard s’alluma, mais très vite Monsieur éteignit la lueur, s’excusa et rentra dans sa chambre”

in his article on Alejo Carpentier titled “Alejo Carpentier’s Re-Invention of América Latina as Real and Marvellous,” published in the 2005 edited volume *A Companion to Magical Realism*, notes the importance of parables¹⁷⁸ and allegories in the literary production of Alejo Carpentier, a leading figure of “magical realism” in South America. As for Stephen Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang, in their article published in the same edited volume and titled “Globalization of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics,” they insist on the “miraculous” dimension and other “lycanthropic powers” (i.e. the illusion of being a wolf or another wild animal) as prominent features of “magical realism” –exactly just like Odile’s metamorphosis. The fable in question, incidentally, is evidently the result of careful reflection on Weckmann’s part, even as far as onomastics is concerned, since the name “Odile” refers to the patron saint of Alsace, daughter of Duke Aldaric in the eighth century C.E., who had been born blind and whose eyes opened on the day of her baptism –Odile, thus a historico-legendary character, whose pilgrimage place, *le Mont Sainte-Odile* above the town of Obernai, has been watching over Alsace to this day. By invoking, through his character of Odile, this arch-Alsatian Odile and all that she represents (plus of course other characteristics since the original Odile was a saint and no sorceress), Weckmann takes one step further towards “magical realism,” since “magical realism” is characterized by an emphasis on everything which is “local”:

“Magic is derived from the ‘supernatural’ elements of ‘local’ or
‘indigenous’ myths [...]; the process of decolonization [...] entails
recovery of histories derived from ‘local’ or ‘indigenous’ myths”
(Ouyang, 16)

¹⁷⁸ “parables of belonging” (Wilson, 74)

This aspect of “magical realism” usefully complements what we have said about the “topicality” of Weckmann’s literature, and, in addition, importantly gestures towards “minor regional literature” as a work of reappropriation which inscribes itself in the process of “decolonization of the minds” and of mentalities, to take up Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s phrase –a phrase which, as we also already saw, applies to “external colonization” (i.e. for métropole-former colonies relationships) as much as it does to “internal colonization” (i.e. for France-French regions relationships). As Hart maintains, indeed:

“Imperialistic powers deprived the colonized people not only of their territories and wealth but also *of their imagination*” (7, emphasis added)

“Magical realism” is, in this respect, a reaction of revivification of local, region-specific imaginations against a homogenized (“archipoliticized”) imagination.

This aspect, what is more, is further reinforced by the fact that Odile, in *La Roue du Paon*, defines herself through her genealogy –a genealogy in which one becomes a sorceress from generation to generation, with mothers transferring their powers over onto their daughters ever since Odile the patron saint, the protagonist’s homonym and “historically” most remote ancestor:

“It is on the Bastberg mountain¹⁷⁹ that I had the joy and surprise of seeing my great-grandmother Béreswinde again; she arrived on a cloak of mist, so happy that the family tradition was not getting lost.

¹⁷⁹ The topographical reference is meaningful in that sense that the Bastberg (Mont Saint-Sébastien), located in the Northern part of the Vosges mountains, is reputed to have been believed a meeting place for witches (cf. <http://www.commune-bouxwiller.fr/index.php/component/content/article/4/43>, accessed 4/16/2013). Weckmann thus inscribes his novel both into an imagined history *and* geography of Alsace

Wasn't *she* the one who, in 1911, had forced her influence onto Wilhelm II, the Kaiser? [...] Wasn't she the one who had cast a spell onto the moustache of the sovereign –a moustache that would fall down, pitifully fall down, despite all of his mighty efforts and those of his coiffeur? And Béreswinde said to him, that night, in the midst of the body armors, sabers and spears: 'My little Willi, let the Alsatians have their autonomy, and you shall instantly retrieve this ornament of your face which gives you such a haughty look, symbol of the Reich's greatness.'

[...] Then of course there was also my grandmother Herrade, who went back on duty in 1941. It happened in Saverne, at the train station. Führer Adolf's bullet-proof train had been stopped there. Herrade wanted to re-do the moustache trick, but, primo, Adolf's moustache was just a crew cut moustache, and, secondo, Satan, clad in Obersturmbannführer SS clothing, was watching, and Herrade went up in smoke [partit en fumée] via the chimney of the Struthof's crematorium"¹⁸⁰ (28)

The similarity with Martin Graff's mythical ancestor Emile (the trickster who played a trick on Louis XIV) is striking, and Weckmann's Alsatian witches may well be regarded as political "tricksters" as well –symbols of Alsatian resistance. The familiarity with which the

¹⁸⁰ "C'est au Bastberg que j'eus la joie et la surprise de revoir mon arrière-grand'mère Béreswinde qui arriva sur un pan de brume, toute heureuse d'apprendre que la tradition familiale allait être reprise. N'était-ce pas elle qui avait, en 1911, forcé l'empereur Guillaume II [...] ? N'avait-elle pas jeté un sort sur la moustache du souverain qui tombait, tombait piteusement malgré tous ses efforts et ceux de son coiffeur ? Et Béreswinde lui dit, cette nuit-là, entre les cuirasses, les sabres et les lances: 'Mon p'tit Willi, accorde leur autonomie aux Alsaciens et tu retrouveras cet ornement qui donne à ton visage cet air altier, symbole de la grandeur du Reich.' [...] Il y eut bien ma grand-mère Herrade qui reprit du service en 1941. Cela se passa en gare de Saverne lors d'un arrêt du train blindé du Führer Adolf. Herrade voulut refaire le coup des moustaches, mais, primo, la moustache d'Adolf n'était qu'une brosse, et, secondo, Satan veillait, habillé en Obersturmbannführer SS, et Herrade partit en fumée par la cheminée du crématoire du Struthof"

Alsatian witch/Delilah-like woman addresses the Emperor (“*mon p’tit Willi*”) denotes a lack of supposed due respect for all things military, and an irony confirmed through the syntagm “the Reich’s greatness” –a greatly ironical phrase indeed since that greatness will be more or less distinguished depending on whether a moustache will fall... or rise. That same familiarity is expressed through the other syntagm, “Führer Adolf” (title + *first name*) –this time with tragic consequences that illustrate how much “being Alsatian,” caught between the hammer of French nationalism and the anvil of German nationalism, is a risky, self-destructive business.^{181 182} It is, I suggest, extremely significant that our “witches,” even them, for all their supernatural powers, have *no absolute* power in the face of the reality of History: thus Béreswinde’s vaporous *magical* arrival on her “cloak of mist” –“*pan de brume*”– is tragically echoed, in a cyclical structure, by Herrade’s *very realist* departure “up in smoke” –“*partit en fumée*”–, the Struthof mentioned in the quotation being a Nazi concentration camp located in Alsace, and World War Two’s only concentration camp in France. The expression “[*partir*] en fumée” is of course reactivated here, as, in French, it is usually used to refer to projects which, because of external circumstances, are prevented from ever being completed. Metonymically, then, with Herrade’s death, it is the project of Alsatian autonomy which definitely goes up in smoke (essentially, after the cataclysm of World War Two, the unfathomably massive blood sacrifices of France and the Allies to rid Alsace and Europe of Nazism have been so unfathomably massive that any velleity for Alsatian

¹⁸¹ e.g. 1: the evocation of the fate of the young Alsations who, in World War II, were forced into joining the Nazi Army (“*les incorporés de force*,” also named “*les malgré-nous*,” literally the “in-spite-of-ourselves”): “Alsace could not continue to be sitting like that between two chairs, to be neither fish nor bait” –“*L’Alsace ne pouvait pas continuer à s’asseoir entre deux chaises, à n’être ni chair ni poisson*” (90)

¹⁸² e.g. 2: the “Alsatian space” between “France” and “Germany” not simply as “encounter” or “process” but rather as archipolitical *locus of power* through its metaphorical representation as a “balance with two scales”: in this cultural struggle, “the winner, even after he has won, does not hesitate to apply his thumb on his scale to reinforce his victory. The Alsatian equilibrium is nothing but an illusion” –“*le plateau de la balance penche toujours du côté du plus fort qui n’hésite pas, en plus, à y appuyer son pouce. L’équilibre alsacien n’est qu’une illusion*” (87)

independence would be interpreted as ungratefulness, thus politically incorrect –in one word, discursively impossible, *unthinkable*).

This being said, it is interesting to note that even though Odile's grandmother and great-grandmother have "lived" (novelistically speaking) in the recent past, i.e. in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries –so, the modern era–, their names however (Béreswinde, Herrade...) do have a definitely medieval connotation, which subliminally provides the reader with a cyclical conception of History, or at least a conception of a *continuing* History. "Béreswinde" indeed is not only Odile's fantasy late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century great-grandmother in the novel; it is *also*, historically, the name of the mother of the legendary Odile (hence, *also* an eight-century C.E. character). Likewise, "Herrade" is not only Odile's fantasy twentieth-century grandmother; it is *also*, historically, the name of a twelfth-century female writer, abbess of the Mont-Sainte-Odile monastery. Therefore, this sense of a *continuing* History and in fact "double literary genealogy" *doubly* inscribes Odile (the Odile who is the sorceress at the center of the novel and kidnaps the President) within a long lineage of powerful women –and a lineage which is not about to stop, for this *continuing* History is the History of a powerful Alsace region, resisting dominating pressures from both sides, French as much as German. What emerges from this is an *Alsatian singularity*, neither French, nor German, but Alsatian –certainly both French and German (cf. Hoffet's notion of "Alsatian duality"), but above all Alsatian. This, of course, is a very political statement in the face of the "Archipolitics."

Wilson, in his aforementioned article on "magical realism," argues that while surrealism aims at revolution, "magical realism" focuses rather on (always political) History (71). This relationship to History is thus a fundamental aspect of "magical realism" which justifies the application of this theory to Weckmann's works. "Magical realism" being, originally, a theory

developed in Latin America to problematize Latin American literature and politics, we need to explicate, indeed, why it can legitimately apply to Weckmann's "minor regional literature" in a West European context.

From the very opening pages of his "Introduction," Hart cites a Latin American canonical work which, to him, is representative of "magical realism," namely *The Kingdom of this World* by Cuban author Alejo Carpentier, a 1949 novel centered on the execution of Mackandal, the Haitian, by the French:

"The slaves witness his escape [...] A single cry filled the square:
Mackandal sauvé! [...] but the French colonizers and their agents, the
Haitian soldiers, *see nothing* and instead witness his execution" (2,
emphasis added)

To see or not to see –such is the question which lies at the heart of "magical realism." The first implication of this "to-see-or-not-to-see" notion leads us back into the domain of historiography –from a yet different angle. García Márquez, another author writing in the "magical realist" vein, describes, in his works, a world homogenized by capitalism (a topic certainly akin to Weckmannian problematics) –a world in which the most atrocious crimes are being committed against the proletariat, with no hope of justice. Márquez's literary world is a world in which, after the army has shot and killed workers,

"the authorities deny that any wrongdoing has been committed ('You must have been dreaming [...], nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened in Macondo, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town')" (Hart, 4)

An incredible denial of arguably exactly the same kind is precisely what Odile, in *La Roue du Paon*, is trying to change and correct in the President of the French Republic during his time of captivity at her house. Until then, the President/“France” as a whole conceptually speaking, was equally convinced about “France’s” own impunity (compare with Bernard Wittmann’s “accented historiography” vs. “official French historiography”),¹⁸³ and thought, (to paraphrase Márquez), that “*This is a happy Alsace*” (emphasis added), cf. the President’s folklore-based, hence totally artificial and erroneous, perception of “Alsatianity” as a frozen, museified kind of identity:

“[...] [Kougelpopf, riesling, flags on the windows, children waving little bleu-blanc-rouge bouquets, virgins in their traditional costumes with the big black knot on top, offering themselves to the kiss of the fatherland]”¹⁸⁴
(*La Roue du Paon*, 12)

Against this false image of an Alsace unambiguously celebrating, in plebiscitary mode, its imagined “reunion” with “France,” Odile definitely inscribes her action into the “to-see-or-not-to-see” problematic. During the very important section of the novel when she carries out the President’s brainwashing through the magical projection of a magical movie on a *non-official*

¹⁸³ As a reminder, see how Wittmann busts the myth of “France’s” pseudo innate moral grandeur by noting, in *L’Antigermanisme en France et en Alsace et ailleurs*, that “the very same day” that “France” was celebrating the allied victory in World War Two –a victory supposed to consolidate that myth–, “the repression of the protests of Setif on May 8, 1945[...] would cause the massacre of 15,000 to 45,000 Algerians, [ushering in] the long list of massacres to come” –“le jour même de la victoire,” “la répression des manifestations de Sétif du 8.5.1945 [...] se solda par le massacre de 15 000 à 45 000 Algériens, [ouvrant] la longue liste des massacres à venir” (132) –the mere reminding of which by Wittmann is a blow dealt to the old Gaullist motto “France-cannot-be-France-without-grandeur,” “La-France-ne-peut-être-la-France-sans-grandeur”

¹⁸⁴ “[...] [kougelpopf, riesling, drapeaux aux fenêtres, enfants agitant de petits bouquets tricolores, vierges au grand nœud noir s’offrant au baiser de la patrie]”

“History of Alsace,”¹⁸⁵ adding *mental* attraction to sexual attraction through her powers as a sorceress, her aim is to *force* the President *to see*. It is an indeed magical movie, since it is a virtual yet extremely vivid movie, projected *inside* the very mind of the President, and Odile is, so to speak, in full power of the remote control, since she is able to pause the movie, go back, or go ahead:

“I’m making the movie go faster. I’m skipping the Revolution, I’m fast-forwarding the Empire. [...] Stop. [...] We are missing one century, Monsieur says [the President says]. That will be for later, I reply”¹⁸⁶ (48-49)

Odile’s “I” – “*Je*” – is an “I” who decides, thus completely reversing on its head the dominator-dominated relationship, although things are not that simple since the President resists the therapy, to the point that he almost succeeds to counter-brainwash Odile, which literally testifies to the tremendous power of the Archipolitics. The lexical field of “*parapsychologie*” (74), “*envoûtement*” (bewitchment, 76), “*charme*” (8), “[*hypnose*]” (48), “*conditionnement*” (conditioning, 10) is *not* limited to Odile, far from it. Here is what Odile says after dangerously allowing the President to cast a counter-spell on her, i.e. after letting him speak about “culture”:

¹⁸⁵ It thus debunks the myth of high culture belonging to France only, and cruelty to Germany only (cf. Wittmann), e.g. the metaphorical scene of the “[King’s horses trampling over an individual who came to greet them because said French horses did not understand Germanic languages]” – “Il lève ses deux bras et crie: Höüf, höüf! Mais les chevaux du Roy ne comprennent pas l’alémanique et lui passent sur le corps” (47). Further commenting, in this section, on the Sun-King or perhaps more broadly on French civilization as self-proclaimed “sun of the world,” Weckmann calls it a “siccative sun” – “soleil siccatif” – (50), that is a kind of sun which makes all the colors fade and dry, a direct reference to homogenization and neutralization. Of course, in its very principle, this movie sets itself in sheer contradiction with Ernest Renan’s notion of “forgetfulness,” necessary for any “nation” to subsist (cf. “What is a Nation?”)

¹⁸⁶ “J’augmente la vitesse de défilement du film. Je passe la Révolution, je passe l’Empire en accéléré. [...] J’arrête la bobine. [...] Il nous manque un siècle, me fait remarquer Monsieur [le Président]. Ce sera pour plus tard, lui dis-je”

“Scham di [shame on you], Odile, for letting him bewitch you in this manner. Or could it be that you found your master, the supreme haxemaïschtr [Head sorcerer]?”¹⁸⁷ (46)

However, what matters the most in this “magical movie” passage, I suggest, is that the President/“France” *cannot pretend to not see any longer*. This ties in to the second implication of “to see or not to see,” which is part and parcel of “magical realism’s” very definition, and that is that, at the foundation of “magical realism” in its original acception, i.e. in its original Latino-American context, lies the fact that indigenous people and Europeans did *see*, literally, different things and things differently: what would be magical for one group would not be for the other one, and likewise what would be “real” for some would not be so for others. Hart stresses that “magical realism is born [...] in the gap between the belief systems of two very different groups of people” (3) –see for instance Schiffman’s insistence on “linguistic culture”-related “beliefs” in the Introduction, or “French greatness”-beliefs that could be called “historiographical beliefs.” Consequently, “magical realism” implies that, *against* Homi Bhabha’s model of hybridity, two different cultures interacting with each other are not necessarily going to change as a result of the interaction; the two cultures at play may well remain irreducibly *distinct*.

Henceforth, Homi Bhabha’s assertion, taken from *Nation and Narration*, and which Hart quotes on his front page, an assertion according to which hybridity would be the “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (1), turns out to be, *stricto sensu*, inaccurate, and is in fact quickly explicitly dismissed by Hart: “Is it really the language par excellence (Bhabha’s idea) of the emergent postcolonial world?” (6). The difference, in effect, between “hybridity” and “magical realism” is that the postcolonial model developed by Bhabha (hybridity) puts the

¹⁸⁷ “Scham di, Odile, de te laisser ainsi envoûter. Ou bien aurais-tu trouvé ton maître, le haxemaïschtr suprême?”

emphasis on an intermediary “third space,” whereas “magical realism” insists, rather, on the two initial cultural “spaces” at hand, and argues that they remain, in some ways at least, irremediably distinct. Important terms in magical realism studies, thus, are terms such as “‘fissured’ world” or “a cultural reality fundamentally riven” (Hart, 7), and, when the word “*mestizaje*” is being used, it is indeed used in the sense of “cultural intercrossings,” however “cultural intercrossings which *do not* operate in a syncretistic way, but instead emphasize conflicts and alterity” and “social asymmetry” (ibid, emphasis in original). As an illustration, “Cornejo Polar’s theory of cultural dynamics consistently refuses synthesis and fusion –[...] *keeping as two what others wish to see as one*” (ibid, emphasis added). In one word, the key word is: “heterogeneity” (ibid).

To be fair, Bhabha does not say that homogenization is necessarily the end result of his “third space” theory: in fact, if it is true that there are, in this “third space,” tensions –in the sense of reciprocal interactions– between the two cultures, this is proof that the two cultures do remain, to a certain extent, *two* cultures. Nevertheless, one may well hypothesize that that hybridization, infinitely reproduced, might lead, *in fine*, to homogenization and loss of diversity. It thus appears that Homi Bhabha’s theses and those of “magical realism” are, in the last analysis, not mutually exclusive but actually do complement each other, differing only through their different emphases: emphasis on the distinct character of each culture as far as “magical realism” is concerned, and emphasis on hybridity as far as Homi Bhabha is concerned. Moreover, Bhabha’s theory is concerned with the *description* of naturally-occurring cultural phenomena; while the original Latin-American “magical realism” is also, purportedly, focused on the *description* of intercultural relationships as founded on the idea of a certain irreducible incommunicability, it is possible to wonder whether applying “magical realism” to the relationships between Alsace and “France” or Alsace and “Germany” to affirm the unicity of Alsatian culture, does not contribute

to highlight that said “magical realism” may well be, all in all, a *prescriptive* or *optative* critical enterprise as much as –if not more than– a *descriptive* one.

The reason for that is that, importantly, literary/metaphorical manifestations of Bhabhaian hybridity are in reality quite numerous and obvious in *La Roue du Paon*. Even in terms of plain onomastics, characters display a complex triangular identity, always deeply wrought by cultural pressure and *resistance* (a crucial aspect of Bhabha’s theory, as we shall see). The remarks above, indeed, do not amount to saying that, in a Bhabhaian perspective, there would be no specific “Alsatian” culture; even an “Alsatian” culture constantly evolving towards an always evolving triangular middle point between “itself,” “French culture” and “German culture,” would still be a *uniquely* “Alsatian” culture, *marked by resistance*. As an example of such resistance, related to onomastics, Weckmann provides us with the side character Yokela –Yokela in Alsatian, Jacob in German, and Jacques in French –“or rather Schaak” (82, 83, 87), who says about himself:

“[...] For my mom and dad, I was going to be their little Yokela. Well...
no, in the end, I ended up never being Yokela, but indeed Jacques –*or rather Schaak*, because inhabitants of Blôderschè [Blôderschè in Alsatian/Blattersheim in German/Blatterchemm in French, 11] had not yet learnt how to suck on the French j”¹⁸⁸ (83, emphasis added)

The French phrase “*apprendre à sucer le j français*,” I argue, is quite interesting because of the two possible –in my mind, equally plausible– interpretations it lends itself to. On the one hand, put in relation, intertextually, with the devilish theme present in *Fonse ou l’éducation*

¹⁸⁸ “[...] Pour eux deux, papa et maman, je ne serai rien d’autre que leur petit Yokela. Eh bien non, je ne fus jamais Yokela, mais bien Jacques, ou plutôt Schaak car les Blôderschois n’avaient pas encore appris à sucer le j français”

alsacienne,¹⁸⁹ it may refer to a frequent sculptural medieval motif found on Alsatian cathedrals, i.e. the representation of sin as a fellation to the devil or a horned animal such as a goat. Giving up the Alsatian dialect in order to succumb to French monolingualism being a contemporary “sin” (in the Biblical sense of “missing the target”), this “linguistic sin” could be, then, in that perspective, indeed represented by Weckmann as “sucking on the French language.” What potentially may reinforce this interpretation is the French President’s depiction, in *La Roue du Paon*, as “*haxemaïschtr suprême*” –“supreme Head sorcerer”– (46), and also the paradox of Odile being able to abduct the President through the power of her gaze, which supposes that, according to traditional love topoï, their “eyes actually met” (cf. Jean Rousset’s *Leurs yeux se rencontrèrent*), and yet, she confesses the following, pages later, in ways that remind very much of Fonse’s own “green eyes” (85):

“And I had not yet seen the color of his eyes. Are they blue Île-de-France, grey frison, ocean green, Mediterranean yellow, or colonial black? Or do his eyes change colors depending on his changing appetites?”¹⁹⁰ (48)

The quotation above does several things: number one, it confirms that, in Weckmann’s eyes, “regional studies” is definitely part of “colonial studies,” and “internal colonialism” part of “colonialism.” Number two, “*frison*” is a type of horse whose hair is always black, which could, again, be an intertextual reference to Fonse’s “[black horse]” (39) on which he invites René to ride with him –hence a confirmation of the fantastic (fully eerie) aspect of the President as

¹⁸⁹ Odile grandiloquently describes her enemy as “the Great Standardizer and Corrupter” –“le Grand Niveleur et Corrupteur” (29); the term “corruption” being, thematically, in the Bible, associated with the devil, this authorizes the intertextuality

¹⁹⁰ “Et je n’avais pas encore vu la couleur de ses yeux. Sont-ils bleu Île-de-France, gris frison, vert océan, jaune méditerranéen ou noir colonial? Ou changent-ils de couleur au gré de ses appétits?”

“supreme Head sorcerer” and thus a confirmation of the “sucking on the French language” motif as a sinful “fellatio to the devil.”

The other possible explanation for Weckmann’s use of the verb “*sucer*” lies in the pleasurable aspect of the action (i.e. the *sucette*-as-*friandise*) put in relation with Schiffman’s ideological “linguistic culture” stating that, in “French” public opinion, “French” is the *most beautiful* language in the world (cf. Grossmann), hence, also, the most pleasurable to the mouth/palate (see Hoffet)¹⁹¹ –a topic problematized by Weckmann as well, in *La Roue du Paon*, through the “*chou* (“cabbage,” in French) / *kriit* (“cabbage,” in Alsatian)” pair. In one of the chapters, the narrator is not Odile but Jacques Mathis, an Alsatian *male* narrator. In this chapter, even besides the central plot featuring the extraordinary action of Odile-the-sorceress, the French school system is presented as another locus of (ordinary yet powerful) witchcraft and “magical attraction.” Mathis explains that he fell under the spell of the French language by falling in love with the school mistress, “*Mademoiselle Geneviève*,” or “*madmassell Cheuneuvièèf*,” since “at the time [he] was still pronouncing these sweet words like a barbarian” (85). “The first words I learnt were: ‘mon chou’” (ibid), the narrator continues –first words which he likes to figuratively keep in his mouth and suck on them: “*Je les mâchais et remâchais*” (ibid), not unlike, arguably, Beckett’s character Moloy, which opens up avenues for psychoanalytical analyses of Alsatianity. The sentence “The first words I learnt were: ‘mon chou’” is very significant given that “*mon chou*” is a nice word for boys (who are born in cabbages) in the French tradition, but of course the school is located in the heart of cabbage-producing Alsace, home of sauerkraut. There is thus an outright competition happening between the French soft “*chou*” and the Alsatian guttural

¹⁹¹ Especially his denunciation of the popular characterization of German as “a ‘half-barbarous’ and ‘unrefined’ tongue [...], ‘diffuse, difficult to handle, unpleasing to the ear,’ by contrast with ‘elegant’ and ‘polished’ languages” (19) such as “French”

“*krüt*” (ibid), reinforced by the competition in pronouns: the schoolmistress calls the boy hers (“*mon chou*” –my cabbage), whereas “*notre krüt*” (our cabbage) points to the community that the boy is eventually going to leave by choosing “*chou*” over “*krüt*,” basing his decision on the sounds in “*chou*” being less harsh than the sounds in “*krüt*.” We end up with an axiological value being attached to languages: “French” is described as “the language of angels [...] [in] celestial spheres” (ibid).¹⁹² Such a conclusion having no scientific linguistic ground, the schoolmistress becomes a sorceress on the side of the “supreme head sorcerer” (that is the President), allied against Odile. The schoolmistress, another “sorceress-seductress,” is indeed called “the first woman who *seduced* me” (85, emphasis added).¹⁹³ Figuratively, “Sucking on the French language,” therefore, can be either a fellation to the devil, or, semi-antithetically, sucking on the witch’s nipples, after being seduced by it.

Regardless of our final conclusion in this matter, it remains that this quotation is absolutely emblematic of Bhabhaian hybridity, marked by *resistance*. It is paramount to note, indeed, that Alsatians characters in the novel, regarding names such as Yokela, are *not* saying “Jacques” as the French archipolitics would entice them to do, but: “*Shaak*” –“*Shaak*” as a *middle term*, i.e. a *non-exact reproduction* of “Jacques.” It actually does not matter whether they are saying “*Shaak*” instead of “Jacques” involuntarily, because of psycholinguistic impossibilities (in the case they wanted to speak “correct, accent-free French” but are unable to do so because their ears are “too old” to get re-trained, entailing a physiological impossibility of

¹⁹² “À l’époque, je prononçais ces doux mots à la barbare: madmassell Cheuneuvièff. J’avais six ans, j’étais assis au premier rang et humais à plein nez les effluves de jasmin qu’elle répandait dans la classe. Les premiers mots que j’appris furent: mon chou. Je les portai vite à la maison, les mâchais et les remâchais, ils signifiaient pour moi un monde nouveau, un monde que j’imaginai immédiatement se situer dans les sphères célestes. Était-ce donc cela la langue des anges dont maman m’avait parlé, mélodie éthérée, purifiée de toute pesanteur terrestre?”

¹⁹³ “[...] la première femme qui m’avait séduit”

being “a hundred percent” “French,” hence the Hofferian “Alsatian complex of inferiority”) *or* if they are doing so voluntarily, as a conscious and militant act of resistance against the Archipolitics. The fact is that their “Shaak” is a *de facto* symbol of *resistance*, in the sense that it is a blatant *mimicry* of “Jacques,” and their behavior in general, as it relates to the so-called ideal of “French civility,” a “sly civility” –to use some of Bhabha’s important concepts.¹⁹⁴

Another illustration of “hybridity” as “non-exact reproduction” and “resistance” is provided in the incipit, when Odile symbolically puts herself into a culturally stereophonic situation so to speak as a radio listener: linguistic code-switching is also, most trivially, radio-station switching, thus unashamed transnational fluidity as far as sources of input are concerned. For instance she listens to “Baden-Baden” (hence a German radio station) for the weather forecast and then *naturally* (a “naturalness” that can only be questioned in the context of the magnetic power of the Archipolitics) switches to “France-Inter” for the news (6). I have argued, in an article titled “The Non-Uniformity of In-Betweenness in André Weckmann’s *La Roue du Paon*,”¹⁹⁵ that, in this political space, classical music, in the person of Vivaldi, seems to bring a degree of a-spatiality, or neutrality, as though classical music, so to speak, “belonged to no-one.” The counter-argument which, on second thoughts, denies an apolitical status even to classical music, is that classical music is used to reinforce “hybridity” as “Mozart,” for Odile, is never quite “Mozart” as she alternatively parodies this name into a German-sounding “Mootzarth” (41) or a French-sounding “Mozaare” (43).

¹⁹⁴ cf. in “Signs Taken for Wonders,” a section of *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states: “Paradoxically, [...] the image [of identity] can neither be ‘original’ –by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it– nor ‘identical’ –by virtue of the difference that defines it. Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. [...] Such a display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic)”

¹⁹⁵ *Tiresias: Culture, Politics and Critical Theory*, issue 5, 2012 (pp. 62-76)

Despite all these elements pleading for an interpretation of Weckmann's œuvre in terms of Bhabhaian hybridity, there is however *also* much ground, as we have amply noted, to see, particularly in *La Roue du Paon*, a literary implementation of "magical realism." Interestingly, though, applying "magical realism" to Weckmann is a theoretical choice that contributes to making him, in a definite way, *reactionary*. This characterization, I argue, is not bound to be pejorative, as one may well be "reactionary" –reacting against– the Archipolitics, not to mention that a "reaction against" is also an "affirmation of." Still, the similarities between Latin-American "magical realism" and Weckmann in the French Archipolitical context help us better understand why it has been possible for Robert Grossmann to accuse Weckmann of allegedly being "nostalgic" and dangerously spreading dreams of an ethnic "Alsatian nation" –like a distinct culture to protect at all costs. Such suspicions, as we have demonstrated through Weckmann's cosmopolitan "one-humanity" perspective in *Les Nuits de Fastov*, are unfounded, yet they may however have been fueled by the contentious aspects of "magical realism" just as undeniably present in *La Roue du Paon*.

One way of resolving this contradiction is to resort to Henri Giordan, who edited the collective volume gathering the contributions to the 1990 international conference held in Strasbourg/Strassburg on the theme of "*droits de l'homme, droits linguistiques*" –"linguistic rights and human rights." "Humanity," Giordan reminds his audience in a powerful phrase, "is at the same time one and diverse" –"*l'humanité est à la fois différenciée et une*" (24). Hackneyed as it may sound, this phrase, I suggest, perfectly sums up the substance of Weckmann's politico-literary engagement: between "one-humanity" and "diversity," the good news is that we no longer need to choose.

Whether aware or unaware, Weckmann's adhesion to the principles of "magical realism" is thus a deeply politico-literary act. There is still another way, I suggest, through which the author is engaged politically and literarily, i.e. politically-through-literature: by inventing an entirely fictitious kidnapping, performed by a no less fictitious "sorceress-seductress,"¹⁹⁶ he brings to literary life an *imaginary world*, a dream world notoriously at odds with the "real world" and its national metanarratives.¹⁹⁷ Ouyang does not hesitate to make connections, incidentally, between the role of imagination in "magical realism" and the concept of "*imagined community*" (emphasis added) dear to Benedict Anderson. Any "nation" being anyway, by definition, a construction, and thus in the last analysis a product of imagination, there are two possible ways of interpreting what Weckmann does through his use of literary/social imaginary: he is either creating/cultivating the idea of an alternate "nation" (another imagined community),¹⁹⁸ or, more radically, he could also be heroically exiting the "nation-as-episteme" – nothing less. The implausibility of the plot (staging the kidnapping of a President: *really?! where were the body guards? what were Secret Services doing?*) cannot be, in this perspective, considered as a flaw of *La Roue du Paon* as a novel, because it is precisely this unlikely (*invraisemblable*) aspect which makes the novel indeed an "eccentric" novel, or makes Weckmann an "eccentric" novelist, in the sense of "conceptually moving away from the center."

Doing so, Weckmann powerfully liberates himself/Alsace from the hegemony of the "nation-

¹⁹⁶ Fictitious, but whose name, as already noted, will definitely evoke something in the imaginary of many Alsations, which of course is not an innocent choice. Zamora, in *Magical realism. Theory, History, Community*, writes: "[The] primary narrative investment [of texts labeled magical realist] may be in myths, legends, rituals –that is, in collective [...] practices *that bind communities together*" (3, emphasis added)

¹⁹⁷ "Nation-state [is] a paradigm of knowledge: [...] [it] informs not only political thought and action, but also the ways in which history is written, literary texts shaped and literary criticism mapped" (Ouyang, 225)

¹⁹⁸ In adequation with the following quotation by Benedict Anderson which Ouyang underscores: "Almost every year the United Nations admit new members. And many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders –nationalisms, which, of course, dreams of shedding their subness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight" (225)

centered,” French archipolitical system. This, it shall be noted, is totally congruent with an essential function of “magical realism” according to Zamora: “its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity” (3).

Because Weckmann’s writing mode in *La Roue du Paon* is thus political through and through, it has therefore more affinities with “magical realism” than with surrealism. What Jason Wilson says about Alejo Carpentier is certainly valid for André Weckmann as well: “He could not be further from automatic writing, or believing that the unconscious dictates meaning” (72).

This being said, in the last analysis, we need to distinguish between *Les Nuits de Fastov* and *La Roue du Paon*: while *Les Nuits de Fastov* is a fictional novel, it also undeniably rests on the author’s past experience on the Russian front –a most traumatic experience. If we take into account this “trauma dimension” and its necessary effects on the unconscious, we cannot completely rule out that the surrealist elements in *Les Nuits de Fastov* may, perhaps, indeed be “truly surrealist,” in the form of a resurgence of the past, during the writing experience, some twenty years after the traumatic experience itself, in which case the political, conscious dimension would come only second both chronologically and in terms of importance. The case of *La Roue du Paon* is much different, as the content of this novel is located on the borderline between the marvelous and the fantastic,¹⁹⁹ and is carefully premeditated, clearly to serve political purposes. All things considered, Weckmann’s conception of “engagement” is definitely

¹⁹⁹ cf. at the very moment he was abducted, he was already replaced (35), and, at the end of the novel, when Odile releases him, the strange (fantastic) scene happens when he returns to his palace, shakes hands with his successor (looking like a “twin brother”), and the two of them get reincorporated together to form just one body: “Monsieur greets Monsieur. [...] They enter the building walking closely side by side. Once in the reception hall, they are only one” –“Monsieur salue Monsieur. On dirait deux frères jumeaux. Ils pénètrent dans le bâtiment bras dessus, bras dessous. Arrivés au salon, ils ne font plus qu’un” (185). The trivial question asked by his servant (“Did Monsieur sleep well?” –“Monsieur a bien dormi?”) indicates that nothing seems to have happened at all (ibid). Hence a sense of hopelessness of the literary act in regard to the urge of the political situation? Except that Weckmann’s text (Weckmann whose last name, in Alsatian, aptly means “Wakeman”) is meant to be a wake-up call from Alsatian slumberiness

more Sartrian than strictly conform to Breton's surrealist dogma. His œuvre is a mixture of (likely) "true surrealism," (strategic) "surrealist style," and "magical realism." Each one of these elements contributes to a better understanding of where the author's political engagement comes from, and what it truly consists in. This mixture, too, is definitely one aspect which makes his œuvre rich and complex –a complexity which, I argue, largely accounts for Grossmann's misreadings and misinterpretations about him expressed in *Main-basse sur ma langue*. A similar sort of careful deciphering and explication will be needed in order to not misunderstand our next example of "accented, antiarchipolitical" literature: "banlieue literature."

CHAPTER TWO:

“*LA PAROLE IMMIGRÉE*” MADE VISIBLE/AUDIBLE: FRENCH-MAGHREBI AUTHORS MOUNSI AND AZOUZ BEGAG BOTH INHABIT AND RESIST THE ARCHIPOLITICS

“No discourse which may affirm any kind of difference is ever relayed or listened to”²⁰⁰
Mounsi, *Territoire d’outre-ville* (19)

3.1 Introduction: The Paradox in Mounsi’s Anti-Assimilationist Proto-Rap

In their abstract for their 2009 book titled *Parole de Banlieue: Mounsi* (Editions of the Centre d’études et de recherches sociocritiques), Jeanne-Marie Clerc and Fabien Cruveiller define Mounsi as a “*chanteur de rap devenu romancier*” –“a rap singer who became a novelist.” While Mounsi, born in 1951, is indeed commonly referred to as a “rapper,” there are however also plenty of reasons that arguably justify why, anecdotically yet significantly, the English-version Wikipedia article on Mounsi introduces him merely as a “novelist and singer” –and *not* as a rap singer *per se*–, thus echoing Dominique Le Boucher’s characterization of Mounsi, in “L’Actualité Littéraire,”²⁰¹ as an “*auteur-compositeur de chansons*” –“author and composer of songs”–, without, again, these songs being necessarily “rap songs.” In fact, his most famous

²⁰⁰ “Aucune parole qui affirme une différence n’est jamais recueillie ni écoutée”

²⁰¹ “Dialogue avec Mounsi.” http://www.revues-plurielles.org/uploads/pdf/4_5_12.pdf (accessed 12/7/ 2014)

song, the 1985 “Seconde Génération,” which does, certainly, contain *rap themes* such as drug consumption and immigrant minority identity, was put to music by Jean-Noël Charléat, who also worked for Alain Chamfort (note the musical similarities between Mounsi’s *Seconde Génération* and Chamfort’s 1979 *Manureva*, itself very close to Jean-Jacques Goldman’s style of music). It comes as no wonder, then, that Mounsi’s “rap” strikingly evokes the 1980s, like a sort of improbable “Jean-Jacques Goldman rap.” From the point of view of music, rather than themes, thus, Mounsi’s rap may be best termed as “*proto-French rap*,” as opposed to “rap.”

In this section, looking especially at Mounsi’s 1995 essay *Territoire d’outre-ville* – translatable as “French Outercity Territory” –, I investigate the paradox which I see as lying at the heart of Mounsi’s literary and artistic production, that is, a strong tension between total compliance to the “French” archipolitics and powerful *resistance* to that same archipolitics, through his notion of “shout.” This tension, I argue, interestingly makes Mounsi *both* a rebel *and* a fully cognizant participant in the archipolitics. I then build upon this paradox to suggest that such a reading of Mounsi more broadly helps us understand the extent to which some stylistic features found in “banlieue literature” authors such as Azouz Begag’s, while having at first sight the potential of making their authors appear as most “conventional” authors vis-à-vis the archipolitics, are in fact conducting no less than an actual *revolution against* the archipolitics, not necessarily from the point of view of the ideas being expressed (e.g. Azouz Begag’s famous stance in favor of French education as a tool towards the integration of minorities into the French republic), but from the point of view of style and (performative) *meaning* of style.

Regarding Mounsi, first of all, his essay *Territoire d’outre-ville* does seem, on the one hand, to fully participate in the “French” archipolitical *discourse* when he authoritatively says, using an *injunction* mode (“must”):

“Someone who owns [a] language consequently owns the world expressed and implied by the vocabulary and syntax [of this language]. It is for this reason that *the youth of the banlieue must appropriate themselves the French language*” (80, emphases added)²⁰²

As presented by Mounsi, the reason for this injunction to speak standardized “French,” directed at the immigrant youth of the banlieue, is socio-economic in nature –in the sense that speaking standardized “French” would be a necessity if one wishes to find employment and move up the “French” social ladder. To link this to the regional problematic (chapter 1), Mounsi’s argument definitely echoes the “French discourse” “pragmatic” arguments in favor of the eventual relinquishing of regional dialects and accents by regional populations. The ultimate (apparently noble) objective is to have both regional populations *and* the immigrant youth not “minoritized” any more, or, as Mounsi would say, make them “fully French” –“*des Français à part entière*” –, instead of being “different French people, segregated from the French” –“*des Français à part*” – (77). Thus:

“Maintaining the immigrant youth [les jeunes] in the use of verlan, the language of vagabonds reprimanded by the police, is to condemn them to read the world in an upside-down way” (81)²⁰³

²⁰² “Un être qui possède le langage possède par contrecoup le monde exprimé et impliqué par le vocabulaire et la syntaxe. C’est pour cette raison qu’un enfant de la banlieue doit faire sienne la langue française”

²⁰³ “Maintenir les jeunes dans l’usage du verlan des maraudeurs houspillés par les gendarmes, c’est les condamner à lire le monde à l’envers”

To enjoin the immigrant youth to join the dominant French language community thus means to *help* (note the positive denotation of the verb) the immigrant youth integrate –integrate the archipolity.

Yet here is the paradox: on the other hand, it turns out that the theme of *accent* –in other words, the theme of the *anti-archipolitics*– is equally absolutely central in Mounsi’s literary/artistic production. As much as verlan (i.e. a form of “accent” in the sense of both linguistic and discourse variation relative to the “purity” of the “French” language), was vilified as “non-French” and therefore as an obstacle to integration, it is *at the same time* relativized as an intermediary stage and in fact *extolled* as a sign of great promise for empowered minority expression in its own right (minorities, in other words, do not *need* to disappear any longer):

“The youth of immigrant descent, too, have a culture of their own. And it shall not always be the case that a mysterious Someone [on ne sait qui]²⁰⁴ has the power to exclude them or include them. The ‘verlan’ in which French society [on]²⁰⁵ wants to imprison them is only a moment in the history of their language. [...] My wish is that they will be able to create a new language, written with so to speak stenographic, rhythmic words, extremely fast-paced and at the same time extremely expressive. Like graffiti taggings. They do have the potential, within themselves, to invent this. ‘Verlan’ is a ‘*shout*,’ a transitory necessity, almost a conditioned reflex. It is a moment in the evolution of oral language. Why wouldn’t they exist in the written language? I live in the hope of the written moment

²⁰⁴ The impersonality of discourse

²⁰⁵ Again the impersonality of discourse

of their reality, that is to say the moment when what is nowadays
manifested through violent acts will, tomorrow, be able to carry out,
through words, *meaning*” (80, emphases added)²⁰⁶

Note, in this important quotation, the conceptual gradation from 1) violence, cf “violent acts,” as a crude mode of expression but a mode of *proto*-expression nonetheless to 2) “oral language” (first level of expression, verlan being a stage thereof), to 3) “written language,” considered an ultimate, more elaborate level of expression.

Postcolonial “violence” as proto-mode of expression is an important concept which bears connections with topics also developed by Abd al Malik; as such, it shall be discussed later on. As for “oral language,” i.e. verlan, Mounsi’s characterization of it as “shout” [cri] gestures towards a shift from standard French language, hence from Frenchness, through the motif of “jarring dissonance” – “accent” in the context of this dissertation. What naturally concerns me here the most, however, is Mounsi’s focus on “written language.” Concretely, what Mounsi seems to be describing/prophesizing is the advent of a kind of postcolonial literature which, in the context of metropolitan France’s urban ghettos, would necessarily need to be “slammic” (whether literally or metaphorically) in nature – hence a “slammic” postcolonial literature, or “rap-like” postcolonial literature.

²⁰⁶ “Les jeunes issus de l’immigration possèdent eux aussi une culture. Et il ne tiendra pas toujours à on ne sait qui de décider de les exclure ou de les inclure. Le ‘verlan’ dans lequel on veut les enfermer n’est qu’un moment de leur langue. [...] J’espère d’eux une langue neuve, écrite avec des mots pour ainsi dire sténographiques, rythmiques, extrêmement rapides et en même temps extrêmement expressifs. Comme des tags. Ils ont la possibilité à l’intérieur d’eux-mêmes d’inventer cela. Le ‘verlan’ est un ‘cri,’ une nécessité passagère, presque un réflexe conditionné. C’est un moment de la langue orale. Pourquoi n’existeraient-ils pas dans la langue écrite? J’attends le moment écrit de leur réalité, c’est-à-dire le moment où ce qui se manifeste aujourd’hui par l’action de la violence pourra, demain, signifier, à travers les mots, un sens”

In what follows, I argue indeed that Mounsi's stress on "*stenographic, rhythmic* words, *extremely fast-paced* and [...] *extremely expressive*" (emphases added) does *not only* apply to "oral language" but indeed to postcolonial "written language" as well. Crucially, I similarly also argue that Mounsi's concept of "*shout*" [cri] does *not only* apply to verlan, but to "written language" as well. As we shall see, this notion of "shout" is going to be key to both Mounsi's theoretical apparatus in *Territoire d'Outre-Ville* and key, I maintain, to my understanding of the politico-literary functioning of contemporary "beur/banlieue literature" as a whole, deeply connected as it is to what I call Mounsi's far-reaching "two-generation theory."

3.2 The "Two-Generation Theory": From Subalternity to Expression and Literary Expression

Describing both the postcolonial situation at large and his own situation as a postcolonial writer, Mounsi takes up again, in a very striking manner, the notion of "shout," developing it to mean, more precisely, "the-shout-of-the-young-immigrant-generation." Very importantly, he pairs this "shout" with what could be termed in contrast the "(forced)-silence-of-the-older-immigrant-generation" in this very central quotation:

"Immigration ties younger and older generations of immigrants together through historical 'interlinkages.' I situate myself within this interstice of time. Our fathers did not shout, did not seek confrontation. They

underwent domination in silence. It is this silence which you are urged to decipher in the loud scream [hurlement] of their children” (17)²⁰⁷

It must be noted that Mounsi, in a powerful gradation, went from using the word “cri” (“shout”), to “hurlement” –which, in French, is even stronger than “shout” and may be translated as “extremely loud, screechy, disruptive scream.” “*Hurlement*” is disharmonious. Looking beyond “violent acts” or verlan, my entire objective, in this chapter dealing with Mounsi and Azouz Begag will be to discern how postcolonial/ beur/ banlieue *literature* in twentieth/twenty-first century France may in effect be interpreted as a second-immigrant-generation “hurlement” meant to compensate for the “silence” (or rather *silencing*) of the first generation of immigrants.

Mounsi takes great pains, throughout *Territoire d’Outre-Ville*, to voluntarily stress an essential difference between the “two generations” as far as expression is concerned, in order to later be able to also stress the “interlinkages” [“raccords historiques”] between them. Note the “Our fathers//Now, with their sons and daughters born on French soil” opposition in the following quotation:

“French society, it is true, has been used, for centuries, to denying any form of speech to immigrants. It has defined the immigrant as speechless obedience [obeissance muette] and automatic submission; a man devoid of any capacity to criticize, judge or reject –an imperfect being, law-abiding not out of good conscience but out of servility. *Our fathers* were naturally seen as analphabets, so their silence was just normal. *Now, with their sons*

²⁰⁷ “L’immigration relie les générations les unes aux autres par des ‘raccords’ historiques. Je suis dans cette fraction du temps. Nos pères ne criaient pas, ne s’expliquaient pas, ils subissaient en silence. C’est ce silence qu’il vous est demandé de déchiffrer dans le hurlement de leurs enfants”

and daughters born on French soil, French society is challenged to hear voices that do care about the ways in which they are being interpreted” (17-18, emphases added)²⁰⁸

This generational opposition constitutes a powerful thematic network that structures the entire *Territoire d’Outre-Ville*, as these next quotations continue to demonstrate:

“The youth of immigrant descent have been through such a hard –and so long– journey. Each episode of their lives immediately harks back to other lives –those of their parents” (18)²⁰⁹

“In these families, I had the impression that everything was interlinked. Pull on a bough of the tree, and it is the entire genealogical tree which will be moving –father, mother, sons, daughters, little ones and all of their roots” (109-110)²¹⁰

“My delinquency as a teenager cannot be understood without reference to the history from which I come from [...]. Each and every crime I

²⁰⁸ “La société française, il est vrai, est habituée depuis des siècles à dénier toute parole aux immigrés. Elle définit l’immigré par l’obéissance muette, par l’automatisme de la soumission. Un homme vide de toute impulsion à critiquer, à juger, à rejeter. Un être inachevé, respectueux des lois non par conscience mais par servilité. Nos pères étaient naturellement vus comme des analphabètes, dont le mutisme était la moindre des décences. Or, avec leurs fils et filles nés sur le sol français, justement, il s’agit d’entendre des voix qui se mêlent de la façon dont on les interprète ”

²⁰⁹ “Les jeunes issus de l’immigration reviennent de très loin. D’un si long voyage. Chaque épisode de leur histoire évoque aussitôt une autre histoire, celle de leurs parents”

²¹⁰ “Dans les familles, j’ai eu l’impression que tout était lié. Quand on tirait sur la branche, c’est tout l’arbre généalogique qui venait avec le père, la mère, les fils, les filles, les petits et toutes les racines”

committed was a creative act in relation to the freedom which had been denied to my father” (65)²¹¹

“The guilt of the sons [...] [as a means] to counter the ‘innocence’ of the fathers” (66)²¹²

“I was the other half of my father [...] –a part of himself, and the wild [sauvage] part of himself” (ibid)²¹³

“I only conceived of delinquency as a means to give back to my father some kind of power” (67)²¹⁴

Mounsi thus expounds the different ways through which the first generation of immigrants, the generation of the fathers, was thus “tamed” and “silenced” –“de-powered.” Firstly, it is interesting to note that, within his *essay*, he devotes significant space to lengthy, detailed, *novel-like* descriptions of the hard working condition of these fathers who came to France to “find work” and instead of “work,” found “extremely harsh work.” This, to be sure, will need to be related to *novels* such as Azouz Begag’s. In a manner reminiscent of Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, though crudely realistic, Mounsi writes, in the autobiographical mode:

“This morning, I saw, on a construction site, two Arab workers. They were buried deep in a pit, up to their necks, and were vigorously shoveling

²¹¹ “La délinquance de ma jeunesse n’a pas de sens si elle n’est pas explicitée par l’histoire dont je viens [...]. Chaque délit que j’ai commis fut acte d’invention de la liberté que l’on refusait à mon père”

²¹² “la culpabilité des fils [...] pour effacer ‘l’innocence’ des pères”

²¹³ “Moi, j’étais l’autre moitié de mon père [...]. Une part de lui-même, sauvage”

²¹⁴ “La délinquance, pour moi, ne fut jamais dans son essence qu’un geste pour redonner une puissance à mon père”

some heavy dirt out of the pit. [...] I thought of my father. For years, he had worked in one of these factories where a greasy assembly line keeps clinking and rattling without stopping over the workers' heads. Keeping up with the rhythm of the machine, the men's fingers adjust metal parts. They would work in this environment twelve hours every day, [...] with every one of their gestures very precisely pre-calculated, measured and timed. At the end of the day, he would come home –empty. Then every morning, he would leave for work again. One day, the factory shut down. He was fired. But the assembly line continued, for a long time, to go round and round in his worn-out head. It seems that part of himself has stayed caught in that squeaky wheel” (43-44)^{215 216}

Significantly, for it contributes to turn the essay into a poetic / novel-like piece of writing, the assembly line is rendered through a snake metaphor: “at the end of the long snake” –“au bout du long serpent” (53)–, finally, the newly-produced car is ready to go! Let it however be reminded that a snake is a harmful creature –potentially lethal. Significantly, too, the narrator's father is here presented as a worker in a *Renault* factory, which means, given that Renault is an emblem of “French cars,” that he is definitely exploited in a “*French*” system of super-productivist modernity (with an emphasis on “French”). With, as a result, this pathetic phrase:

²¹⁵ “Ce matin, j’ai aperçu sur un chantier deux ouvriers arabes. Enfoncés jusqu’au cou dans un trou, ils jetaient vigoureusement de lourdes pelletées de terre. [...] J’ai songé à mon père. Durant des années, il avait travaillé dans l’une de ces usines où une chaîne graisseuse claqué au-dessus de la tête des ouvriers. Au rythme de la machine, les doigts des hommes ajustaient des pièces de métal. Ils travaillaient là douze heures par jour, [...] chacun de leurs gestes minutieusement calculé, gradué, chronométré. À la fin de la journée, il rentrait: vide. Chaque matin, il repartait. Un jour, l’usine a fermé. Il a été licencié. Mais la chaîne continua longtemps de tourner dans sa tête usée. Il semble qu’un morceau de lui-même resta pris dans la roue qui grinçait”

²¹⁶ Compare with Faïza Guène's father experiencing premature dementia in *Du rêve pour les oufs* (27)

“My speechless father, tied to his fate, diminished, out of breath, forever crushed under his poor people’s burden” (44)²¹⁷

In this “reality novel,” it is the same “real character,” namely Mounsi’s father, who, in addition to being reduced to the status (anti-status) of “subaltern” in the industrial plant, is also shown as “subaltern” (quite literally as a “wretched *of the earth*”) toiling away in the other context of the coal mine, thus being a characters of many lives –or rather “anti-lives”:²¹⁸

“At the age of seventeen, in the North of France, my father went down into the mine as a diver holding his breath. When he reached the surface again, his eyes would be dancing around like moths dazzled by daylight. [...] Behind their masks of soot, these black faces were people from everywhere, from Eastern Europe to Northern Africa. They were the coal-trimmers of the industrial revolution [...]; they experienced the agony of the depths of the earth well before experiencing that of the tomb. *De profundis*” (44-45)²¹⁹

After linking “work for immigrants” to nothing less than *death* (cf. “the tomb”), and the French system of “integration” as a “cannibalistic” –“cannibale”–²²⁰ system of devoration

²¹⁷ “Mon père, muet à son sort, réduit, essoufflé, éternellement tassé sous son fardeau de pauvre”

²¹⁸ “These were the living conditions in the North of France [...] at a time when the words ‘working class’ still had a meaning” –“C’était le Nord [...] dans un temps où dire ‘classe ouvrière’ avait encore un sens” (45)

²¹⁹ “Là-bas, dans le Nord, à dix-sept ans, mon père est descendu à la mine comme en apnée. Quand il remontait, ses yeux s’agitaient tels des phalènes aveuglées par la lumière du jour. [...] Derrière leurs masques de suie, les gueules noires auront été des hommes de partout, de l’Est de l’Europe à l’Afrique du Nord. Soutiers de la révolution industrielle, [...] ils auront connu l’agonie du fond bien avant celle de la tombe. *De profundis*”

²²⁰ This dehumanization and devoration, incidentally, already began, according to Mounsi, through the enlisting of colonial populations into wars that were not theirs (first and second world wars). See Mounsi’s reactivation of the

“eating up the weak” – “elle mange les plus faibles” – (58) (cf. also the snake metaphor above), Mounsi resorts to one final comparison: Fernand Léger’s movie *Ballet Mécanique*. This comparison is significant because this movie is part of the Dadaist trend and is commonly known as “the first movie without a scenario,” thus further underscoring the meaninglessness of the father’s life:

“As in Fernand Léger’s mechanical ballet, I imagine my father, subaltern [sous-prolétaire] humanoid robot, repeating, with extreme precision, ‘machinic’ gestures. Having adapted to this automatic mechanism, he himself could not have anything else but the gestures and thoughts of an automaton” (51)²²¹

As we shall see with Azouz Begag, “beur/banlieue literature” written by French, second-generation immigrant writers will be giving a voice –an “accented,” thus *shouting* voice (in contrast with previous silence)– back to these voiceless fathers.

Their dehumanization through complete economic submission, however, is only one way through which the first generation of immigrants has been de-powered, according to Mounsi.

concept of “soldat inconnu” (unknown soldier, whose *identity does not matter*) in the following quotation: ““How many times were Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Senegalese sent to the front! So, it appears that France, formerly, had started to accept all people, no matter where they came from, no matter their skin color; it had become infinitely tolerant in the choice of its martyrs. After all, it was better not to be picky; it had even come up with the nice concept of ‘unknown soldier’ [‘soldat inconnu’]. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité...” –“Combien de fois les tirailleurs algériens, marocains, tunisiens, sénégalais furent-ils lancés à l’assaut! Ainsi, naguère, la France s’était-elle mise à accepter tous les hommes d’où qu’ils viennent, toutes les couleurs de peau; ainsi était-elle devenue infiniment tolérante dans le choix de ses martyrs. Après tout, mieux valait n’y pas regarder de trop près; elle avait même trouvé le joli concept de ‘soldat inconnu.’ Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité...” (54).

These anonymous deaths, anonymous masses of dead colonial flesh dumped onto the altar of French nationalism, are transcribed by Mounsi by the phrase “chair à canon” –“cannon fodder” (ibid) –to be related to Weckmann’s concept of “Moloch”

²²¹ “Comme dans le ballet mécanique de Fernand Léger, j’imagine mon père, homme-robot sous-prolétaire, répéter avec une extrême précision des gestes ‘machiniques.’ Adapté à ce mécanisme automatique, il ne pouvait plus avoir lui-même que des gestes et des pensées d’automate”

The author mentions indeed several other causes for the dehumanization which the fathers have undergone. Secondly, thus, in a section on France's relationship with Algeria, and more precisely France's tendency to "want to forget"²²² about past colonial crimes and the use of torture, he does not hesitate to use the word "*gégène*" (31) –a slang term from the French military, shorter for "*génératrice*," meaning "power generator." Originally carried around on the battlefield during the Algerian War to power portable telecommunication devices (telephones), the electricity produced then also served as torture device. Against French forgetfulness about torture (forgetfulness being yet another form of silencing), Mounsi's explicit reference to the "*gégène*" is in itself a shout –a shout which, springing up from the written page, revives the shouts of the tortured fathers. One could argue that the very use of the word "torture" is a shout in itself, given that Mounsi notes that this very term had been erased from official "French language" and official "French discourse," replaced as it was by the locution "*pression physique modérée*" –"moderate physical pressure" (32).

Mounsi does not enter into *harki* vs. *non-harki* distinctions, thus creating a sort of "generic tortured Algerian" figure. He notes that, once in France, dehumanization only further continued for *all* Algerians, whether previously tortured or not tortured, through a third method of silencing, that is systematic discrimination:

²²² "[...] Forgetfulness seems to be, in this country, something like a national duty..." – "[...] l'oubli, dans ce pays, semble quelquefois un devoir national..." (31)

“In French society, the immigrant worker, although innocent in general, can sense that he is generally considered a suspect. He accepts this very precise and intense little *death of himself*” (66, emphasis added)²²³

A fourth way, related to the third one, through which the generation of the fathers has been ruthlessly silenced consists in police repression against anti-Algerian war demonstrations; the Paris massacre of October 17, 1961 especially occupies a large space in *Territoire d'outre-ville*. Mounsi identifies these events as a “ratonnade” (22, 31), thus underscoring the plainly racist aspect of this police repression (“raton” [“small rat,” in English] being a highly pejorative word, especially used in the 1950-60s, to designate Maghrebi people in French slang). As a reminder, several dozens of demonstrators’ corpses (no official figure being available) were thrown into the River Seine as a result of the repression. Mounsi responds to such silencing of the fathers’ generation with an account of the *action* (or “shout”) performed by the new generation some thirty years after the silencing occurred:

“On October 17, 1992, we gathered [along the Seine River] in Paris. The numerous young people who were present dropped red carnations into Canal Saint-Martin. The drowned dead bodies suddenly swam upstream like salmon... Young people of immigrant descent have a memory of the Algerian War –a disorderly memory. *The revolt of today’s youth is*

²²³ “Dans la société française, le travailleur immigré, bien qu’innocent en général, pressent qu’il est suspect en particulier. Il accepte cette petite mort précise et vivante de lui-même”

superimposed to something of yesterday; rebellions add up to each other
(32-33, emphasis added)²²⁴

The *red* color of the flowers thrown into the water by the “sons” in remembrance of the “father-victims” recalls the *bloodshed*. Their remembering act is here literarily depicted as a powerful act –a life-bringing act. Even though, indeed, the flowers of course do not resuscitate the fathers and do not change themselves into the fathers, they do “magically,” in Mounsi’s imagination and literary production, transform themselves into lively fish (cf. “[...] suddenly swam upstream like salmon...”). This comparison is interesting, I suggest, because fish are animals which famously *do not talk*, which means that at this point, the fathers are still, crucially, speech-deprived.

To this subalternity or lack of true agency of the fathers, Mounsi responds by highlighting the “expression” of the second generation –a first level of “expression” being, as already pointed out, “violent acts,” or what could be termed “postcolonial violence.” Again, since this aspect bears similarities to Abd al Malik’s own experience and theoretical thinking, this will be developed later. Let it suffice to say that Mounsi here underscores the sharp contrast between the fathers’ “lack of being” –their subalternity– and, on the contrary, the sense of “*being*” which delinquency provides to the second generation:

“Being guilty is, at least, a form of ‘being.’ The accusatory finger pointed
at you signifies, at least, your singularity” (66)²²⁵

²²⁴ “Le 17 octobre 1992, nous nous sommes retrouvés [au bord de la Seine] à Paris; les nombreux jeunes présents ce jour-là jetaient des œillets rouges dans le canal Saint-Martin. Les noyés comme des saumons remontaient au fil de l’eau... Il y a une mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie chez les jeunes issus de l’immigration, mais une mémoire dans le désordre. La révolte des gamins d’aujourd’hui se superpose à quelque chose d’hier, les insoumissions s’ajoutent les unes aux autres”

Evidently, Mounsi's above assertion runs the risk of essentialism, which surely is not what he intended. Mounsi's point is definitely not to imply that all second-generation immigrants "will be" delinquents. However, Mounsi certainly affirms that when second-generation immigrant delinquency does occur (as it did for him), it needs to be put in perspective –i.e. explained (hence the "two-generation" model). Whether this means "justified" is another debate, but it remains that it is entirely correct to say that, for Mounsi, "second-generation immigrant delinquency" calls for a sort of collective, diachronic soul-searching. In *Territoire d'outre-ville*, Mounsi expounds the process of such diachronic soul-searching for him as an individual, and subsequently as a writer (thus conceptually passing from subalternity to expression to, indeed, *literary* expression).

Proposing here a novel way of reading *Territoire d'outre-ville*, I suggest that the essay, taken as a whole, translates into literature this "diachronic soul-searching" as it not only merely "talks about" the "two-generation theory" but in effect literarily *performs* it.

The very title *Territoire d'outre-ville*, indeed, is polysemic. A neologism built upon the already existing phrase "territoires d'outre-mer" (the "overseas territories" inherited from colonial policies), its first and most obvious meaning, of course, is to denote exclusion (cf. "outre" = "beyond"), thus denouncing the "banlieue" indeed as an *urban* space paradoxically *cut* (conceptually and very basically through infrastructures such as beltway roads) from the rest of the *urbs*/city. However, my novel reading of the title consists in re-emphasizing that this is not the only way Mounsi himself understands the phrase.

Consider the following quotations:

²²⁵ "La culpabilité suscite aussi l'identité absolue de soi. Le doigt qui accuse signifie au moins votre singularité"

“In the labyrinth of the city, I grope my way through my memories,
searching the smallest streets on a quest for my own life” (16-17)²²⁶

And:

“It took me thirty years to move from the ‘Crimes and delinquency’
section of the newspaper to the literary section. My memories are forcing
me through a windy itinerary to find myself again [pour me retrouver] in
this part of myself which I call ‘Outercity Territory’ –for me in particular:
‘Territory beyond the Seine River.’ And this river continues to flow inside
me, shaping me, deeply, secretly” (21)²²⁷

Very interestingly, it turns out that the phrase “Territoire d’outre-ville” is not “purely” associated to the physical urban space of the “banlieue,” but, rather, to an imaginary intermediary space (interface) where the physical, urban space would meet the interior, mental space of the narrator: “this part of myself which I call ‘Outercity Territory’,” “‘Territory beyond the Seine River’ [...] flowing inside me,” writes Mounsi. Furthermore, in both quotations, the “external/internal” cityscape is linked to the motif of “memories”: “I grope my way through my memories, searching the smallest streets [...],” “my memories are forcing me through a windy itinerary [...].” Last but not least, the city is rendered through a unique metaphor: that of a “labyrinth,” which can arguably be read as an image for the unconscious (a similar case can be made for the fluidity of a “river” flowing inside, and shaping, the individual). The soul-searching

²²⁶ “Au milieu de la ville, je me fraye un chemin dans mes souvenirs, je fouille les ruelles en quête de ma vie”

²²⁷ “J’ai mis trente ans pour passer de la page des faits divers à la page littéraire. Mes souvenirs m’imposent un itinéraire sinueux pour me retrouver dans cette contrée de moi-même que je nomme ‘Territoire d’Outre-Ville,’ pour moi ‘d’Outre-Seine.’ Et le fleuve continue son mouvement sourd et secret en moi”

mentioned earlier thus involves even the unconscious: “No one can ever say these simple words: ‘I am who I am’” (16).²²⁸

There is one powerful, though potentially controversial way, I suggest, through which such foregrounding of the “unconscious” may uniquely strengthen Mounsi’s “two-generation theory.” The reason why it is potentially controversial is because it rests on hypnosis-related notions such as “collective memory” and “past life regression” (i.e. the idea that memories of past lives, or incarnations, may be accessed through hypnosis). My argument, though, is that Mounsi is here using a form of *metaphorical* “past life regression” theory, as well as a *metaphorical* notion of “collective memory,” to say that his memories are not just made up of “his” own memories, but comprise his memories *and* the memories of his father(s). This thus sheds special light on the following excerpt from *Territoire d’outre-ville*’s “Foreword”:

“From the shores of the Mediterranean to the French Outercity Territories,
I patiently attempted to glue back together the pieces of my memory”
(11)²²⁹

Mounsi’s “memory” (archetype of the second-generation immigrant’s memory) is recognized as being fragmented and will only be “whole” again when connected with the memories of his fathers. Such is, in my opinion, the ultimate meaning of Mounsi’s key phrase in the essay: “interlinkages” (“raccords historiques”).

²²⁸ “Il n’est jamais permis à quiconque de dire ces simples mots: ‘Je suis moi’”

²²⁹ “Des rives de la Méditerranée au Territoire d’outre-ville, j’ai patiemment tenté de recoller les morceaux de ma mémoire”

Before finding this intergenerational connection through the literary experience, Mounsi confesses that he sought it through using drugs (a hypnosis-like experience? or at any rate a modified state of conscience). The phrase “pre-history,” in the following quotation, is in this regard especially significant:

“I remember sometimes seeking to forget this obscure and fragmented conscience through using drugs. [...] I would come back from the trip in an ever more terrible state. So, when solitude and anguish were lurking, I would once again ‘leave my body’ and land in a sort of ecstasy. I was doing that just in order to vanish, to flow with the sand inside the timer, and dissolve myself out of the present. I however needed to retrieve my lost days in order to fully measure what my history means –the history of which, as the son of an immigrant, I am both an actor and a witness. But my pre-history is as difficult to decipher as recently dug-out archeological artifacts” (14)²³⁰

Now a writer, Mounsi still holds the “two-generation theory” as a major topic for *Territoire d’outre-ville*. This is confirmed through the fact that it is found in the essay’s very incipit, when Mounsi describes the writing process as a sort of “*recherche du temps perdu*” –not only *his* “lost time,” but also his fathers’ “lost time” (cf. the notion of “interlinkages” [“*raccords historiques*”] understood as “interstice of time”):

²³⁰ “Je me souviens avoir quelquefois cherché à oublier dans les stupéfiants cette conscience obscure et fragmentée. [...] J’en suis revenu enténébré. Ainsi, quand la solitude et l’angoisse me prenaient, alors je m’absentais’ une fois de plus de moi-même, je m’abîmais dans une sorte d’extase. Juste pour m’évanouir, glisser dans le sablier, m’écouler hors du présent. Il fallait pourtant que je retrouve mes jours perdus pour pouvoir pleinement mesurer ce que signifie l’histoire dont je suis, en tant que fils d’immigré, l’acteur et le témoin. Mais ma pré-histoire est aussi difficile à déchiffrer que des objets de fouille”

“To write is to lay down, for a moment, on a piece of paper, one’s internal mess to see if it makes any sense. Time is not a prisoner of clocks or calendars. It runs, or gets lost, within words –some people set off on a journey to find it again. [...] Memories long forgotten resurface, entire scenes and complete situations become present” (13)²³¹

Postcolonial literature, in other words, is necessarily dialogical in the sense of transhistoric –and more particularly *transgenerational*.

3.3 The Politics of Self-Portraiture as a “Banlieue Writer”

Mounsi repeatedly describes himself, self-referentially, as a “writer”: “My point *in this book* is neither to comfort nor to worry anyone but simply to give voice to a fraction of all things seen, experienced or observed” (9, emphasis added),²³² he announces in the “Foreword.” “It took me thirty years to move from the ‘Crimes and delinquency’ section of the newspaper *to the literary section*” (21, emphasis added),²³³ he also writes. “*I write because* human beings are, in the last analysis, a tale of agony –agony in a literal sense, the Greek sense of ‘struggle’ –struggle with words and through words” (71),²³⁴ he adds.

²³¹ “Écrire, c’est juste tenter de déposer un moment son désordre sur cette page afin de voir si cela a un sens quelconque. Le temps n’est pas enfermé dans les montres ni dans les calendriers, il court dans les mots, ou se perd, et certains hommes partent à sa recherche. [...] Des souvenirs depuis longtemps oubliés reparaissent, des scènes entières et des situations complètes deviennent présentes”

²³² “Mon propos dans ce livre n’est ni de reconforter ni d’inquiéter mais simplement de dire une part des choses vues, vécues ou observées”

²³³ “J’ai mis trente ans pour passer de la page des faits divers à la page littéraire”

²³⁴ “Si j’écris, c’est que tout homme est un récit d’agonie, agonie au sens premier, au sens grec, c’est-à-dire de ‘lutte,’ avec et par les mots”

This abundance of self-characterization is, in my opinion, significant, for it harks back to Mounsi's initial paradox. We have seen earlier that Mounsi had a paradoxical relationship to the "French" language, in that he, on the one hand, defended the assimilation of immigrants into the "French" polity through their assimilation of said "French" language, while, on the other hand, he also valued variations in their own right, i.e. "accents." He was thus both participating in the archipolitical phenomenon *and* resisting it.

Such claims, it can be argued, (pro- and anti-archipolitical claims) had been made from the point of view of an abstract, general, "disembodied" relationship with the "French" language. It is now most interesting that the same paradox continues to be very salient when it comes, for Mounsi, to discuss his status as a "banlieue writer." Defining himself not only as a "banlieue writer," but also as either an "archipolitical banlieue writer" or on the contrary as an "anti-archipolitical banlieue writer" appears to be very "political" business (in Rancière's sense of "political"). Quite strikingly, there are passages in which Mounsi readily describes himself as fully "archipolitical," and others when he on the contrary affirms his "anti-archipolitical" difference. It thus seems that an ambiguous definition of postcolonial "banlieue literature" emerges, where such literature *in order to exist* would need to be "archipolitical" to some extent, while also, to another extent, needing to be absolutely, resolutely "anti-archipolitical," otherwise it would not be "banlieue literature" any more.

One way through which Mounsi defines postcolonial "banlieue literature" as "archipolitical" is by presenting it as completely "dialogical" with canonical "French" literature. Mounsi thus narrates (60 sq) the birth of his own vocation as a writer by relating it to his discovery, while imprisoned for delinquency, of the verses of the famous "*French*" medieval poet, François Villon. Villon, for his part, is said to have composed his *Ballade des Pendus* while

also in prison, awaiting his judgement and possibly execution after committing crimes, which is a detail likely to have drawn Mounsi to such reading at that particular time. This parallel between Villon and himself is made especially explicit in *Territoire d'outre-ville*:

“I never stop wanting to understand this territory where I lose myself and find myself again. In the calm space of the white page, there is no trace of violence in my entire being any more. The grey water of the Seine River flows in my eyes, washing away the entire city of Paris. [...] And [as I re-read Villon’s *Balade des Pendus*], each word rolls out of my mouth *in exactly the same way*, I am sure, as it did come out of Villon’s heart” (124, emphasis added)²³⁵

With the sentence “In the calm space of the white page, there is no trace of violence in my entire being any more,” it does seem in effect that the previously discussed “shout” has disappeared, as though the archipolitics had won and the anti-archipolitics had been tamed, thanks to some would-be therapeutic virtue of literature.

More broadly still, Mounsi interestingly transfers aforementioned postcolonial violence (cf. “violent acts”) from “reality” to literature. He *inscribes* it into literature, and more specifically into what he portrays as a distinctly “*French*” literary tradition –thus, in a way, *circumscribing* this postcolonial violence and neutralizing it. This movement, incidentally already begun with the simile between himself-the-delinquent and Villon-the-criminal, finds its fulfillment through the explicit comparison between immigrant “violent acts” and “*very French*” nineteenth-century *literary* (novelistic) behavior –with implicit references to masterpieces of

²³⁵ “Je ne cesse de vouloir comprendre ce territoire où je me perds et me rejoins. Dans le calme de la page blanche, toute violence a disparu de mon être. L’eau grise de la Seine roule dans mes yeux emportant Paris tout entier. [...] Et chaque mot glisse de ma bouche de la même façon, j’en suis sûr, qu’il est sorti du cœur de Villon”

“French” literature, such as, Jean Valjean’s stealing of bread and struggle with Javert, his police nemesis, in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*:

“The links between young Arabs and the judicial institution are, in many ways, reminiscent of nineteenth-century novels. [...] For a child who grew up in a ghetto, the first rebellion always expresses itself through crime. Extreme poverty [la misère], this old proletarian disease, is what governs all his actions. [...] I remember being hungry. [...] I stole and had my reasons for it. I do not see however why I should spend time explaining why I stole –the reality of this world provides ample explanation for it. Honesty too is a luxury [...]” (59)²³⁶

Even logically sound, well-meaning sentences, meant to refuse racist interpretations of “delinquency figures” (in French media discourse, “*les chiffres de la délinquance*”) trying to show a link between so-called “foreignness of origins” and criminality, involuntarily end up reducing the singularity of postcolonial immigrant experience, which Mounsi had taken great pains demonstrating through his “two-generation theory”:

“Of all life stages, adolescence is the most complex, incomprehensible one. Adults, although they were teenagers once, will never be able to

²³⁶ “Les liens entre les jeunes arabes et l’institution judiciaire ressemblent, par bien des côtés, à un roman du XIX^e siècle. [...] Pour un enfant qui a grandi dans le ghetto, la première révolte se manifeste toujours par un délit. La misère, cette vieille maladie prolétarienne, commande tous ses actes. [...] Je me souviens d’avoir eu faim [...]. J’ai volé et j’avais mes raisons pour cela. Je n’éprouve pas cependant le besoin de me justifier: la réalité de ce monde en rend compte plus qu’il ne faut. L’honnêteté aussi est un luxe [...]”

really understand a teenager. Folly has always been, throughout human history, a characteristic of the youth” (58)²³⁷

Hence, there is no reason why, in media discourse, “les jeunes” should be a politically correct way of referring to “les jeunes Arabes.” The youth is the youth –totally and absolutely the “*French*” youth, as though there was, unproblematically indeed, no outside of “France.”

Integration into the “French” archipolity through literature (both the reading of literature and, in the case of “banlieue writers,” the writing of literature) is presented as an important solution to postcolonial problems. Mounsi, just like Azouz Begag and Abd al Malik will, thus sounds here most conventional –understandably, since “equality” is missing– in his defense of the “French” equalizing educational system:

“For a long time, I lived in a world devoid of words –a world of illiterates. The banlieue did give me slang, this middle term between thug language and French language, actually half-way between the insult and actual language. Reading was the only durable *act of resistance* which I could oppose to this society during my youth” (70, emphasis added)²³⁸

²³⁷ “L’adolescence est l’âge le plus complexe, le plus incompréhensible qui soit. Un adulte ne peut jamais vraiment comprendre un adolescent, quand bien même il en a été un lui aussi. La vertu de la jeunesse fut de tout temps la folie”

²³⁸ “Longtemps, j’ai vécu dans un monde privé de mots, un monde d’analphabètes. La banlieue m’a donné l’argot, ce moyen terme entre le voyou et le français, entre l’insulte et la langue. Lire est le seul acte de résistance tenace que j’aie pu opposer à cette société durant ma jeunesse”

Therefore, “reading and assimilating canonical French literature,” which could have been interpreted in another context as an “act of compliance” vis-à-vis the archipolitics, is here felt by Mounsi as an “act of resistance.”²³⁹

Despite all of these conscious or unconscious statements *in favor* of the archipolitics, it must be noted that, at the very same time, like the other face of the coin, *singularity* –the anti-archipolitics– is also foregrounded by Mounsi, and very strongly so, in relation to language *and literature*.

While, indeed, the author is thankful to the “French” educational system for acquainting him with “words,” “French words,” thus opening up the (“French”) world for him, the act of reading is an *individual* act, perhaps initiated by school and at school, but largely individual. Mounsi, then, precisely as an individual, became a writer, which allows him to pronounce this extremely powerful, eminently postcolonial, statement:

“For a long time I was named, but today it is my turn to name” (20)²⁴⁰

²³⁹ This notion of “acte de résistance” is further reinforced by the concept of “transgression” in the following quotation: “We must fight, with words, in order to demystify the strength of prejudice. [...] *The true transgression*, for the ghetto youth, *is to appropriate themselves language*. Granted, it is with their claws that they are fighting right now, and with both hands. But the time of fingers will come –fingers to write, paint, sculpt, and draw! All human beings do have a form of culture; however violence is deemed to be the only language which [banlieue youth] knows. Is it right to assume that these children are all nature and have no culture, and will never have?” –“Nous devons nous battre avec les mots pour démystifier la force des préjugés. [...] La véritable transgression, pour un enfant du ghetto, consiste à s'approprier la langue. Certes, pour l'instant, c'est avec les griffes qu'ils se battent, à deux mains. Mais le temps des doigts d'écrivains, de peintres, de sculpteurs, de dessinateurs viendra! Tout être humain comporte du culturel: on ne leur reconnaît que la violence comme unique langage. Peut-on reléguer ces enfants dans les limbes de la nature ‘non culturisable’?” (81, emphasis added). This quotation takes up again the idea, earlier mentioned, that young immigrants may “today” express themselves through “violent acts,” but will “tomorrow” use “words” and “meaning.” Mounsi is somewhat dangerously flirting here with right-wing ideas of “immigrant youth” being “des petits sauvages” (cf. “claws”) and relies on notions of “horizon” and “perfectibility” which might not be satisfactory to voters voting in the “here and now” of political (non-humanistic) urgency. Significantly, Mounsi broadens his scope in this quotation, as we not only pass from violence to written expression, but to *artistic* expression at large. About “fingers to draw instead of claws to fight” in the context of the “banlieue,” see the 2011 movie “Fracture,” directed by Alain Tasma

²⁴⁰ “Longtemps je fus nommé, aujourd’hui je nomme à mon tour”

More will be said, in the next section, about “the politics of naming” in the “French” postcolonial setting; for now, let it suffice to say that Mounsi’s *Territoire d’outre-ville* is certainly, profoundly, a piece of “anti-archipolitical,” “accented,” “banlieue literature” in that it reserves itself the right to *name* racism when it sees it, the right to metaphorically “shout” racism’s name, regardless from and independently from the “French equality discourse”:

“I went to school just enough to learn spelling, reading and how to count up to a thousand. Then I thought that was enough. So many times, I had had to *endure the aggressivity* contained in the look of some school masters, *everyday racism* and tensions resulting from the war” (57, emphases added)^{241 242}

Mounsi similarly calls the “banlieue” “banlieue” and *freely* describes it. The next quotation thus explicitly draws upon the first meaning of *Territoire d’outre-ville* (“outre” = “beyond”), which implies *separation* in a quasi-*apartheid* sense:

²⁴¹ “L’école, je l’ai fréquentée juste le temps d’apprendre l’orthographe, la lecture, et le temps de savoir compter jusqu’à mille. Après, j’ai eu le sentiment que cela suffisait. Tant de fois, il m’avait fallu supporter l’agressivité contenue dans certains regards d’instituteurs, le racisme quotidien, la tension de la guerre”

²⁴² Mounsi does not hesitate to criticize “French” schooling for its *de facto* exclusionary practices. Drawing upon an unverified etymology of the word “delinquency,” he writes: “The etymology of the Latin word *deliquere*, i.e. ‘to abandon,’ reminds us of the profound meaning of delinquency. At [school], [...] in the first row, right in front of the schoolmaster’s desk, all the good students were lined up, very attentive. As for us, we were already a lost cause” – “L’étymologie du mot latin *deliquere*, ‘abandonner,’ rappelle le sens profond de la délinquance. A [...] l’école, [...] au premier rang, juste devant l’estrade où il y avait le bureau du maître, tous les bons élèves étaient là, alignés, bien sages. Nous, nous étions déjà ailleurs” (69-70)

Compare with the importance of “where, in which row, you sit in class” in Azouz Begag’s *Le Gone du Chaâba*

“All things considered, my life found its definition on the fecund wasteland of the banlieue, precisely *where*, in an apparent paradox, *the City stops*” (21, emphasis added)²⁴³

“In Nanterre, in the projects of Big Daisies [cité des Marguerites] and Little Daisies [cité des Pâquerettes], between low-income housing and wastelands, children did not thrive in an environment of floral harmony” (55)²⁴⁴

Hence a *language of truth* regarding the “banlieue” and its atmosphere of dereliction and despair:

“Handcuffs at least mean that you are actually going somewhere, which is always better than where you have been” (105)²⁴⁵

“Very few drug addicts consume cocaine. It is cocaine which consumes them” (106)^{246 247}

²⁴³ “Ma vie aura trouvé sa définition sur le terrain vague fertile de la banlieue, là où, paradoxe apparent, la Ville s’arrête”

²⁴⁴ “A Nanterre, cité des Marguerites, cité des Pâquerettes, entre HLM et terrains vagues, les enfants ne baignaient pas dans une harmonie florale”

²⁴⁵ “Les menottes, ça veut dire qu’on t’emmène quelque part, et c’est toujours mieux que là où tu es”

²⁴⁶ “Très peu de drogués consomment la came. C’est la came qui les consomme”

²⁴⁷ This theme is also prominent in the lyrics of Mounsi’s “proto-rap.” The 1985 song “Came-Kaze” plays on the words “came” (“drug”) and “kamikaze” (“suicidal”) to call attention on the extreme dangers of drug-taking. In “Seconde Génération,” he associates “la poudre” (“powder,” i.e. cocaine) with deadly “poison”: “Cleopatras these days // Do not sting themselves with a snake any more // Cocaine is their poison // That’s the second generation” – “Mais les Cléopâtre de mon temps // Ne se piquent plus au serpent // La poudre est leur poison // C’est la seconde génération” (11). Compare with Abd al Malik’s treatment of the same topic

“I can see in the lives of these young people a reflection of my own
biography.

V like Ville

V like Vénissieux, Vaulx-en-Velin

V like Vitry

V like Vol, like Vitrines,²⁴⁸ like Violence” (20)²⁴⁹

“In certain places, violence has become like these bizarre machines used
to test chemical reactions in extreme conditions –just to see, as chemists
would say, how far we can go” (106-107)^{250 251}

“But on this earth everything became indifferent to the fate of humans.

Democracy itself is making no progress. It is eating up the weak, and does
not seem to get tired of this cannibalistic ritual” (56)²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Through the play on sonorities between “Vitry” (a “banlieue” a few miles south from Paris) and “Vitrines” (shop windows), Mounsi is also conducting a criticism of modern-day consumerism and its impact on young impressionable youth: “On display at the store, objects seem to be laid out so as to purposefully suggest and encourage theft [...]. Excluded from a consumer society which defines being by having [l’être par l’avoir], today’s youth, like yesterday’s youth, want to ‘have’ in order to ‘be.’ However the normal modes of appropriation are refused to them. Theft grants them a relative and temporary ‘being’” –“Dans les vitrines, les objets paraissent disposés de manière à suggérer le vol, à l’engendrer [...]. Exclue d’une société de consommation qui définit l’être par l’avoir, des gamins d’aujourd’hui encore veulent avoir pour être. Or les modes normaux d’appropriation leur sont refusés. Le vol leur concède un être relatif et provisoire” (59). These notions of collective responsibility and duality between “être” and “avoir” will be equally central in the thought of Abd al Malik

²⁴⁹ “Je vois dans la vie de ces jeunes un reflet de ma propre biographie. V comme Ville // V comme Vénissieux, Vaulx-en-Velin // V comme Vitry // V comme Vol, comme Vitrines, comme Violence”

²⁵⁰ “En certains lieux, la violence devient semblable à un instrument bizarre dont on apprend l’usage au travers d’expériences extrêmes, pour voir, comme disent les chimistes”

²⁵¹ Note that just like in Abd al Malik, “violence” is a bicephalous monster, with one head being youth violence and the other head, just as ugly, being police violence: “For two types of violence are simultaneously present in the heart of the street: on the one hand, that of the institution, of the modern State, the police, and, on the other hand, that of the ruthless delinquents [‘casseurs’] –with the difference between the two forms of violence being actually incredibly blurry” –“Car deux espèces de violence sont présentes simultanément au cœur de la rue: celle de l’institution, de l’Etat moderne, de la police, et celle des ‘casseurs’ et cela dans un mélange presque hallucinant” (101)

In this dreary list of calamities, even a change of style, when Mounsi parodically switches to a fantastic, “oriental” style reminiscent of “the legend of the Thief of Bagdad” –“la légende du voleur de Bagdad” (113), is not able to remove the dreariness of the postcolonial situation. As though by magic, like the mouth to Ali Baba’s cave opening itself on the words “open sesame”:

“Prison doors seem to open by themselves as they [the second-generation youth immigrants] walk by,”²⁵³

The use of graffiti, already hinted at as a form of “shout,” is here definitely more particularly associated with a “shout of pain” –and, significantly because Mounsi just advocated for the spread of the “French language” as a tool of integration, graffiti however is allowed to be a “*non-French*,” i.e. anti-archipolitical, type of expression:

“The walls of the ghetto, one after the other, began to tell me [...] stories written *in the language of the place*, [...] in this jerky calligraphy which is now characteristic of the cityscape –graffiti tags, [...] the trace of more suffering than I could have ever imagined” (109, emphasis added)²⁵⁴

Even though statements for and against the archipolitics keep mingling and being somewhat disorderly entangled in *Territoire d’outre-ville*, it does nonetheless seem that, on the whole, if we look at the “majoritarian voice” and tone of the essay, Mounsi seems to gradually

²⁵² “Mais sur la terre tout est devenu indifférent au sort des humains. La démocratie aussi tourne en rond, elle mange les plus faibles, et ne semble pas s’épuiser dans ce rituel cannibale”

²⁵³ “Les portes des maisons d’arrêt semblent s’ouvrir d’elles-mêmes sur leur passage”

²⁵⁴ “Les murs des quartiers, l’un après l’autre, se sont mis [...] à me raconter des histoires écrites dans la langue des lieux, [...] dans cette calligraphie heurtée qui dessine désormais le paysage urbain: les tags, [...] la trace de plus de souffrance que je n’aurais imaginé qu’il pût en exister”

turn away from the archipolitics –towards the anti-archipolitics. The following quotation, for instance, could hardly sound more Rancierian:

“French people should, at long last, recognize the *reciprocity of languages and utterances*, so that those who are named, defined and circumscribed by words may, in turn, say what they think about themselves and others. *Shared ability to speak* [le verbe partagé] remains the best medium for *supreme equality*” (20, emphases added)²⁵⁵

Territoire d’outre-ville becomes a sort of manifesto in defense of the right of “immigrant culture” to exist and be recognized as legitimate without being labeled as “low culture” as opposed to a “French-native” culture which would be “high culture.” This manifesto, thus, takes the form of a sort of *Anti-Distinction*, in reference to Bourdieu’s *Distinction*:

“My relationship with art was never a premeditated one [un rapport réfléchi], but it always relied on chance encounters and the sensation felt in the face of the unexpected. This, which I call the ‘enchanted attitude of the naïve,’ has *nothing to do with the refined taste of the aesthetic elite*” (75, emphasis added)²⁵⁶

Balancing, out of necessity, as we saw, between archipolitics and anti-archipolitics, postcolonial “banlieue literature” as understood by Mounsi, in the last analysis, must lean more

²⁵⁵ “Il faudrait enfin que les Français admettent la réciprocité des langues et des paroles afin que ceux qui sont nommés, définis, circonscrits de mots puissent à leur tour dire ce qu’ils pensent d’eux-mêmes et des autres. Le verbe partagé demeure le moyen de l’égalité suprême”

²⁵⁶ “Je n’ai jamais vécu dans un rapport réfléchi avec l’art, mais dans une espèce de sensation qui me venait du hasard et me touchait toujours d’une façon inattendue. C’est ce que je nomme l’émerveillement des naïfs, qui n’a rien à voir avec le goût raffiné des esthètes”

towards the anti-archipolitics in order to be really “banlieue literature.” “Banlieue literature” thus stands out as this interesting mixture of “French” and “anti-French.” As Mounsi himself sums up, speaking about his own status as “banlieue writer”:

“No real poet can ever be an ‘official’ poet. The most terrible danger, for culture, is ‘state culture’ –dead by definition” (63)²⁵⁷

This conclusion takes on a special resonance as Mounsi still further makes his point –his anti-archipolitical point–, now using a “film metaphor” designed to make the theme of “accent” even more apparent.

3.4 Film/Media as Metaphor and Reality of the Archipolitics

While Mounsi, as we have seen, is keen on examining, in *Territoire d’outre-ville*, the emergence of “banlieue literature” as indeed *creation* of “accent” in its two dimensions of both linguistic and discourse variation, what he is *also* most concerned about is “[the *losing/erasure* of one’s original accent]” in the face of “French” cultural hegemony; in short, Mounsi denounces “French” hegemonic cultural politics.

The centrality of the theme of *accent* is obviously salient in the lyrics of the proto-rap song “Seconde Génération,” which, inserted at the beginning of *Territoire d’outre-ville*, sets the tone for the entire piece. In the middle, indeed, of a depiction of the “banlieue/ghetto” which reimagines said “banlieue” as a “synesthetic” blend of dreary Parisian reality with fantasized

²⁵⁷ “Aucun poète digne de ce nom ne peut être ‘officiel.’ Le danger le plus terrible, c’est toujours la culture d’Etat, morte par essence”

Egyptian scenery (“the Seine River” // “the Nile River,” “the projects [HLM]” // “the pyramids”...), Mounsi writes –and sings– this remarkable line:

“And even the thief of Baghdad // Would lose his Arabic accent” (11)²⁵⁸

Although the signifier “thief” could well be part of the lexical field of delinquency otherwise present in the song (e.g. “hold-up” –“braquer une banque”–, 12) and thus refer to the general phenomenon of delinquency on the part of young people of immigrant descent as a sign of postcolonial discontent, I however put forward that what Mounsi is aiming at here is the *entire syntagm* “thief of Baghdad” *as a reference to the cultural politics* at work in one specific cultural product –and metonymically, through this example, a reference to “French” cultural politics in general.

The specific cultural product in question, as the syntagm indicates, is the movie titled by the same name, *Le Voleur de Bagdad* –*The Thief of Baghdad*–, in its successive 1924, 1940, 1961 and 1978 avatars. Considering, for example, the American 1978 peplum-like TV version by British director Clive Donner, it is a notable fact indeed, that all of the main characters, from Prince Taj to the Khalif or Princess Yasmina, *when dubbed in French for the French version, were made to all pronounce the “French” language in a “most-French” (extremely standard “French”) fashion*; the only characters which are made to speak an “accented French” (excessively “accented French” to boot) are the *alien* wooers to Princess Yasmina, for example the Mongolian Prince, in order to semiotically signify their foreignness/unsuitedness and foreshadow the fact that they, unlike Prince Taj, are not a right match for Princess Yasmina.

²⁵⁸ “Et même le voleur de Bagdad // Perdrat son accent arabe”

In other words, what Mounsi underlines is the fact that although the movie could not possibly be more Arabia/Arabic-themed, *no* Arabic people, in very concrete terms, were hired to dub the movie into “French,” hence a definite (deliberate or semi-unconscious) *erasure of accent* very noticeable in this particular movie.²⁵⁹ This, according to Mounsi, is in turn metaphorically symptomatic of the exclusion of immigrants in postcolonial “French” culture and society at large.

The theme of “the movie/the media world as a metaphor of society” is continued by Mounsi in several ways. First of all, Mounsi stresses the absence/invisibility of immigrants in the media in general. He interprets this absence as a larger will of “French” society to “not see” its immigrant population, along the lines of some collective instinctual “*cachez-ces-immigrés-que-je-ne-saurais-voir*” (it is due to this attitude that when Harry Roselmack, first Black anchorman in France, first presented the *Journal Télévisé* or “French News” prime time on a major channel, TF1, in 2006, this could be described as an “event”).

This enables Mounsi to further diagnose the archipolitics as an explicitly *racist* tool of totalitarian political and cultural domination which literally *forbids* the expression of “real difference”:

“It is a well-known fact that, in [French] society, everything may not be said, everything may not be talked about [...] –everyone, in short, may not talk about everything. Only certain ideas are authorized just like only

²⁵⁹ While the same criticism could theoretically be directed at the original American version in the English language as well (hence leading to a criticism of *western* cultural politics and not just “French” cultural politics), in that sense that the actors, supposed to play the roles of Arabian characters, do in fact equally speak in a “most English fashion” without any trace of Arabic accent, the specificity of France’s postcolonial situation must be noted: American postcoloniality is different from French postcoloniality, and the translation of the movie into the French context required different artistic means

certain people are authorized to be doctors [il y a un ordre des idées comme il y a un ordre des médecins]. The only way the stranger may be integrated (or at least *apparently* integrated) into the [French] polity is by submitting without conditions [extrême soumission] to the common rites of this society” (19)²⁶⁰

Mounsi thus strongly criticizes France’s absolutist, or achipolitical, “will-to-*integrate*” without respecting the individual’s “*integrity*”/singularity.²⁶¹ Within the French archipolity, in sum, “the only good stranger is a dead stranger,” meaning dead to his former self and identity. In a series of very strong statements, Mounsi adds:

“The television, the radio, or the press, are not places where the stranger [the stranger as stranger] is welcome, but excluded” (ibid)²⁶²

“No difference-affirming utterance is ever relayed or listened to” (ibid)²⁶³

“The prerequisite in order to be ‘integrated’ is to recognize [French] truths and conform to validated [French] values” (ibid)²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ “Dans la société, on sait bien qu’on n’a pas le droit de tout dire, qu’on ne peut pas parler de tout dans n’importe quelles circonstances, que n’importe qui, enfin, ne peut pas parler de n’importe quoi. Il y a un ordre des idées comme il y a un ordre des médecins. Seule une extrême soumission aux rites communs de cette société peut conférer à l’étranger un apparent droit de cité”

²⁶¹ cf. “I refuse both *intégration* and *intégrisme* [fundamentalism]. I however plead for integrity, i.e. being neither this or that, but this *and* that and even more [toute chose]” –“Je refuse et l’intégration et l’intégrisme. Je revendique l’intégrité, c’est-à-dire être ni ceci ni cela mais toute chose” (123-124). To be related to Abd al Malik’s contention that *désintégration* [destruction] is *intégration*’s negative close relative

²⁶² “La télévision, la radio, la presse écrite ne sont pas des lieux où s’exercent à son endroit le partage, mais un principe d’exclusion”

²⁶³ “Aucune parole qui affirme une différence n’est jamais recueillie ni écoutée”

“Taboos [des interdits], limiting dams [des barrages], and thresholds of tolerance [des seuils de tolérance] have been put in place in order to contain and master the most *dissimilar* part of this generation” (ibid, emphasis added)²⁶⁵

“It is as though there was a deliberate will to erase the people of this generation from [French] thought and [French] language –despite the fact that [French] thought and language definitely have been marked by them” (ibid)²⁶⁶

This “elimination” gives rise to a sense of profound injustice, highlighted through the parallelism “more and more present//more and more absent” in the next quotation:

“The youth of immigrant descent are more and more present in society and more and more absent in culture. The invisibility of which they are the victims is significant. They are active, leading actors in everyday life and, in the reality as depicted by all art forms –films, books, etc...–, they find themselves relegated to the rank of extras. One day, they will have to reappropriate for themselves their own image [...] and deconstruct other people’s judgements against them” (78)²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ “La condition requise pour être ‘intégré’ est la reconnaissance des mêmes vérités et la conformité aux valeurs validées”

²⁶⁵ “Des interdits, des barrages, des seuils de tolérance et des limites sont disposés de manière que soit maîtrisée la part la plus dissemblable de cette génération”

²⁶⁶ “Tout se passe comme si on avait voulu effacer jusqu’aux marques de son irruption dans la pensée et la langue”

²⁶⁷ “Les jeunes issus de l’immigration sont de plus en plus présents dans la société et de plus en plus absents dans la culture. L’invisibilité dont ils sont victimes est significative. Ils sont acteurs et premiers rôles dans le quotidien et ils

This last quotation is interesting because it demonstrates that, paradoxically, in the context of the archipolitics, one may be technically “present,” as the quotation says, “in all art forms –films, books, etc...–” *and yet* still be “absent” and “invisible.”

The motifs of “dubbing” and “translation,” indeed, which denote the action of coarsely going over the original version, masking and erasing (making invisible) the original difference and true alterity, serve to denounce the archipolity’s propensity to remove both “accents” (sociolinguistic accents) and “accent” (true alterity).

For Mounsi, this tension between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, is valid both in the media and in society (what is happening in the media being sadly a symbol, a metaphor, of the state of society):

“In each and every film in which this youth [of immigrant descent] appears, they are taste-less, *accent-less*, without any possibility to be themselves. *In real life as in movie life*, the young Arab is never called to play the role of the beloved; as we say in theater, ‘he doesn’t fit the character’” (79, emphases added)²⁶⁸

Hence:

se retrouvent figurants dans leur réalité dans les films, dans les livres, dans tout ce qui touche à l’art. Un jour, il leur faudra investir totalement l’image qu’on a d’eux, explorer cette perception et, finalement, déconstruire les jugements que l’on porte sur eux”

²⁶⁸ “Dans chaque film où ces jeunes apparaissent, ils sont sans odeur, sans accent, sans possibilité d’être eux-mêmes. Dans la vie comme au cinéma, le jeune Arabe ne sera jamais appelé à jouer le rôle de l’aimé: comme on dit au théâtre, ‘il n’est pas le personnage’”

“Our lives in original version have nothing in common with the dubbed version which we are presented with –translated speeches have nothing in common with the people who are actually speaking” (18)²⁶⁹

And:

“In the ‘dubbed’ movies produced by French society, strangers are always badly translated. [...] But these figures are only a bad imitation of ourselves –a mimickry devoid of any truth” (ibid)²⁷⁰

These last quotations still need to be unpacked, for in addition to exploring the discursive visibility/invisibility dichotomy, they also importantly move from the issue of invisibility strictly speaking to that of representation and misrepresentation, in ways very much reminiscent of the power dynamics described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, notably Said’s emphasis on “*le parler-pour*.” Again, in the quotation above, immigrants are *not* “invisible in the media” any longer, but their visibility “in all art forms –films, books, etc...–” is unfavorably distorted, according to Mounsi: “[...] in all art forms –films, books, etc...–, they find themselves relegated to the rank of extras. One day, they will have to reappropriate for themselves their own image [...] and deconstruct other people’s judgements against them.”

Regarding the “[relegation] to the rank of extras” aspect, we have seen in more detail Mounsi’s point of view when he explained that “[...] in real life as in movie life, the young Arab is never called to play the role of the beloved; as we say in theater, ‘he doesn’t fit the character’.”

²⁶⁹ “La version originale de nos vies n’a rien à voir avec la version sous-titrée qu’on présente: les paroles traduites n’ont rien à voir avec les personnes qui parlent”

²⁷⁰ “Dans le ‘doublage’ produit par la société française, les étrangers sont toujours mal traduits. [...] Mais ces figures sont une imitation de nous-mêmes. Une singerie sans vérité”

This was certainly true, by and large, in the 1980-1990s, at the time when Mounsi wrote *Territoire d'outre-ville*, although arguably somewhat exaggerated. The 1985 *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, by Mehdi Charef, is good case in point. Considered one of the first “beur movies,” this is a film about “aimless wandering” in the “banlieue” and its final scene shows a police van rushing towards Majid, one of the characters, police officers picking him up from where he was sitting down, and the police van rushing away. On the one hand, then, Mounsi is right in saying that “the young Arab [is not playing] the role of the beloved”; on the other hand, though, the pathetic register which is used throughout the movie is meant to definitely arouse the public’s sympathy. The same can be said about the 1987 *L’œil au beur(re) noir*, Malik Chibane’s 1993 *Hexagone* or his 1995 *Douce France*, for example. My point, in remarking that “the young Arab” (Sami) *does* “play the role of the beloved” in a more recent movie such as Gabriel Julieu-Laferrière’s 2009 *Neuilly Sa Mère!*, (the final scene being this time a *kissing scene* between Sami the Algerian French and Marie, a blonde girl) is not to suggest that racism disappeared in twenty-first century France, compared to the 1980s-1990s; *Neuilly Sa Mère!*’s very contents would contradict such hastened conclusion.²⁷¹ Twenty years after the publication of *Territoire d'outre-ville* (1995-2015), the fact that Abd al Malik is still calling for a “*révolution des regards*” to take place is proof that more work obviously still needs to be made until “French” society is completely prejudice-free.

In the above quotation, Mounsi also urges: “One day, they will have to reappropriate for themselves their own image [...] and deconstruct other people’s judgements against them.” This latter part of the quotation is, in Mounsi’s thought, closely linked to the *naming* of “Arabs” as

²⁷¹ The same goes for the 2011 blockbuster *Les Intouchables* in which the character Driss, played by Omar Sy, not only does becomes “loved” by his employer Philippe, but also becomes “loved” by the over 19 million people (a record) who went to the theater to watch the movie

“Beur” in verlan –the naming resulting in a certain “image” of what the “beur” will necessarily look like and be like. As the term “beur” became less and less a term of “self-depiction” and more and more a term used by “other than Beurs” to depict “Beurs,” Mounsi observes that it became perverted and the exact opposite of what it was supposed to be, i.e. a term of empowerment. In 1995, *date of Territoire d’outre-ville*, the butter (le beurre) has thus become rancid:

“In this upside-down world, there is one word which has been distorted from its original meaning, and it seems to me it is high time we put it back in the right order. [One verlan word in particular] has become some sort of trademark; it has been typed and typed and re-typed all over the newspapers’ editorials. It was emphatically enunciated, like a proclamation, even on the very steps of the Élysée palace. It was printed, printed on book covers, and discussed with such seriousness and solemnity as if it had been an overly complex conceptual construct. This word, “Beur,” verlan word for “Arabe,” left us with a bitter, rancid aftertaste, as the term became, for some, an image of which they however ignore the reflection. We can no longer afford to simply shelter behind the antiracists’ banners in order to live” (73)²⁷²

²⁷² “Dans ce monde à l’envers, il y a un mot détourné de son origine, un mot qu’il me semble grand temps de remettre à l’endroit. Parmi les mots de verlan qui, depuis quelque temps, gisaient là, exténués, vidés, ratatinés, il y en a un qui devint une marque déposée. Il fut tapé, inlassablement, à longueur de de feuillets dans les chroniques des journaux. Il fut emphatiquement énoncé, comme une proclamation, jusque sur les marches de l’Élysée. Il fut imprimé, imprimé sur les couvertures de livres, et discuté aussi sérieusement et solennellement que s’il se fût agi d’une élaboration conceptuelle complexe et ardue. On nous a laissé un arrière-goût amer, rance, ce mot ‘Beur,’ ce verlan d’‘Arabe’ dont certains se sont fait une image, mais dont ils ignorent le reflet. Nous ne pouvons plus nous abriter derrière les banderoles des antiracistes pour vivre”

Mounsi continues by referring to “antiracists” as “a certain left” – “une certaine gauche” – (74), “bobos” (bourgeois bohème), and through the coinage “beur-geoisie” (ibid). This coinage, which replaces “bour” by “beur” in “bourgeoisie,” *using* “beur” like a prefix, instead of a self-standing noun in its own right, suggests that certain “bourgeois bien-pensants” have in a way phagocytized or vampirized the term to their own benefit: by helping, they have helped themselves. More shockingly still, Mounsi develops this criticism by associating such antiracists with “the orientalist bourgeoisie of yesterday” – “la bourgeoisie orientaliste de jadis” (ibid)–, a criticism that seems to imply that, in Mounsi’s opinion, even “French” antiracists have mostly stayed in a logic of relationship to the “beur” completely opposite of Glissant’s Relation, but still impregnated by power and domination, the “beur” not being “equal” enough but “needing help.”²⁷³ The reason why some antiracists, then, have become more a part of the problem than part of a solution is because their activism *prevents* “beurs” from taking action by themselves. “French” antiracist activism keeps them in an infantilized stage.

To Mounsi, the 1983 “Marche des Beurs” constituted in this respect a turning point –like a symbolical “*prise d’indépendance*” proper to pave the way towards a distancing from the archipolitics. The “Marche des Beurs,” indeed, represented for “young Arabs” a “coming to awareness” that their identity was fine “*as is*”; “*as Beurs*,” they could make change happen. Now

²⁷³ Mounsi depicts this disconnect in a rather humorous way, in the form of a personal anecdote: “In Nanterre where I lived, one only had to cross the highway to go from the world of scholarly research projects [Université de Nanterre] to the world of the projects” – “À Nanterre où je vécus, il suffisait de traverser la bretelle de l’autoroute pour passer du monde de la recherche et du savoir à celui des cités de transit” (46). The delightful dialogue between a group of these “bobo students” and Mounsi and his friends is here re-told by Mounsi: “‘Do you know Karl Marx?,’ one of them said. [...] ‘And where does your Karl Mars live, in which part of the ghetto?,’ Farid asked. ‘No, no! Karl Marx! 1917!,’ the nerd insisted [...]. ‘Watch out, these guys are cops,’ Majid whispered [...]” – “‘Tu connais Karl Marx?,’ fit l’un d’eux. [...] ‘I’ crèche à quelle cité ton lascar, Karl Mars?,’ demanda Farid. ‘Mais non! Karl Marx! 1917!,’ insista l’intellectuel [...]. ‘C’est des keufs, ces keumés,’ murmura Majid [...]” (48-49)

visible, audible and perceptible, they were able to bring “accent” to “French society,” and be an anti-homogeneous, anti-archipolitical force –a “democratic” force in Rancière’s sense:²⁷⁴

“Up until this mass demonstration through which the youth of immigrant descent acquired, in the French people’s eyes, a form of humanity which will lead, a few months later, to the image of the ‘Beur’ teenager, our history had been imprisoned in invisibility. The participants in the March obtained [...] a dignity which the then government would have had a hard time granting them. They were the only source of their own strength”

(76)²⁷⁵

Mounsi encapsulates the power of such “accent” –the reality of this newfound visibility– in a magnificent phrase:

²⁷⁴ Just like, however, we saw that “postcolonial banlieue literature” necessarily consisted in a *compromise* of sorts between archipolitics and anti-archipolitics, the same appears to be true for “Beurs” as a social group: while in a way their “Marche des Beurs” did indeed contribute to make them visible and undoubtedly “bring accent” to “French” society, *pragmatically*, of course, they needed to claim allegiance in some ways to the archipolitics, as the following quotation shows: “Would their aspirations finally be taken into account? Job training, employment, schooling, housing, a more active participation in local politics, and the right to vote for immigrants? *They claimed their integration to the values of the Republic*; that is, the possibility for them of being ‘fully French’ [des Français à part entière], instead of being ‘fully excluded from the French’ [des Français à part]” –“Allait-on prendre en compte leurs aspirations: la formation, l’emploi, l’école, le logement, une participation plus active aux affaires de la cité, le droit de vote aux immigrés? Ils revendiquaient l’intégration aux valeurs de la République: c’est-à-dire la possibilité d’être des Français à part entière, et non des Français à part” (77, emphases added)

²⁷⁵ “Jusqu’à cette marche grâce à laquelle les jeunes issus de l’immigration acquièrent aux yeux des Français une forme d’humanité qui débouchera, quelques mois plus tard, sur l’image de l’adolescent ‘Beur,’ notre histoire a été enfermée dans l’invisibilité. Les marcheurs de 1983 ont retiré de ce qu’ils défendaient une dignité que le gouvernement de l’époque eût été bien en peine de leur conférer. Leur force, ils la tenaient d’eux seuls”

“Here I am, in this France celebrating the two-hundred year-anniversary of the Rights of Man –here *I am like the transparent pyramid in the middle of the Louvre’s main courtyard*” (75, emphasis added)²⁷⁶

Given the context, the “I” in the quotation refers both to Mounsi as an individual, Mounsi as an individual member of the Beur group, and Mounsi as a literary author of postcolonial “banlieue” literature. While the “transparent” aspect of the pyramid harks back to the “integrity” (as opposed to “purity”) of his identity which he was able to maintain thanks to his adhesion to the anti-archipolitics, “accent” thus stands out as a monument one *cannot* not see –an established reality one cannot do without any longer.

There is one last thing which this final quotation importantly demonstrates. To the question, “Between the archipolitics and the anti-archipolitics, i.e. homogeneity vs. heterogeneity, i.e. real/metaphorical monolingualism vs. real/metaphorical accent, which one is preferable *from the point of view of ‘happiness’* (qua ‘self-realization,’ another word for ‘integrity’)?,” Mounsi provides us here with a clear answer. “The transparent pyramid in the middle of the Louvre’s main courtyard” is a literary image which evidently transpires serenity and “healthy pride” –in the same way that regional identity *à la* Weckmann combats shame vis-à-vis the archipolity and restores post-“*complexe d’infériorité*” human dignity. The “archipolitics,” far from being a removed and abstract model of political philosophy, first and foremost describes processes of mental submission and destruction. The lyrics of Mounsi’s “Seconde Génération” proto-rap song efficiently portray immigrant reality in postcolonial “France” *before* the immigrant’s realization as Rancierian “accent”: “For us [...] the pyramids

²⁷⁶ “Je suis là, dans cette France du bicentenaire des Droits de l’homme, comme la pyramide transparente au milieu de la cour du Louvre”

are the projects // In my Egypt, which is the banlieue // Lots of children are like little Ramses II // Their destiny however has nothing of that of a Pharaoh [...]" (11).²⁷⁷ The contrast with "*I am like the transparent pyramid in the middle of the Louvre's main courtyard*" is complete; "*le vivre-ensemble*," then, is a project of restored dignities living together within a common anti-archipolity.

The next short section seeks to showcase examples of the benefits, for literary criticism, of applying Mounsi's "two-generation theory," within larger Rancierian theory, to contemporary postcolonial "banlieue" literature. While Azouz Begag, for instance, is typically praised by proponents of the archipolitics (usually politicians)²⁷⁸ because of the positive light his literary works cast on "French schooling" for integration/assimilation purposes, it is tempting to disqualify him as "uninteresting" (relative to the archipolitics- antiarchipolitics problematic) for exactly the same reasons. Basing my study on his 2007 children's book *La leçon de francisse* (somewhat more confidential than his much-discussed *Le gone du Chaâba* but with many similarities), I argue, on the contrary, that Azouz Begag's writing, far from being submissively compliant to the "French" archipolitics, demonstrates a sort of "accent" which effectively breaks "national harmony" and makes "France" indeed "political" in Rancière's sense.

²⁷⁷ "Pour nous [...] les pyramides c'est les HLM // En mon Egypte de banlieue // Renaissent des Ramsès II // Qui n'ont rien de pharaons [...]"

²⁷⁸ cf. He was appointed "Ministre de l'Égalité des Chances" in the government of Dominique de Villepin (2005-2007)

3.5 Ventriloquism and Anti-Archipolitical Resistance in Azouz Begag

“The things that are most important for us to say
are not always the things which we proclaim
out aloud”
Mounsi, *Territoire d’outre-ville* (13)²⁷⁹

La leçon de francisse is a short novel “for children” published in 2007 by the publisher Gallimard Jeunesse. From the opening pages, it presents itself as a novel of initiation between a Maghrebi father and his son (narrator-son) living in France. The specific *rite of initiation* through which the child will become a “man,”²⁸⁰ though, has little to do, at first sight, with impressive rites such as the ones described in Camara Laye’s *L’enfant noir* for example.²⁸¹ It is nonetheless impregnated with seriousness and solemnity:

“Yesterday, I became a big boy. It is my father who officially announced it. We were sitting at the table. He took my hand in his and said, in a strange voice, in a mix of French and Arabic: ‘Listen to me carefully, *moufils*, [my son], it is high time you started to walk by yourself in life. Tomorrow morning, you will come with me to the *marchipisse* [flea market].’ I burst into joy”²⁸² (7)

²⁷⁹ “Ce qu’on a de plus important à dire, on ne le proclame pas toujours à haute voix”

²⁸⁰ “I jumped off the bed in a millisecond and stood on my legs –these were now *the legs of a man*” –“J’ai sauté du lit en une demi-seconde pour me retrouver sur *mes nouvelles jambes d’homme*” (12, emphasis added)

²⁸¹ In Camara Laye’s native African (Guinean) community as described by himself, rites of initiation, for boys, involved a night spent outside, blind-folded and surrounded by noises of roaring lions; the taming of one’s fear is what would turn a boy into a man

²⁸² “Hier, je suis devenu grand. C’est mon père qui me l’a annoncé officiellement. À table, il a pris ma main dans la sienne et il a dit d’une étrange manière dans une langue mélangée d’arabe et de français: ‘Ecoute-moi bien *moufils*, il est temps que tu commences à marcher tout seul dans la vie. Demain matin, tu viendras avec moi au *marchipisse*”

This liminal quotation immediately calls attention onto the two main problematics of the novel, which, I argue, will be, on the one hand, the problematic of language and identity (“in a mix of French and Arabic”) and, on the other hand, the problematic of the *marché-aux-puces* (flea market) experience as an important rite of initiation –that is, the relationship between father and son. The main thrust of this section will be to show how using Mounsi’s “two-generation theory” helps to demonstrate the profound ways in which these two problematics are interrelated and why it matters.

Concerning, first, the problematic of language and identity, *La leçon de francisque* was clearly written, chronologically *and* conceptually speaking, in the wake of Azouz Begag’s earlier acclaimed novel, his 1986 *Le gone du Chaâba*. In this previous book, Begag as the author-narrator writes mostly in standard French, this language which he learnt at school, but, interestingly, makes a point to not “Frenchify” or at least overly “Frenchify” the *words spoken* by the older generation, i.e. his father-mother-aunts-and-uncles. This older generation, indeed, may be said to have spoken an oral variation of “French” which could be termed “Arabized French.” Begag calls it “Bouzidian language,” in reference to Bouzid, the narrator’s father in *Le gone du Chaâba*. In an appendix to *Le gone du Chaâba*, Begag thus explains the principles of such language:

“The Arabic language is made of consonants and vowels which do not always have a perfect equivalent in French. There is, for instance, no letter P or V, nor any sound like ON [ɔ̃], IN [ɛ̃], AN [ɑ̃] or U [y]. Once you

master this rule, you will be able to translate and understand without any problem Bouzidian language”²⁸³ (233)

In *Le gone du Chaâba*, entire sentences are thus left “as is” in the text, including the *very last* sentence of the novel, which is thus emphasized. To a “Frenchman” asking him when he might go back to Algeria, Bouzid significantly responds:

“Hou là là! [...] Ci Allah qui dicide ça. Bi titre, j’va bartir l’anni brouchaine, bi titre li mois brouchain”²⁸⁴ (231)

This sentence tells us a lot about language and identity in Begag’s novels. While the sentence “Maybe I’ll leave next year, maybe next month” may semantically suggest that Bouzid, the narrator’s father, does not feel himself as belonging to the “French” “nation” because he is theoretically ready to leave and go back to Algeria, supposedly his true “homeland,” the reader must be sensitive about the ironical dimension of the sentence: given the reality of transnational immigration, “next year or next month” actually means “probably never.” The phrase “Hou là là” by which Begag begins Bouzid’s response incidentally definitely inscribes Bouzid into “Frenchness”; the fathers became “French” by living and working so many years in “France” and are now “French.” The excessively hard work endured by this first generation of immigrants made them a silenced, repressed and oppressed element of society (cf. Mounsi). As a second-generation immigrant French *writer*, Begag now *performatively operates here a major political*

²⁸³ “La langue arabe comporte des consonnes et des voyelles qui n’ont pas toujours de correspondance dans la langue française. Elle n’a, par exemple, pas de lettre P ou V, pas plus que de sons ON, IN, AN ou bien U. Lorsque vous maîtrisez cette règle, vous pouvez traduire et comprendre sans difficulté la phraséologie bouzidienne”

²⁸⁴ In “French”: “Hou là là! C’est Allah qui décide de ça. Peut-être que je vais partir l’année prochaine, peut-être le mois prochain”; in English: “Oh my! Allah is the one who decides about that. Maybe I’ll leave next year, maybe next month”

act through literature: not only does he grant “Frenchness” to this first generation, but even more than “Frenchness,” he grants them “*the right to exist and to be French with an accent*.” I use the word “ventriloquism” because this first generation is finally given the means to speak their accented speech, without restraints, *through* the literature of the second generation.

This French-Arabic “bidentité,” as Nehal Abuelata calls it,²⁸⁵ revealed by the use of “Arabized French,” is, in some ways, eminently non-problematic: Begag calls his appendix to *Le gone du Chaâba* “a guide to understand Bouzidian language” – “guide de la phraséologie bouzidienne” (233 sq, emphasis added), and indeed, this “guide” does contain a few examples of transliterations from Bouzidian language into standard French, but as a matter of fact it mostly *explains*, didactically, what Bouzidian consists in, so that the reader can then *understand* by himself/herself (hence “the rule” mentioned above). De facto, it very quickly becomes very easy to understand, entailing an important process of *familiarization*, hence “sympathization,” through literature, towards the social group embodied by Bouzid, i.e. the first-generation immigrants, aka “the fathers.”

It has become clear, by now, that when Begag, in *La leçon de francisse*, makes the father talk to his son “in a mix of French and Arabic” – actually, in the right order, “a mix of *Arabic and French*”: “une langue mélangée d’arabe et de français” –, what he means is *not* a mix of Arabic language and French language (although some Arabic occurrences do surface),²⁸⁶ but rather what

²⁸⁵ *Identité et Langue Française chez Azouz Begag et Chahdortt Djavann* (39)

²⁸⁶ “‘All right, let’s go to the fruits and vegetables stand,’ my father said *in Arabic* [...]” – “Bon, on va aux fruits et légumes, dit mon père en arabe” (33); it does also seem that *the child, despite living in an archipolitical system, has grown up bilingual*: “*In Arabic*, I whispered him that children under twelve, like me, do not need a bus ticket [...]” – “En arabe, je lui glisse à l’oreille que les enfants de moins de douze ans comme moi ne payent pas le bus” (67). Note however, that unlike words “in a mix of Arabic and French,” words that are totally “in Arabic” are not transcribed into the text. Whether this is because of the power of the archipolitics or because the book is “for children” is up for discussion, unless the reason is both (the French archipolitics does not want children to learn Arabic)

he means is: “Arabized French” (French with an Arabic pronunciation). “*Moufils*” is clearly “*mon fils*” and “*marchipisse*” is clearly “*marché-aux-puces*.”

Unlike what we described about *Le gone du Chaâba*, though, it shall be noticed that, in the case of our liminal quotation, it is *not* the entire sentences which are transcribed into “Bouزيدian French,” but indeed *only* two individual words: “moufils” and “marchipisse.” I argue that the reasons for that are not merely because *La leçon de francisse* is a children’s book meant for a younger public. Begag’s choice to do so, I suggest, reflects the complexity of the Begagian “restoration of the fathers’ dignity through literature” operation.

It is no coincidence, indeed, that one of the two words thus emphasized, “*marchipisse*,” for a “French” reader, or for that matter, for a son who went to a French school and does therefore speak standard French, is a word that contains in it the word “pisse” (i.e. “piss” or “pee-pee”). Hence the son’s initial perplexity:

“Marchipisse? That was the first time I had heard this word. At first, I thought it meant walking [marcher] and peeing [pisser] at the same time, but that was impossible, because in our home, when the family is around, no one ever uses bad language, that brings curse and attracts evil spirits – the kind that wears glasses”²⁸⁷ (8)

To emphasize the word “marchipisse” amounts to emphasizing, in a way, the father’s ignorance and more particularly the father’s ignorance of standard French. Of course, this is done in an amused tone (in the context of a children’s book: how can “evil spirits” wear glasses?).

²⁸⁷ “Marchipisse? C’était la première fois que j’entendais ce mot. Au début je croyais que ça voulait dire marcher et faire pipi en même temps, mais c’était impossible, parce que chez nous on ne dit jamais de gros mots quand on est en famille, ça porte malheur et ça attire les mauvais esprits à lunettes”

Note the irony in the following sentence, where the motif of “ignorance” is transferred from the father to the son whereas clearly the son is less superstitious and knows more French than his father thanks to his experience of French schooling:

“[...] I eventually asked to my father if he could explain the word to me.

He was surprised by my ignorance: ‘Quoi, ti connais pas li marchipisse?’

[‘What, you don’t know what a *marchipisse* is?’] I shook my head. He told me it’s a place where you can buy things *boumarchi* [‘bon marché,’ i.e. ‘cheap’] [...]”²⁸⁸ (8-9, emphasis added)

“[...] [That night, I fell asleep asking myself all sorts of questions]. It was strange to have parents who spoke *a weird kind of French* [un français bizarre] after being in France for twenty years, *but that’s alright*, I got used to it. At first I was afraid that my school teacher would learn about it, but I think he knows now. My father, who is stubborn, claims that he does not need to learn this language [French] because anyway tomorrow he’ll go back to Algeria. *That makes me laugh* –he has said ‘tomorrow’ so many times that, in the meantime, he could have perfectly learnt ‘*le francisse*’ [French], as he says, and even have fun with the imperfect of the subjunctive conjugations and complements of direct object, like me”²⁸⁹ (9-10, emphases added and in original)

²⁸⁸ “[...] J’ai finalement demandé à mon père de m’expliquer ce mot. Il a été étonné de mon ignorance: ‘Quoi, ti connais pas li marchipisse?’ J’ai fait non de la tête. Il a dit que c’était un endroit où on achetait des choses *boumarchi* [...]”

²⁸⁹ “J’ai rabattu la couverture sur moi en me posant des questions. C’étant étrange d’avoir des parents qui parlaient un français bizarre alors qu’ils étaient en France depuis vingt ans, mais c’était comme ça, je m’y étais fait. Au début,

The son's reaction to the father's "ignorance" is, interestingly, ambivalent. On the one hand, the fact that the father does not speak standard French is said to be all right (anti-archipolitical trend), but, on the other hand, the son is also ashamed of his father ("at first I was afraid that my school teacher would learn about it"); his love for grammar (imperfect of the subjunctive conjugations!) signifies the archipolitics. Even though the father is only very gently mocked by the son throughout the book, and never with meanness (cf. "that makes me laugh"), it still remains that the mastery of standard French language acquired through French schooling puts the son in an "unnatural" position of superiority relative to his father –potentially destructive for the father's self-esteem. The title of the novel, *La leçon de francisse*, [the French lesson], thus refers to an illustration of this *a priori* position of superiority, when the son is striving to *teach* French to his father in several dialogues such as this one:²⁹⁰

“‘If one day I win the lottery, we’ll buy a house with central hair.’

‘Air!,’ I correct him [...] scoffingly.

Oï, oï, oï, if my school teacher was hearing that!

‘Air, not hair,’ I try to educate him”²⁹¹ (64)

Begag repeats the same idea twice in a few lines, making “I correct him” directly echo with “I try to educate him”; note that in the French text, the correction has one extra connotation, as it is not between “hair” and “air,” but between “sauvage” [savage] and “chauffage” [heating

j’avais peur de le dire à mon maître d’école, mais maintenant je crois qu’il sait. Mon père, qui a la tête dure, prétend qu’il n’a pas besoin d’apprendre cette langue puisqu’il va retourner en Algérie demain. Ça me fait rire, depuis le temps qu’il dit ‘demain,’ il aurait pu apprendre parfaitement le francisse, comme il dit, et même s’amuser avec les imparfaits du subjonctif et les compléments d’objet direct, comme moi”

²⁹⁰ He later refers to himself as a “French teacher” –“enseignant de français”–, “[a hard job]”: “Une chose est sûre, le métier de chauffeur de train est *plus facile que celui d’enseignant de français*” (72, emphasis added)

²⁹¹ “‘Quand j’i gagne li tierce dans l’ordre, nous achetons une villa avec le sauvage central.’ ‘Chauffage!’, je rectifie [...] en pouffant de rire. Ouille, ouille, ouille, si mon maître d’école entendait ça! ‘Chauffage, pas sauvage,’ je tente de l’éduquer”

system], thus subliminally implying that the father (the savage) needs to be civilized through French. Although the tone is light, the implication is a rather heavy one. At a first level of analysis, the father in *La leçon de francisse* is a humiliated father, since the life lesson (*leçon de vie*) which he wanted to give his son by taking him to the flea market for the first time has been changed into a French language lesson (*leçon de français*) which his son is giving to him. The rite of passage idea seemingly becomes a minor topic which does not even make it into the title of the novel: “the French lesson.”

If studied carefully, this is however not the whole story told by *La leçon de francisse*. The entire diegetic trajectory of the novel needs indeed to be taken into account. This trajectory may be summarized as follows:

- The father takes his son to the flea market in order to teach him how to spend money wisely, negotiate with vendors, be thrifty, and *be a man*; to keep up with the idea of the flea market as rite of initiation, a lexical field of “jungle” and “hunting” is used (27);²⁹² the child is firmly holding his father’s hand for reassurance (21).
- The father is humiliated in front of his son at the flea market, partially because he does not understand all of the vendors’ French language: “[The second-hand shoes vendor] speaks the French from here [from France], and I realize that my

²⁹² e.g. “My father lets his *eagle* eyes roam over the objects of the [vendor] without letting the man’s sales arguments *strike his flanks*. I can sense that what is going on is *highly strategic* [...]. [My father] is *sharpening his claws*” –“Mon père laisse traîner son regard d’aigle sur les objets du monsieur sans prêter le flanc à ses arguments de vente. Je sens que c’est finement stratégique [...]. Mon père affûte ses serres” (30, emphases added). See also the shark and snake metaphors, as well as the fantasy description of Kabyle infants cutting off the umbilical cord from their mothers all by themselves, with their own teeth –and “precious wisdom teeth” to boot (32)

father does not know what ‘to resole’ mean; yet here he is pretending to be a shoe expert”²⁹³ (23).

- The father and son go back home on the bus, empty-handed
- This is when the “French lessons” take place; second seeming humiliation for the father
- In the end, while they are still riding on the bus, the father discloses a bag which he had been hiding from his son’s sight so far. When his son was not looking, he had managed to successfully bargain for the toy which his son always wanted!
Extreme happiness of the son, restored dignity for the father
- *Linguistically speaking as well*, the father’s dignity gets restored as well

It is this latter point which I wish to develop, for it definitely consecrates, in my view, Azouz Begag’s novel as “accented literature.” First of all, it must be noted that even in the dialogue about the “French lesson,” the echo I mentioned was not a perfect one, as, in reality, we passed from “I correct him” to a more nuanced “I *try* to educate him” (emphasis added). This foreshadows the father’s *resistance* to the “lesson” and the fact that he, the father, is going to “have the last word.” Here is, indeed, the rest of the dialogue:

“At this point [...] my father began to talk in a *linguistic cocktail* he only can produce.

‘Ji parle tri bien le francisse, même si ji jami alli à l’icoule!’

‘L’école,’ I correct him.

‘L’icoule!’

²⁹³ “Il parle français d’ici et je me rends compte que mon père ne sait pas ce que veut dire ‘ressemeler,’ mais il fait semblant d’être un expert”

‘No: école! With an é.

‘L’icoule! Le sauvage! Le fromage!

‘Le FROmage!

‘Formage! Voilà.’

Voilà. OK. If you want. He puts his back up. He feels good. He feels like *playing with pronunciations*. It’s Sunday. No cement today. No supervisor. *He speaks French just like he wants to. He is a free man*, he is his own master”²⁹⁴ (64-65, emphases added)

It is very significant, I posit, that the father is ready to respect all of France’s rules, *except for the linguistic ones*. In fact, he is ready to follow all the rules in a hyperbolic way: even though he perfectly knows, thanks to his son, that “children under the age of twelve do not need a bus ticket to ride on the bus” (67), he still asks the bus driver for “*doux tikis*, s’il te plaît” –“two tickets, please”– (69), because, as the son-narrator comments, “[...] he does not want to provide the descendants of Vercingetorix with the slightest pretext for reproach against him, for as long as he lives among them, so, as a result, he is going to luxuriously pay for two tickets, since we are two people” (68).²⁹⁵ Although the son-narrator metonymically and somewhat derisively calls the “two tickets” which his father is holding in his hand “two tickets for integration” –“deux tickets d’intégration”– (70), note that by *not* including himself into the phrase “the descendants of Vercingetorix,” the father does set himself outside of the archipolitics (cf. “nos ancêtres les

²⁹⁴ “Et le voilà qui [...] se met à parler dans un cocktail de langue dont il connaît seul le secret. ‘Ji parle tri bien le francisse, même si ji jami alli à l’icoule!’ ‘L’école!’, je corrige. ‘L’icoule!’ ‘Non: école! avec un é.’ ‘L’icoule! Le sauvage! Le fromage!’ ‘Le FROmage!’ ‘Formage! Voilà.’ Voilà. OK. Si tu veux. Il se cabre. Il est joyeux. Il joue avec les prononciations. C’est dimanche. Pas de ciment aujourd’hui. Pas de contre-maître. Il parle français comme bon lui semble. C’est un homme libre, il est chef de lui-même”

²⁹⁵ “[...] Il ne veut pas que les descendants de Vercingetorix aient quoi que ce soit à lui reprocher au cours de son séjour chez eux, alors il va se payer le luxe d’acheter deux tickets parce que nous sommes deux personnes”

Gaulois” was famously taught in colonial –e.g. Algerian schools– as well). The “social hypercorrectedness” illustrated by this “two ticket-scene” is however quickly contradicted by his *trickster* character *when it comes to language*. Thus, in the following dialogue prompted by the father’s “mistake” of saying “doux tikis, s’il *te* plaît” instead of “doux tikis, s’il *vous* plaît” (emphases added):

“‘What? What did I say wrong, this time? Are you making fun of me?’

‘You said ‘s’il *te* plaît’ to the driver...’

‘Yes, so what? Isn’t that *pouli* [polite]?’

‘No, it is not polite. [...] When you do not know someone, you say ‘vous.’

He pondered for a second, scratching his chin. Then he said, in his Arabo-francisse mix:

‘You are right. One must always stay *pouli* with the French [avec les Francisses] so that they can never have anything against us. Next time I will say to the driver: ‘Doux tickis, vous!’ [...]’

He put his hands back onto his bag to signify that the discussion was closed”²⁹⁶ (71-72)

Of course, “Two tickets, you!” is *not* what is expected in standard French, which creates all together an “écart de langue,” an “écart de langage” and an “écart de comportement.” Hence, the discussion is closed and the novel finishes with the persistence of “accent”; what is more, the father’s resistance to the archipolitics is indissociable from Azouz Begag’s own resistance to the

²⁹⁶ “‘Qu’est-ce que j’ai dit de mal, encore? Tu te moques de moi?’ ‘Tu as dit s’il *te* plaît au chauffeur...’ ‘Oui, et alors? C’est pas *pouli*?’ ‘Non, c’est pas poli. [...] Quand on ne connaît pas quelqu’un, on dit ‘vous’.’ Il réfléchit une seconde en se grattant le menton. Puis il sort un mélange arabo-francisse: ‘Tu as raison. Il faut toujours rester *pouli* avec les Francisses, comme ça ils ont rien à se mettre sous la dent contre nous. La *brouchaine* fois, j’irai au chauffeur: ‘Doux tickis, vous!’ Il repose les mains sur son sac pour clore la conversation”

archipolitics as a second-generation immigrant French author, as we saw through the notion of literary “ventriloquism.” This is ultimately evidenced through the fact that *The French Lesson* as a title chosen *by the author*, after all, is *not* “la leçon de français,” but indeed “la leçon de *francis*se.”

3.6 Conclusion: Literature vs. “Accented Literature,” and Literature as “Accented Language”

A common point between Mounsi and Azouz Begag is that they both “write well”: their sentence structures, as well as word choices, are “harmonious” and “pleasing to the ear.” They undeniably write in “very good French.” Yet, I hope to have demonstrated that, in the perspective of this dissertation, both Mounsi’s writings and Azouz Begag’s novels may be termed “accented literature,” as they in effect powerfully put forward “accent” – “accent” as I have described it in the Introduction, i.e. both in terms of “linguistic variation” *and* “discursive variation” (the affirmation of the possibility of different “Frenchness”). However, it must be noted that while both *really* are, indisputably, “accented literature,” *both however show signs of wanting to integrate “French canonical literature,”* Mounsi through his dialogism with Villon, and Begag through the narrator’s explicit intention, in *La leçon de francisse*, to “become another Jules Verne.” This, I argue, ultimately raises the question of a possible porosity between “accented literature” and “canonical literature” in the French context and, more broadly, thus gestures towards the definition of literature in general.

Regarding, indeed, the phrase “Doux tickis, vous!” in the previous section, this departure from the norm, or discrepancy from expected language, does create a form of humor generated

by the surprise element. “Accent,” it may thus be argued, although of course not always humorous, however definitely brings unique freshness and life into the language. A certain “foreignness” to the language (another possible definition for “accented literature”) is, in other words, *what enables poetry/language creativity*. Significantly, the fact that the father is “a stranger to the French language” brings about the right conditions for the following brilliant play on words to occur, as the “faire des *zicounoumies*” [saving money] topic gets developed: “Il ne faut pas laisser *repartir* des *revenus*” –“Income is here to stay and shall not go away” (35, emphases added). The reactivation of “revenus” [“income”] as deriving from the “repartir/revenir” conceptual pair gives rise to an entire lexical field based on the idea of coming and going: “faire *entrer* des sous,” “quand ils sont *partis* d’ailleurs et *arrivés* chez toi, c’est comme ça que tu deviens riche” (35, emphases added); “Tu n’aurais jamais dû faire cette folie [you should never have bought me this expensive gift], Abboué. Tes *revenus* sont *repartis*. Un jour je finirai de lire tous les livres du marchipisse, je deviendrai Jules Verne et je les ferai *revenir*. D’accord?” (75-76, i.e. the novel’s last page; emphases added). The novel’s conclusion, henceforth, amounts to a hopeful affirmation of the possibility of the young Beur narrator/writer to “become Jules Verne,” that is, a performative affirmation of the possibility for “accented literature” to become “canonical,” something however our first chapter on regional literature would definitely be in tension with, given archipolitical constraints.²⁹⁷ Conversely, though, in this perspective, all “canonical literature,” in order to be “literature,” may be said to entertain an “accented” relationship with language in order to be “literature” –think for instance of the canonical example of the oxymoron rhetorical figure of speech, taken from Corneille’s *Le Cid*, as

²⁹⁷ Weckmann, thus, was always published, as far as his “French-Alsatian” literary production is concerned, by *local* Alsatian publishing houses, and by German publishing houses as far as his “German-Alsatian” literary production is concerned; as for his first novel, his 1968 *Les Nuits de Fastov*, it was significantly described in the literary section of *Le Monde* as a “*presque un chef-d’œuvre*” –“almost a masterpiece” (emphasis added)

a form of accentuation of language: “Cette *obscure clarté* qui tombe des étoiles...” (emphasis added). The “French genius” which produces “French literature” is therefore a genius because it dares to “accentuate” (make variations out of) the raw material of the French language.

“Accentuation” is therefore a marker of “French genius,” of “Frenchness.”

It thus becomes clear how “accented literature,” in our perspective, is different from “accented language”: “accented literature,” *in addition to* being “accented language,” is a literature that *also* questions “Frenchness” from a postcolonial perspective; it *violates* “French” linguistic *and* discursive laws. Abd al Malik’s rap, studied in the next chapter, perfectly exemplifies what I mean by “accented literature” as *violation/violence*.

CHAPTER THREE:

“POSTCOLONIAL ISLAM” THOUGHT AND RAPPED:

ABD AL MALIK’S *RÉVOLUTION PACIFIQUE* FROM WITHIN THE

“FRENCH” “NATION”

“[...] For us, rap [without forgetting American rappers, especially American rappers, no matter what one might have against them], meant much more than just a new musical genre [...]. Most of the people who denigrate rap today have no idea about this world and do not know what it was able to bring to young people like me [...]”²⁹⁸

Abd al Malik, *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* (70-71)

4.1 Introduction: Abd al Malik’s Rap in the Context of the French “Archipolity”

Abd al Malik is a French rapper born in 1975 of Congolese parents, and raised in Neuhoef, a “*banlieue*” (ghetto/underprivileged neighborhood) of Strasbourg, capital of Alsace. Commonly referred to as France’s “Sufi rapper,” his spiritual journey took him from Christianity to Islam, and more precisely still for the latter part of the journey, from radical Islam –his first, immediate response to the harsh conditions of postcolonial *banlieue*– to Sufism. He has, recently, regularly appeared in many TV shows to discuss the ideas contained in his 2013 book *L’Islam au secours de la République* (*Islam at the Rescue of the Republic*) as well as to promote *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* (*May Allah Bless France*) –a movie which he himself directed and an adaptation of his

²⁹⁸ “[...] Pour nous le rap [sans oublier les rappeurs Américains, surtout les Américains, quoiqu’on puisse leur reprocher], était beaucoup plus qu’un nouveau genre musical [...]. La plupart de ceux qui dénigrent le rap aujourd’hui n’ont aucune idée de ce monde et ne savent pas ce que cela a pu apporter à des jeunes comme moi [...]”

2004 autobiographical narrative by the same name. *L'Islam au secours de la République* fictionally describes the reaction of French people after the front-runner in the presidential election, whom they never thought to be Muslim, is “caught in the act” of praying on a prayer rug –an act perceived as sheer “heterogeneity” in a country which, however postcolonial it might be, seemingly still likes to discursively think of itself as “homogenous.”

As suggested in the Introduction, political philosopher Jacques Rancière, in his 1995 book *La Méésentente (Disagreement)*, uses the word “archipolitics” or “archipolity” to describe a political entity driven towards “kosmos,” “harmony,” “homogeneity.” “The archi-politics,” says Rancière, “might as well be called ‘archi-police’; it causes to conform, absolutely and without any leeway, ways of being and ways of doing, ways of feeling and ways of thinking” (102). The philosopher makes no mystery about the fact that, to him, France is/historically gradually became such an “archipolity,” as he indeed conflates Plato-like “archipolitics” with “modern-day democracies.”²⁹⁹ In the case of France, as we have by now amply shown, this also applies to “ways of speaking”: through its standardizing educational/educating system, and through its implementation of a universalist ideology of integration-assimilation based on the so-called superiority and purity of the French language, France has virtually eliminated regional dialects (such as Occitan, Breton, Alsatian...) from its soil, and has been resisting immigrant languages. Additionally, because of sociolinguistic mechanisms related to “prestige” (being understood that it is, *in fine*, ideology which pre-determines which language or which variety are “prestigious”), speaking French with either a regional accent (e.g. Alsatian accent) or a “*banlieue*” accent has been seen as something “shameful” and/or an obstacle to employment and social promotion: in

²⁹⁹ cf. the parallelism between, on the one hand, “France’s” “French” cultural politics (see Introduction and chapter one), and, on the other hand, Plato banishing certain kinds of poets from his Republic while keeping others –the “moral” ones, i.e. the “harmonious” ones

any case, people in France collectively find themselves faced with a discursive social/national injunction that *accents need to be erased*; not only “should” France be monolingual, but also *homolingual*. Importantly, this does make France “not-a-democracy-at-all” according to Rancière’s definition of “democracy” since for Rancière indeed, “democracy” is fundamentally defined by “equality” –“equality of intelligence” and *language* equality.

In this context, what is so characteristic about Abd al Malik, I suggest, is the massive presence of “accent” (Alsatian regional accent, “*banlieue*” accent, abd al malikian idiosyncratic accent...) in his rap and art in general. Importantly, I here understand “accent” *not only* as a sociolinguistic reality, but I extend this notion of “accent” to the politico-literary field to mean “linguistic variation” as much as “discourse variation.” Looking at both *Le Dernier Français* (*The Last Frenchman*), a 2012 collection of poems/rap lyrics, and *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, the 2004 autobiographical narrative, this article examines, thus, how Abd al Malik’s literature/rap may be said to be a form of “minor literature” or “accented literature/culture” both relative to Islam *and* relative to the dominant French language and discourse. In other words, it seeks to uncover how Abd al Malik, through rap, *performs* both “*Frenchness*” and (*postcolonial*) *Islam*.

Ultimately, therefore, Abd al Malik’s rap, needs to be situated not only *vis-à-vis* the “French archipolity,” but also *vis-à-vis* “postcolonial Islam” and *vis-à-vis* the rest of (French) “rap.” *In fine*, I put forward that it is important to be reminded of the fact that Sufism is the end point of his journey in order to truly understand the specificity of *his* rap, and also to understand how his adherence to Sufism paves the way to his concept of “*révolution pacifique*” (“pacific revolution”) which redefines the French nation from the inside, making him a manifestation of Equality *à la* Rancière and the embodiment of true Rancierian “democracy.”

4.2 Rap and the Complex Intertwining of Race, Violence and Transgression

But first, what may seem to be a petty, technical question begs to be addressed: is Abd al Malik's rap *really* rap? The question may arise from the very simple, basic facts that from a musical standpoint, his pieces feature a lot of piano, a classical (white?)³⁰⁰ instrument *par excellence*, and also that from a thematic standpoint, there are in Abd al Malik's lyrics and video clips no inappropriate words, nor fancy cars, nor *any* submissive women.

Gerald Early, in a 2013 talk delivered at the University of Pittsburgh, straightaway inscribed rap in the general category of "black music." Having performed this racialization of rap, he asked, "Is Black Music Criminal?" i.e. "*Is Rap Criminal?*" A little bit of background information in cultural history is here necessary to understand where Early's interrogation comes from. His starting point was the diachronic perception, since the very origins of "black music" in the United States but nowadays and everywhere with rap music in particular, that it is "dangerous and harmful" –even "criminal" – in several ways. First of all, Early insisted that rap, through the invention of beats, did nothing less than "reimagine the use of instruments" and thus led to no less than an "aesthetic revolution" in the way people "would, from then on, understand the forms of music." This revolution, as are all revolutions, was shocking –shocking to "real musicians," i.e. the white people who traditionally believed that "black people don't play in tune and don't know anything about music." Henceforth, the spread of such music to a white audience –like (rich) suburban white kids– would be considered a threat to good taste in the first place, something like an aesthetic disease that needed to be contained. Secondly, another aspect which

³⁰⁰ White, or black-and-white (cf. jazz)

makes rap a so-called “deviant” art form –hence potentially “criminal”– lies in the fact that people in both the white *and* the black communities would have issues with the *violent* contents conveyed by rap. Such violence, Early emphasized during his talk, was relatively new in black music, as he traced it to the generation emerging after the 1960s urban riots, which amounted to a “major transformation of aesthetics” since “black music had generally not been angry –think blues, ragtime, jazz...– up to that point [...] despite black people having a ton of reasons to be angry even before that.” The fact is that rap, on the contrary, is equated with violence. Indeed many Black critics, among whom, famously, Delores Tucker, have criticized rap for being a “degenerate kind of music” because of its obscene obsession with “holes” –disrespectful against black women–³⁰¹ and its preoccupation with –violently earned?– material possessions that may “make the whole race look bad” and incidentally lead to further stigmatization of Blacks as being “mere entertainers.” There is, furthermore, the definite concern that rap would emulate young impressionable people to carry guns, which would lead to crime and prison.³⁰² This concern is all the more acute since, as Early reminded the audience, “art is a power”³⁰³ carrying a lot of

³⁰¹ In a 1998 interview with Daz Dillinger (formerly Dat Nigga Daz) contained in his 2008 book titled *Rap Stories*, musicologist Olivier Cachin asks the rapper: “By the way, any news from Delores Tucker, the anti-gangsta rap activist?,” to which Daz Zillinger characteristically responds, “Oh yeah, she had an abortion! [*coarse laughter*] She may do whatever she wants, I don’t give a sh*t! She’s not around to see us smoking our weed!” –“*Au fait, des nouvelles de Delores Tucker, l’activiste antigangsta rap? Ouais, elle s’est fait avorter! (Rires gras, NDR.) Elle peut faire ce qu’elle veut, je m’en bats les couilles! Là on fume des joints, et elle n’est pas là!*” (20)

³⁰² In his interview granted to Olivier Cachin in 1999 and included in *Rap Stories*, Jay-Z says, “I had built my reputation before becoming famous. [...] I was nine when I saw the first person being shot in front of me. I’ve lived in the projects, in the middle of the ghetto, violence was there everyday, you could hear gunshots from noon to midnight, you see? When you are immersed in there, you don’t analyze it, it’s a part of you, it’s only when you get out of there that you might say, ‘Waow, that was kinda crazy!’ [...] I prefer to go to jail because I have a gun than being killed because I don’t have one, ah ah ah! [...] I’ve had my first gun at age fourteen” –“J’ai bâti ma réputation avant de devenir célèbre. J’avais neuf ans la première fois que j’ai vu quelqu’un se faire buter. J’ai vécu dans les projects, au cœur du ghetto, la violence était là tous les jours, ça flinguait de midi à minuit, tu vois? Quand on baigne là-dedans on ne l’analyse pas, c’est une partie de soi jusqu’à ce qu’on en sorte que qu’on se dise: ‘Waow, c’était un peu dingue, là!’ [...] Je préfère aller en taule pour possession d’arme que de me faire descendre parce que je n’en ai pas, ah ah ah! [...] J’ai eu mon premier flingue à quatorze ans ” (175)

³⁰³ Early quoting from Frederic Wertham’s 1966 *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence*. The quotation is taken from the section entitled “Blood and Oil: The Role of Art and Literature” (326)

influence, and music even more so, according to Early, given the special status/aura of the musician in the contemporary period.³⁰⁴

It follows that rap, in order to be rap, must have to do, *to some degree at least*,³⁰⁵ with race, violence, and transgression.

There are, then, quite a few ways in which Abd al Malik's prose and poetry do *not* fit the description –most notably the author's ultimate stance for peace and nonviolence. Despite this observation, it remains that race, violence and transgression certainly *do* play a great role in his work, thus confirming his self-depiction as a “rapper.”

The first element, indeed, that may look somewhat surprising at first sight, knowing Abd al Malik's aforementioned general stance for peace, is the place given in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France* as well as in *Le Dernier Français* to the figure of Malcolm X, hence recognizing the

³⁰⁴ Note that Early's argument implies that rap music is denied any *cathartic* function such as that expressed by Rohff in a 2004 interview to *Radikal*: “Rap is like a therapy for me. I vent my rage when my head is full, when, because of extreme pressure, I'm at the end of the rope. I write and my stress level goes down a bit. That's how it works” –“Le rap c'est comme une thérapie pour moi. Je me défoule quand j'ai la tête pleine et que je suis au bord de la crise de nerf avec la pression grave. J'écris et j'évacue. C'est comme ça” (467). Another option would be that Early considers “rap-writing” and “rap-listening” as two separate brain/cognitive activities

³⁰⁵ One could of course oppose MC Solaar's rap in the 1990s (e.g. the literarily playful title “L'As de trèfle qui pique ton cœur”), which helped popularize rap in France, and which is not nearly as violent as other forms of rap. Rap such as MC Solaar's rap may be said to be more influenced by New York rap than “gangsta rap” (violent rap) *per se*. Race (hence the violence of race discrimination) however, is arguably still subliminally present in the lyrics of “L'As de trèfle qui pique ton cœur” since the rapper's lover has a typically standard French name (“Caroline”) at a time when intercultural/interracial couples in France were taboo.

For a discussion of the non-necessarily violent nature of rap (especially in its New York/Bronx hip-hop variant), see the “Introduction” to Bradley and DuBois' *Anthology of Rap*: “Hip-hop emerged out of the impoverished South Bronx in the mid-1970s. In defiance of circumstance, a generation of young people –mostly black and brown– crafted a rich culture of words and song, of art and movement. Rap was the voice of this culture, the linguistic analog of hyperkinetic dance moves, vividly painted subway cars, and skillfully mixed break beats. ‘Rap was the final conclusion of a generation of creative people oppressed with the reality of lack,’ KRS-One explains. Hip-hop pioneers fashioned in rap an art form that draws from not only from the folk idioms of the African diaspora but from the legacy of Western verse and the musical traditions of jazz, blues, funk, gospel, and reggae. These young artists commandeered the English language, bending it to their own purposes. Over time, the poetry they set to beats would command the ears of their block, their borough, their nation, and eventually the world” (2)

special influence Malcolm X had in the early stages of his journey. In *Qu'Allah bénisse la France*, Abd al Malik writes, “But it was Malcolm X, this Muslim African-American leader, a pacifist leader yet refusing non-violence, who influenced me the most” (57)³⁰⁶ and he does not hesitate to call him “my hero” – “*mon héros*” – (ibid), preferring him over Martin Luther King “the non-violent argumentation of whom he [Malcolm X] was in disagreement with” (58).³⁰⁷

A tension immediately arises, as how can one be, in the same sentence, both “pacifist” and “refusing non-violence”? This tension, at least, testifies to Abd al Malik’s reflection on revolution from an early stage and on the best means to achieve the overturning of an unjust society, be it the American post-slavery society or the “French” postcolonial one.

In addition to this indeterminacy between violence and non-violence,³⁰⁸ Early reminds us, in his 1994 collection of essays titled *The Culture of Bruising*, about the deep controversy surrounding Malcolm X, especially in the essay “Notes on the Invention of Malcolm X: Wrestling with the Dark Angel.” He stresses that Malcolm’s “call for black unity as a way to preserve the race” (242) relied on one “basic idea –millenarian race-based cultural nationalism culminating in a worldwide race war that would overturn European dominance forever–” (238) and on the concept of “racial purity” (240). It implied “adopting a ‘cultural diet’ that altogether abstained from ‘whiteness’ –a complete “avoidance of white contamination” (243). This metaphor of “cleanliness” is not surprising, Early observes, since Malcolm, “good Muslim that

³⁰⁶ “Mais ce fut Malcolm X, ce leader musulman noir américain pacifiste mais récusant la non-violence, qui me marqua le plus”

³⁰⁷ “dont il [Malcolm X] récusait l’argumentaire non-violent”

³⁰⁸ with a definite leaning towards violence, as Early encapsulates in the following rhetorical question: “Is Malcolm a hero these days because he seemed more his own man than Martin Luther King, because he was more ‘militant,’ because he did not speak to love and peace but of war and apocalypse?” (*The Culture of Bruising*, 251)

he was,” “condemned [for instance] pork-eating” (ibid). According to Early, then, Malcolm’s “afro-centrism [is an attempt] to reinvent segregation” –nothing less than “a reactionary impulse to reestablish a segregated *black* life” (ibid, emphasis added), which Early finds eminently problematic. In a way, too, it can be seen as fundamentally “anti-hybridity,” i.e. *anti-postcolonial*, if “the postcolonial” is characterized by hybridity.

It is important to note that it is through the figure of Malcolm X that Abd al Malik was introduced to Islam, and so, an arguably “anti-postcolonial” kind of Islam;³⁰⁹ but it is, however, equally as important to note that Abd al Malik was, through the same Malcolm X, also introduced to essential postcolonial concepts. Indeed, Early acknowledges that with Malcolm, “all-blackness became a source of honor and accomplishment, not of degradation and shame” (241). Malcolm, hence, would have played a similar role as Aimé Césaire’s concept of “négritude” and truly it is definitely in this respect that Malcolm X was in fact most influential to Abd al Malik. As evidence of such influence, Abd al Malik writes, in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*:

“*La racaille sort un disque*”³¹⁰ [NAP’s first record, NAP –New African Poets– being Abd al Malik’s rap band before he began his solo career] was taking up again the very term [racaille, *thugs*] through which we were stigmatized, and made a title of glory out of it –in the same way that, in another domain, the most radical

³⁰⁹ actually, either “anti-postcolonial” or “absolutely postcolonial,” depending on one’s perspective!

³¹⁰ *The Thugs Have a Record Out*

militants of Africanity were referring to themselves, willingly and proudly, as ‘negroes’ instead of ‘blacks’”^{311 312} (126)

Furthermore, in *Le Dernier Français*, an entire eponymous poem is devoted to “Malcolm X” –followed, in the title, by his name in Arabic (“al hajj malik al shabazz”). The poem denounces the fact that, to paraphrase Ngugi wa Thiongo’s phrase, “the minds still have to be decolonized or deslaverized”:

“Ils haïssaient leur nez leurs cheveux la couleur de leur propre peau
// alors qu’ils n’avaient même plus une seule cicatrice sur le dos”³¹³
(167)

Race, therefore, figures quite prominently and is treated *as an issue* in Abd al Malik’s poetry –a good number of which are also rap lyrics.

In addition, it is an understatement to say that the poems contained in *Le Dernier Français* do *not* eschew the motifs of utter violence and extremely harsh conditions of the banlieue. The banlieue stands out as a milieu in which people get “[désintégrés]” instead of “[intégrés],” in Abd al Malik’s words (67), and where the common phrase “*c’est la galère*” (“we are all on the same boat/hard-ship”) is turned into a threaded metaphor: “[...] la cité autour était

³¹¹ “*La racaille sort un disque* reprenait à notre compte le terme par lequel on nous stigmatisait pour en faire un titre de gloire –tout comme, dans un autre domaine, les militants les plus radicaux de l’africanité se revendiquent nègres et non pas noirs”

³¹² In the scope of this dissertation, an ultimate form of accentuation of dominant discourse?

³¹³ “They hated their nose their hair the color of their own skin // while they did not even have one single scar on their backs any more”

un océan // et nous y ramions seuls” (104).³¹⁴ This “boat people” image is completed by the reactivation of the word “île” –“island”– in the syntagm “Île-de-France,” which, from being a purely administrative name, is poetically resignified (“ennemis amis de circonstance // galèrent autour de l’Île-de-France,” 113). The image eventually ends up, in a powerful gradation, with a reference to desperate people actually *drowning*, all fighting individually in a struggle to death: “[...] respecting each other only when one of them *dies*” (ibid, emphasis added).³¹⁵

In fact, Abd al Malik’s realist style appears at times borderline with the postcolonial affect typically referred to as “*la haine*.” Blood –shed blood, the blood of everyday shootings– is, consequently, quite present in his writing. The rap song “Soldat de plomb,” for instance, compares the children roaming the street of the banlieue to children soldiers (“enfants soldats”) and to miniature toy soldiers made out of lead (“soldats de plomb”); significantly, “plomb” in French is the metal associated with bullets, which immediately triggers related mental images, quickly confirmed by the following lines: “J’avais juste 12 ans // les poches remplies d’argent // j’avais déjà vu *trop de sang*” (183, emphasis added).³¹⁶ Guns are evoked clearly and without any ambiguity through onomatopoeia: “Certains de mes proches de mes frères décidèrent de faire sauter la banque à coups de revolver Bang ! bang ! bang!” (184)³¹⁷ –although in this example the words are sung quite softly and “sound” almost harsher on the written page.

This is paralleled in the same rap song with some heavy criticism against the police:

“sans oublier les histoires bêtes // Un contrôle d’identité on finit une balle dans la tête // [...]

³¹⁴ which could be freely translated as “we, people from the ghetto, are all on the same boat, rowing, isolated, in the middle of an ocean of crap”

³¹⁵ “[...] se respectent seulement quand l’un d’eux meurt”

³¹⁶ “I was barely twelve years old // pockets full of money // I had already seen too much blood”

³¹⁷ “Some of my buddies my brothers decided to rob the bank with a gun Bang! bang! bang!”

Alors ça finit en émeute en guerre rangée CRS casqués contre jeunes en meutes enragées”³¹⁸ –a poeticized reference to the riots in which “émeute” is made to internally rime with “meute” and “guerre rangée” with the adjective “enragées,” 184-185), but also, very powerfully, in another rap song called “Saigne” (“dédié à Hassan qui est parti l’année dernière, victime d’une bavure,” 207)³¹⁹ where the same event –i.e. the shooting of a young black person– is successively narrated by all actors of the event, even the dead one –making the subaltern speak at last, through an impressive prosopopeia! This juxtaposition of point of views provides us with a multiperspectival vision of the event. The policeman’s *prejudiced* account needs here to be quoted in length:

“[Le] gars roulait dans cette belle voiture comme un dingue parce qu’il doit l’avoir volée en plus! Il s’est arrêté brusquement, bizarrement: alors je l’ai pris en joue et mon collègue qui arrêtait pas de me dire qu’il voulait se faire du bougnoule, alors... ça, plus toute la tension, plus toute la violence qui règne autour de nous, je me suis dit que j’avais jamais tiré en vrai. Quand: ‘Pan!’”³²⁰ (208)

This last onomatopoeia, in the soundtrack, is an actual gunshot, the *reality* and very vivid violence of which underscoring that yes, the policeman did shoot *for real*, in opposition with the preceding sentence “j’avais jamais tiré *en vrai*” (emphasis added). Whether this representation –

³¹⁸ “Not to mention things that happen stupidly // An identity check the checked one ends up with a bullet in his head // [...] Then it all ends up in a general fight Riot police with helmets on against youth made crazy running like wild animals”

³¹⁹ “dedicated to Hassan, who, last year, fell victim to a police blunder”

³²⁰ “[The] guy was driving this nice car like a madman because he must have stolen it, I’m sure! The way he stopped the car was abrupt, bizarre: so I aimed my gun at him, and there my colleague kept repeating, too, that he wanted to kick some nigger’s [bougnoule] ass, so... This, plus all the tension, plus all that violence all around us, I told myself that I had never shot for real. When: Bang!”

so immediate that it is almost a “presentation” – could be interpreted as an encouragement to own guns and make use of them is a different story, but it definitely inscribes Abd al Malik’s art into a certain “rap” genre. It is significant in this regard that even though Abd al Malik’s ultimate ‘message’ is about hope, peace and love, the covers for both books (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France* and *Le Dernier Français*) are pictures of himself not smiling at all, but with a dark, gloomy expression on his face, as if Abd al Malik had felt the need to have *the attitude* of a rapper. The picture for *Le Dernier Français* even has him wearing a New York Yankees cap which, semiotically, is not an innocent choice, as it reinforces the links and the filiation between “French rap” and a certain “American rap.”³²¹

However, this being said, there are certain ways in which Abd al Malik’s music does not completely fit this category, for instance through the repeated use of piano –a classical (white?) instrument par excellence– as a major feature in addition to the beat and spoken rhythm. I would therefore propose the oxymoronic terminology of “classical rap” or “black and white rap” – “complex rap” at any rate. This aspiration towards a certain form of classicism is also well demonstrated linguistically, as Abd al Malik cautions his fellow rappers against being too “trashy” as it were in his poem-song called “Céline” (49-51) –from the literary author:³²²

³²¹ Beyond the link between French rap et American rap, Abd al Malik stresses the link between rap and Africa – which is an additional reason why Malcolm X’s “afro-centrism” was important: “Le rap, sorte de chant parlé sur une rythmique, est apparu dans le ghetto new-yorkais au début des années soixante-dix. Certains le font même remonter aux Last Poets, parce que ce groupe noir américain de l’East Coast fut le premier à employer cette technique récitative. Le support musical de ce phrasé était chez eux constitué quasi-exclusivement de percussions africaines, djembé et tambour, en référence aux griots” –“Rap, this sort of mix between speaking and singing on a beat, appeared in the ghettos of New York City at the beginning of the 1970s. Some even trace its origins back to the Last Poets, because this African-American band from the East Coast was first in using this technique of oral speech. The musical accompaniment was almost exclusively made up of African percussions, djembe and drums, in reference to the *griots*” (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 62).

With Africa, America and Europe, the circle, in which both Africa and America are important, is thus complete

³²² Considering that Céline is not just “a literary author” but a polemical literary author whose unconventional use of language was arguably linked to a definition of the French nation governed by race and hate, Abd al Malik’s

“Il faut faire attention lorsqu’on utilise les mots
 le verbe du peuple le parler de la rue
 parce que du beau peut jaillir la laideur absolue
 À force de vouloir faire rue on est devenu caniveau
 C’est pas que c’est inutile un caniveau
 c’est juste qu’on est devenu des ‘pas beaux’”³²³

This is evidently not the same kind of rap as the 2013 exchange of insults between Booba and La Fouine (“La Fouine, on la enculé sa grand-mère!” –sic– as heard on the internet!).^{324 325}

Moreover, even though violence is definitely present, and intensely so, in terms that are very

interpellation on “trashy language” may not be aimed at “fellow rappers” alone, but at French society in general, calling attention to an important “How-do-I-call-the-Other” *politics of naming*

³²³ “One has to be careful when using the words // the language of the people the street language // Because from the beautiful can surge the absolute ugly // One wanted to be street language so bad that one became street gutter // It’s not that a street gutter has no use at all // It’s just that you became ‘not beautiful’”

³²⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMyH32hzeo>. Consulted August 11, 2013

³²⁵ Such insults and rivalries may be best understood if contextualized as a mimetic imitation of “American rap” by “French rap,” especially the tradition, in “American rap,” of “beefs” (for instance East Coast/West Coast beefs), also known as “hip-hop feuds,” thus explained by Olivier Cachin in *Rap Stories*: “‘Who’s the best rapper, Biggie, Jay-Z or Nas?’ This famous rhyme has turned into a curse for the two rapologic survivors of the virtual struggle for the most envied title in the arena of hip-hop: yes, who is the best MC? In this world where competition is so fierce that it cost the lives of two of its best soldiers (2Pac and Biggie), the question is far from anecdotal. [...] [For instance] Nas talks about those who unduly use Biggie’s name for their own sake and ‘think they are the kings of New York’ (follow his gaze) [or] Jay-Z [who] mentions another rapper, although not by name, saying just ‘You just shave your eyebrows, three streaks like marks of a tiger’s claw, and you think you’re rough, but you stole our slang and our style’ [...]. Will the new rap war take place? As though, once again, there was no space for two people in these mountain tops where the half-gods of hip-hop confront each other” –“‘Who’s the best rapper, Biggie, Jay-Z or Nas?’” Cette rime fameuse est devenue comme une malediction pour les deux survivants rapologiques de la lute virtuelle pour le titre le plus envié dans l’arène du hip-hop: oui, qui est le meilleur MC? Dans ce monde où la compétition est si féroce qu’elle a coûté la vie à deux de ses meilleurs soldats (2Pac et Biggie), la question n’est pas anecdotique. [Par exemple] Nas parle de ceux qui abusent du nom de Biggie et ‘se prennent pour le roi de New-York’ (suivez son regard), [ou] Jay-Z [qui] évoque un rapper qu’il ne cite pas nommément, disant juste ‘tu te fais trois coups de griffe sur le sourcil et tu te prends pour un dur, mais tu as volé notre argot et notre style’ [...]. La nouvelle guerre du rap aura-t-elle lieu? Comme si, une fois de plus, il n’y avait pas de place pour deux dans ces sommets où s’affrontent les demi-dieux du hip-hop” (170)

graphic and real –because violence is, after all, real in real life—³²⁶ Abd al Malik always makes sure *not to ever praise* crime.³²⁷ Rather, *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* can be read as a kind of confession, which transpires into the poems of *Le Dernier Français*.

4.3 A Complex Confession: “*Islam de Banlieue*” and Delinquency as Signs of Postcolonial Discontent

This confession, however, is a rather complex one to say the least. On the one hand, to a certain extent, the reader could be under the impression that the older Abd al Malik does not fully regret the unlawful activities performed by his younger self. Although that would probably be a misguided conclusion, it remains that Abd al Malik offers, in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, an incredible amount of detail about his past criminal activity as a teenager/young adult, to the point that the book could almost be interpreted as a manual for thieves (expounding methods of theft,³²⁸ best places to steal,³²⁹ best places to meet other thieves³³⁰...). This impression is further

³²⁶ Compare Mounsi’s “anti-assimilation stance” with the following excerpt from Jay-Z’s interview in *Rap Stories*. Jay-Z is answering Olivier Cachin’s question, “Do you think violence in rap has decreased since the assassinations of Pac and Big?” –“Vous avez l’impression que la violence dans le rap a diminué depuis les assassinats de Pac et Big?” Jay-Z’s answer: “Hell no! Hip-hop music is a *rebellious voice* from the street, it’s a *shout of anger*, that’s why hip-hop has been around for so long. There are so many people in the projects who feel forgotten but who know that they can play a CD that’s going to talk to them directly about what they are experiencing every day in their real lives. That is why hip-hop is so *angry*” –“Hell no! La musique hip-hop est une *voix rebelle* issue de la rue, c’est un *cri de colère*, c’est pour ça qu’il tient bon depuis si longtemps. Il y a tant de gens dans les projects qui se sentent oubliés mais qui savent qu’ils peuvent mettre un CD qui va leur parler directement de leur vie réelle et de ce qu’ils vivent chaque jour. Voilà pourquoi le rap est si *véneré*” (173, emphases added)

³²⁷ Compare with Booba’s 2008 title “Izi Monnaie”

³²⁸ “It was the principle of the two-blade razor: double action for more security” –“C’était le principe du rasoir à deux lames: double action pour plus de sécurité” (48): this would-be commercial for Gillette explains how to best snatch away handbags, with one thug running ahead and another one running right behind him. The first one destabilizes the victim, tries to get the bag, and if that didn’t work, the second one, then, will surely get the bag. Pickpocketing, on the other hand, requires three people (please refer to page 25 of the manual for more details!). The word “security,” here, is of course problematic, as delinquency is a synonym for “insecurity,” the very “insecurity” which led Nicolas Sarkozy to victory in the 2007 presidential elections!

conveyed by the lexical field of “robbery-as-work” that literally pervades the first chapter of the book: “nous considérons [nos opérations illégales] le plus sérieusement du monde comme notre métier, notre gagne-pain” (35);³³¹ and: “j’allais ‘travailler’ [là où] [...] il y avait les meilleurs clients” (26),³³² or: “‘Non, les gars, y a école. J’‘travaille’ que le weekend et pendant les vacances scolaires!’, disais-je fièrement, et tout le monde éclatait de rire.”³³³ Ils étaient apparemment impressionnés que je parvienne à mener de front une scolarité dans un collège privé et une activité délinquante régulière” (29)³³⁴ –among countless other examples. Not unlike what happens in Egyptian novelist Albert Cossery’s 2000 *Les Couleurs de l’Infamie*, there are numerous passages where stealing is presented as –legitimate?– acts of revolution against a locked society, like an alternate system that rises to oppose itself against the existing bourgeois system from which they are excluded: “Je devais absolument passer par là [apprendre à conduire

³²⁹ “There were, of course, neighborhoods particularly well suited for this activity, especially the touristic sites such as around the cathedral of Strasbourg, the area of the Petite-France and, more generally, the downtown area, if there were enough people out on the streets, that is” –“Il existait bien entendu des quartiers particulièrement propices à cette activité, notamment les sites touristiques comme les environs de la cathédrale de Strasbourg, le quartier de la Petite-France et d’une façon générale le centre-ville, pourvu qu’il y ait un peu d’affluence” (26)

³³⁰ “This nightclub [Paradise] had the specificity of being attended by only the city’s worst delinquents: drug dealers, [all kinds of] stealers, shop-lifters... [...] This nightclub was a hub for criminals, and a lot of crimes were planned and devised there” –“Cette boîte [le Paradise, une boîte de nuit] avait la particularité de n’être fréquentée que par les pires délinquants de la ville: des dealers, des tireurs, des voleurs à la roulotte, à l’étalage, à l’arrachée. [...] Cette boîte était un repaire, et de nombreux coups s’y sont montés” (35)

³³¹ “We would consider [our illegal activities], most seriously, as our job, our source of income”

³³² “I went to work to the places where the best clients were”

³³³ It is indeed quite paradoxical to “work” *only* during vacation!

³³⁴ “‘Nope, guys, I won’t go with you this time –it’s a school day! You know I only ‘work’ over weekends and holidays!’, I would proudly say, and it would make everyone burst out laughing.”³³⁴ The others were impressed, I think, by my ability to remain at the same time an excellent student *and* an excellent delinquent”

une voiture volée] si je voulais devenir comme eux une *personnalité de prestige*, un *gradé de la délinquance*” (34, emphasis added).³³⁵

Mazarine Pinget, who wrote the preface to *Le Dernier Français*, rightly notes, “Abd al Malik est un homme de conversion. Conversion religieuse, mais d’abord conversion de vie, conversion des mots en musique, de la musique en mots, conversion en adulte *qui porte en lui l’adolescent qu’il fut*” (8, emphasis added).³³⁶ In other words, the adolescent is not shunned, banned, denied by the adult, but on the contrary, the adolescent is thoroughly recognized, in a life-is-a-journey kind of way, as part and parcel of the person *en puissance* who would later become this better adult.

All in all, it appears to be a confession pretty sympathetic towards banlieue violence in that it *explains* it. Number one, Abd al Malik’s depicts in full detail the banlieue environment: from difficult family situations –such as his own mother raising her sons all by herself– to his painful witnessing of the transition all around him from marijuana to cocaine and heroin (“[....] elle se propagea, si je puis me permettre l’expression, comme une trainée de poudre,” 39),³³⁷ to violence being already there all around him in the Strasbourg neighborhood where he spent his childhood –Le Neuhof (significantly, the acronym HLM, which usually stands for “Habitat à Loyer Modéré” takes on, here, the meaning of “Haut Les Mains!,” 15).³³⁸ This is further

³³⁵ “I absolutely needed to go through this [i.e. learning how to drive a stolen car] if I wanted to become, like them, a VIP, a high-ranked delinquent”

³³⁶ “Abd al Malik is a man of conversion. Religious conversion, but first of all life conversion, conversion of words into music, of music into words, conversion of child into adult –an adult still carrying inside himself the adolescent whom he used to be”

³³⁷ “It was spreading like wildfire, or if I may use the expression, like wild *powder*”

³³⁸ “Hands-Up projects” instead of “Low-Income projects”

reinforced by the alliteration in /p/ in the circumlocution referring to this same neighborhood:

“une **p**épinère de **p**ick**p**ockets” (25).³³⁹

Number two, the writer-rapper invokes the influence of American culture broadly speaking, echoing some of Early’s earlier concerns:

“Le cas de *Scarface* est particulièrement extrême, mais le cinéma avait d’une façon générale une influence certaine sur nos comportements, nos modes de raisonnement, tout ce qui faisait nos valeurs et notre imaginaire. Parmi les films les plus importants, on peut sans doute citer *Boyz’n the Hood*, du réalisateur noir américain John Singleton, avec le célèbre rappeur et acteur Ice Cube [...]. Ou encore *New Jack City*, avec le célèbre acteur noir Wesley Snipes, qui campait une version new-yorkaise de *Scarface*. Si l’on met de côté les films de hip-hop comme *Beat Street*, [...] et le *Malcolm X* de Spike Lee, le cinéma avait sur nous une influence complètement négative. Il va de soi que nos aspiration et notre quotidien correspondaient exclusivement au mode de vie des ‘méchants.’ En mal de références, nous n’avions absolument pas la maturité nécessaire pour mettre une distance entre nous et ces personnages plus charismatiques les uns que les autres. Et s’ils mouraient à la fin, nous pensions que c’était précisément parce qu’il s’agissait d’un film! Dans la vraie vie, c’est nous

³³⁹ The alliteration doesn’t quite work as well in English: “a nursery of pickpockets”

qui tenions le rôle et jusqu'à présent nous avons toujours gagné!"³⁴⁰

(*Qu'Allah bénisse la France*, 41)

Number three, the attitude of the police, already criticized as we have seen, is described as exerting "une brutalité souvent aveugle et disproportionnée" (46),³⁴¹ which elicits this comments from Abd al Malik: "Cela n'excuse rien quant à l'attitude des jeunes en question, mais *explique* beaucoup: la seule conséquence durable de ce déchaînement fut de rendre les jeunes fous de rage envers une société qui confiait l'ordre à de tels hommes" (46, emphasis added).^{342 343}

Number four, Abd al Malik puts a great emphasis on –in this case, foul– interpersonal relationships in the postcolonial context in order to explain violence. Thus, we find this extremely powerful –and in my opinion quite central– quote in "HLM Tango," a poem-rap song taken from *Le Dernier Français*:

³⁴⁰ "Scarface's case is particularly extreme, but cinema in general had a definite influence on our behaviors, our ways of reasoning and all of our value system; it shaped our imagination. Amongst the most important movies for us, one can certainly mention *Boyz'n the Hood*, from African-American filmmaker John Singleton, with the famous rapper and actor Ice Cube playing in it. [...] Or also *New Jack City*, with the famous African-American actor Wesley Snipes, who played a New-York version of *Scarface*. Except for hip-hop movies such as *Beat Street*, [...] and Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, one can say that cinema had over us a completely negative influence. It goes without saying that our aspirations and our everyday lives exclusively corresponded to the way of life of the 'bad guys.' Since we were lacking any role models, we absolutely did not have the maturity necessary to put any kind of distance between us and these characters –one more charismatic than the other. And if they died at the end, we thought, that's because it's a movie! In real life, we were the ones with the roles of the 'bad guys,' and, so far, we had always won!"

³⁴¹ "an often blind and disproportionate brutality"

³⁴² "This, by any means, does not excuse the attitude of the youth in question, but explains a lot: the only long-term consequence of this unleashing of police violence was to make the youth enraged against a society that entrusts law enforcement to such men"

³⁴³ e.g. Teemour, in his rap piece "Pas Mieux Demain" –"Not Better Tomorrow"– from the 1996 *Hostile hip hop* compilation, calls the anti-riot police (CRS) "CR-S-S" and predicts, in a superb –from a literary standpoint– paronomastic variation on "Œil pour œil et dent pour dent" –"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth": "Mais laisse! Il [le policier] aura la monnaie d'sa pièce. On allumera la mèche et le feu fera le reste // Le stress a fait naître un nouveau slogan: c'est 'Deuil pour Deuil et Sang pour Sang'!" –"Hang on! In the end we will get at the police. We'll light the fuse and fire will do the rest // Stress gave rise to a new slogan, and that's 'Mourning for Mourning and Blood for Blood'!"

“Et ce Noir ou ce Rebeu que tu croises dans la rue, quel regard lui portes-tu? Parce que c’est ce regard qui va déterminer chaque lendemain de son existence et de la tienne aussi”³⁴⁴ (99)

The writer adds, “Mais si tu dis sans cesse qu’on est pas chez nous, qu’on est pas [sic] comme toi. Alors pourquoi tu t’étonnes quand certains agissent comme s’ils n’étaient pas chez eux, comme s’ils n’étaient pas comme toi?” (ibid, anacoluthon in original).³⁴⁵ It follows a certain shared responsibility that does not only rest on the author of violence, but also on the –presumably white– spectator of postcolonial violence who might think he or she has no part whatsoever in it. This is a key element that Abd al Malik rephrases in a variety of ways throughout his work, for instance in the already-quoted “Soldat de Plomb” poem/rap song:

“Bien sûr qu’un sourire nous aurait fait plaisir juste un peu
d’attention Et peut-être ç’aurait été autrement // Nous aurions été
des enfants normaux et pas des enfants soldats”³⁴⁶ (183)

The environment, made up of the harsh conditions of the banlieue in postcolonial France and lack of true interpersonal relations –or absence, characteristic of postcolonial France, of relations between the different social groups–, is thus made to explain this delinquency

³⁴⁴ “And this Black or this Arab whom you see as you are walking on the street, *how* do you see him? For it is the way you see him and the way he sees you which is going to determine every tomorrow of his existence and of yours, too”

³⁴⁵ “But if you’re constantly saying that we are not at home here, that we are not like you –so how should it be surprising to you if some of them are acting like they are not at home, like they weren’t like you?”

³⁴⁶ “Sure, a smile would have made us happy just a little attention // And maybe things would have been different // We would have been normal children not child soldiers”

(“insécurité”) often deemed by politicians and a certain public opinion to be one of the most serious problems faced by postcolonial “France.”

Turning now to the religion aspect, postcolonial discontent is similarly made to account for radical Islam, which Abd al Malik significantly terms “*Islam de banlieue*” – “ghetto Islam.”

In *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, indeed, the author spends significant time narrating first his transition from Christianity to radical Islam –before his transition from radical Islam to Sufism. The transition to radical Islam is justified by an extreme blurriness and confusion of the individual as far as morals go –blurriness and confusion which are themselves a backlash of the postcolonial-related general atmosphere of delinquency:

“Toutes ces activités [les vols] étaient tellement courantes chez les gamins de la cité qu’on n’y voyait absolument aucun mal. [...] [Quant à moi,] j’étais une racaille plus futée que les autres, avec une conception toute personnelle de la spiritualité: le genre à prier Dieu afin qu’il me permette non seulement de me faire plus d’argent, mais également de ne pas me faire prendre par la police. [...] Pour moi, [...] la distinction entre bien et mal était demeurée très floue, il s’agissait plutôt de savoir ce qui ‘fait du bien’ [...] ou ce qui n’en fait pas”³⁴⁷ (22, 32, 60)

Still according to his own record of his journey in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, Abd al Malik explains that joining radical Islam seemed like a good solution to him in the past, as he

³⁴⁷ “All of these activities [stealing activities] were so frequent amongst the kids of the ghetto that we didn’t see anything wrong with it. [...] [As for me,] I was a more clever kind of thug than the others, with a very personal conception of spirituality: I would pray to God to help me not only make more money, but also help me not get caught by the police. [...] For me, [...] the distinction between good and evil had remained very blurry; what was more important to me was the question of what-does-good-to-me [...] and what does not”

was thus passing from this extreme blurriness and confusion to extreme –retrospectively too extreme, extremist– clarity:

“[...] Bon nombre de mes aînés musulmans, pourtant bardés de diplômes, se métamorphisaient en abrutis lorsqu’on abordait la religion, comme si le simple fait d’évoquer l’islam inhibait toutes leurs capacités intellectuelles –alors que [cela] aurait dû les décupler. Dès qu’ils se mettaient à parler d’Islam, ils semblaient commuter leur discours en pilotage automatique, récitaient mécaniquement leur catéchisme et tout esprit critique s’évanouissait de leur propos” (117-118). “J’étais fasciné par ces paroles qui me semblaient à la fois vigoureuses, structurées, volontaires [...]. J’allais moi-même être amené à les répéter un nombre incalculable de fois”³⁴⁸ (100)

At one point, as he was in the middle of precisely radical Islam, Abd al Malik even reports having been solicited to commit a terrorist attack against a “French” symbol: “C’est à cette époque que Majid et moi [...] fûmes contactés par des frères qui avaient une vision pour le moins ‘explosive’ de la propagation de l’islam: [...] ‘On est prêt à faire sauter la préfecture, joignez-vous à nous...’”(*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 110-111).^{349 350} Radical as it was,

³⁴⁸ “A good number of our older brothers, however many diplomas they might have, became idiots the minute you’d speak to them about religion, as though the mere mentioning of the word ‘Islam’ would all of a sudden inhibit all of their intellectual abilities –whereas [it] should have multiplied them. As soon as they would set off talking about Islam, it seemed like their speech changed itself into automatic pilot mode, they would mechanically recite their catechism and any sense of critical thinking would be all vanished. [...] I was fascinated by these speeches which seemed to me all at once vigorous, structured, voluntary [...]. I myself was to soon be repeating them countless times”

³⁴⁹ “It is around that time that Majid and I were contacted by brothers who had, literally, an ‘explosive’ approach to the propagation of Islam: ‘We are about to blow up the Préfecture [an administrative building], will you join us?...’”

³⁵⁰ The three dots may imply that this actually could have been a trap laid out by the RG (Renseignements Généraux – Secret Services) to determine how far they would go –a controversial technique of preventing terrorism by provoking it

however, radical Islam, for Abd al Malik, did not mean terrorism, so he said ‘no’ –he saw clearly at least in this respect.

Crisis of identity-wise, though, radical Islam, with the change of habits and clothing it brought by, seemed, at least initially, overall positive:

“J’éprouvais [...] une certaine joie [quand] les non-musulmans me regardaient avec insistance. J’avais le sentiment d’appartenir à une communauté qui ne m’avait pas été imposée mais à laquelle j’avais adhéré de plein gré. Cette démarcation par rapport à la masse des autres me donnait la sensation d’exister pleinement, d’avoir enfin trouvé mon identité”³⁵¹ (90)

At the same time, radical Islam became in turn more and more blurry and turned into just another source of confusion: in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, he compares it to a “*brouillard spirituel*” –“spiritual fog”– in which he almost drowned (96). It is only later on that he will be able to understand that this radical Islam, this “*islam de banlieue*” (“ghetto Islam”), was nothing but “*une banlieue de l’islam*” –“a ghetto of Islam”– (149), meaning not what Islam, the essence of Islam, is really about. How did this realization come about?

³⁵¹ “I did feel [...] a certain joy [when] I’d see non-Muslims staring at me. I had the feeling of belonging to a community that hadn’t been imposed to me but which I had joined completely freely. This marker of difference from the mass gave me the feeling to really and fully exist, and to have, at long last, found my identity”

4.4 Sufism in the Republic (1): the Return of Interpersonal Relations as Abd al Malik's Horizon and Reality

The transition from radical Islam to Sufism came to Abd al Malik gradually and, somewhat paradoxically given what we have seen thus far, partially through rap –and partially through Malcolm X, himself on a journey:

“À la suite de plusieurs voyages [...] mais surtout après sa conversion à l’islam orthodoxe, il [Malcolm X] rompit définitivement avec la Nation of Islam et la rhétorique raciste qu’elle véhiculait. D’Arabie où il effectuait alors un pèlerinage à La Mecque, il écrivit une lettre mémorable [...]. Cette lettre, je la lus et la relus cent fois, tout mon être vibrat d’exaltation en la découvrant, elle fut à ce point un tournant dans mon adolescence désorientée que je veux en livrer ici la teneur : ‘Jamais, écrivait Malcolm X, je n’ai connu d’hospitalité aussi sincère, de fraternité aussi bouleversante que celles des hommes et des femmes de toutes races réunis sur cette vieille Terre sainte [...]. Jamais je ne me suis senti plus humble, et plus digne. L’Amérique a besoin de comprendre l’Islam, parce que c’est la seule religion qui ignore le racisme”^{352 353} (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 58-59)

³⁵² “Following several trips [...] but even more importantly following his conversion to orthodox Islam, he [Malcolm X] definitely broke off from Nation of Islam and the racist rhetoric it conveyed. From Saudi Arabia where he was doing his pilgrimage to Mecca, he wrote a memorable letter. [...] I must have read and re-read this letter a hundred times; as I was discovering it, my entire being was vibrating with exaltation. It was so much a turning point in my disoriented adolescence that I here need to summarize the contents of this letter: ‘Never,’ wrote Malcolm X, ‘did I ever experience such sincere hospitality, such deeply moving brotherhood, than when I saw all these men and women of all races, united on this old Holy Land. Never in my life did I feel more humble, more dignified. America needs to understand Islam, for Islam is the only religion that knows no racism”

This ambivalence of Malcolm X –Early’s “dark angel” now revealed or reconstructed as “bright angel”– is echoed by the ambivalence of rap itself: how are we, indeed, to interpret the discrepancy between, on the one hand, Abd al Malik’s positive sentence in the liminal quotation (“La plupart des gens qui dénigrent le rap [...] ne savent pas ce que cela a pu apporter à des jeunes comme moi”)³⁵⁴ and, on the other hand, this other quotation we cited earlier (“le cinéma [noir américain aux acteurs rappeurs] avait sur nous une influence complètement négative”)³⁵⁵? Here again, too, we must not forget that rap is polymorphous and we have to look at the complete picture: “[...] Pour proposer à la jeunesse une alternative à la violence endémique des gangs, le rappeur new-yorkais Afrika Bambaataa eut l’idée de créer la Zulu Nation, en référence à l’esprit combatif et résistant du peuple zoulou. [...] Dans un premier temps la Zulu Nation avait pour objectif concret de structurer et de codifier le hip-hop [...]. Elle n’eut de cesse ensuite de maintenir la cohésion de ce mouvement autour d’un esprit pacifique et non-violent. La charte de ce mouvement est ainsi placée sous le slogan ‘Peace, Love, Unity (and Having Fun)’” (64).³⁵⁶ Rap’s influence could definitely be a positive one –and was, for Abd al Malik:

³⁵³ Consequently, the picture provided by Early in *The Culture of Bruising* seems to have been incomplete –i.e. not taking into consideration the whole person or perhaps the whole journey of Malcolm X, perhaps because the symbolic legacy or weight of Malcolm X was accumulated before the letter found by Abd al Malik. Nevertheless, Abd al Malik is eager to complete the picture: “He [Malcolm X] came back from his pilgrimage just like the sun comes back after the rain [...] // Men of good will are much more ‘dangerous’ than weapons” – “Il [Malcolm X] revint du pèlerinage comme après la pluie vient le beau temps [...] // Les hommes de bonne volonté sont bien plus ‘dangereux’ qu’une arme” (*Le Dernier Français*, 168)

³⁵⁴ “Most of the people who denigrate rap today [...] do not know what it was able to bring to young people like me”

³⁵⁵ “cinema [with African-American actors/rappers] had over us a completely negative influence”

³⁵⁶ “[...] In order to offer the youth an alternative to endemic gang violence, the New York rapper Afrika Bambaataa got the idea of creating the Zulu Nation, in reference to the combative and resistant spirit of the Zulu people. At first, the concrete objective of the Zulu Nation was to structure and codify hip-hop [...]. Afterwards, it unceasingly strived to maintain the cohesion of this movement around a pacifist, non-violent spirit. The Charter of this movement is then guided by the motto ‘Peace, Love, Unity (and Having Fun)’”

“Toutes les expériences que j’avais vécues prenaient un sens parce que je pouvais à présent m’en libérer en les rappant. [...] Mais cela ne nous suffisait pas encore, car pour nous le rap était beaucoup plus qu’un nouveau genre musical, et l’attrance pour l’islam que ressentaient beaucoup de rappeurs américains faisait sensation chez nous. Le rap conduisait à une expression spirituelle. [...] Les rappeurs américains furent pour moi des modèles positifs”³⁵⁷ (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 70)

Whereas “rap” –all of rap?– could have seemed negative in the first part of our argument, judging from Early’s question of “rap” being dangerous or even “criminal,” it is not a far cry to say here that, retrospectively, “rap” –or some “positive” aspects thereof– is in fact what started Abd al Malik on the path to Sufism in the first place.

How does Abd al Malik define Sufism, then? And how is it different –or not– from orthodox Islam?

One of Sufism’s most fundamental principles is to be found in a phrase that gets repeated over and over again both in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* and in *Le Dernier Français*: “l’unique race humaine” –“the one human race.” In *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, the Sufi rapper thus states:

“Je voyais bien à présent qu’il n’y avait ni ‘nous’ ni les ‘autres,’ juste des femmes et des hommes en quête de bonheur. Je sentais bien que tous nous

³⁵⁷ “All of my past experiences were now having a meaning, because I was now able to free myself from them by rapping them. [...] Still, that was not yet enough to us, because, to us, rap represented much more than a new musical genre, and the attraction many American rappers felt towards Islam was making a big impression on us. Rap was leading up to a spiritual expression. [...] For me, American rappers turned out to be positive models”

ne faisons qu' 'un,' et que toute idée d' un partage radical de l' humanité en deux camps n' était qu' un confortable mensonge”³⁵⁸ (132)

I would even suggest that the very “*contrat d'écriture et de lecture*” –“writing and reading compact”– presiding over the confession contained in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France* can be seen as Sufism in –literary– action. Indeed, the *very precise* mapping of Abd al Malik's teenage criminal activity is an interesting initiative on Abd al Malik's part, as the author is keen on revealing very scrupulously the exact places in his hometown of Strasbourg where he used to use his “skills” as a pickpocket, such as the cathedral. I argue that such meticulous mapping could be a sign of efforts on Abd al Malik's part to powerfully *create an interpersonal relationship with his victims*. Let us imagine indeed a resident of Strasbourg whose wallet was once stolen in front of the cathedral, reading this book and realizing that his thief from several years ago might be Abd al Malik! Then the reader would read on and get to all the “explaining parts” we have enumerated. The book, in a way, may then work as a sort of mediator by highly dramatizing a virtual face-to-face meeting between robber and robbed, perhaps as a step towards reconciliation. Where physical assaults could lead to racism/*Front National* voting, a gesture of this nature would lead to comprehension and thus humanization –anti-racism, in sum. Such a perspective brings new light to the “*Avertissement*” –foreword, or cautionary word to the reader: “Certaines personnes ont pu se sentir heurtées [par ce livre] [...] et je tiens à m'en excuser sincèrement. Mais il s'agit de mon histoire de vie: je me devais de raconter” (8).³⁵⁹ The artificial boundaries between people –likely from different origins and social groups– have just collapsed through the powerful literary act, inspired, in this case, by Sufism and its One-Humanity principle.

³⁵⁸ “I was now well able to see that there was no ‘us’ vs. ‘the others,’ only men and women looking for happiness. I now knew, deep inside, that all of us formed only ‘one,’ and that any radical division of humanity into two camps was nothing but a comfortable lie”

³⁵⁹ “Certain people might have been shocked [by this book] [...] I really would like to sincerely apologize. But this is the story of my life, and I had to tell it”

It is, also, an episode of a unique kind of interpersonal relationship that serves as a turning point in Abd al Malik's narrative *Qu'Allah bénisse la France*. Both the actual narrative and its poeticized version in *Le Dernier Français* are worth being mentioned and studied. Here is the narrative of this very important moment:

“On se mit donc au travail. [...] Le plan était simple. [...] Mais en fait de précision, les choses ne se passèrent pas comme prévu. Ni [la personne âgée] ni [mon collègue] ne lâchèrent le sac, et elle [la personne âgée] s'effondra sur le trottoir sous la violence du choc. [Mon collègue] la traîna sur l'asphalte sur plus de deux mètres [...]. Pendant tout ce temps –une éternité– et malgré la surprise et la brutalité de son assaillant, elle n'avait émis aucun cri, ni poussé le moindre gémissement. Je me sentais sale. Laissant la vieille dame à terre, on se mit à courir sans nous retourner une seule fois [...]. Cette histoire [...] m'a traumatisé et m'a déterminé radicalement à me réapproprier ma vie. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui je suis hanté par l'image de cette dame qui tombe en silence devant moi. Plusieurs semaines durant, je n'ai cessé de lire la rubrique des faits divers des Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace [the Strasbourg local newspaper], mais ils n'en parlèrent jamais. Peut-être était-ce trop banal...”³⁶⁰ (49)

³⁶⁰ “We then started to work. [...] The plan was quite straightforward. [...] Instead of working as planned, things went completely amok. Neither [the elderly woman] nor [my colleague] did let go of the bag, and she [the elderly woman] violently fell flat on her face. [My colleague] dragged her on the pavement for over six feet [...]. During that whole time, which seemed like an eternity, and despite her surprise and the brutality of her attacker, nothing came out of her mouth –no cry, no whine. I felt dirty. Leaving the old lady lying on the ground, we started running without looking back even once. [...] This story [...] traumatized me and made me decide to radically get a hold of my life. Up until today I've been haunted by the image of this lady silently falling in front of me. For several weeks, I would read through the local section of the newspaper, but they never mentioned the attack. Perhaps it was just too banal...”

The poem from *Le Dernier Français* that presents us with a poeticized version of the same event is called “Prière de rue.” Although all the details do not match up (for example, there is a gunshot – “un coup de feu” – which is not present in the original narrative), the obsessive vision of the old lady victim clearly resurfaces. What is very interesting is that the recurring problem of French Muslims of not being able to worship inside buildings because of lack of space in appropriate places –entailing street prayer, “prière de rue”– is merged and intertwined with the victim story. The two, in effect, are put on the same level and dealt with the same respect:

“Elle se prosterne boulevard Ney
son nez³⁶¹ tout juste poudré
reflue l’espoir qui sort d’elle rouge
Évidemment personne ne bouge
[...] Elle morte sac à main vide
Ça ressemble donc à ça une prière de rue
[...] Gardiens de l’ordre vêtu de bleu
[...] Tout le monde s’agenouille quelque part
[...] De rester à distance ils prient les badauds
Ça ressemble donc à ça une prière de rue”³⁶² (113-114)

³⁶¹ We will come to this very “Abd al Malikian” technique that looks like some sort of “phonic enjambment,” in which the last word of one line is taken up again, albeit in a different form, in the next line: here, “Ney/Nez”

³⁶² “She is bowing down on Nay Boulevard // Her nose just freshly powered // From it hope is flowing back, all red // Of course no one is making a move // [...] She is dead and her handbag is empty // So that’s what it looks like, a street prayer // [...] Police officers, all in blue // [...] Every one is kneeling down where they can // They pray the curious people to please stand back // So that’s what it looks like, a street prayer”

In this multi-layered text, the verbs “*se prosterner*” (“to bow down”) and “*prier*” (“to pray”) are, at a first yet subliminal level of signification, verbs with a religious connotation that unmistakably refer to the aforementioned situation of Muslims in France; however, we quickly understand that the woman in question, holding an empty handbag, is not really praying with her head piously touching the ground, but that she lies dead, flat on her nose out of which blood is flowing –and with it “*l’espoir*,” “hope” for a better “France”? As for the religious verb “*prier*,” it receives the very matter-of-fact, down-to-earth meaning of policemen “praying” –asking– the crowd of curious people to stay clear of the crime scene.

These passages not only embody, in a performative manner, interpersonal relations, but they also show Abd al Malik’s care and interest for French Muslims in general. Hence again the question, is Sufism different from orthodox Islam?

Abd al Malik himself would contend that there is no difference at all: Sufism is “for peace” just like Islam actually *means* peace. So he keeps underscoring the fact that, to him, Sufism is perfectly “orthodox” in the sense that “le prophète Muhammad (PSL)³⁶³ n’avait-il pourtant pas combattu toute forme de ségrégation, qu’elle soit basée sur l’origine ethnique ou sociale?”³⁶⁴ L’islam n’était-il pas une religion sans frontières, destinée à toute l’humanité et pour

³⁶³ “Paix soit sur lui” (“Peace be on him”)

³⁶⁴ Hence Abd al Malik’s sadness at the sight of Muslim communities within contemporary France keeping separate, for example Muslim communities from the Maghreb refusing to mingle with Black Muslim communities, thus perpetuating a form of racism: “L’universalisme et l’antiracisme de l’islam, pourtant bien réels, devenaient malheureusement un discours creux dans la bouche de beaucoup de musulmans, qui pratiquaient l’inverse. Ce communautarisme exacerbé était particulièrement visible et choquant pendant l’Aïd-el-Fitr [...]: chaque communauté priait dans des lieux séparés. [...] Ne parlons même pas des questions de mariage, où les parents recherchaient en priorité une fille du pays...” –“Islam’s universalism and antiracism, undeniable as they might be, would become meaningless in the mouths of many Muslims, who practiced exactly the opposite. Exclusion on the basis of belonging to a different community was extremely visible and shocking during the Aïd-el-Fitr, [...] as each community would be praying in separate places. [...] Not to mention questions of marriage, with parents seeking for their sons in priority girls of the same origin...” (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 114-115). This last aspect of course would be later on of particular concern to Abd al Malik as a person, since he the Black

toutes les époques?” (116),³⁶⁵ which *de facto* makes the Sufi principle above –the “one-human-race” principle– in full accordance with Islam. The poet-rapper uses here beautiful expressions to express this state of things. “L’Alchimiste,” for instance, is a poem-rap song from *Le Dernier Français* which describes the role Abd al Malik attributes to his Sufi master, Sidi Hamza, who indeed as an alchemist, changed his heart –transformed it from vile to noble:

“Tu m’as dit ‘Le Noir l’Arabe le Blanc ou le Juif³⁶⁶ sont à l’homme ce que
les fleurs sont à l’eau’”³⁶⁷ (211)

This quotation introduces two things: first, that there is a Principle bigger than man in the same way that water is bigger than the flowers; water is essential to flowers, and unites them in that they all take their beings from the same source of Being, and yet every flower is different from the others in terms of smells and colors. Similarly, Abd al Malik recounts a Sufi meeting in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France*: “Toutes les palettes de l’humanité [...] étaient représentées. C’était magnifique. [...] Je me sentais léger, comme délesté de moi-même. J’avais l’impression de voir, après avoir été aveugle. Je goûtais à présent l’islam comme on croque un fruit délicieux”

African man got married with Wallen, from Morocco, generating at the beginning a lot of opposition from Wallen’s family

³⁶⁵ “Didn’t however Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him) fight against any form of segregation, be it ethnic or social? Isn’t Islam a religion without borders, good for the entire humanity and good for all time periods?”

³⁶⁶ Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu... and all other religions: “This diversity of religions stems from the diversity of cultures, from the diversity of worldviews which stand for as many responses made by man to God’s proposition” – “Cette diversité des religions tient à la diversité des cultures, des visions du monde qui marquent la réponse des hommes à la proposition de Dieu. Cette proposition de Dieu surgit à l’intérieur de la conscience humaine; c’est là, dans ce sanctuaire intime, que Dieu parle à chacun et l’invite à l’aimer. Cette invitation s’adresse à tous les hommes” (*Le Dernier Français*, 21). Significantly, a lot of sayings from certain poems could be Sufi/Muslim or Christian, which strongly gestures towards such universalism. The poem “La Voie,” for example, mentions “des cœurs assoiffés” (“thirsty hearts”) and the notion of “[frapper à la porte]” (“knocking at the door”) which are very reminiscent of John chapter 4 and Matthew chapter 7, respectively

³⁶⁷ “You said to me, ‘Blacks, Arabs, Whites, Jews are to man what flowers are to water’”

(172).³⁶⁸ We will have to come back to this epiphanic idea of “multicolored diversity” later in the course of this section.

Sufism, in its affirmation of spiritual universalism, is thus eminently pacifist and rejects all forms of violence:

“J’voudrais [...] qu’autour ça sente plus la poudre // On a l’même sang
qui coule rouge, qu’importe l’idée, le principe”³⁶⁹ (*Qu’Allah bénisse la
France*, 189)

As for the poem “Jerusalem,” it goes as far as talking about praying for one’s enemies:
“Je priais soudain pour mon ennemi // réalisant que derrière le masque se cachait l’Ami // À mi-
chemin de la prière en pleurs // puisque l’amour fait disparaître les peurs” (*Le Dernier Français*,
141)^{370 371}

³⁶⁸ “The whole palette of humanity [...] was represented. It was gorgeous. I felt so light, as though my body had no weight at all. It was like being able to see after being blind. I was now tasting Islam as one would bite into some delicious fruit”

³⁶⁹ “I would so much like [...] that it doesn’t smell like powder around us any more // We all have the same red blood, no matter what our ideas and principles are”

The “all-the-same-red-blood” “proof” of Sufism’s “One-Humanity” principle is certainly most powerful (see also the importance of “blood” in Islamo-Judaic thought, where “blood-shall-not-be-eaten” because “blood-is-life,” hence the halal and kosher meat prescriptions); yet Olivier Cachin, in his chapter of *Rap Stories* titled “Géopolitique Rapologique” – “Rapological Geopolitics” – regrets the intense rivalries within “French” rap, quoting the rapper Lunatic’s emphasis on his “Hauts-d’Seine” Parisian banlieue identity, an identity supposedly opposed to that of other rappers coming from other banlieues: “On n’est *pas du même groupe sanguin* [...]” – “We don’t have the same blood type” (482, emphasis added), generating this comment from Cachin: “One would have hoped that in rap, at least, in this music fashioned by and for the outcasts of Western urbanism [...], discriminations would have been abolished. That’s called wishful thinking. [...] The fight is going on” – “On aurait aimé croire que dans le rap, au moins, cette musique façonnée par et pour les oubliés de l’urbanisme occidental, [...] les discriminations avaient été abolies. Cela s’appelle un vœu pieux. [...] Le combat continue” (ibid). Cachin’s explanation for these anti-“principle of solidarity” rivalries is twofold: 1) “French” mimetism of American (rap) beef culture, and 2) the material conditions of rap production as delineated earlier, characterized by “overabundance of the offer,” in which rappers, in order to exist, “have to get noticed”

This micro-counterargument, I argue, does not affect, however, Abd al Malik’s macro-project for “France,” as the healing of “rivalries between rappers of different banlieues” must be preceded by a more general healing of “France”

³⁷⁰ “I would be all of a sudden praying for my enemy // realizing that behind the mask is the Friend // Half-way through prayer, in tears // Since love makes our fears disappear”

Sufism being, in consequence, the exact antithesis of “la haine,” and to the extent that rap is associated with “la haine,” then Sufi rap should be an “anti-rap” of sorts, except that we already saw that, in Abd al Malik’s case, things were slightly more complex than that, as Abd al Malik totally considers himself to be a “rapper” –and not at all an “anti-rapper.”

Another complexity here arises: despite the affirmation that Sufism and Islam are both “orthodox,” Sufism appears in fact to be fought against very hard by “orthodox Islam” in Abd al Malik’s narrative: after a conference on Sufism organized in the mosque of Strasbourg had to be cut short because of some loud protests from parts of the audience, the author concludes,

“Visiblement, la grande mystique soufie, fleuron de la culture musulmane, n’avait [pas] droit de cité dans les cités...”³⁷² (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 153)

He continues by going over his conundrum of being, as a Sufi rapper, at the crux of a double transgression: first off, on the one hand, Sufism itself is considered a transgression relative to Islam, because by privileging “sincerity” over “rules” and legalism, it *de facto* lessens the importance of the haram/halal dichotomy so pivotal to orthodox Islam;³⁷³ but then also, rap, on the other hand, is considered as another transgression relative to Islam! Both terms in the syntagm “Sufi rapper” thus appear to be problematic for orthodox Islam.

Concerning rap, Abd al Malik develops:

³⁷¹ Again, this is reminiscent of the First Letter of John, chapter 4 verse 18: “L’amour parfait bannit la crainte” – “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear”

³⁷² “Obviously, it seemed like the great Sufi mystic movement, despite being a jewel of Muslim culture, was not allowed to have any space in the urban space of the ghetto”

³⁷³ For Abd al Malik, however, Sufism does stay “orthodox” because “le Prophète Muhammad (PSL) n’affirme-t-il pas: ‘Rendez les choses faciles, ne les rendez pas difficiles’?” – “Do make things easier, and not harder” (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 139). Compare with Jesus saying, in Matthew 11:30: “Prenez mon joug sur vous et recevez mes instructions, [...] car mon joug est aisé, et mon fardeau léger” – “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”

“[Le fait que] la musique est *haram* selon certaines autorités [...] me posait un cruel dilemme. [...] Je continuais donc à faire du rap comme on suit le traitement d’une maladie honteuse”³⁷⁴ (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 119-120)

Interestingly, Early, in his talk, had concluded that yes, black music –rap included– was an “enormous achievement” in the history of the United States on the part of black people, but that it also created a lot anxiety –included among black people. Indeed, in the context of black people being, in Early’s words, “institutionally poor” (“they do not have institutions to protect their children, they have no counter-propaganda to go against rap”), rap on the contrary “*is there*” –immediately available. Black people’s anxiety towards rap is therefore twofold: it is, on the one hand, anxiety about not being able to stop children from listening to music, and, on the other hand, anxiety about “having no power over the artist, no way to influence the artist.” For Early, this situation reflected back on structural problems, i.e. Blacks lacking adequate institutions, and the answer to the “rap problem” would thus be “more institutions.”

Mutatis mutandis, this problematic could be easily transposed to postcolonial France as well. Given the already existing affinity between rap and Islam, both in the United States and in France –although, of course, this phenomenon needs to be historicized, relativized and absolutely not generalized–, one could thus wonder if Islam, the religion, could be the solution to this problem: could Early’s call for “more institutions” be interpreted as a call for “more orthodox Islam”?

The problem with this, in Abd al Malik’s specific case, is that Tariq Ramadan, one of the Muslim leaders comprised in the above circumlocution “certaines autorités,” has, in the end,

³⁷⁴ “The fact that music is *haram* according to certain authorities [...] faced me with a cruel dilemma. [...] I thus continued to make rap in the same way that one follows a treatment for some shameful disease”

agreed to allowing Abd al Malik to create “une forme artistique inédite, en conformité avec notre foi musulmane,”³⁷⁵ which not only is very vague, but which also Abd al Malik could simply not accept on the grounds that:

“Je savais bien que rien, en musique comme dans les autres domaines de l’art, ne naissait spontanément. Tous les courants, genres et styles actuels avaient une généalogie, et ils se fécondaient les uns les autres, a fortiori dans cet Occident multiculturel”³⁷⁶ (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 135)

“*Se fécondaient les uns les autres*”: factually, Mazarine Pingeot is indeed right to point out, in her preface to *Le Dernier Français*, that, in Abd al Malik, “[Deleuze and Derrida côtoient Notorious B.I.G. et Jay-Z, IAM et NTM]” (9);³⁷⁷ and also, related to the previous discussion of Abd al Malik belonging or not belonging to “rap,” see his excitement about being in NY city: “Me voilà donc [...] dans la ville de Big Daddy Kane, The Notorious B.I.G, Nas, Jay-Z et tous les autres!” (149).³⁷⁸ Note as well, finally, Abd al Malik’s well-known collaboration with Juliette Gréco and Brel’s piano accompanist Gérard Jouannest, two “monuments de la chanson française.” Abd al Malik totally and consciously situates himself in this “*Occident multiculturel*” in which each culture –including his own idiosyncratic rap– does not exist autonomously aside from the other cultures, but exists because of the other cultures, each culture fertilizing the other ones.

³⁷⁵ “a new kind of art form, compatible with our Muslim faith”

³⁷⁶ “I was well too aware that nothing, in music but also in all the other domains of art, is self-generated. All contemporary currents, genres and styles had a genealogy, and cross-fertilized each other, *a fortiori* in this multicultural West”

³⁷⁷ “[Deleuze and Derrida are made to rub shoulders with Notorious B.I.G. and Jay-Z, IAM and NTM]”

³⁷⁸ “So here I am, in the city of Big Daddy Kane, The Notorious B.I.G., Nas, Jay-Z and all the others!”

Such a statement may thus strike us as a true “postcolonial confession of faith, resonating indeed with this process of cross-pollenization that postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha see at work in every postcolonial cultural production, where no culture –dominating or dominated– gets reproduced exactly identical, but comes out as a “third term” hybridized as a result of some sort of “resistance.” We are yet to see, in the next section, which brings Rancière’s theory into the picture, how Abd al Malik’s Islamic/Sufi art is postcolonial in this very sense.

4.5 Sufism in the Republic (2): Abd al Malik’s Literary and Political Implementation of Rancierian Equality

In this section, I argue that it is very important, in order to understand Abd al Malik’s postcoloniality in all its depth, to keep in mind each one of the three following components: number one, that he is, “nation” and “nationality”-wise, “French”; number two, that he grew up in a banlieue as a young “Frenchman” of immigrant –Congolese– descent; and number three, last but not least, that this banlieue was specifically located in Strasbourg, which is the capital city of a region of “France” with a very strong regional identity, namely the Alsace region in the north-east of the country –a strong but minority identity based on a Germanic, i.e. “non-French,” dialect which is struggling to survive in the face of the hegemony of the “French” culture and language.³⁷⁹ In Alsace, thus, as we were able to see in Chapter 1, identity crises or questionings

³⁷⁹ Olivier Cachin himself, in *Rap Stories*, emphasizes Abd al Malik’s “regionality” as he mentions, in the course of his chapter titled “Géopolitique Rapologique” –“Rapological Geopolitics”– “NAP from Strasbourg,” which is *Abd al Malik’s very band* before his solo career. Giving first a little bit of background, Cachin puts things in ways that are actually quite consistent with the rest of this dissertation. Below his first subtitle, which reads, “France Cut in Half: The North-South Divide” –“*La France coupée en deux: l’axe Nord-Sud*,” Cachin writes: “The map of France, rap-wise, looks like an electoral map, with its strongholds [...] and factions. Is it because of American mimetism that this country felt urged to invent two rapological capitals waging a ferocious competition against each other?”

are not limited to second or third-generation immigrants in the banlieue, but arguably apply to the whole Alsatian population in general; this is indeed a region of “France” where the integration vs. assimilation debate, depending on whether one is or is not allowed to retain his or her particularities in order to fit into the “French” “nation,” has been historically affecting a far greater number of people than just immigrants.

As we have also had plenty of occasions to note, Jacques Rancière has (implicitly yet powerfully) identified the hegemonic tendencies of the “French” language and culture –backed up by a deliberate language policy of the “French” state– as being part and parcel of an “Archipolitics.” “Archipolitics” designates, in the conceptual system laid out in Rancière’s book

Hard to say; it still remains that while the US has New York and Los Angeles, France has Paris (plus its surrounding banlieues) and Planet Mars (Marseilles). To an East/West divide, we substituted a North-South one. [...] A centralized country, France always had as a principle to crush its provinces and attract to the capital the talents who wanted to ‘make it.’ IAM’s reflex, on the contrary, [...] [in the early 1990s], was to stay in their city and exacerbate Marseillais identity. [...] IAM never conceived of success as a stepping-stool towards Paris, but took this opportunity to make Marseilles shine, [...] [which initially did not make very happy] the ayatollahs of Parisian underground art scene” (480). Taking stock of this initial Paris/Marseilles divide, Cachin goes on to examine the situation of rap in the rest of the country, after a brilliant subtitle: “*Rap des villes et rap des champs: le hip-hop en province*” –“City Rat/Rap and Country Rat/Rap”: “[...] The provincial towns are a breeding ground for rap where, alas, those of them who are going to become famous are very, very few. For a few bands like KDD (from Toulouse) and NAP (from Strasbourg), who found their space in the hip-hop checkerboard, how many were forced to stop dreaming? The list is long [...]. The politics of blocks and the law of clans make the emergence of a new big name, outside the two main centers which are Planet Mars and the capital, virtually impossible. For in addition to geography, too, affinities play a big role in a rapper’s career. NAP, for instance, is indeed from Strasbourg, but could possibly not have made it at all without the extra credibility provided by the unwavering support of producer Sulee B” –“La France du rap est découpée comme la carte électorale, avec ses camps retranchés [...] et ses factions. Est-ce le mimétisme américain qui a poussé ce pays à s’inventer deux capitales rapologiques pratiquant une concurrence acharnée? Difficile à dire; toujours est-il que si les Etats-Unis ont New York et Los Angeles, la France a Paris (et ses banlieues qui la ceignent) et la planète Mars, soit Marseille. À l’Est/Ouest, on a substitué le Nord/Sud. [...] Pays centralisé, la France a toujours eu pour principe d’écraser ses provinces et de faire monter à la capital les talents voulant se faire connaître. Le réflexe d’IAM, [...] fut de tout ramener à leur ville et d’exacerber leur identité marseillaise. [...] IAM n’a jamais conçu le succès comme un marche-pied vers Paris, mais en a profité pour faire briller la cité de Phocée, [...] [ce qui initialement ne plut guère aux] ayatollahs de la scène underground parisienne” (480). “Par contre, la province et ses villes moyennes sont un vivier rapologique où les élus se comptent, hélas, sur les doigts de la main gauche de Django Reinhardt. Pour quelques groupes comme KDD (de Toulouse) ou NAP (de Strasbourg) qui ont trouvé leur place sur l’échiquier du hip-hop d’ici, combien sont les recalés du rêve? La liste est longue [...]. La politique des blocs et la loi des clans rendent quasi impossible l’émergence d’une puissance rap hors de ces deux principaux centres d’activité que sont Mars et la capitale. Car outre la géographie, les affinités jouent un grand rôle dans la carrière des rappers. Être de Strasbourg comme NAP, d’accord, mais avec le crédit ajouté qu’apporte le soutien indéfectible du producteur Sulee B” (481)

Disagreement (La Mésestente), a *polis* –here, “France”– whose self-avowed *telos* is “unity,” “unison,” “kosmos” –in one word: “harmony” (102-104).

This forced harmony is the result of a national ideology, the explicit purpose of which is to “harmonize” i.e. homogenize/standardize the “Nation.”³⁸⁰ Such a state of affairs, Rancière remarks, goes against the most basic of the most fundamental principles, which is: Equality. As the philosopher puts it, Equality is not a goal to achieve, but a postulate. It is, in other words, always already there, and it is always already there because *language* is endowed to everyone and not just to some hypothetical “happy few.” Rancierian Equality is thus first and foremost equality of intelligence through *equality of language*.

Importantly, according to Rancière, as long as it remains an “Archipolitics,” the current entity named “France” cannot, *stricto sensu*, be considered truly “democratic.” It is not even, Rancière says, really “political.” On the contrary, it is only when Equality is actively encouraged to break the discursive harmony of the Nation that “le politique,” or “democracy,” really happens; this encapsulates the well-known tenet of Rancierian philosophy of “disagreement” –or disharmony/jarring equality– consisting in the “uncounted” becoming “counted” and the “*sans-part*” finally receiving a part. Although what is known as Rancière’s “politics of aesthetics” is a much wider intellectual system, the valorization of disharmony over harmony is definitely an important part of it.

In this dissertation, I have complemented Rancière’s theory by arguing that such equality through language fundamentally posits *equality of all accents*; I further suggest here that Abd al Malik’s unique performative use of language and especially *accents* in his rap songs make him an agent of “democracy” in the Rancierian sense.

³⁸⁰ The video clip for Diam’s 2006 “Ma France à Moi” rap song –“France as I See It”–, showing the performative silencing of anything “non-harmoniously-French,” is in this respect particularly eloquent

Indeed, far from giving in to the overt-covert French language/accent policy according to which there would be accents more acceptable than others, with “banlieue-speak” ranging high on the list of unacceptable ones, it is very notable that Abd al Malik makes no efforts whatsoever to change his way of speaking. In fact, his very idiosyncratic voice and characteristic tone of voice become so recognizable that after listening to his songs, one also reads the poems or prose through his voice as it were –entailing a very unique experience for the reader. Far from erasing any accent, his songs are, rather, a superposition of accents.

This is evidenced in many ways, for instance when he sings in English with a purposefully strong “French” accent: see –or rather listen to– the magnificent song called “Ground Zéro” from his album *Château Rouge*. The “accent aigu” (diacritic) left in the title of the song –zéro– testifies, to a degree, that he couldn’t care less about speaking with the “right” accent; and even “zarma English” –signaled as such– makes its way into his poetry: “*Mama raised no fools!*” (157, emphasis in the text).

Above all, the poem-rap song “Conte alsacien” –“Alsatian Tale”– is a good case-in-point, in which the chorus is sung half in “French” and half in the Alsatian dialect –another accent, alongside the “ghetto” one, deemed “lourd” (“heavy,” i.e. “unrefined”), and thus unacceptable in the eyes –ears– of “French” language ideology. Whereas the sociolinguistic notion of “prestige” is responsible for the sharp decline of the Alsatian dialect among Alsatians, it is here sung with absolutely *no shame* –by a non-native Alsatian:

“On dirait l’Alsace de Brazza à Kinshasa.

On dirait l’Alsace d’Oujda à Tlemcen.

On dirait l’Alsace partout où les cœurs se terrent.

On dirait l’Alsace où la terre a un cœur.

Mer det seye s'elsass von Brazza bis Kinshasa.

Mer dat seye s'elsass von Oujda bis Tlemcen.

Mer dat seye s'elsass do wo d'harze sich versteckle.

Mer dat seye s'elsass do wo d'ard a harz het"³⁸¹

"Conte Alsacien," *Le Dernier Français* (95, italics in original)

Interestingly, this "Alsatian tale" could as well be an "African-Alsatian tale" because of all the toponyms related to his family's place of origin, such as "[le] Café Nono, dans le quartier Poto-Poto"³⁸² in Brazzaville where Abd al Malik's parents reportedly met –which could have marked the beginning of a great romantic love story ("C'est l'histoire d'un jeune homme et d'une jeune femme qui se partagent un cœur et qu'ont [sic] des rêves plein la tête," *ibid*)³⁸³, if the difficulties of being later immigrants in a foreign country had not utterly destroyed their relationship. In the end, the song leaves us with the portrait of a very beat-up and torn apart family, with one of the sons –one of Abd al Malik's brothers?³⁸⁴– "serving" time in prison:

"C'est l'histoire d'une femme qui va pour la énième fois rendre visite à
l'un de ses plus jeunes fils au parloir. Il lui dit : 'C'est rien, m'man !' Et
elle, elle pleure, n'arrivant même plus à soutenir son regard. C'est cette

³⁸¹ "You'd think it's Alsace from Brazza to Kinshasa // You'd think it's Alsace from Oujda to Tlemcen // You'd think it's Alsace wherever hearts are burying themselves to hide // You'd think it's Alsace where the land has a heart"

³⁸² "The Nono Café, in the Poto-Poto neighborhood"

³⁸³ "It's the story of a young man and a young woman who share just one heart and whose heads are full of dreams"

³⁸⁴ "Around the same time, my younger brother Stéphane –the one who had never seen my father– sank into the most violent forms of delinquency" –"À peu près au même moment, mon jeune frère Stéphane –celui qui n'avait jamais vu notre père– semblait dans la délinquance la plus violente" (*Qu'Allah bénisse la France*, 129). Could a possible attempt of an explanation for delinquency be contained in the interpolated clause, subtly gesturing again towards the difficult condition of being an immigrant?

Afrique qu'il ne connaît pas qui ensoleille sa peau et sourit *derrière son accent alsacien*. C'est toute seule qu'elle monte dans ce tramway nommé douleur [...]”³⁸⁵ (96-97, emphasis added)

This portrait of the “immigrant Mater Dolorosa” is far from being an isolated instance of Abd al Malik integrating his host city –Strasbourg– and of his host region –Alsace– into his art,³⁸⁶ and, at one level of interpretation, this could be read as a positive symbol of hybridity, like an anti-racism, intentionally integrationist move (I-take-a-step-towards-you-so-that-you-can-take-a-step-towards-me-as-well). The previous example, however, is tragic on two accounts: the Strasbourg tramway is definitely iconic of the Alsatian city, but the icon is turned into a symbol of despair through the reader-response expectation of the sentence to finish with another word starting with “d.” In addition, there is something tragic as well in this young African boy who does have an “accent alsacien” but who, on the other hand, turns out to be completely out of touch with Africa –a theme further explored by Abd al Malik in his song “Gibraltar.”

So, as much as Abd al Malik’s incorporation of “Alsatian emblems” seems to be a consistent militant gesture on his part in the sense that we delineated above –that of an “alliance” of sorts between two lesser French accents in the face of the hegemony of the dominant one(s)–, it remains that such integration might be, in the last analysis, more complex or less naïve than a mere let’s-get-together: a type of hybridity, instead, more along the lines of Homi Bhabha’s notion of “resistance.” The two aspects, I would argue, are not mutually exclusive.

³⁸⁵ “It’s the story of a woman who goes, for the umpteenth time, to pay a visit to one of her youngest sons at the prison’s visiting room. He tells her, ‘It’s nothing, mama!’ And she cries, she cries, she is not even able to look at him straight in his eyes any more. It’s this Africa, which he does not know, that makes his skin so shiny like the sun is shiny, and smiles behind his Alsatian accent. And it’s all alone that, on her way home, she takes this streetcar named dolor”

³⁸⁶ See, for instance, the poem entitled “Cathédrale” (pp.109 sq)

This is a sample of how, I believe, Abd al Malik is, indeed, truly “political” in Rancière’s sense, in the domain of what Rancière calls “*le politique*.” How does Abd al Malik now envision “*la politique*”? This is the next interesting question which will finally explain why the name of his book is *Le Dernier Français* and why we titled this part of the dissertation “Abd al Malik’s Révolution Pacifique.”

The term “*révolution pacifique*” is Abd al Malik’s (218), and it is in itself an interesting term, especially given that other poems in *Le Dernier Français* do tackle revolutions not entirely “*pacific*” –namely the revolutions of the recent Arab Spring which have been carried out through a mix of peaceful and violent means. For instance the poem “Jasmin et Chrysanthèmes” – “Jasmine and Chrysanthemum” – is a direct evocation of the Tunisian revolution known as “*la révolution de jasmin*” while the second blossom in the title –not used anywhere else in the poem, and therefore not explicitly explained– is traditionally put in French cemeteries for All Saints’ Day. The juxtaposition of the two flowers, therefore, can be interpreted as an homage symbol to all dead people, i.e. all victims of revolutions. Note also the reference to “*dégage*,” the slogan against the erstwhile President Ben Ali (43):

“Le peuple devient ouragan une fois conscient de lui-même

Le souffle de la liberté ne peut être contenu qu’un temps

[...] Égoïstes et dictateurs sachez que la rue est invincible

[...] Alors dégage va voir ailleurs Ici vous avez déjà tout pris pillé le peu de fruits

[...] Ce vendredi c'est l'homme au pistolet d'or³⁸⁷ qu'on enterre

Hier c'est l'homme du 11 septembre qu'on jetait à la mer",³⁸⁸

In addition, Abd al Malik does not hide his affinity with "*le mouvement des Indignés*" akin to the "Occupy Wall Street movement" – Stéphane Hessel in person is summoned in the poem called "La Voie" (138)– and with the leftist political thought of Alain Badiou who wrote *Le Réveil de l'Histoire* distinguishing between three kinds of riots ("émeute immédiate" from "émeute latente" and "émeute historique"). Note that *Le Petit Panthéon Portatif* by Badiou incidentally figures among Abd al Malik's avowed favorite readings (173), in an appendix to another book by Abd al Malik which we have not yet mentioned, but whose title is in itself very significant: *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu*; in English: *The War of the Ghettos Will Not Take Place*.

Some poems directly attack, to the root, capitalism and the political system as we know it, much in the same way as Badiou's *Le Réveil de l'Histoire* is a criticism against all those "satrapes-nigauds" (10),³⁸⁹ as the philosopher calls –satirically but very seriously– the politico-economic elite ruling over the modern world.

³⁸⁷ former Libyan leader Gaddafi

³⁸⁸ "The people becomes hurricane once it is conscious of itself // The wind of liberty may only be temporarily contained // [...] All ye selfish individuals and dictators, know that the street is invincible // [...] So, get out of here, get lost somewhere else, here you already took all you could take, plundered whatever little fruit you could find // [...] This coming Friday, it is the man with the golden pistol who is getting buried // Yesterday it was the man of September 11 who was thrown into the sea"

³⁸⁹ Untranslatable "*mot-valise*" pun made up of the word "satrape" (administrator of Ancient Persian empires) and "attrape-nigauds" (scam, trap for naïve people) to thus designate technocratic modes of governance. With this figure of speech, Badiou thus argues that capitalism is presented, to the people who is naïve and docile enough to believe it, as the only possible mode of governance

Such poems include “Des élections ou mini-traité de politique intérieure”³⁹⁰ and “Le Dernier Français” which gave its name to the collection of poems.

In the following excerpt of “Des élections ou mini-traité de politique intérieure,” Abd al Malik identifies some of the wrongs of contemporary Western democracy i.e. “fake democracy” (as opposed to Rancierian democracy):

“Il y a les candidats investis // il y a les candidats à l’investiture // il y a les
espérances de votes // et le bruit des casseroles // il y a les porteurs de
valises³⁹¹ // il y a les casseroles dans les valises // il y a les sondages // et
les scandales (donc) // il y a les retournements de situations // il y a ceux
qui se retournent dans leurs tombes [...]”³⁹² (33)

“Fake democracy” thus stands out as a system in which the only goal is to get elected and stay in power –hence the reference to the controversial presidential practice of ordering expensive polls, a practice that came under the spotlight in France under Sarkozy and a practice here described as scandalous because polls are ironically useless to the people and yet *paid for* by the people! The twist in the set phrase “*espérance de vie*,” changed into “*espérance de vote*,” –

³⁹⁰ “On Elections; A Mini-Treatise on Domestic Politics”

³⁹¹ A reference to the judicial Karachi case. See also this other quote from the same poem, denouncing the occult links between politics and money, aka corruption: “[il y a] ceux qu’on perdu d’avance // il y a ceux qui perdurent d’avances” –“Some have lost in advance // Some are not losing because of cash advances” (34). More precisely, even, than a mere reference to the Karachi case, this is reference to the Court’s suspicions about former President Nicolas Sarkozy’s involvement in that case

³⁹² “Some candidates are committed people; some candidates are committed to being elected // There are vote expectancies // And the noise of scandals // Some are carrying suitcases // There are scandals inside those suitcases // There are polls // and scandals, then (of course) // Some situations get overturned // Some people are turning over in their tombs”

another “v” word– highlights here what really matters to politicians, and it is certainly *not* life/the people’s interest.³⁹³

The next quotation, taken from “Le Dernier Français” (the poem), thus sounds like a serious warning:

“Et la jeunesse interpelle: // Ô vous dont la fin n’est plus bien loin // faites
donc attention à ce que vous nous transmettez [...]”³⁹⁴ (29)

So, a revolution is under way. From what precedes, however, it is not necessarily obvious that it should be “pacifique,” so let us now read more of the quotation from which the phrase “révolution pacifique” is taken from:

“Il faut [...] une nouvelle Révolution française. Non violente, pacifique [...]”³⁹⁵
(218)

Adding into the phrase both the capital “R” and the adjective “française” helps us see better through Abd al Malik’s concept of “révolution pacifique” in definite ways: firstly, it shows that what Abd al Malik is mostly interested in is not so much a general discourse about

³⁹³ Playing on Aristotle’s definition of “man as a political animal,” Abd al Malik thus states, “C’est ce qui disqualifie d’office l’animal politique d’aujourd’hui // parce que précisément n’étant plus tout-à-fait humain // il devient étranger au bien commun” (29). As for the poem “Des chiffres et des êtres” (81-82), the title is a play on words with the famous TV game “Des chiffres et des lettres,” the principle of which is to draw random letters and create the longest word possible with these letters; another part of the games is about numbers (a metaphor here for money). In the poem, the imaginary player drew four vowels (E, I, E, E) and six consonants (N, F, B, T, C and S), and, as the way the game normally goes, he says, “neuf lettres. Pas mieux. [in the sense ‘I could not come up with a longer word than that’]: BÉNÉFICES.” Indeed, judging everything through the lens of profit does not reflect a positive vision of society –a very Badiouian theme–, so the player is necessarily going to have to say something intrinsically negative –in this case, to stay within the lingo of the famous TV game: “pas mieux”!

³⁹⁴ “So the youth is calling out: // Ô you all whose end is in sight // Why aren’t you more careful about the values that you are transmitting?”

³⁹⁵ “What we need [...] is a new French Revolution. Non-violent, pacific [...]”

revolution, or “revolution in the abstract,” nor is his primary concern “revolution elsewhere” (despite the fact that, as we observed, he is not *uninterested* in the Arab Spring). His frame of reference is clearly “*France*” in the here-and-now –what can be done for “France” today to get postcolonial “France” out of the deep crisis it finds itself in especially with regard to identity and minority acceptance.³⁹⁶ Secondly, the capital “R” in “Révolution” enables Mazarine Pinget, in the preface she wrote for *Le Dernier Français*, to propose the following reading of Abd al Malik, a reading that I disagree with or at least think it needs to be greatly qualified: “Il [Abd al Malik] renoue avec l’esprit des Lumières [...] et son universalisme [...]”³⁹⁷ (8). The so-called “universalism” conveyed by the French Revolution and subsequent regimes has been widely criticized as a hegemonic ideological construction and this is definitely *not* what Abd al Malik is gesturing towards.

To be fair, Mazarine Pinget immediately completes her thought by saying “[...] et son universalisme qu’il veut à tout prix concret, et qu’il concrétise” (ibid).³⁹⁸ The truth is that indeed, Abd al Malik goes well beyond a formal/superficial adherence to the spirit of the French Revolution and its hackneyed motto “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.” It is a different kind of universalism, but a universalism nonetheless that Abd al Malik, as Pinget rightly points out, strives to make eminently “concrete.” How so?

We have already been led to talk about the importance of true interpersonal relationships in Abd al Malik’s work, but we have to come back to it, for *here*, simply yet powerfully, lies the

³⁹⁶ And possibly also the economic crisis if we take a holistic approach and consider that all the aspects of the crisis are tied together

³⁹⁷ “He [Abd al Malik] demonstrates his filiation with the spirit of the Enlightenment [...] and its universalism [...]”

³⁹⁸ “[...] and its universalism which he absolutely wants to make concrete, and does make concrete”

answer, according to the poet. “Jasmin et Chrysanthèmes,” the poem supposedly about the Arab Spring, ends with final lines that are very much about “France” and what the revolutionary act *par excellence* in the contemporary “French” context might ultimately look like –i.e. again, simply yet powerfully, an act of love towards the other:

“J’ai planté du jasmin ce matin dans ma cité HLM
Et je me suis demandé ce que je devais faire pour que la France elle
m’aime
pour que la France elle m’aime”³⁹⁹ (46)

This emphasis on “love” refers back to the importance of Sufism for Abd al Malik but it also has far-reaching consequences from a theoretical point of view. It first completely reverses on its head the nationalistic, xenophobic “love-it-or-leave-it” slogan; it then also importantly puts Leslie Adelson’s understanding of “hybridity” in dialogue with Homi Bhabha’s. As we did see earlier, Homi Bhabha’s theory does apply to Abd al Malik’s work –to some extent at least. While we have already used Leslie Adelson’s 2001 article “Against Between: A Manifesto,” and her differing understanding of hybridity, in our section about André Weckmann, it proves to be very useful again concerning Abd al Malik. The poem entitled “La France,” indeed, is very reminiscent of Leslie Adelson’s depiction of –in the German context– a *hyphenated* “Turco-German culture” which, in the said article, she compares to “a house in which people gather and join forces” (6). Love *is* therefore a *constructive* political act:

“La France que nous appelons de nos vœux n’est pas préfabriquée c’est à
nous de la construire

³⁹⁹ “I have planted some jasmine this morning in my ghetto // And I did ask myself, what should I do so that France loves me // so that France loves me”

[...] La France c'est notre bled que tu le veuilles ou non

[...] Aimer son pays c'est respecter la destinée qui a lié notre destin
prendre les armes de la paix et aller sur le front du quotidien"⁴⁰⁰ (91)

France unquestionably remains Abd al Malik's sole frame of reference, which could be supported by countless additional evidence like: "Je ne rêve ni en arabe ni en lingala // pas même en wolof pas même en bambara // Je ne rêve ni en espagnol ni en anglais // mais parle aime et rêve en français"⁴⁰¹ (*Le Dernier Français*, "Comme dans un rêve" – "Like in a Dream" – 77), or this excerpt from the already mentioned poem-rap song "Saigne" – "Bleed" – where the chiasmus definitely puts the emphasis on the syntagm "*en français*":

"Et franchement, je pense, je parle, je rêve et je respire en français! En français je pleure, je ris, je crie, je saigne"⁴⁰² (206)

Note that such insistence on the "French" language and the persistent belief in something called the "French" "Nation" does not preclude the validity of our previous argument, namely that Abd al Malik is a good representative of Equality according to Rancière. The compatibility of the two ideas is wonderfully demonstrated in the piece entitled "Le nouveau président" – "The New President" –: in this poem, the reader gets exposed to a long, vibrant and incredibly inspiring inaugural speech, the last words of which are the following exclamation:

⁴⁰⁰ "The France whose existence we hope for is not prefabricated it's our job to build it // [...] France is our bled, whether you like it or not // To love one's country is to respect its destiny, its destiny which linked our destinies together it's to seize the arms of peace and go fight on the front of the everyday"

⁴⁰¹ "My dreams are neither in Arabic nor in Lingala // Not even in Wolof nor Bambara // My dreams are neither in Spanish nor in English // But I do speak love and dream in French"

⁴⁰² "And frankly, I think, speak, dream and breathe in French! In French I cry, I laugh, shout, bleed"

“Vive la République! Et vive la France arc-en-ciel,⁴⁰³ unie et débarrassée
de toutes ses peurs!”⁴⁰⁴ (176)

All along, the reader is led to believe that it is indeed a real new French president actually speaking. Then comes the coda, in italics:

*“L’homme quitta le pupitre et se remit à balayer la salle où le candidat du
Parti, s’il était élu, allait tenir son premier discours présidentiel dans
moins de vingt-quatre heures.*

*Ses collègues de la société de nettoyage qui, comme lui, s’affairaient à
nouveau avaient bien ri en le voyant faire le mariole derrière le micro qui
était éteint, évidemment...*

*Mamadou, avec son accent appuyé, lui avait même dit qu’il voterait pour
lui si l’idée lui venait de se présenter aux prochaines élections. Bien
entendu, s’il s’était fait naturaliser d’ici-là!”*^{405 406}

(176-177, emphasis added)

⁴⁰³ Again the stress on “multicolored diversity,” central to Sufism

⁴⁰⁴ “Long live the Republic! And long live the rainbow France, united and freed from all its fears!”

⁴⁰⁵ “The man left the pulpit and started again to sweep the room in which the candidate of the Party, if he was elected, would be pronouncing his first presidential speech in less than twenty-four hours. His colleagues from the cleaning company who, like him, had gotten busy again, had had a good laugh by watching him acting like a fool behind the mike, which, of course, was turned off... Mamadou, with his strong accent, had even told him that he would vote for him if it came across his mind to be a candidate for the next elections –that is, if he had received his citizenship by then, of course!”

⁴⁰⁶ This “would-be” speech takes on a whole new dimension, and becomes, through literature, a “will-be” speech, when put in parallel with Abd al Malik’s most recent book, *L’Islam au secours de la République –Islam at the Rescue of the Republic*– which, published in 2013, presents us with the story of a candidate to the “French” presidential elections, well ahead in the polls until he is “caught” praying like Muslims, because he *is* Muslim

The context is definitely France, but a non-normative France indeed where a place is given to other languages (such as Arabic)⁴⁰⁷ and to “strong accents” (“[*des accents appuyés*]”) – as well as political rights to the proud owners of these accents: in sum, Rancierian “politique” leading towards real and effective multiculturalism; anti-racism in action.

Abd al Malik contends that there is nothing more “French” than the state of mind presented here. In the postface, titled “Après l’indignation” – “After Feeling Outraged” – (in reference to Stéphane Hessel’s pamphlet “Indignez-vous” – “Time for Outrage!” –), Abd al Malik inscribes “à la source de l’identité française” – “at the source of French identity” – “*le refus d’asservissement*” – “the refusal to be enslaved”:

“Le refus d’asservissement s’élève aujourd’hui, à nouveau, dans le contexte d’une société financiarisée, collectivement orientée vers une vie matérialiste et consumériste”⁴⁰⁸ (218)

The first part at least of the next sentence sounds very much like Badiou:

“À ‘l’Ancien Régime de la société financiarisée’ il faut substituer la ‘Société de l’homme de foi’”⁴⁰⁹ (219)

Very crucially, Abd al Malik deems this refusal to give in, this inclination to resist and protest, as “typically French.” Equally as important is that he continues by suggesting that as racism/lepénism becomes a rampant, insidious discourse pervading contemporary postcolonial

⁴⁰⁷ cf. the poem “Mabrouk” (73), or the letter to his brother ending with a *Franco-Arabic* greeting: “Le Salam, donc” (154)

⁴⁰⁸ “This refusal to be enslaved is being heard again, today, in the context of a financialized society, collectively oriented towards a materialist, consumerist life”

⁴⁰⁹ “To the ‘Ancien Régime of financialized society,’ we need to substitute the ‘Society of the man of faith’”

“France,” the “true French people” are going to be the ones who resist it. The peaceful revolution thus at hand may be an arduous task: “Ce n’est plus seulement l’Histoire que nous devons écrire, mais la Légende” (151)⁴¹⁰ –and French people giving in to capitalism and to racism, in these critical times, could not be said to be true or faithful to the essence of “Frenchness” hereby defined. *Le Dernier Français*, all in all, is a call to rise up to the situation.

And this is how *la boucle se boucle*, so to speak, with the poem “Le Dernier Français” that gave its name to *Le Dernier Français* –the book:

“Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une idée certaine de la France
et en vérité je vous le dis
je suis le dernier Français”⁴¹¹

(30, emphasis in original)

The Gaullist phrase “une certaine idée” –de la France–⁴¹² is reversed into “idée certaine,” highlighting the hope and confidence of the writer in France.⁴¹³ Quite paradoxically, it is a Black “Frenchman,” a recent immigrant perhaps still considered as a stranger and outsider by some, who proves to be more “French” than “the French” themselves.

⁴¹⁰ “It is not just History that we have to write, but Legend”

⁴¹¹ “All my life, I have cultivated a certain definite idea of France // and verily I say unto you // I am the last Frenchman”

⁴¹² cf. De Gaulle’s already quoted in this dissertation famous quotation from his *Mémoires de guerre* serves here as the background *common* reference (entailing that Abd al Malik is here purposefully, willfully participating in the “French imagined community”): “Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France. [...] La France ne saurait être la France sans grandeur” –“All my life, I have cultivated a certain idea of France. [...] France cannot be France without grandeur”

⁴¹³ See also the messianic tone of “en vérité je vous le dis” used, before Abd al Malik, by a certain Jesus of Nazareth

In the face of economic hardship/exploitation and cultural/language hegemony that together constitute the World Order in the French postcolonial context, or “French World Order,” it remains to be seen, last but not least, how the rapper-poet implements his own revolution in the French *Word* Order as I argue it is the case –the revolution against the World Order is indeed accompanied by –or preceded by– a revolution within the Word Order. It is a revolution in word and deed.

So, what could be the *style* of this “rap” that is not exactly “rap” but not exactly “anti-rap” either? To answer this, another feature of Sufism has to be put forward: that is, a feature present in both “standard” Sufism and in Abd al Malik’s implementation of it, namely a special focus on “interiority.” “Je compris aussi [...] que le problème des cités n’était pas seulement social, qu’il ne concernait pas que la condition du groupe, mais d’abord et surtout le rapport de l’individu à lui-même,”⁴¹⁴ says Abd al Malik in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France* (107). Sufi “Jihâd,” therefore, can only be “jihâd al-nefs,” meaning “le jihâd de l’âme” –“jihâd of the soul” (148): “J’aimais cette idée qu’au lieu de pointer un doigt accusateur vers l’autre, c’est nous-mêmes qu’il convient de remettre en question” (ibid).⁴¹⁵

“Interiority” is important with regard to style in one special way: Adonis, the Syrian poet, suggests, in his 2005 book *Sufism and Surrealism*, that the two movements have actually a lot in common in that to Surrealism’s reliance on “*écriture automatique*” –“automatic writing”– would correspond Sufism’s excorporeal experiences and communication with the divine; what is more, Adonis sees them both as responses to modernity. I argue that the dire situation of “French”

⁴¹⁴ “I also understood [...] that the problem in French ghettos is not only social; it does not only have to do with the condition of the group, but it is first and foremost a matter of the relationship between the individual and himself”

⁴¹⁵ “I liked this idea that instead of pointing an accusing finger towards the other person, the appropriate way is to question ourselves”

banlieues and the internal power struggles pertaining to postcolonial “France” in general do in fact constitute, for Abd al Malik, a “modernity” against which he deliberately wants to be “anti-modern.”⁴¹⁶ Does that mean, following Adonis’ reasoning, that the writing technique used by Abd al Malik to write the poems in *Le Dernier Français* is going to be surrealist or akin to surrealism? Perhaps so – a Freudian analysis would anyway always pinpoint that the unconscious is at work no matter what. What can be said for sure about Abd al Malik’s poems-rap songs, though, is that literary creation for him comes a lot through mental association (“association d’idées”).

What I have termed “phonic enjambment” when commenting on the close homophones “Ney” and “nez” in the poem-rap song “Prière de rue” (“Elle se prosterne boulevard **Ney** // son **nez** tout juste poudré”, 113, emphasis added) is a good illustration of this phenomenon.

Examples are numerous, such as:

“Sur leurs T-shirts d’un badge Touche pas à mon pote ils étaient **ceints**

(**Syn**)thétisaient jeunes de cité toute une pensée révolutionnaire”⁴¹⁷

Le Dernier Français (85, emphasis added)

Or:

“Comme un faible écho de cette nuit cousine germaine où il a plu des

cristaux

(**To**)talitaire pensée fascisante la bête immonde peut prendre de subtiles

⁴¹⁶ Interestingly, Abd al Malik takes up again Jonathan Frazen’s phrase comparing rappers to some “Baudelaire des temps modernes” (*Qu’Allah bénisse la France*, 70)

⁴¹⁷ “On their T-shirts they’d wear a button that said Don’t Touch My Buddy // The youth from the ghetto was thus synthesizing an entire revolutionary thought”

formes”⁴¹⁸

Le Dernier Français (87, emphasis added)

These two examples are particularly interesting because in the corresponding rap song, i.e. in the actual musical performance, titled “Lorsqu’ils essayèrent” –“When They Tried”– (shorter for “*Lorsqu’ils essayèrent de ranimer Malik*” –“When they tried to revive Malik”), the two words, when *actually* rapped, are being literally fused together –which is indicated in the text by the parentheses– so that what the listener actually hears is “*ils étaient ceintsthétisaient*” and “*cristauxtalitaire*.” Evidently, the minimal units making up the French language here are not taken as simple, fixed-once-and-for-all building blocks,⁴¹⁹ but as malleable material to be fashioned and recreated at will, whether consciously, semi-consciously or unconsciously –an operation facilitated, in Abd al Malik’s case, by Sufism.

4.6 Conclusion: “Postcolonial Islam,” “Republican Rap” and “Faithfulness to France”

If postcolonialism is a part of postmodernism, the logical consequence should be a certain distrust towards any idea of “nation”; although thinkers like Neil Lazarus would object, postcolonialism, indeed, is *in theory* a close relative of postnationalism. In Abd al Malik’s case, though, despite the fact that we hope to have demonstrated that the term “postcolonial” applied to him, the Islam he conveys in his rap and poetry appears to be nonetheless compatible with an

⁴¹⁸ “Like a remote echo from that night, first cousin night, German cousin night, when it rained crystals // Totalitarian thought fascist thought the ugly beast can take various, subtle forms”

⁴¹⁹ “Matière poétique illicite et deal de paradoxes // des mots et des camés // À chacun sa drogue!” –“Illegal poetical matter and dealing with paradoxes // on the one hand, words; on the other hand, junkies // You may have your drug, I have mine!” (130)

idea of “French nation” in an almost most traditional (sacred) sense. It is “postcolonial Islam” and “national Islam” all at once.

What happened that could explain this seeming contradiction? Has Abd al Malik fallen for the illusion of “French” universalism, has he succumbed to the force of “French” ideology, which would only further underscore the extraordinary power of such discourse? Should rappers now defend “France” in the most traditional sense, indeed, “France” would thus stand out truly as an “arch-achipolitics” of sorts capable of phagocytizing everything around itself through its colossal assimilating centripetal force. Or is Abd al Malik “only” putting “France” at the very center of his art because, in order to combat racism, he has to address his “French” audience in terms that they will understand, i.e. in plain “French” terms?

However, whether Abd al Malik’s adherence to the “French” “nation” is a hundred percent “sincere” or “strategic,” is, I do think, a moot question: I have put forward, indeed, that Abd al Malik’s literary production is a literature that puts Rancierian equality into practice, as it foregrounds language diversity and, very strikingly, diversity of accents. The revolution it embodies is thus both “quiet” and “loud.” It is quiet, almost velvety, because while it may affirm solidarity with or comprehension for the riots/revolutions on the street, it does stay within the realm of words and language, as Mazarine Pingeot sums it up: “Il [Abd al Malik] a fait du slogan l’espace de la poésie” (7).⁴²⁰ Furthermore, Abd al Malik’s rap, as we saw, is “softer” than other kinds of rap (including as far as diction is concerned), located as it is at the sensitive border between violence and non-violence. But it is also “loud,” undeniably and powerfully loud, because Equality does indeed break the discursive harmony of the Nation, thus introducing, at the metaphorical level, well-needed *disharmony* –which is how “true politics,” *le politique*, gets

⁴²⁰ “He [Abd al Malik] made out of the slogan a space for poetry”

ultimately defined by Rancière. France may well seem “sacred” for Abd al Malik, making his rap look like a sort of “republican rap,” it is sacred without the sacredness of “French” language and ideology –thus *unsacred*. Situated at the junction between “regional literature” and “immigrant literature,” Abd al Malik’s literature is Equality incarnate into words.

CONCLUSION:

REDEFINING “LEGITIMATE” CULTURE IN FRANCE

“‘L’oeil’ est un produit de l’histoire reproduit par l’éducation. [...] Le goût classe, et classe celui qui classe. Les sujets sociaux se distinguent par les distinctions qu’ils opèrent, entre le beau et le laid, le distingué et le vulgaire [...]”⁴²¹

Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (iii, vi)

While definitely informed by the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière, this dissertation is also in no less important dialogue with the sociological analysis of Pierre Bourdieu, as exposed in *La Distinction*, published in 1979.

As we have now seen, the harmony-driven “French” Archipolity is characterized by a double monolingualism: “one language,” but also “one discourse” about what “France” is, or should be; and “accented literature” occurs in any piece of literature presenting variations from these linguistic and discursive norms. “Prestige” has proved to be a key concept in this dissertation, as the “French discourse” which has evolved over time is a *centralized* “French *superiority* discourse” that has had the *power* to relegate competing anti-centralization discourses into the margins of non-prestige. This dissertation, then, redefines Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” in light of this “French discourse”; in fact, all things considered, my dissertation ends up

⁴²¹ “The ability to appreciate a work of art is a product of history, itself reproduced by education. [...] Taste makes distinctions, and distinguishes as a distinguished individual the person who makes such distinctions. Social subjects distinguish themselves through the distinctions they make between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar [...]”

questioning the validity of Bourdieu's concept of "prestigious" "*legitimate* culture" (emphasis added) as implicitly associated with "higher-class culture". I have demonstrated that, in effect, a re-balancing of power-prestige between "French canonical culture" and "French minority cultures" (regional and immigrant cultures) has been occurring, inside "France," since the postcolonial moment (i.e. since the regionalist movement *and* since decolonization, i.e. since 1968), and that this re-balancing of power should not be overlooked. No less than a redefinition of "legitimate culture" is thus unfolding under our very eyes in contemporary France; but to grasp the importance of this phenomenon, we need to first get a good understanding of what "legitimate culture" means in Bourdieu's original context.

In *La Distinction*, Bourdieu crucially argues that one's ways of reasoning are heavily influenced, if not determined, by what he calls "habitus" –socially-formed habits of thought. His point is that higher-class people, by being socially exposed, from very early on, to "higher-class culture," spontaneously develop "higher-class habits of thought" that enable them to appreciate said "higher-class culture," since they will indeed master the "higher-class codes" necessary to understand it. It is a form of "cultural capital" that adds up to other forms of capital to create and perpetuate inequalities. Bourdieu's premise is that in order for a "lower-class" person to be able to hope to one day move up the social ladder and reach the "higher-class" sphere, this person needs to first be able to understand the culture of this "higher-class" and therefore share its codes. However, "lower-class people," unlike "higher-class people," do *not* have this privilege of being exposed to this "higher-class culture" by birth, and therefore begin life with a considerable unfair disadvantage which greatly reduces their chances of social advancement. School, even, which in theory is supposed to promote social advancement, will in fact largely contribute to *reproduce* social hierarchy, as the "higher-class" children who already master the codes will *de*

facto get the higher grades, then the better diplomas, which, in the French system, do secure access to “higher-class France.”⁴²² Such an elitist French system, arguably inherently hostile to immigrants who by definition do *not* possess by birth these “French higher-class codes,” was recently denounced, precisely in Bourdian terms, by journalist Bertrand Chokrane in his article “France: La Machine à Exclure,” published in *Le Point* magazine this past March 2015.⁴²³ One may wonder, too, if the “French anxiety around spelling” (cf. Harold Schiffman in the Introduction) may not be another manifestation of a “French higher-class code,” unconsciously meant to exclude immigrants. In this case, Abd al Malik’s spelling “mistakes” (despite the fact that he was, at school, a brilliant student)⁴²⁴ may thus be a *deliberate accentuation of the “French linguistic culture”* described by Schiffman.

Related to this and paramount to this dissertation is the fact that Bourdieu terms “French higher-class culture”: “*legitimate culture*” (i, emphasis added). As we saw in the Introduction, Rancière already questioned the “high vs. low culture” problematic by showcasing, in his *Nuit des Prolétaires*, that the literary works produced by nineteenth-century *workers* (as opposed to “writers”) were *just as “legitimate”* as the works typically included in the French literary canon. Through his concept of “aesthetics,” he established that the only reason why these works were not known by the public was because of a problematic of “political conditions of visibility.” *The “politics of aesthetics,” therefore, also amounts to a reevaluation of “literary/cultural*

⁴²² “Against the charismatic ideology which holds that taste, as far as legitimate culture is concerned, must be a natural gift, scientific observations show that cultural needs are the result of upbringing” – “contre l’idéologie charismatique qui tient les goûts en matière de culture légitime pour un don de la nature, l’observation scientifique montre que les besoins culturels sont le produit de l’éducation” (i); also: “Cultural nobility, too, has its titles of nobility, which are granted through the school system [...]” – “La noblesse culturelle a aussi ses titres, que décerne l’école [...]” (ii)

⁴²³ http://www.lepoint.fr/invites-du-point/bertrand-chokrane/chokrane-france-la-machine-a-exclure-24-03-2015-1915229_2466.php#xtor=CS3-190 (accessed 03/24/2015)

⁴²⁴ e.g. in “Conte Alsacien”: “C’est l’histoire d’un jeune homme et d’une jeune femme qui se partagent un cœur et *qu’ont* [sic] des rêves plein la tête” (emphasis added), instead of “qui ont,” *en bon français*

legitimacy"; against Bourdieu, Rancière claims that not only "French canonical culture" is *legitimate*.

In addition, where Bourdieu, and Rancière, for that matter, were mainly concerned with the consequences of cultural hegemony and cultural reproduction *in terms of "class"* ("high culture vs. low culture" entailing an insurmountable separation between "higher class" and "lower class"), I emphasize the artificial, arbitrary, discursive equation of "high culture" with "French *national* culture," which historically enforced the systematic lowering of regional speech and immigrant speech *—regardless of "class."* My dissertation thus completely situates itself in the wake of Bourdieu, yet with a complete shift in focus.

As far as regional speech goes, this systematic lowering has been discursively implemented over time through, for instance, the instillation into French people's minds of one particular *habitus*, which is the *habitus* of a "Paris-Province" dichotomy *—*with "prestige" being organically attached to the "Paris" element of the dichotomy (cf. as a mere example Stendhal's 1830 *Le Rouge et le Noir*, deeply structured, at least at a first level of reading, around such a binary opposition). As far as immigrant speech goes, we have seen, in Chapters 2 and 3, how second and third generation authors are compensating for an initial lowering/silencing of the immigrant father's voice. While "canonical French culture/literature" may, realistically, given the archipolitical constraints in place, remain the "*official* (common-denominator) culture/literature" of France, I hope to have demonstrated how, after 1968 and the postcolonial moment, a new "hyper-aesthetic regime" enabled "minority regional literature" and "minority banlieue literature" alike to become more visible, and thus reach the status of "*legitimate* *—*if not *official* culture," but at least performatively endowed (endowing itself) with *prestige*.

Given the role of education and schooling in Bourdieu's account, it should come as no surprise that "bilingual education" is such a controversial topic in today's France. As one should note, the system described by Bourdieu is only valid in a polity based on a uniform/uniformizing type of education, such as, precisely, the "French Republican" one. In the last analysis, therefore, bilingual schooling, whether "French/Alsatian" or "French/Arabic," can only be perceived as a threat to the archipolity (aka "social order") –cf. Introduction– because it would not only (for the regional problematic) undermine the reproduction of habitus such as the Paris/Province mental structure which secures the hegemony of "French-Parisian superiority discourse," but it would *also* (for the immigration problematic) *disturb the reproduction of social hierarchy*, more effectively than an umpteenth "plan banlieue."

This anti-archipolitical process at work through the displacement of "*official* literature/culture" by a concept of "*legitimate* literature/culture" (all literatures being "legitimate" cf. Rancière's "equality-through-language") is, as I see it, extremely important –and positive. It paves the way, to a certain extent, for a sort of "Québécoisation" of France. Any move away from the archipolity and towards an anti-archipolity will indeed mirror, *mutatis mutandis*, Québec's own transformation, after the 1960s "Quiet Revolution," from an "ethnic nation" into a more *immigrant-inclusive* "civic nation" (Oakes and Warren). Such a displacement from "official literature/culture" to "legitimate literature/culture" bears incalculable consequences, as it redefines contemporary France *not so much as an archipolitical nation any more* ("linguistically-monolingual-and-discursively-harmonious-nation") *but as a "community"* ("linguistically-multilingual-and-discursively-heterogenous-community") –i.e. "democracy" in Rancière's sense; or, indeed, postcolonial, "agonistic community."

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