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Le regard de l'étranger ? France as 'elsewhere' Un échange à partir de six questions

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FIXXION: How would you characterize French studies – in terms of the relationship of its practitioners to the otherness (or otherwise) of their object of study, in terms of its evolving disciplinary landscape, in terms of its underpinning paradigms and relationship to Anglophone intellectual movements such as Cultural Studies particularly in the United Kingdom?

Anna-Louise Milne: It strikes me, when thinking about the currents that have contributed to breaking the banks of a traditional conception of French Studies, that the pressures known colloquially as the 'canon wars' in the US operated from quite different bases in the United Kingdom, though the result was also to diversify and radically renew the study of French culture. And I think this does have to do with the fact that France and French culture was an *ailleurs*, though a very proximate one for many of the key practitioners. This side-step towards 'non-national' territory meant that the process of redress driving the canon wars was less directly operative, arguably leaving space for other motivations to come to the fore, linked in part to transformations underway within the British higher education sector. So although there is a danger of sounding facetious, I think it is useful to start by considering that British students and scholars of French culture are always in a certain relation of marginality to their object of study and that has a range of consequences for how French Studies has evolved in the Anglophone context. It would be easy to be disparaging, in the first instance, and identify a possible parochialism in British French Studies, in the way that I have heard Alain Farah do with regard to French Studies and the French literary production in Québec in the 1980s and 90s. It's probably true that there were lags in some quarters. But there were also some very striking examples of keen attuning to new voices that came from connections that bypassed the centrality of the canon. For example, the hugely significant work accomplished by Alec Hargreaves on the *beur* novel and Azouz Begag in particular,

which retrospectively looks to owe a lot to his own position in a northern, non-traditional university environment, Loughborough University, which only became a full university in 1996 having been a technological university since 1966 and where he worked with young Brits who were often first-generation university students. One could point to all amount of significant work done on subjects relegated to the 'periphery', if considered at all within metropolitan France before the 2000s, by scholars working in the periphery of the United Kingdom. I'm thinking of your own work on travel writing and Haiti, but also Jim House from Leeds on the Algerian War, David Murphy from Stirling on Senghor and pan-Africanism, to cite only a few and with an emphasis on the North.

And intersecting with that, of course, is that other key manifestation of the changing composition of the British student population and university faculty, most evident first in the North again, that is the growth in Cultural Studies with a strong underpinning in British Marxism and the influence of Raymond Williams. Obviously, Stuart Hall in Birmingham is the first name that comes to mind, and we could point to the centrality of Fanon's writings for Hall ("The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why Black Skin, White Masks?", 1995) or his work on French post-war 'humanist' photography (1997), but I also think it's important to remember that T.J. Clark, whose work on Paris and the Nineteenth Century would have huge but diffuse impact, taught in Leeds, before emigrating for a long span of his career to California. The existence of the journal *French Cultural Studies*, founded in 1990, testifies to the precocity with which British scholars of French Studies abandoned the canon and turned their attention to new objects of study, ones that resonated with their interests in 'popular' or vernacular culture, and that were also more accessible to their students engaged in learning a language and discovering a culture, as opposed to becoming students – and often teachers – of the national literature in a country overwhelmingly conditioned by the presumed pre-eminence of literary culture.

I'd just add that, though there were examples of this type of work emerging in French Studies in the US through the same period, they shared something of the same marginality within the broader field where the stakes were being set very much by the importation, as we know, of 'French Theory'. And here again we're going to find a lot of interesting cross-currents because if today scholars such as Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are finally starting to find substantial readerships in France, then we shouldn't forget that their work began quite literally in Spivak's case in the act of translation of Jacques Derrida into English and also, by extension, into the frame of English and Comparative Literature. French Theory's impact on the development of a notion of 'the literary' and by extension literary studies, laying the groundwork for the growth of world literature (and in tension with modern languages study in some regards) is something we should come back to, but to conclude first on the significance of Cultural Studies and Marxism, the work of someone like Kristin Ross, whose first book on Rimbaud, social space and the prose poem was only translated 25 years after first publication in English and released – 'quietly' – in France in 2014, is also significant. And she started out in California, worked in the vicinity of T.J. Clark and other Marxists, for whom Henri Lefebvre was absolutely decisive.

Charles Forsdick: This year is the centenary of the Leathes report, still one of the most important public documents on what was then called 'Modern Studies' in the UK. Published in 1918 in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, it reflects on the importance of Modern Languages in preparing the young for the process of returning Europe to peacetime. The assumptions of the report are that French remains the most important language in the educational ecosystem: the language of our closest neighbours; a key medium for trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange. There is no complacency around this: diversification of provision in other languages is proposed, and there is a recommendation for a government initiative to map the need for competence in other languages. What is often ignored in Leathes, however, is his focus on the relational and even biographical dimensions of language learning. In a key section, he reflects on whether language teachers should be 'British' or 'foreign'. The binary seems to suggest that the former will always be monolingually Anglophone, an assumption challenged by the individual life histories of many colleagues in the UK (I'm currently reading *Paulette* by Martin Sorrell, an account of the journey by his own mother – 'French by birth, English by chance' – from France to Great Britain in the early years of the Second World War.) What Leathes suggested, however, in his recommendation that we need a home-grown cadre of highly trained Modern Linguists was that the relationship of practitioners of, say, French studies to an object of study seen as an *ailleurs* could be productive, that an ethnographic distance from France and the wider French-speaking world could generate insights otherwise unavailable to many pioneers in the field who had migrated from France, often bringing with them disciplinary and methodological assumptions that did not necessarily translate smoothly into a British context and would have a significant impact on the ways in which Modern Languages was in its early years perceived.

I welcome as a result to explore the questions of relationality and geography you outline. My own experience resonates closely with what you have described. A sentiment that the evolution of French studies depends on distinctive theoretical underpinnings, and that such engagement provides a disciplinary traction that has permitted engagement with wider socio-political issues came via an initial discovery of key texts in cultural studies, not so much Stuart Hall in the first instance as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. It was the impact of Williams that was perhaps most significant as I grappled with his reflections on culture and industrialization in *The Country and the City*, trying to grasp the pertinence of this analysis for parallel but ultimately very different shifts in France, as analysed very differently by, for instance, Eugen Weber and Alain Corbin. *Keywords* was important too, again as I sought to discern for myself a parallel 'vocabulary of culture and society' that would help me understand modern and contemporary France. And a key concept – one that was particularly important in my analysis of the persistence of and nostalgia for diversity in French culture despite constant jeremiads about the decline of difference – is a Williamsian one, the 'structure of feeling', a problematization of the Gramscian notion of hegemony and an identification of the evolving popular response at any given moment, often captured in cultural production, to official discourse. It is this, in my work on exoticism for instance, that I have sought to discern from an outsider perspective in France and elsewhere.

The group around *French Cultural Studies* were, as you suggest, key to the formalization of these shifts, and the late Brian Rigby demonstrated very clearly the

importance of Hoggart and Williams to his own evolution as a student of French. Rigby found in Cultural Studies a frame for his own analyses of contemporary France evident in works such as *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse*; he also focused, however, on the translation dynamics that are reflected in the reception of Hoggart's *Uses of Literary* in France, where – as *La culture du pauvre* – it has arguably had a greater and longer impact than in Britain itself. Another key figure involved in *French Cultural Studies*, Mike Kelly, has recently described the 'regard de l'étranger' that underpins some of the most successful work in French Studies, and this term captures for me important aspects of the relational dynamics you describe: 'France', 'Frenchness' and the 'Francosphere' still contain a fundamental degree of otherness for practitioners of French Studies that is not generated by any exoticism, romanticism or other forms of idealization of the object of study; there is a critical and ethnographic distance that challenges earlier, often Francophile tendencies that have adopted a mimetic relationship to French models of study such as *lettres modernes* and have perpetuated a certain methodological nationalism; and this understanding opens up spaces of criticality that generate analyses that have often been rejected, ignored or simply not recognized as important in France itself. Robert Paxton's vanguard work on Vichy is an often-cited case in point, and I would argue that the same is true for recent work in the Anglophone academy – by scholars such as Laurent Dubois, Ann Laura Stoler and Dominic Thomas – on postcolonial France, not least because this has engaged with the limitations and blind spots of universalist paradigms and sought to examine the challenges of what Dubois himself helpfully (and counterculturally) calls a '*République métissée*'.

FX: What is the role of the autobiographical in French studies, particularly in terms of the spatialized (and at times nostalgic) relationship with France as an *ailleurs*? What is the place here of the everyday ?

A.L. M.: Well, again it would be possible to point to a slightly fetishizing relation to Frenchness in some of the Anglophone French Studies universe, something like a desire to 'pass', 'plus français que les Français' and all that, which would also smack of a certain parochialism. But what strikes me as much more interesting is the contexts in which that posture started to come apart and how those contexts connected to a new radicalism in French Studies. Take Nancy K. Miller's early essay on 'The French Mistake' (1988) or Alice Kaplan's 1993 *French Lessons: A Memoir*. If these books reveal aspirations to 'be' in France or in French, to spend time immersed in the country, in the language, its texts and its archives, they're also seriously reflexive in relation to this desire. And that reflexivity is underpinned by precisely the sort of Marxist philosophy I referred to previously, Lefebvre in particular. Kaplan and Ross published an issue of *Yale French Studies* entitled *Everyday Life* in 1987, a real *ovni* relative to other YFS issues at the time combining Bourdieu, Situationism and Lefebvrian Marxism. And while Kaplan's ground-breaking book *Reproductions of Banality. Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (1986) acknowledges the author's fascination with magazine culture as a vector into French life, it also builds its argument from Walter Benjamin, who was virtually unread in France at that time. This current of work intersected with British-based interest in Situationism and what is so striking, when looking back on the 1980s and into the 1990s, is how what was perhaps in part a nostalgic desire for 'France' as the site of sixties radicalism also carried some of that radicalism forward through a time when in France the counter-

revolution was expunging the anti-colonial dimension of the revolts of the sixties and early seventies from memory, establishing a national narrative that would make May '68, for example, a generational transition not a post-colonial revolution. Forty years or so later, in 2008, when Ross's book on this process, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (2006), was prominently cited in a broad swathe of the anniversary publications, I knew something had changed in the French academy and it was going to be possible finally to 'decentre' May and by extension a whole edifice. But closer to the field of literary studies, the same claim could be made about an author such as Georges Perec, whose influence is everywhere to be found in contemporary writing today, but who has been read with particular and I think important attention to his own early Marxist and Situationist affiliations first and foremost by British scholars, in projects as different as David Bellos's renowned biography and Michael Sheringham's lasting study *Everyday Life. Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (2006). So I think it is fair to say that if there is a 'longing' for the *ailleurs* of France and Frenchness operating amongst British and American scholars of French Studies, that longing is strenuously requiring as well and anything but slavish, as we see in the multiple arenas where scholarship emerging through this ambivalent attachment to the elsewhere of France and Francophone culture has shaken up the field.

Ch. F.: Yes, I am encouraged by the growing attention to the issues you raise, and the resulting awareness of the situatedness of the individual researcher in relation to his or her object of study. This is an aspect that we really should address more fully with our students, not least because the stories of individual attraction to Modern Languages often have more strongly autobiographical and even embodied dimensions than those relating to other disciplinary fields. *French Cultural Studies* devoted a special issue to 'the hidden selves of scholars and teachers' (the title of Brian Rigby's opening piece) in 1999. A number of researchers – including the late Lucille Cairns, who wrote about her 'queer romance' with our subject area – reflected frankly on their own relationship to France and the wider French-speaking world in terms of often very personal aspects of their own identities. I remember that the wider response at the time was one of unease or even suspicion as there was a sense in certain quarters that this sort of openness was a form of betrayal, somehow breaching a certain objectivity towards our object of study or confidentiality concerning our relationship to it. But other volumes have followed, most notably *Why France? : American Historians Reflect on an Enduring Fascination* (2006) and a recent collection, *Ego-histories of France and the Second World War : Writing Vichy* (2018), that explore the personal dimensions of the reasons that several British and U.S. scholars have been drawn towards studying World War Two France. The historian Herman Lebovics talks in *Why France?* about a relationship of 'tough love' to his object of study, and the position he describes challenges the Francophilia that often underpinned traditional French Studies. Lebovics writes as a historian of Empire, but the same is true of researchers focused on literary and cultural artefacts who have been more willing to allow who they are impact on how they study France in often more critical ways.

FX: What was (and is) the role of engagement with postcolonialism in the development of French studies – and how does this relate to a shift away from elite/ canonical texts? and to an openness to exploring France itself as a multilingual space?

Ch. F.: You have already alluded to the 'cracking of coherence' – to borrow a phrase proposed by your former ULIP colleague Christophe Campos – that French studies underwent in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s. This moment was a multi-dimensional one and included a challenge to canonicity in the forms of Cultural Studies, Film Studies and Area Studies, a related openness to questions of gender and sexuality, and a recognition that the 'French' in French Studies no longer exclusively designated France itself. In the first instance, this geographical diversification manifested itself in the emergence of a distinctive Francophone Studies, focused on an alternative but still high literary canon – Césaire, Senghor, Damas – and closely linked to the modes of studying this postcolonial literary production, often in comparative literature departments, in France itself. The result was often a somewhat distorted sense of disconnectedness as departments employed a 'Francophone hire' who would teach non-metropolitan literature whilst other colleagues maintained a metropolitan and primarily canonical focus.

This situation changed rapidly in the 1990s for a number of reasons as work began to emerge at the intersection of the Francophone and the postcolonial. In part, this related to the reassertion of a strong existing tradition of postcolonial writing in French, evident throughout the Francosphere. In the work of Fanon, Khatibi and others there was a marked violence to this, exemplified by the work of the Moroccan movement around the journal *Souffles* which sought to dynamite the French language from inside. Major authors such as Edouard Glissant and Assia Djebar provided clear evidence that some of the most important writing in French in the final decades of the twentieth century was not being produced by authors born in France. At the same time, manifestoes such as the *Eloge de la créolité* revealed, post-Négritude, the emergence of other clear intellectual schools and tendencies. In parallel, the recognition of the importance of Beur literature – a development which owes much, as you have noted already, to the work of UK-based scholars such as Alec Hargreaves – suggested the impact of postcoloniality on literary production in France itself – and the need to discern new ways of reading that accounted for these shifts.

The study of Francophone literature initially had many parallels to that of Commonwealth literature in departments of English literature, but in the 1980s, the study of the latter was disrupted and reinvigorated by the exploration of postcolonial methods, derived in part from the work of Edward Said but crystalized in volumes such as *The Empire Writes Back*. A number of us in French studies watched these developments with interest, and sought to discern their implications for our own field. Particularly striking was the fact that postcolonialism could be seen as an integral part of 'French theory', the product of the transatlantic migration and translation of French poststructuralism (I am thinking of Derrida and Foucault in particular) and Franco- phone decolonial thought (such as the work of Césaire, Fanon, Memmi and others). The transfers and transformations inherent in this 'travelling theory' had nevertheless evacuated any obvious Frenchness as the resulting postcolonial paradigm tended to focus more on the Indian subcontinent than on, for example, Algeria or Haiti. In what strikes me in retrospect as having been a somewhat self-congratulatory manner, a number of us began in the late 1990s

to target Anglophone postcolonial studies as limited by its monolingualism and linguistic indifference, a stance aided by critics such as Harish Trivedi who had suggested that postcolonialism had 'ears only for English'. In grappling with postcolonial studies focused on the Anglophone world, we missed the opportunity though to engage with parallel movements in other language areas – most notably Hispanophone and Lusophone – where new thinking around the decolonial was emerging. Our aim was to elaborate what Emily Apter dubbed '*postcolonial studies à la française*', and in the process not only to diversify French studies but also to begin the ongoing process of its decolonization.

The initial hostility from a number of colleagues in France was palpable, but we found excellent allies in pioneering scholars such as Jean-Marc Moura who had been outlining almost single-handedly a parallel project since the 1980s. Moura's work was a key point of reference – along with that of Chris Bongie and Tzvetan Todorov – in my early work on exoticism. The historians linked to ACHAC also became productive collaborators in these endeavours, and great supporters of the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies when it was launched nearly twenty years ago. Over that period, we have witnessed a remarkable flourishing and diversification of work in the Francophone postcolonial field on both sides of the Atlantic. It is important to note also in this context that a number of talented scholars of Francophone postcolonial questions from within the Francosphere – especially from the French-speaking Caribbean – have migrated to U.S. academia where they have found an institutional environment less rigidly policed in disciplinary terms and more open to modes of enquiry that foreground empire and its afterlives. Particularly striking has been the growth of Haitian studies, especially since the January 2010 earthquake, but we have also seen attention paid to the Francophone Pacific as well as – thanks to the work of Bill Marshall – the 'French Atlantic' more generally. Despite its mixed reception, the publication of the *littérature-monde* manifesto in 2007 also gave renewed impetus to this work and encouraged a more integrated approach to French and Francophone culture, a move particularly evident in attempts to explore the clear overlaps – despite the segregation perpetuated by works such as *Les Lieux de mémoire* – of national history and colonial history in France.

A.L. M.: It's interesting that you pick up the manifesto led by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud in the context of a diversification of spaces of both production and critical reception of non-Metropolitan French writing. Broached through this lens, it is part of a trend as you have just suggested that crosses languages and continents, but it can and has also been perceived as a continuation of well-worn road to an *ailleurs* in European French literature, perhaps most provocatively by Camille de Toledo in his great little essay from 2008 *Visiter le Flurkistan, ou les illusions de la littérature-monde*. Surprisingly absent from the contributions gathered in this collection, De Toledo's work seems to me to include some of the most varied re-configurations of the *ailleurs* in contemporary writing, and it is worth noting that his engagement with the 'littérature-monde' manifesto from March 2007 was one of the few sustained responses it received from 'within' the Hexagon. As it makes scathingly clear, new ground lies not in opening literature and its spaces of production up to 'le grand large', in going out to 'rub up' against the world, as the manifesto called for writers to do, with the aim of unearthing new vital energies in these putative *ailleurs*. Rather the way out – the 'voie de sortie' – from what De Toledo refers to as 'la tristesse

européenne' lies for him in an excavation and also an elaboration between languages, between nations, between genres, exemplified in the series of hybrid, radically unpredictable works through which he has gradually established his eclectic oeuvre, though always and significantly positioned within the frame of Europe and in relation to traditional modes of elite cultural production. That this experimentation happens still very clearly in relation to what is an long-enabled space of hybrid, non-fiction writing in French, neither exactly travel- writing, nor memoir, nor fiction as such, within such prestigious collections as Maurice Olender's *Librairie du XXI^e siècle*, and imprints such as Verdier and more recently Gallimard's *Collection blanche*, is not to be overlooked, of course, but observed perhaps in relation to the proliferation of forms and modes that make the spaces of this work so radically diverse, both in the world (art galleries, internet sites, transient publications) and in text form (combination of song and critical discourse, alternately dense, 'plundered' writing and highly elliptical and elegiac forms). In an analogous way, its focus on the reconstitution of European space, particularly in the wake of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, offers a refraction of the post-colonial vectors you mention previously, the French Atlantic and the hugely complex imbrication of French and North and Western African cultures. Similarly to the vast number of works dealing with internal fractures within the space of the nation, and the multiple, often relatively impenetrable 'languages' that this has revealed, it seems to me to be inseparable from though tangential to the postcolonial relations that have irreversibly transformed the languages of France. And it is worth noting that this sort of diversification, which is contributing at least partially to shattering the univocity of French 'from within' France and Europe, has been perhaps until very recently most resonant outside of academic critique, even while borrowing some of its forms. In this respect we are perhaps looking at a determined re- affirmation of the possibility of avant-gardist experimentation, supported by a vast expansion in mechanisms of dissemination, which may be bringing a new resurgence from ground deemed by many to be arid and finished as the current century got underway...

Ch. F.: I am struck by the ways your observations actively and constructively contradict the claims of Michel Le Bris and others in the *Pour une littérature voyageuse* movement in the 1990s – one of the principal vectors for the rhetoric conflating the 'Ailleurs' and 'le Grand Dehors' that de Toledo so mordantly challenges. In seeking 'une littérature qui dise le monde', these authors relied on an anti-Structuralism and an assault on avant-garde writing that meant they ignored the fact that some of the most important and stimulating work of the late twentieth century remained experimental, part of a loosening of the generic constraints of prose in the work of authors such as Gérard Macé and Pierre Michon and of return to new forms of essayism. I suspect that this is part of a set of wider developments according to which the space of 'non- academic writing' and publication in French (evident in the lists of, for example, Éditions Amsterdam) was for a while much more critically productive than that of academic writing and certainly that of university presses within French institutions. The institutional rigidity of French academia certainly prevented any rapid change in terms of the adoption of postcolonial thought, but this has been translated back to France by publishers such as Éditions Amsterdam, whom I have mentioned already, and there is a new generation of scholars increasingly open to the debates that such work engenders. Patricia Donatien from the Université des Antilles is one of those who has forcefully articulated the need for active engagement

not just with postcolonial thought but also with decoloniality. This is an exciting moment for a number of reasons: there is increasing dialogue across Anglophone and Francophone contexts about postcolonial comparatism; there is a willingness to postcolonialize dominant French practices such as genetic criticism, the fruits of which are evident in recent research on Césaire and Kourouma; and there is a growing awareness of the intersections of the postcolonial and the multilingual. Macron's rebooting of the Francophone project has, paradoxically, been underpinned by a firm sense that France itself is a monolingual country. What interests me about a postcolonial approach to France itself is that it challenges such persistent ethnolinguistic nationalism and forces us to acknowledge the ways in which French is (and for many years of course has been) constantly in contact with minoritized languages (including Breton and Basque) and community languages (notably Arabic, Creole and Wolof). To understand linguistic phenomena such as bilingualism and the emergence of new practices such as translanguaging, the resort to postcolonialism and internal colonialism is invaluable. The work of scholars such as David Gramling on the 'invention of monolingualism' also reveals these linguistic blind spots of French studies, and its importance needs to be recognized along marginalized French voices on these topics such as Philippe Blanchet's work on *glottophobie*.

FX: What is your understanding of the current interest in the transnational as a means of understanding France and the Francosphere? Does this imply a shift beyond postcolonial concerns ?

Ch. F.: Part of Translating Cultures, the AHRC thematic programme I have been directing for the past six years, is a large project called 'transnationalizing Modern Languages'. Focused primarily on Italy and its diasporas, the team have extended their purview more widely to encompass other culturally and linguistically defined areas, including France itself. A series of books is being published by Liverpool University Press, and I am editing with Claire Launchbury the one devoted to transnational French Studies. To think about France transnationally is inevitably to engage with a number of questions raised by postcolonialism. There is a need, for example, to understand the transpolitical connections that continue to bind France to Algeria, to explore the transatlantic axes that – through historical phenomena such as BUMIDOM – link French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Martinique to the so-called metropole. The existence of the DROMs represents in fact a testing of the term 'transnational', for although the *outré-mer* clearly exists as an *ailleurs*, it is integrated constitutionally and economically into a national logic. These two examples – Algerian and Antillean – underline the importance of mobility and of the porosity of the borders of the Hexagon.

Introducing the transnational undermines many of the assumptions on which modern languages was established: the nation-state persists as an important ideological construct, but it is increasingly inadequate as a frame of study. The assumption that one nation= one language= one culture is no longer tenable, and indeed – as work by Medievalists such as Simon Gaunt has stressed – has never been tenable. Despite the controversies it generated, Boucheron's *Histoire mondiale de la France* (2017) provides a clear indication that there is an increasing openness to such approaches in France itself. A more 'transnational' French studies reveals the ways in which cultural phenomena seen as quintessentially French – such as the Revolution, *la bande dessinée*, wine and cuisine – need to be understood in much more

complex frames. It highlights the importance of translational dynamics in the generation of thought and the production of literature. The growing importance of translingual writing – with the work of authors such as François Cheng, Dai Sijie, Andrei Makine, Vassilis Alexakis and many others – reveals the ways in which the 'French' in 'French literature' is itself under increasing strain – and indeed has long depended on imagined unity shored up institutionally by a centralized education system and a range of phenomena such as literary prizes.

It remains unclear how this transnational turn relates to the postcolonial developments we have discussed already. I consider these approaches to be in tension rather than straightforwardly complementary. There is a risk that emphasis on the transnational evacuates the clear focus on politics that reference to postcoloniality entails. Franco- phone postcolonial studies engages, for instance, with slavery and its legacies, questions of neo-colonial dependency, the blind spots of republican universalism in terms of race and ethnicity, and the structural inequalities these blind spots continue to generate. Postcolonial approaches provide a clear frame for understanding the rootedness of contemporary political discourse in forms of colonial nostalgia. They highlight the historical contexts in which French overseas policy is to be understood – contexts in which, as Butler and Spivak made clear several years ago, the national remains an important site of resistance. In Haiti, often dubbed the 'republic of NGOs' as a result of the erosion of any national infrastructure, historic underdevelopment is now compounded by the dynamics of overseas aid. The nation retains a potent force, and let's not forget that in November of this year, Kanaky will be voting in a referendum on whether its inhabitants desire national independence, three decades after the political struggle that shook the country. And a transnational approach should similarly not trivialize the ideological persistence of the nation in France itself: as Chamoiseau makes clear in his *Frères migrants* (2017), the crisis of European political will around migration has led to a fortification of national boundaries around the northern Mediterranean, not least in the south of France.

A.L. M.: The substantial proliferation in writing about 'the migrant crisis', since the impact of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq started to make itself felt in the arrival of young men fleeing conflict and exactions, points precisely to the dangers you suggest in the idea that the age of generalized mobility means that 'transnational' dynamics have now replaced the more entrenched patterns of postcoloniality. As an 'elsewhere' from which to think the structural failings of our contemporary societies, the camps and escape routes across the Mediterranean and through Eastern Europe have proved far more compelling in the frame of literature in the past ten or so years than, for example, the *cités* that are home for successive generations of ex-subjects of the empire along with more recently displaced people. Works such as Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* (2006) or Karine Tuil's *Douce France* (2007), after the first major wave of migrants arrived in Europe, then Pascal Manoukian's *Les échoués* (2015) and Pierrette Fleutiaux's *Destiny* (2016), as well as Maylis de Kerangal's *À ce stade de la nuit* (2015), are all registers of the fascination that this contemporary form of forced displacement with its extremities of cultural and material encounter has on the literary imaginary. Though my own work under the auspices of our virtual Paris Centre for Migrant Writing and Expression has been very much oriented to working in some of the most fragile spaces of emergence of new

expressions within France such as camp and street environments, I look actively in doing this towards the rich vein of contemporary sociology with its focus on the more embedded patterns of marginalization in France to understand the incredible diversification of experience occurring at present within the frame of national institutions, particularly educational institutions, which is resulting I think in a massive but under-analyzed transformation of language. In many respects, these demographic and social forces are leading the diversification of intellectual agendas, with calls for a decolonized university coming much more insistently from within student communities than from faculty-led initiatives, though as always, it's the intersections that are the interesting spaces to observe, where the tussle between capacities for containment and the tools for critique plays out most acutely.

FX: How important is the emergence of *littérature-monde* for French studies? Has the significance of the phenomenon been inflated? To what extent is *littérature-monde* comparable with cognate phenomena in other languages?

Ch. F.: *Littérature-monde* is a phenomenon that cannot be understood without recourse to these entanglements of the postcolonial and the transnational. As I have made clear elsewhere, I think the category as elaborated in the 2007 manifesto is deeply problematic, in part because it perpetuates certain assumptions already apparent in the 1990s in *littérature voyageuse*, in part because its oxymoronic emphasis on the French language implies a monolingualism that is not feasible in any literary production that purports to engage with the multilingual world. That said, *littérature-monde* encapsulated and rendered more visible a number of concerns that had underpinned Francophone postcolonial studies. It challenged in particular the neo-colonial hierarchies that have traditionally separated the 'French' and the 'Francophone', whether these be in the curriculum or in the publishing industry itself. A major implication was, as a result, a logic of provincialization – to borrow from Dipesh Chakrabarty – of France itself, a manoeuvre which is at odds with the language-focused soft power strategies of the country and also underlines the linguistic reality that the future of French will be played out in sub-Saharan Africa and not in France itself. Despite an initial flurry of media attention and some more searching engagement from scholars such as the excellent Claire Ducourneau, attention to *littérature-monde* in France has been limited, and I would argue that more recent developments – such as the 'Nous sommes plus grands que nous' statement published in 2017 – are perhaps more important interventions. The response in the English-speaking academy could, as a result, be seen as somewhat inflated: Jackie Dutton has recently estimated that over 300 articles and chapters have been devoted to *littérature-monde* in the decade since its publication. What interests me about this work has been its willingness to interrogate the detail of the manifesto, to explore the slippage between the document's rhetoric and the highly centralized reality of publishing in the French-speaking world, to understand the persistence of what Graham Huggan called the 'postcolonial exotic'. Equally important has been a willingness to reflect on *littérature-monde* in a comparative and translingual frame. When Michel Le Bris drafted the document, there was no apparent awareness of parallel debates around 'World literature' and *Weltliteratur*. I think the consideration of *littérature-monde* in wider debates about the globalization of literary production has underlined the risks of linguistic indifference (whether Anglo- or Franconormative) in this area, and has also encouraged us to reflect on the

(un)translatability of the various language-specific terms used to describe writing that spills beyond the limits of the nation.

FX: Where is the *ailleurs* situated today? Is it translatable as a concept? How do texts such as Chamoiseau's *Frères migrants* encourage us to explore alternative meanings?

Ch. F.: Historically, the location of the *ailleurs* has relied on an explicitly colonial logic. The *ailleurs* was a peripheral location, often associated with what Johannes Fabian saw as a denial of coevalness. This designation of an alternative temporality was deployed positively and negatively, as a marker of an otherness that was Edenic or savage (and often a combination of the two). The *ailleurs* existed on a periphery where its qualities were defined in relation to a metropolitan centre. It often also – as in the case of the penal colonies of French Guiana or New Caledonia – became a place where undesirable elements of home could be relocated. It is important, nevertheless, to recognize a more domestic *ailleurs*, the product of an internal othering that saw minoritized cultures (Breton, for example) or marginalized classes (the so-called urban *classes dangereuses*) subject to a logic of control similar to that deployed against the colonized. As the twentieth century unfolded – and in particular in the wake of empire in the second half of the century – any clear distinction between home and *ailleurs* became increasingly untenable, despite continued efforts across the political spectrum in France to resist the reality of social, cultural and linguistic hybridization in the name of republican universalism. The mobility of former colonial subjects during the *trente glorieuses* and other resettlement programmes such as BUMIDOM led to unprecedented levels of socio-cultural mixing, as a result of which the *ailleurs* became embedded in the everyday. The conflation of *ailleurs* and *outré-mer* was no longer a straightforward one, and an emerging relational consciousness, evident in the earlier twentieth century in the work of Victor Segalen, made it clear that there was a potential reciprocity in these terms: Edouard Glissant, in *L'Intention poétique*, noted: 'Vous dites: *outré-mer* (nous l'avons dit avec vous), mais vous aussi êtes bientôt *outré-mer*', and it is clear that a similar point could be made about the *ailleurs*.

James Clifford describes the normalization of this observation in his *Predicament of Culture* (1988), a work that draws heavily on authors such as Segalen, Leiris and Lévi-Strauss, and was successfully translated into French as *Malaise dans la culture*; and Alastair Pennycook describes the linguistic implications of these reconfigurations – this emergence of the *ailleurs* in 'unexpected places' – in his *Language and Mobility* (2012). Whilst there is a general applicability to such tendencies, I think there is nevertheless – in the light of the work of Barbara Cassin – a need to recognize the untranslatability of the term *ailleurs*, by which we should understand a constant grappling to understand its meanings in a French and Francophone context. *Ailleurs* does not feature in Cassin's *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, but it does not straightforwardly designate what we understand in English as 'elsewhere'. The semantic field of the *ailleurs* inevitably stretches back to earlier uses of the term as it resonates with the habitat of the Noble Savage in Bougainville, Diderot and Rousseau; it refers to the escapist strategies of Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du mal*; it relates to the imagined other universes of Henri Michaux. One of its most recent deployments as a loaded term has been by Patrick Chamoiseau in *Frères migrants* (2017), another text that has recently appeared in English translation. Chamoiseau describes the role of the *ailleurs* in the colonial imaginary, where it allowed the

creation of a deregulated space in which the colonizer could – ‘en bonne conscience et toute impunité – deploy the brutalizing techniques of colonial expansionism: ‘terrifier, dominer, exploiter, massacrer, et en finale hisser le déshumain jusqu’à l’institution’. His argument is that the neo-liberal economy no longer requires a spatial elsewhere: ‘La barbarie nouvelle, elle, supprime partout l’Ailleurs.’ The omnipresence of the digital sphere, the collapse of centre and periphery, the presence of death and suffering in the European everyday have all contributed to a reordering of the ways in which we perceive ‘elsewhere’.

A.L. M.: I was extremely grateful to you for bringing Chamoiseau’s text *Frères migrants* and his account of ‘L’Ailleurs’ to bear on this conversation. His capitalization reinforced precisely what strikes when trying to operate between *l’ailleurs* and *elsewhere*, as we did at the outset of this project, that is the nominalization that holds out the possibility in French of a designated or substantified entity, ‘un ailleurs’ and potentially even multiple *ailleurs*, a usage that the adverbial form in English makes improbable, if not impossible. But more importantly than this accentuation of a deeply inscribed vein of meaning in the French tradition, what I take most forcefully from Chamoiseau at the close of this collaboration is the projection of new, still often unsuspected semantic patterns that invite *reading*, that make up ‘le film’ of which we are all a part. Not chaos, not the collapse of the possibility of making sense to one another, despite the massive reordering of the world that has ensued as a result of technological change. Chamoiseau insists on the act of reading in his claim that the capacity to ‘lire dans le monde’ today belongs most fiercely to those who find themselves in danger of being held in an undesignated *ailleurs* of administrative or penal limbo, not relegated to a potentially exoticized space where colonial imagination can unleash its horrific fantasies, but everywhere abandoned.

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