“Une littérature compliquée”: (Re)Writing the Margin in Contemporary France

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation considers a preoccupation with the margin in current French literary production to assert that a number of its texts mobilize practices gleaned from the social sciences to ask how the deep-seated center/margin binary influences what we know of France, and shapes the experience of living there today. From historiographical inquiry into the obfuscated Harki figure in Alice Zeniter's *L'Art de perdre* (2016), to the location and critique of administrative and discursive hierarchies oppressing the "migrant" population in Natalie Quintane's *Un œil en moins* (2018) and *Les Enfants vont bien* (2019), to investigations into housing-related disparities in Paris provoked by urban planning initiatives in Joy Sorman's *L'Inhabitable* (2011, 2016), I forward that in an increasingly diverse France where debates on identity and belonging abound, such texts strive to "parler et d'écrire autrement" of the marginalized.[1] Emphasizing the empirical prowess of these works in examining political and social tensions of national and international significance, current scholarship contemplates how the book might become a locus of healing, restitution, and space of belonging. However, if the texts in question call for a timely reconnection to Others, forgotten territories, and even ourselves, I argue that their investigations are models of "complication," or the combined efforts of research, analysis and problematization that enrich how it is that we interact with and in our shared globe. Deploying complication as a lens through which to subvert engrained belief systems and hegemonic discourse in which the marginalized are at stake, the works of my corpus textually introduce complex and often conflictual narratives, compound methodologies, a myriad of resources, and hybrid forms to

[1] Nathalie Quintane, *Les Enfants vont bien*, p. 11.

rethink, and I argue rewrite the margin. This includes the very binary distinguishing margin from center, and its concomitant discriminations related to race, origin, gender, religion, and social class, among other identity-related factors. Individual chapters examine the layers of complication these interdisciplinary texts inscribe in their narratives and suggest what their transparent use of fieldwork, statistics, biographical information, archival materials, excerpts from press articles and media outlets, and government and legal documents add to their narratives. As an emergent form of literary responsibility, complication endeavors to inclusively transform collective narratives and ways of knowing in France. Informed by scholarship in literary studies, the social sciences, ecocriticism, feminist theory, and intersectionality from the United States and the French-speaking world, my dissertation reveals that France's "complicated literature" is of the utmost importance in a climate where Republican universalism, and indeed "Otherblindness," have become increasingly difficult to endorse.

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"L'idée, c'est de faire quelque chose qui n'existe pas encore."
Nathalie Quintane, Un œil en moins

Introduction

It's Complicated

Director Ladj Ly's 2019 film opens with a closeup of a boy of about ten, enveloped in France's *tricolore* with face paint to match, and exiting what appears to be a suburban *HLM* to meet up with friends at a nearby bus stop. It is July 15, 2018, and the adolescents make the trip to Paris to watch, and soon celebrate France's World Cup victory over Croatia. Amid the heterogeneous gathering of spectators, one denotes an abundance of blue, white, and red, but also the Algerian and Moroccan flags and a Raja Casablanca soccer jersey, testaments to France's richly diverse population. The opening scene captures an idyllic moment of French solidarity, the multicultural crowd erupting in joy when it becomes clear that France has earned their second national jersey star. Paradoxically, it is during their blissful celebrations on a *tricolore*-lined *Champs-Élysées* before the iconic *Arc-de-Triomphe* that the film's title appears in bold on the screen: *Les Misérables*. In fact, the boisterous crowd foreshadows a throng of a very different kind, those who will riot later in the film when the young soccer fan is shot in the face with a flash-ball while fleeing a team of policemen.

Set in Paris' neighboring *commune* Montfermeil where Victor Hugo wrote his masterpiece of the same name, Ly lends more to his film than the author's setting of choice and famous title. While the very visible battles associated with the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 depicted in Hugo's novel parallel the 2005 French suburban riots that inspired Ly's film, the director's recasting of *Les Misérables* speaks to the more surreptitious struggles affecting the French population and notably, those marginalized due to their race, origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and/or social class. And this despite France's universalist paradigm, which

has been compared to the highly-contested American concept of "colorblindness."[2] Like an increasing number of French citizens, Mame-Fatou Niang challenges what she argues in *Identités françaises* (2019) is the country's universalist "myth" that conceals and perpetuates problematic biases and discriminations inscribed in how the collective thinks and experiences France.[3] These extend from conceptions of space (Niang illustrating the Paris/Banlieue divide through what *Les passagers du Roissy Express* [1990] notes is "un purgatoire circulaire, avec au centre 'Paris-Paradis'") to cinematographic representations (in her comparative study of the films *Bande de filles* [2014] and *Mariannes Noires* [2016] and analysis of tropes permeating filmic representations of the Black French woman).[4] Faced with what Niang finds is "l'impossibilité républicaine d'articuler les altérités (surtout raciales)" (3), *Les Misérables* provides an illustration of French multiculturalism on the big screen, and demonstrates how social distinctions can, and often do shape individual trajectories in the *Hexagone*.

If one looks to newspaper articles, television broadcasts and other forms of media depicting the terrorist tragedies at *Charlie Hebdo* and the Bataclan, populist uprising during the controversial *Gilet jaunes* movement, and the country's "Racial Spring," narratives spanning the past decade portray a crisis-stricken and increasingly divided Republic.[5] Ly's film is one of many examples of French cultural production in dialogue with polemical topics and social

[2] in *Les Politiques de diversité* (2019) Serge Guimond draws this conclusion in his analysis of universalism as a problematic model of decategorization, "[qui] implique de faire comme si la diversité n'existait pas" (72-3). Conceptualized by M.B. Brewer and N. Miller in 1984, the decategorization model argues that privileging personal identities over social identities in intergroup settings reduces bias, anxiety and intolerance, cultivates a sense of trust among group members, and improves interpersonal communication.
[3] It is important to note that in France, Niang's scholarhip has encountered much criticism. In her article "Defying the Myth of Universalism," KellyAnn Tsai explains that "Niang's work is highly controversial. Critics have called her a racist and a traitor for daring to question what they consider to be unassailable French Republican values."
[4] In using the word "myth" to refer to the universalist model, I am citing Niang in her article "France's Racial Spring."
[5] See Niang's article "France's Racial Spring" (2020). Niang's article is also available in French and titled "2020 : année du printemps racial en France."

intersections affecting the lives of the French population in a seeming effort to unpack moments of turbulence and reflect on the gradations and implications of identity categories. This phenomenon is evident across divergent mediums of cultural expression, from socially-conscious songsters such as Gaël Faye and Bigflo & Oli, to Margaux Eskenazi and Alice Carré's current politically-committed play *1983*.[6] A look through cultural offerings at Paris' *Le Carreau du Temple*, a city-sponsored complex dedicated to the arts and athletics, yields opportunities to attend a debate featuring feminist journalist Lauren Bastide and gender-fluid activist Mathilde Able, a musical exclusively featuring the work of female composers, or the second installment of "Solid'Art," a contemporary art exhibition benefiting socio-economically disadvantaged children.[7] Privileging marginalized populations as a center of interest, French culture is increasingly aware and accommodating of social distinctions, and curious as to how collective recognition of our differences may enrich life in the *Hexagone* for all.

If cultural production shows increasing concern for complex subject matter and the socially precarious, French literature is – and as Hugo's novel illustrates perhaps always has been – a privileged vector for contemplating marginalized populations and milieus. Like a significant percentage of those residing in France today, much of contemporary French literature is rich with characters navigating the pitfalls concomitant to marginalized identity categories. In Alice Zeniter's *L'Art de perdre* (2016), narrator and protagonist Naïma feels the weight of her

[6] On rapping about topics from social class to immigration issues in "Je suis" and "Rentrez chez vous," the duo Bigflo & Oli have said "on n'est pas des rappeurs engagés mais on est engagés dans notre rap" (Hebral 4), given that they feel the term "engagé" is used indiscriminately. Author and songwriter Gaël Faye's album *Rythmes et botanique* is a particularly rich example of rap's commitment to political turmoil. Finally, in tracing the Left's euphoria surrounding Mitterrand's presidency, the Paris/Marseille march for "Égalité contre le racisme," and ensuing deception with the rise of the Front national, *1983* points to this year as a turning point in France's political sphere.

[7] *Le Carreau du temple* is a city-sponsored cultural and sports center in Paris' third arrondissement. The first two programs are titled, respectively, "Faire corps #6" and Maude Le Pladec's "Counting the stars with you (musiques femmes)."

Algerian origins in Parisian society and notably, the pressures associated with being labeled a "petite-fille de Harki" and a "bon arabe," leading her to question and investigate her familial heritage. Through their rendering of France's hierarchical discursive web, *Un œil en moins* (2018) and *Les Enfants vont bien* (2019) from Nathalie Quintane elucidate the symbolic and physical violence refugees in France face daily, from arduous and discriminatory administrative practices to altercations with forces of order in makeshift refugee camps.[8] In *L'Inhabitable* (2011, 2016), Joy Sorman's study of housing-related inequities in Paris reveals the many imbrications of discrimination contributing to the tenants' precarious existences, and asks how housing practices in Paris and indeed, how in the de Certeauian sense we "practice" the city may perpetuate their marginalization.[9]

In effect, current literature takes French cultural production's inquiry into the margin to new heights with books that actively *perform* research within the narrative.[10] Borrowing Émile Zola's phrase from *Le Roman expérimental* (1887), Laurent Demanze denotes a "new age of *enquête*" in current French literary production, or narratives that conduct "une recherche systématique de la vérité par l'interrogation de témoins et la réunion d'éléments d'information"

[8] Pierre Bourdieu describes "symbolic violence" in *Reproduction: In Education, Society and Culture* (1977, English ed.) as "every power which manages to impose meaning and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (4). For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a principle disseminator of dominant/dominated social frameworks, or "le monde social comme un espace structuré par des rapports de force exprimant des inégalités" (Dictionnaire 251), a central concept in Bourdeusian thought. The socialist's developments on dominant/dominated frameworks, social and elsewhere, informs my conceptualization and analysis of France's center/margin binary.

[9] See Michel de Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien, Tome 2: Habiter, cuisiner* (1981).

[10] In Dominique Viart's article, "Les littératures de terrain. Enquêtes et investigations en littérature française contemporaine," he writes that "en invitant le lecteur à partager les évolutions et les incidents de l'enquête, ces ouvrages deviennent des *narrations heuristiques*, dans lesquelles la recherche de documents, la rencontre d'objets, le recueil de récits, la visite d'archives, la découverte de correspondances oubliées, la description, et parfois la production, dans le texte même, de photographies fournissent, avec les hypothèses et médiations du narrateur, le matériau même du livre, alors que le résultat effectif de ces enquêtes demeure, quant à lui, bien souvent, à peine formalisé" (3-4, emphasis original).

(TLFi).[11] If I have selected the abovementioned narratives as the primary works of my corpus, it is not solely because they earnestly investigate important matters affecting the French population, but rather because they *complicate* the topics they address. To greater and lesser extents, these works become the complex material symbol of their sensitive subjects and involved projects. Melding prose with documentary sources such as government and legal texts, data sets, photographs, maps, excerpts from press articles and media outlets, biographical information, and archival materials, the narratives in question leave a discernable trail of their fieldwork and interdisciplinary commitment. I suggest that the intricacies these texts incorporate and deploy within their narratives create a complicated literary framework conducive to fostering a more profound engagement with the margin. That is, "complication" as a literary approach seeks to "accroître, diversifier, enrichir" (TLFi), and to increase the number of components informing our research, analysis, and experience.[12] The persistently complicated responses the works of my corpus contribute to matters of social interest model informed research, solicit readers to develop our awareness, and I argue demonstrate an emergent form of literary responsibility. What I term "complicated literature" equips readers with the knowledge, tools, and methodological practices necessary to participate in mindful ways in France's challenging discussions, and those pertaining to the margin in particular.

In *L'Art de perdre*'s fictional narrative, the protagonist, Naïma, channels research trips, interviews, and analysis, a practice that simultaneously informs the reader and increases the

[11] In *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête* (2019), Demanze describes the contemporary manifestation of *enquête* as a "forme ouverte aux croisements méthodologiques, elle est redevenue, à l'époque contemporaine un paradigme majeur, pour nouer ensemble les disciplines et penser de concert littérature et sciences sociales dans une même démarche cognitive : sa force cohésive et fédérative explique pour une large part son puissant magnétisme et sa capacité de sollicitation imaginaire" (15).

[12] Informing my interpretation is the *Trésor de la langue françai*se's entry for "compliquer," in which "la multiplication des composantes a pour effet un enrichissement," and "qui a la puissance d'analyser, recherche et provoque les occasions d'analyser, multiplie les expériences…" (TLFi).

narrative's mimetic functioning while enacting a *mise en abyme* of Zeniter's own inquiry into her Algerian origins. Quintane's work of concrete poetry is paradoxically all document yet not documented, though as I demonstrate in chapter two, *Les Enfants vont bien* is *documentable*. As a result, it is the author's patterned arrangement of discourse gleaned from political, legislative, and media spheres with speech emanating from refugee aid-networks that informs interpretation of the text's fragments. Finally, the first edition of *L'Inhabitable* is a testament to creative non-fiction's capacity to embody complication: tangibly thick cardstock pages chronicle Parisian insalubrity through a narrative saturated with documentation and further emphasized by color and typographic play. Yet, as Sorman's solo second edition sans images and maps shows, complication can also require that one distance themselves from familiar documents and thought patterns in order to rethink and I posit, rewrite the center/margin binary in France.

The books in question are emblematic of works of contemporary French literature that inscribe resources and critical thinking models in their literary projects as a means to disrupt engrained social binaries.[13] Together, Zeniter, Quintane and Sorman's narratives demonstrate that rather than render the topics at hand all the more perplexing, complication affords a site of mediation where readers may sit with challenging matters that are nonetheless of the utmost importance in France today. My corpus serves as a point of departure to analyze complication as a mode of thinking through the troubling circumstances, discourses and practices of our times, and ask why literature has become a privileged site for this timely endeavor. Might it be that literature possesses a unique authority, in that it draws its power not from domination or control

[13] Other examples of note are Kaoutar Harchi's autobiographical text *Comme nous existons* (2021), Nicole Lapierre's inquiry into a seeming predisposition to suicide among women in her family in *Sauve qui peut la vie* (2015), and Laila Slimani's investigations delineating a disavowed yet pervasive sexuality in Morocco in *Sexe et Mensonges* (2017). Another, earlier example of this trend is François Bon's narrative *Daewoo* (2004), devoted to the predominantly-female, former employees of a Lorraine factory that belonged to the now-bankrupt Southern Korean manufacturer.

but rather, in the words of Bell Hooks, from a conception of power "that is creative and life affirming" (84)? And what are the implications, stakes and potential responsibility of this literature in light of current debates on national and social identities and belonging in France? This dissertation forwards that complicated literature honors the exceedingly complex nature of human existence. Much like the compound literary frameworks of my corpus, each individual is comprised of countless intricacies, influenced by a labyrinth of variables, attributes that complication's project to broaden collective thought and knowledge carefully considers, and brings to light.

(Re)Writing the Margin[14]

My project is not the first to examine contemporary French literature's interest in the margin, and specifically this emergent leitmotif within France's *pôle de production restreinte*, which in *Sociologie de la littérature* (2014) Gisèle Sapiro defines as literary production that privileges a work's esthetic merit over earnings, a value certified by fellow authors in the literary sphere, cultural intermediaries such as editors, literary critics, and through the sub-field's crowning achievement: literary prizes. By comparison, success in the sub-field of "grande production" is determined by a book's commercial value and is often ephemeral.[15] In turn, the distinction between mass-produced texts and those that are "exclusive" influences readership, with the former targeting a larger, general audience and the latter comprised of a smaller network of peers within the literary sphere and others possessing significant cultural capital.[16]

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[14] My use of "(re)write is denotes that the works of my corpus "write" the margin as part of their endeavor to "rewrite," or reconfigure the center/margin binary in France.

[15]Reading Pierre Bourdieu, in *La Sociologie de la littérature* (2014) Gisèle Sapiro writes that "contre ce que Sainte-Beuve a appelé la 'littérature industrielle,' qui se situe au pôle de grande production, régi par la logique économique de rentabilité à court terme, se constitue un pôle de production restreinte qui décrète l'irréductibilité de la valeur esthétique à la valeur marchande de l'œuvre. Cette valeur est certifiée non seulement par les pairs mais aussi par des intermédiaires, éditeurs, critiques, instances de consécration (telles que les jurys des prix littéraires)" (40).

[16] In Bourdieu's delineation of social classes, cultural capital is a form of inherited symbolic capital that determines one's cultural practices, lifestyle, and types of expenditures and investments. For example, in Bourdieusian thought,

Alexandre Gefen's recent monograph, *Réparer le monde* (2017), provides a valuable index of France's most-celebrated, "exclusive" narratives, from which he determines that "les individus fragiles, les oubliés de la grande histoire, les communautés ravagées sont les héros de la fiction française contemporaine" (9). Ascribing this phenomenon to what he terms is an "esthético-éthique" turn in French Letters, for Gefen "les moi blessés, désinscrits ; les communautés manquantes, asservies, aveuglées ; l'altérité innomée, abandonnée ; l'histoire trouée, occultée, banalisée ; les corps souffrants, mourants ; les drames et les êtres sans langage ni représentation" (12) are literature's appeal to reader empathy. In sharing marginalized trajectories, then, *Care*-ing, or "reparational" literature asks readers to "[se] mettre à la place d'autrui pour partager ses émotions et comprendre sa position dans les situations les plus problématiques," and proposes an ethical remedy to issues in our social world through its capacity to help us recognize, comprehend, and actualize ourselves (12-13).[17]

In *taking thought for* historical blind spots, *providing for* the inaudible refugee voice, and *looking after* the isolated locales of Parisian insalubrity, my corpus and much of French literature today does *care* for the welfare of marginalized populations, ideas, and territories. However, I would like to suggest that, while empathetic, the representations of the margin within the texts in question interact more dynamically and productively with their subject matter, and this in both works of fiction and creative non-fiction. There is an apparent disconnect between the act of empathetic care and what Gefen argues is literature's project to "[restituer] des mondes et vient corriger les oublis des discours officiels à leurs marges" (14). Care presumes two roles:

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the practice of investing in artwork is telling of that person's cultural capital. As Bourdieu demonstrates in *Les Héritiers* (1964), *La Reproduction* (1970), and *La Distinction* (1979), because cultural capital is a condition of scholastic success and those possessing the highest volume of cultural capital belong to France's dominant class (intellectuals, executives, and white-collar professions), cultural capital is a vector for symbolic violence in that its possession (or lack thereof) perpetuates dominant/dominated frameworks. (Dictionnaire xvii-xix)

[17] For more on *Care* theory, I suggest Sandra Laugier's work and notably *Qu'est-ce que le Care ? Souci des autres, sensibilité, responsabilité* (2009).

caretakers in possession of skills or goods that facilitate their actions, and those who are seemingly deficient (medically, economically, etc.) and require care. Applying care theory to narratives in which the margin takes center stage therefore runs the risk of perpetuating the center/margin binary my corpus contests, and further victimizing already stigmatized populations and places while potentially edifying France's literary elite. Before, and if literature can "rendre la parole aux infâmes" or "proposer une clinique du monde social" (ibid), by studying the villainized Harki figure, probing into political discourse on the "migrant" figure, and inquiring into Paris' questionable rehousing process, narratives from Zeniter, Quintane and Sorman argue for the imperative to locate and elucidate instances of marginalization at work. Asking *why* and *how* the marginalized have been forgotten, obscured, or abandoned, complicated literature challenges the very framework underpinning the margin/center binary. For, as I will expound upon in my conclusion, has contemporary French literature really given the floor to the "ignoble"? I will suggest not entirely, or rather, not yet.

Before proposing how literature might (re)write the margin through complication, the term "margin" merits elucidation, and particularly because scrutiny of this designation and the nuances it obfuscates is inherent to the respective projects of my corpus. From the Latin *margō*, meaning edge or border, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines margin negatively by stating what it is not: the center. The margin is "marked off or distinguished from the rest of the surface" (OED), and by definition is "à la périphérie," or "à l'écart" (TLFi) of something of greater importance requiring our attention, a definition perhaps best illustrated through the pages of our favorite books. Centered on the page is what we have come to the book to find; readers follow blocks of black text from page to page and the purpose of the surrounding margin, traditionally white, is to visually support our focused attention on the predominating narrative. This

intrinsically negative center/margin binary similarly manifests itself in our social world, which as Kimberlé Crenshaw argues in "Mapping the Margins" (1991) excludes identity categories that are perceived as different and endorses their stigmatization (1242). Indeed, it is the center that assigns the designation of marginalization in collective imagination, a practice inscribed in the very conception of Durkheimian collective or common consciousness.[18]

Yet, what are the implications of the margin and marginalization in France, specifically? A look to current literary production in France suggests that unearthing silenced voices from our collective past, reconsidering populations and issues that are misrepresented in public spheres, and exploring forgotten territories are increasingly important endeavors, and I suggest three prevalent loci of complication in contemporary French literature. Zeniter exemplifies a tendency by which French writers demonstrate a penchant for revamped historical novels that reinterpret narratives surrounding tumultuous past events and specifically, those from a violent twentieth-century characterized by war and decolonization in France.[19] *L'Art de perdre* is indeed a "Restitutional Literary Transcription" as Demanze has suggested, in that it rehabilitates and reinstates the misconstrued Harki figure in communal memory, in France and Algeria, and indirectly affords Harkis the possibility to speak (Demanze 178). More than enact a judicial compensation or figurative restoration of expropriated goods by way of an inclusive historical narrative (ibid), however, I posit that complicated literature participates in a recasting of History

[18] Here, I am thinking of what Émile Durkheim describes in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) to be "the psychological life of society" (40). Thought to represent the beliefs and values shared by the average members of a given society, Durkheim founded his term on the theory that this enduring "sum of social similarities" is unaffected by generational shifts or individual conditions, and is disseminated over the entirety of a society (39). However, as I will show, a significant segment of contemporary French literary production asks from where this consciousness is disseminated and moreover, in light of France's increasing diversity, whether one can speak of a consciousness common to all members of French society, or an "average" member, for that matter.

[19] Other conflict-inspired narratives include Jean Echenoz's tongue-in-cheek interpretation of World War I in *14* (2012), Pierre Lemaître's recent trilogy spanning the time period between World Wars, and Leïla Slimani's tale set in the French protectorate of a Morocco on the eve of independence in *Le Pays des autres* (2020), the first novel in her forthcoming trilogy.

and a historiographical renovation oriented towards the creation of globally sensitive narratives so as to avoid repeating this cycle.

Quintane's unofficial two-book project points to current literature's concern for those affected by humanitarian crises and notably, the "migrant" figure. In effect, along with *Un œil en moins*, reimaginations of refugee shipwrecks in Maylis de Kerangal's *À ce stade de la nuit* (2016), Marie Darrieussecq's *La Mer à l'envers* (2019), and Salim Bachi's poetic reflections on expatriation in *L'Exile* d'Ovide (2018) have led Oana Sabo to denote the existence of a "Migrant Canon" in twenty-first-century France.[20] In agreement with Sabo that these works are agents of cultural and economic mediation, my analysis of Quintane's texts explores their potential as *social* intermediaries. While literature cannot concretely remedy the perilous plights of refugees, its capacity for discursive and circumstantial problematization present the opportunity to recognize and remediate the structures in place that render their trajectories all the more difficult.

This initiative extends to Joy Sorman's *L'Inhabitable*, a text emblematic of French narratives that Dominique Viart forwards "ne se satisfont plus désormais de *raconter* le réel ni de le *représenter* mais envisagent la littérature comme un moyen pour l'*éprouver*, l'*étudier* voire l'*expérimenter*" (Viart 1, emphasis original). Unlike many of her literary counterparts who playfully explore Parisian space with geographic precision, Sorman seizes her fieldwork as the opportunity to inform readers on the inequities haunting the less-frequented corners of the capital city.[21] While details delineating deteriorated buildings and make-shift apartments figure strongly, they are seemingly the author's threshold to reaching the unified communities formed in insalubrity. As the narrative peels away moldy walls and electric wires to reveal Fatima, Monsieur Shunxi, Djibril, Adel, and others, rather than emphasize their Otherness, *L'Inhabitable*

[20] See Sabo's monograph, *The Migrant Canon in Twenty-First-Century France* (2018).
[21] Here, I am thinking of volumes from Philippe Vasset, Éric Hazan, and Thomas Clerc, among others.

speaks to the tenants' humanity, their unique practices of the city and affiliation to Paris' dynamic patchwork.

While Quintane intimates in her preface to *Les Enfants vont bien* that questioning discourses participating in the conservation of France's presumably unalterable social frameworks is "open to all," it would appear that contemporary literature has an intrinsic responsibility to identify and problematize these issues: "à nous de parler et d'écrire autrement" (Les enfants 11). And, it is worth recognizing that the "nous" in this dissertation is decidedly feminine. At first this selection appeared fortuitous, because while I considered adding works from Jean Christophe Bailly, Philippe Vasset and François Bon to my corpus, the quantity of female authors performing research in current French Letters is just as plentiful, with texts from Olivia Rosenthal, Maylis de Kerangal and Leila Slimani having also been contenders. Yet, beyond Zeniter, Quintane, and Sorman's shared and decidedly complex approach to the social world, I now see the selection of all female writers as quite meaningful. More than illustrate the reconfiguration for which these texts advocate, their connection to the center/margin binary through gender may be telling in the interest and concern their books show, not merely for the margin, but for marginalized populations' increased exposure to symbolic violence, or what Bourdieu describes in *Reproduction: In Education, Society and Culture* (1977, English ed.) as "every power which manages to impose meaning and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (4). As Sapiro has demonstrated, Bourdieu's study in *La Domination masculine* (1998) of gender roles and the power dynamics they mobilize in society offers a compelling perspective on symbolic violence at work (Sapiro et. al 879). Regarding gender roles, specifically, for Bourdieu masculine domination is founded in an androcentric conception of biological and social reproduction, with women as circulating objects

within the economy of symbolic goods (La Domination 39-48). That this arbitrary "matrix of perception" became an internalized blueprint for acting in and thinking society, and so much so that its seeming objectivity is engrained at the institutional level, informs the functioning of binaries governing racial, religious, national, and sexual identities, among others (39), and suggests that symbolic violence is a principle disseminator of center/margin divide, in France, and elsewhere. [22]

This dissertation is not a feminist reading of the margin, however, but rather one that, like the texts in question, deploys complication as the lens through which to examine blind spots in historical, socio-political, and geographical awareness. Addressing complicated subject matter that "[consists] of an intimate combination of parts or elements not easy to unravel or separate" (OED), the works of my corpus acknowledge that these involved topics merit an equally intricate study. Rather than attempt to explain or provide answers to challenging questions being asked in France today, the four works analyzed in this dissertation complicate, or "make complex or intricate (*as by the introduction of matter*)" (OED, emphasis mine). Admittedly, this method is seemingly paradoxical. In fact, my use of "complicated literature" is inspired by a passage from *Un œil en moins* in which Quintane recounts the bewildered reactions she receives while describing her approach to resuming collective discussions and inquiry on everything from medieval history to political amnesia: "je vois des dizaines de mini-points d'interrogation sortir des crânes de certains de mes interlocuteurs et grimper de là dans l'atmosphère ; mais comment,

[22] Informed by social theories from Marx, Durkheim and Weber, as François Denord shows in his entry titled "Domination" for the Dictionnaire International Bourdieu, domination is a central concept in Bourdeusian thought. The expression "dominant.e/domnié.e" is used to refer to Bourdieu's conception of "le monde social comme un espace structuré par des rapports de force exprimant des inégalités" (Dictionnaire 251). The sociologist's work differentiates between direct and indirect domination, as well as its concomitant physical and symbolic violence, the second of which I will soon address.

ce que je fais est de la poésie ? est de la littérature ? Ça donne une littérature compliquée. Les choses sont ainsi" (29).

The "introduction of new matter" is imperative to subverting frameworks that perpetuate marginalization and discrimination, and to reconfiguring our social world. As Bourdieu has shown, because the collective has reified categories produced according to center/margin binaries as social truths, the recognition, analysis, and deconstruction of identity categories is not sufficient to eradicate these structures (Sapiro et al. 879). Locating narratives that are byproducts of center/margin discourse, calling them into question, and through analysis and research considerately *reintroducing* marginalized populations, places, and perspectives, complicated literature argues for a repositioning the margin. Moreover, this critical gesture that I posit is an emergent form of literary responsibility in contemporary French Letters affords the opportunity to examine problematic institutional and social frameworks in France and disclose toxic power dynamics that disparage our ineluctable differences.[23] Indeed, "the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction" (Crenshaw 1242).[24]

While many mediums of cultural production attend to the considerate reintroduction of marginalized identities in France's collective narratives, I posit that literature, and upmarket literature in particular, bolsters this initiative through what our interactions with books teach, and show us how to do. As Christy Wampole forwards in *The Other Serious* (2015), literary studies

[23] My use of "literary responsibility" refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's theorization of *littérature engagée*, or the responsibility to employ one's art as a means to engage with matters of collective significance and particularly, those of a political nature.

[24] In *La Domination masculine*, Bourdieu specifies that "du fait que le fondement de la violence symbolique réside non dans des consciences mystifiées qu'il suffirait d'éclairer mais dans des dispositions ajustées aux structures de domination dont elle sont le produit, on ne peut attendre une rupture de la relation de complicité que les victimes de la domination symbolique accordent aux dominants que d'une transformation radicale des conditions sociales de production des dispositions qui portent les dominés à prendre sur les dominants et sur eux-mêmes le point de vue même des dominants" (La domination 47-8).

are unique in that they require a "slow focus" that other disciplines do not (79). To read is "to consider, interpret, discern, to inspect and interpret in thought" (OED), and while it is certainly possible to study other cultural products in this manner, it is through first becoming adept readers that we learn these critical techniques. The exceptional one-on-one interconnectedness we develop with a book, an exchange that takes concentration, time, and dedication, has become increasingly rare in our distracted twenty-first era where we access our favorite pieces of music on our smartphones, battle popup ads while streaming foreign films on our smart televisions, and wade our way through seas of influencers while visiting museums and galleries. Conversely, the thought-provoking texts circulating in France's sphere of *production restreinte*, narratives that "take people out of the flow of time and muster their spread attentions into a tight bundle" (ibid), foster the concentration and reflection we lack. Furthermore, complicated literature's performative inquiry into the margin, not as an edge or limit but rather as a space of potential becomes a model for its readers on how to assiduously and at times, scientifically explore and analyze the social world.

Complicated Literature's Literary Heritage

It would be impossible to contemplate literature's preoccupation with marginalized populations without referencing the abovementioned *Les Misérables*, or Émile Zola and Honoré de Balzac's contributions to France's literary landscape. While Jean Valjean's transformation of sublime proportions from a starving street thief to a heaven-bound altruist is emblematic of Romantic literature, an increasingly exploratory trend is gearing up as the transcendental movement loses steam. A stark departure from "l'agonie du romantisme" (Zola 305), the *enquête* genre emerges amid the development of distinct disciplinary fields during the nineteenth century, and exemplifies literature's propensity for interdisciplinarity its quest to create testaments to

veritable human experience, and particularly that of middle and lower-class populations. This inclination for social fact-finding and illustration generally nested within the movements of Realism and Naturalism emerged in part as a means to decipher France's increasingly complex social puzzle: in his article "Enquête et 'culture de l'enquête' au XIX^{e} siècle," Dominique Kalifa writes that "le sentiment d'opacité, d'illisibilité ou de dysfonctionnement d'un monde social en pleine mutation suscite un train inédit d'investigations ou d''observations' qui passent autant par la littérature…que par la médecine, l'hygiène publique, la philanthropie, l'économie ou la 'science' sociale, dont la genèse court de Bonald à Durkheim" (4).

Émile Zola's essay *Le Roman expérimental* (1887) signals the nineteenth century's "age of investigation" (293) and formally theorizes the author's cross-disciplinary approach: "en somme, toute l'opération consiste à prendre les faits dans la nature, puis à étudier les modifications des circonstances et des milieu, sans jamais s'écarter des lois de la nature. Au bout, il y a la connaissance de l'homme, la connaissance scientifique, sans son action individuelle et sociale" (8). Zola, for whom literature was innately scientific, and science an act of art, advances that the Naturalist observes in the manner of a scientist and the novel becomes their laboratory, melding empirical data with artistic liberty. The author, then, is an "experimenter," utilizing an artistic medium to depict, and at times invent greater social significations. The author's resolve to privilege France's working class in the country's literary narrative results in veritable case studies informed by the author's immersive field work, evident in his depictions of the exceptional Parisian market *Les Halles* in *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), and the coalminers' strikes of 1869 in *Germinal* (1885). In this way, while current authors have taken to empiricism to inform their richly documented texts, more than a century earlier Zola exemplified what it meant to "sortir de l'écritoire" (Demanze 87).

More than fifty years prior to Zola's development of the experimental novel, however, Balzac was carefully studying social milieus for his colossal oeuvre, *La Comédie Humaine*, a comprehensive *fresque* (Balzac 21) of French Society.[25] While Balzac did not formulate his approach quite as technically as his successor, there was something decidedly scientific, and indeed biological about the way in which he conceived of French Society.[26] In the midst of economic, agricultural, and political turmoil, like those working in the soft sciences Balzac's social classification was a means to invoke social order.[27] For the author, who proclaimed he had "mieux fait que l'historien, je suis plus libre" (22), literature had the added benefit of autonomy, allowing him to record history in the making while simultaneously crafting plots replete with social, moral, and ideological critique (33). This would prove to be a model for Realist and Naturalist authors during what would continue to be a nineteenth-century of political unrest, and as it turns out, for authors in France today.

Since Balzac wrote his preface to *La Comédie Humaine*, France has experienced industrialization on a massive scale, survived two World Wars, colonized and decolonized, grappled with seven different political regimes, and witnessed the rise of a powerful and influential media presence. Roughly thirty million more people reside in France today, and the

[25] I use the French word "fresque," here, for it denotes not only the fresco painting style, but also a consequential composition composed of numerous characters, a series of pictures devoted to a common subject, and a substantial composition characterized by the great lengths to which the author has gone to reenact history through art. Furthermore, it is the word Balzac himself used to refer to *La Comédie Humaine* in its preface.

[26] In his preface to *La Comédie Humaine* (1842), the author likens social classes to species: "La société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie ? Les différences entre un soldat, un ouvrier, un administrateur, un avocat, un oisif, un savant, un homme d'état, un commerçant, un marin, un poète, un pauvre, un prêtre, sont, quoique plus difficiles à saisir, aussi considérables que celles qui distinguent le loup, le lion, l'âne, le corbeau, le requin, le veau marin, la brebis, etc" (7-8). It is worth noting, too, that Balzac's biological reading of society was largely inspired by the work of Naturalist scientist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, to whom he dedicates his novel *Le Père Goriot* (1835).

[27] A. Jardin and A.-J. Tudesq elaborate on this tense climate in volume six of their *Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine* (1973). Just prior to the first of two decisive revolutions that would define the first half of the nineteenth century, "un climat d'inquiétude subsiste, aussi sensible chez l'ouvrier, incertain du salaire du lendemain, que chez l'artisan presque sans commandes ou le petit commerçant presque sans clientèle" (116).

country's population has diversified considerably. And, scholarship produced in the last century and notably that in conversation with postcolonial theory, gender and race studies and ecocriticism has resulted in new understandings of France's collective past and present, and continues to inspire the country's visions for its future. In tandem with mutations within the country's social, political, economic, and cultural spheres and this theoretical metamorphosis, what, how, and why contemporary authors are conducting their literary investigations in France and thus, their exploratory paradigm has transformed. Moreover, the stakes of investigative literature have evolved, as has the role of the author, which in the case of complicated literature I suggest is impelled more by France's seeming need for mediation than it is experimentation.

Despite a shared interest in using scientific methods to explore the margin, today's narratives seem far-removed from the professedly objective and often morally-driven works from the nineteenth-century French literary canon. While they preserve a prowess in historical, social, and political critique, contemporary *enquêtes* have seemingly modified their ethical agendas. What was once the "rôle moral du romancier expérimentateur" (Zola 28) now places less emphasis on the moral debt of the individual, and underscores a shared role and I suggest, responsibility in the reinterpretation of collective narratives. In this way, if the contemporary *enquêteur·trice*'s project is one of ethics, its impetus is not the same that led Zola to assert "c'est nous qui avons la force, c'est nous qui avons la morale" (30). In contrast, today's literary investigator is "un individu ordinaire, dans la foule de ses contemporains, sommé de composer des œuvres avec un valeur d'usage, d'entrer à nouveaux frais en dialogue avec le monde, d'être partie prenante des enjeux collectifs" (Demanze 19), and therefore more likely to question her or himself. Quintane was swift to follow *Un œil en moins* with *Les Enfants vont bien*, a creative choice she explains in the book's preface: "dans un précédent livre…j'avais déjà abordé la question des réfugiés (des

'migrants,' comme on dit), mais son parti pris narratif me semblait, au moment même où j'écrivais, insuffisant à rendre compte de la violence faite, en France, à ces hommes, ces femmes et ces enfants" (Les Enfants 7).

Effectively, a *parti pris*, or a preconceived view, bias or prejudice (OED), is precisely what much of today's literary production in France seeks to combat. Announcing this shift from knowing to questioning is Georges Perec, who in an insert to *Espèces d'espaces* (1974) writes that "le problème n'est pas d'inventer l'espace, encore moins de la ré-inventer…, mais de l'interroger, ou, plus simplement encore, de le lire ; car ce que nous appelons quotidienneté n'est pas évidence, mais opacité : une forme de cécité, une manière d'anesthésie" ("Prière d'insérer"). Much like Quintane, sending his final manuscript to press was not synonymous with completion for Perec. His continued reflections on what we might learn from space when living becomes more than passing from one space to the next while trying our hardest to avoid collision (16) incited the author to add to his text just before publication. [28] Signed "G.P.," the insert reads like a personalized prompt to interact more profoundly with the world from the author himself.

Even before his "journal d'un usager de l'espace" ("Prière d'insérer"), Perec exemplified literature's capacity to innovatively engage with everyday life after a twentieth-century that Viart describes in *Écrire le présent* (2013) as "[dominée] par le formalisme autoréférentiel et l'exploration textuelle" (11). In his 1965 study of the relationship between humans and the spaces they occupy, *Les Choses* challenges literary epistemology and broadens narrative possibility by rendering the text's protagonists less important than the "things" that surround them which, ironically, more fully embody the characters and their values than the characters themselves. By the following decade, Perec's spatial inquiry had evolved to consider what of the

[28] This is my translation of how Perec explains our experience of living in *Espèces d'espaces*, wiring that "vivre, c'est passer d'un espace à un autre, en essayant le plus possible de ne pas se cogner" (16).

physical world escapes us in *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* (1975), and to question the imbrication of spatial practices and socio-economic factors in *Espèces d'espaces*' examination of "l'inhabitable," from "l'étriqué, l'irrespirable, le petit, le mesquin, le rétréci, le calculé au plus juste" (176), to "l'espace parcimonieux de la propriété privée" (177).

The progression in Perec's oeuvre illustrates that the world has a way of revealing its inner workings when we espouse a position of unprejudicial observation. This is possible, however, only if we first disengage from sensationalized narratives that mean to make sense of the world for us. In "Approches de quoi ?," his introductory text for *L'Infra-ordinaire* (1989), it is as if the author anticipated the oppressive, twenty-first century media presence to come:

> "Dans notre précipitation à mesurer l'historique, le significatif, le révélateur, ne laissons pas de côté l'essentiel: le véritablement intolérable, le vraiment inadmissible : le scandale, ce n'est pas le grisou, c'est le travail dans les mines. Les "malaises sociaux" ne sont pas "préoccupants " en période de grève, ils sont intolérables vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre, trois cent soixante-cinq jours par an." (2)

More than underscore the urgent endeavor that is recalibrating our attention toward that which is marginalized in collective consciousness, Perec's larger oeuvre encourages readers and his successors to challenge how we experience and conceive of reality, and particularly, what we perceive at face value.

While, as scholar Alison James puts it, contemporary literature in France demonstrates a certain "soif du réel," Demanze notes that one key transformation within the *enquête* genre is that current literary investigations no longer task themselves with representing reality in the manner of nineteenth-century texts.[29] Rather, in reappropriating factual events and phenomena

[29] In her article "La force des faits dans l'écriture du présent" (2015), James slightly alters what David Shields terms *Reality Hunger* (2010) to think through what she posits is a crisis in current French fiction.

today's *enquêtes* question the very notion of what *is* real in order to "interroger les conditions de sa fabrique, d'inquiéter les institutions qui le construisent et de questionner les conditions de son exploration" (Un Nouvel âge 21). This is certainly true of *L'Art de perdre* that, to reconceptualize the controversial Harki figure, features everything from the Evian accords, street graffiti, works of literature and cinema, and YouTube video comments within the narrative. Rather than proclaim truth or accuracy, the novel is a starting point for continued reflection, and its pronounced oscillations between fact and fiction, in particular, invite readers to question their own historical understandings. Disclosing that the marginalized Harki history is, in fact, central to collective consciousness, in France and Algeria, *L'Art de perdre* transcends a thirst for the real to seek out realities other than those that are currently available to us. The novel's historic reconfiguration speaks to Françoise Lavocat's reconceptualization of the border delineating fact and fiction not as an axiomatic duality of truth versus counterfeit, but rather as two complimentary spheres in dialogue with one another, and literature as a privileged space to foster this inquiry.[30]

That the works of my corpus transparently mobilize practices gleaned from the social sciences and incorporate fieldwork alongside a myriad of resources is precisely where complicated literature begins to branch off from current *enquête*. Though both complicated literature and *enquête* perform research, often enriched through in-text documentation, I suggest that not all works of *enquête* deploy complication as a form of literary responsibility. For, it is not only mobilizing these practices and documents that determines complication, but rather how

[30] In *Fait et fiction : Pour une frontière* (2016), Lavocat argues that borders between fact and fiction are an epistemological necessity. However, she proposes that we broaden our conception of fiction, writing "nous défendons, en définitive, une conception ouverte de la fonctionnalité, fondée sur sa pluralité, d'un point de vue aussi bien interne qu'externe : usages et conceptions multiples de la fiction à la même époque, hétérogénéité ontologique des artefacts culturels. Notre approche n'est pas téléologique, elle d'identifie pas l'essence de la fiction à l'état historique qui voit ce que l'on appelle son autonomie" (27).

they are used, and to what end. In the world of horology, a complication is a function that aids its wearer; beyond the compulsory function of telling time, complications may include calendars, world timers, and astronomical sky maps, to name but a few. The watch wearer operates more efficiently as a result, from remembering a birthday, to adjusting to a new time zone, to being on their guard for full-moon follies. Literary complication functions similarly: complicated literature inscribes methodology, documents and other resources into the text, not merely for adornment or to substantiate an argument, but because they are practical tools that help readers to better function in society, and particularly in the timely effort of rewriting the margin into the center of the French collective.

In *Le Parlement des invisibles* (2014), sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon's observations on social obscurity in contemporary France parallel those of Kalifa on nineteenth-century French society, comparing the French population to a vast iceberg of which we are able to grasp but the emergent, and least substantial segment (17). Is contemporary France, once again, "illisible"? The works of my corpus would suggest that, perhaps, it is that *we no longer know how to read* society. On the art of close reading, Wampole writes that "committing oneself earnestly to one page, to a few lines of verse, is one of the obvious ways left to fuse the eyes and the brain in a crystal chorus" (79). Complicated literature proposes tools that facilitate such moments of intense focus, encourage reflection, and spark analysis. In *L'Inhabitable*, interstitial complications interrupting Sorman's address portraits equip readers for their exposure to the latent yet widespread precarity in one of the world's most idealized cities. Before even crossing the threshold of the text's first address, Sorman opens her narrative with a list of what readers are to expect: "murs fissurés, humidité importante, pièces sans ouverture sur l'extérieur, terrain

instable, absence de raccordement aux réseaux d'électricité ou d'eau potable, absence de système d'assainissement, odeurs fétides, produits toxiques circulant dans l'atmosphère" (7 [2016]).

Furthermore, juxtaposing Sorman's fieldwork, documentation and statistics with photographs from Jean-Claude Pettacini and multi-modal contributions from architect Éric Lapierre on combatting insalubrity in the capital city, one could consider the 2011 edition of *L'Inhabitable* to be a *grande complication*. Like luxury watches that, thanks to their added functions far exceed what one would expect from a timepiece, complicated literature surpasses storytelling to inform on social disparities in France, incite reader inquiry, and provide a model for research. By way of comparison, Philippe Vasset's *Un livre blanc* (2007) appears to be a grand complication. Enlarged, colorful maps featuring Paris' "zones blanches" join poetic, self-reflexive interludes distinguished with italics, and even a work of concrete poetry:

"Lot Abandonné Allée Jardin Maison

Appentis Jardin Allée Dalle Garage" (93)

I posit that though Vasset's inclusion of documents and varied stylistic techniques provide a page-turning, and often quite humorous experience for the reader, it is not a work of complicated literature. *Un livre blanc*'s added elements are tools in that they are guides on how to perform operations; the text may very well encourage readers to begin exploring "white space" on their own terms, or to create a work of poetry that reflects their surroundings. However, they are not mechanisms that facilitate our reading of France's complex social world, mediate between the center and the margin, or instruct on how to perform our shared role in reconfiguring this exclusionary binary.

Confronting the Hydra

This dissertation analyzes what complications add to the works of my corpus and notably, how they incite what Gianfranco Rubino and Viart describe as "un pas de trois entre les données événementielles brutes, leur reflet médiatisé et l'appropriation spécifique qu'en tente la littérature" (Rubino 25). If the complicated text acts as an intermediary in negotiating among central and marginal narratives and experiences, fact and fiction, document and prose, methodologies, and fields, I add the role of the reader, who enters into the act of meaning-making. Unlike France's *romans à thèse* that similarly address topics of collective interest, the narrators' shared critical *posture*, which Jérôme Meizoz defines in *Postures Littéraires* (2007) as "les actes énonciatifs et institutionnels…par lesquels une voix et une figure se font reconnaître dans le champ littéraire" (11), does not propose solutions to the issues they address. Rather, complication creates a site of mediation, wherefrom reading becomes a practice of hermeneutics, and the book a springboard for its audience's own reflections and, ideally, research. While arresting and controversial narratives already in circulation serve as points of departure for the works of my corpus, their invitation to cooperative and prolonged research is a call to look deeper into, and indeed beyond those stories.

To this effect, the authors' respective interdisciplinary approaches and exploration of multiple literacies have inspired a chapter progression that reflects their progressive gradations of genre, methodological transparency, and textual complexity, as well as my own methodological framework for analysis. I close read the works of my corpus alongside the images, maps, and documents included within the texts, and those not appearing in their entirety that are nonetheless expressly referenced. Works from other contemporary French texts and scholarship from literary studies, the social sciences, ecocriticism, feminist theory, and intersectionality from the United States and the French-speaking world inform my reading and conception of France's

complicated literature, as do current events and debates in France. From former Minister of Education Frédérique Vidal's proposed investigation into "islamo-gauchisme" in France's academic sphere, to conversations on the influence of the controversial American "cancel culture" in the *Hexagone*, it has become increasingly clear that the country is in need of a common ground through which to reflect on its differences.[31] This project proposes that complicated literature strives to become such a locus, and endeavors to discern how, or even if literature can (re)write "toute une population dont le principal malheur [est] d'habiter à la marge de la vraie vie, celle des possédants" (Zeniter 410).

Chapter one examines *L'Art de perdre*'s recasting of Franco-Algerian history to contemplate the concern complicated literature shows for History's sidelined narratives and namely, that of the Harki diaspora. Historical perspectives repressed due to trauma, controversy, hegemonic discourse or other factors, historiography has sidelined narratives such as that of the Harki in favor of suitable histories, which in the Franco-Algerian context often speak divisively to either sides of the Mediterranean. Zeniter's novel conducts a productive critique of traditional historiography to unearth narratives caught in this chasm, and through the problematization of the many Franco-Algerian myths still in circulation today demonstrates that historical understandings should perhaps not be so categorical. Did Algeria's dey Hussein-Pacha really assault France's consul Pierre Duval with a fly-swatter? Did FLN soldiers brutally massacre young French soldiers in Palestro? Were Harki soldiers actually in cahoots with the French to help them curtail Algerian independence? In revisiting touchstones from France and Algeria's complex past and the Harki figure, *L'Art de perdre*'s mutable conception of identities and

[31] For more details on these topics, *Le Monde*'s tribune "'Islamo-gauchisme': 'Nous, universitaires et chercheurs, demandons avec force la démission de Frédérique Vidal'" and the chronicle "Déprogrammations, 'cancel culture': Rima Abdul Malek n'est pas seule à penser qu'il y a danger."

juxtaposition of contradictory historical nuances re-sounds History and, as I will show, historiography. While it may not simplify this problematic period, preferring instead to explore what Lavocat has called the inherent literary model of possible worlds, the text's complicated reimagination of France and Algeria's past participates in a larger, and timely reconfiguration of the Harki, and of History.[32]

Not unlike the Harki, the "migrant" figure is at the center of heated debates in France, from those who, like Quintane, volunteer with *Centres d'accueil et d'orientation* (*CAO*), to those who make it a point to "embêter les migrants, et aussi d'embêter ceux qui les aident" (Un œil 168). Chapter two looks to the author's unofficial two-book project to isolate hegemonic discourse surrounding the refugee figure in France, which manifests itself in two very different textual objects. What both books share is a will to *reprendre*, or to resume, recover, and begin anew, nuances in meaning I use to structure the analysis in my chapter. Through her involvement with *Nuit Debout* and refugee aid networks in France, in *Un œil en moins* Quintane observes and recounts a worrisome indifference among her fellow citizens to the worldwide humanitarian crisis and the country's own political struggles. While bland tomatoes may be at the forefront of certain citizen's concerns, *Un œil en moins* urges readers to reexamine collective consciousness by exploring that which by definition of the construct has been relegated outside of it, and is a call to replace indifference toward France's humanitarian and political crises with outrage.[33] Ostensibly a manual for this endeavor, *Les Enfants vont bien* juxtaposes discourse from political, legal, and media spheres with internal emails from her local *COA*, and testimony from refugee

[32] See Part Three of Lavocat's monograph *Fait et Fiction : pour une frontière* (2016), "D'un monde l'autre,"pp. 381-402.

[33] The "bland tomatoes" reference refers to a passage in *Un œil en moins* that I close read in my chapter to demonstrate how the text points to a collective tendency to become distracted by inconsequential matters. My analysis of collective consciousness is again based on Durkheim's conception that he formulates in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893). It is also worth noting that Durkheim himself uses the indefinite article to state that collective consciousness is "*a* distinctive reality" (De la division 46, emphasis mine).

aid workers to provide a telling example of symbolic violence at work. My study of this piece of concrete poetry analyzes Quintane's subversive reappropriation and complication of discourse as a *cutting* critique. I argue that together, her texts ask how artistic creation may become a powerful form of resistance, and creative resistance an equally powerful opportunity to combat collective indifference to margin/center power dynamics and practices.

Manifestly revealing the margin/center divide within our cities, *L'Inhabitable* questions how gentrification practices, and particularly the rehousing processes, "bancal et approximatif" (Sorman 25 [2016]) participates in rendering *intra muros* Paris inaccessible to marginalized populations. While middle-class Parisians found their close living quarters "invivable" during the Covid-19 quarantine, Sorman's study of insalubrity reveals the veritably uninhabitable, where the capital's precarious populations nevertheless make their homes.[34] Chapter three shows how Sorman's field work complicates our collective map of the City of Light and reorients mapping mentalities through its introduction of Parisian space that the map does not dare feature. This reconfiguration becomes an opportunity for the author to study, and reorient the paradoxes of precarity away from a pattern of hypervisibility/invisibility that functions according to the center/margin binary. Melding sociology, journalism and literature with consideration, Sorman's study of insalubrity complicates not only representations of Paris in collective imagination, but also our conceptions of how we and others practice the city. While Gefen has asserted that literature's interest in peripheral territories is evidence of its "projet contemporain de refaire monde, la littérature veut restaurer la *cohésion* de l'espace comme celle du vivant" (202, emphasis mine), I demonstrate that in its project to allow others, and indeed Others to inhabit us, *L'Inhabitable* asks how literature might make remake the world differently.

[34] "Leaving Paris: What's Behind the Exodus?," *France in Focus*, France 24, 28 May 2021, https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/france-in-focus/20210528-leaving-paris-what-s-behind-the-exodus.

Effectively, cohesion appears to be the very condition my corpus contests. Moreover, these texts acknowledge the impossibility to create new worlds without first understanding how, and why ours is broken, with complication becoming a mechanism to decipher dysfunction. Complicated literature situates itself somewhere between the media's France on fire and the infamous *Galerie Lafayette* map's imposing and stylized Parisian monuments. It is neither the wicked, unjust, false, dark, thirsty, corrupted, brutish, empty hell Hugo's narrator exposes in *Les Misérables*, nor the virtuous, just, true, luminous, aware, lively, dutiful, Godly heaven that facilitates textual transcendence to soulful realms, "l'hydre au commencement, l'ange à la fin" (Hugo 152-3).[35] It does not pretend to be France's guardian angel, though perhaps complicated literature is in some ways the textual manifestation of its hydra, and its concomitant paradox. Hugo's narrative deploys the trope of the indomitable, multi-headed snake to invoke anarchy, ignorance, manipulation, and a hidden, yet powerful corrupting force in French society. Indeed, what makes the hydra so fearsome is not necessarily its many heads, but rather that it lurks underwater and strikes without warning. France is, and has always been a multifarious entity. Complicated literature demonstrates that facing this inherent diversity is not to be feared, and rather that it is masking difference that perpetuates division. Per the hydra paradox, the more one tries to eradicate this manifold creature, the more swiftly and greatly it multiplies.[36] Shedding elimination for contemplation, complicated literature takes readers on a hunt for hydra: it is buried beneath the weight of history textbooks and legal jargon. It hides behind fabulized facts

[35] "Le livre que le lecteur a sous les yeux en ce moment, c'est, d'un bout à l'autre, dans son ensemble et dans ses détails, quelles que soient les intermittences, les exceptions ou les défaillances, la marche du mal au bien, de l'injuste au juste, du faux au vrai, de la nuit au jour, de l'appétit à la conscience, de la pourriture à la vie, de la bestialité au devoir, de l'enfer au ciel, du néant à Dieu. Point de départ: la matière, point d'arrivée. l'âme. L'hydre au commencement, l'ange à la fin" (Hugo 152-3).

[36] This phenomenon has been scientifically observed and theorized, as documented in Peter Abram's article for *New Scientist* "Hydra paradox: when culling animals makes them thrive," May 27, 2015. https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22630232-700-hydra-paradox-when-culling-animals-makes-them-thrive/

and figures meant to delineate society, and marks every field and street from Paris to Marseille. It is the unsuspecting, built into the very framework of collective consciousness.

Respire les effluves, les parfums d'Orient
Sous l'étuve les fumées d'encens
Brûlent tes poumons dans les torpeurs enivrantes
Hume les fleurs, leurs senteurs navrantes
Laisse loin la rumeur des villes
Si ta vie est tracée, dévie!
Prends des routes incertaines, trouve des soleils nouveaux
Enfile des semelles de vent, deviens voleur de feu
Défie Dieu comme un fou, refais surface loin des foules
Affine forces et faiblesses, fais de ta vie un poème
Sois ouragan entre rebelles, houngan !
Empereur de brigands, Mackandal, Bois-Caïman
Écris des récits ou te cogner à des récifs
Une feuille blanche est encore vierge pour accueillir tes hérésies
Lis entre les vies, écris la vie entre les lignes
Fuis l'ennui des villes livides si ton cœur lui aussi s'abîme

Gaël Faye, Tôt le matin

"Mais ce n'est peut-être pas si simple":

Complexifying Harki History in Alice Zeniter's *L'Art de perdre*

Introduction

On September 25, 2001, former President Jacques Chirac made a vow to Harkis and their families in France: that the Republic had a duty to remember the sacrifices made by the former colonial soldiers, "c'est pour la France une question de dignité et de fidélité.[37] La République ne laissera pas l'injure raviver les douleurs du passé. Elle ne laissera pas l'abandon s'ajouter au sacrifice. Elle ne laissera pas l'oubli recouvrir la mort et la souffrance. Puisse ce 25 septembre

[37] Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de Harki* (2005) provides the most nuanced definition of the word "Harki" I have encountered, in that it simultaneously accounts for the word's etymology, the actions that characterize what it truly meant to be a Harki, and the consequences associated with the designation: "Le terme de 'Harkis' vient de l'arabe harka, qui signifie mouvement. Les Harkis sont les soldats de certaines unités supplétives autochtones d'Algérie recrutés par l'Armée française pour lutter contre la rébellion, de 1954 à 1962. Leur statut était très précaire, de droit civil d'un mois révocable à tout moment. Anciens combattants des deux dernières guerres, ou devenus Harkis pour protéger leurs familles contre les exactions de l'armée française ou du FLN, ces Algériens ont cru les promesses des dirigeants français affirmant que l'Algérie resterait française. À l'indépendance, le gouvernement français ordonna de limiter le rapatriement des Harkis en France (91 000 personnes environ) alors même qu'en Algérie, les massacres de Harkis et de leurs familles se multipliaient dans l'impunité" (13).

témoigner de la gratitude indéfectible de la France envers ses enfants meurtris par l'histoire!"[38] Eighteen months later on March 31, 2003, Chirac signed a decree enacting the "Journée nationale d'hommage aux anciens Harkis," an initiative reflective of the politics of recognition that characterized his presidency.[39] Despite such commemorative projects, in 2009 literary critic Valerio Cordiner stated that in addition to the enduring obscurities surrounding Harki heritage, "bien qu'officiellement reconnue, [la guerre d'Algérie] qui a coûté des dizaines de milliers de vies humaines est encore trop peu nommée et montrée, encore trop périphérique – comme d'ailleurs toute histoire coloniale – pour être acquise dans la conscience collective du peuple" (266).[40] While Chloé Leprince's recent article for France Culture asserts that, contrary to popular belief, the Algerian war is not purposefully concealed from students in French schools, it does advance that "les Harkis demeurent le véritable angle mort de l'enseignement de la guerre d'Algérie à l'école."[41] If the Algerian war, and Harki memory specifically remain on the periphery of collective conscious, how can France remember and recognize what it does not know?

If past efforts by the French government to remember the Algerian war and Harki heritage have proven unsuccessful, who has the duty, or perhaps the right to elucidate the blind spots obfuscating our past? Might it be History with a capital H, which has come to represent

[38] From former French President Jacques Chirac's speech, delivered in Paris on September 25, 2001.
[39] The three brief articles of the document establish September 25 as the official day of remembrance, institute annual ceremonies in Paris and in each French department, and stipulate the officials responsible for publishing the decree in the French Republic's *journal official.* In their article "France and the Memories of 'Others,'" Géraldine Enjelvin and Nada Korac-Kakabadse note the mid-1990's as a turning point in the French government's transformation in their memory politics from one of difference to one of recognition and "truth recovery," detailing former President Jacques Chirac's involvement in reckoning with "both the 'Vichy syndrome' and the 'Algeria syndrome'" (154-5).
[40] Cordiner, "Arno Bertina: La "Migration de truites" en dehors de l'histoire" *Écritures Contemporaines 10 : Nouvelles écritures littéraires de l'Histoire*, pp. 263-284
[41] Leprince, Chloé. "Non, la guerre d'Algérie n'est pas cachée aux élèves (mais le sort des Harkis, oui)." *France Inter: Savoirs*, 21 Sept. 2018.

objective and factual renderings of the past? Or perhaps the creative medium of literature, and even fiction have a role to play in recognizing the history's absent voices.[42] Despite the edification of the distinct disciplines of History and Letters in the nineteenth-century, author-historian Ivan Jablonka suggests that both are essential to remembering and recording the past. Likening the disciplines' love-hate relationship to a "divorce" in *History is a Contemporary Literature* (2018), Jablonka encourages that we rethink their affiliation, writing "let us not be taken in by theatrical domestic spats rehearsed by old couples, with science pitted against narrative, reason against imagination, professionalism against pleasure, content against form, the collective against the individual" (11). Though the view that "writers write" and "historians do history" is commonplace, trends in contemporary French literature demonstrate that many authors are, in fact, doing both, and with an acute attention to marginalized historical narratives (91).

Despite the authority an alleged impartiality affords the concept of history, literature may possess a farther-reaching grasp on collective conscious. Attributed the *Prix Goncourt des Lycéens* one year before Leprince's article for France Culture was published, Alice Zeniter's *L'Art de perdre* (2017) could very well have taught high school students in France more about Harki heritage than their secondary curricula. Much like Jablonka and the "grandparents he never had," for Zeniter it was her personal connection to historical silences, or poorly elucidated moments from our collective past, that became the impetus for her novel.[43] Yet, apart from *L'Art*

[42] An example of the will to differentiate History from fiction can be found in *Metahistory* (1973) by Hayden White, who writes "it is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by 'finding,' 'identifying,' or 'uncovering' the 'stories' that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between 'history' and 'fiction' resides in the fact that the historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which 'invention' also plays a part in the historian's operations" (6), and notably the extent to which "finding" plays a part in the novelist's operations.

[43] Ivan Jablonka's *A History of the Grandparents I never had* (2016) is an investigation into the lives of his grandparents, who were deported and murdered during the Holocaust.

de perdre's interest in the long-marginalized Harki population, political unrest and matters of socio-political importance are common themes in Zeniter's relatively sizeable corpus for her young age. As early as sixteen, her first novel *Deux moins un égal zéro* (2003) depicts an adolescent's perspective on the traumas of war. In an interview with *La Poudre*'s Lauren Bastide, Zeniter explains that "ça correspond…à une prise de conscience de l'Histoire et de l'histoire de ma famille que j'avais eue…c'est à peu près à ce moment-là que je comprends qu'en fait si je suis née, c'est par une succession de hasard et d'événements historiques dont le premier était la guerre d'Algérie…".[44] While the whispers of historical disturbance in Eastern Europe inhabit the familial chronicle *Sombre Dimanche* (2013), *L'Art de perdre*'s generational saga hits decidedly closer to home in its exploration of Algeria and France's complicated relationship, misrepresentation in historic renderings of the Algerian occupation and war, and the subsequent incomprehension surrounding the polemic Harki heritage.

Paradoxically a five-hundred-page novel about silence, *L'Art de perdre* is at once a critique of historic traditions, a response to the historiographic precarity it locates in the Harki population, and the proposal of an innovative and distinctly literary manner of writing history. Dedicating its three parts to respective generations of a Harki family, Zeniter's text scaffolds the historical gulf created by prevailing accounts on either side of the Mediterranean, and offers its characters the long-awaited opportunity to unearth their stories repressed by trauma and structural violence. *A mise en abyme* of the author's own investigations into the evolution of the Harki nomenclature since the Algerian participation in World War I, an omniscient, heterodiegetic narrator identified with an authorial "je" recounts the family's story with the aid

[44] *La Poudre*, Episode 33, 29:00

of documentation, testimony, intertextuality, memory, and, as memorial deficiencies require, sheer conjecture.[45] As the family's legacy takes shape, with it so does historical possibility.

Zeniter's work as a novelist and playwright has met acclaim from French literary critics, *L'Art de perdre* alone having earned several prizes.[46] In particular, the novel's nomination for the esteemed *Prix Goncourt* incited a flurry of articles appearing in news outlets such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde,* and in the online cultural magazine *Diacritik*.[47] Though the French literati generally agree on the need and value of *L'Art de perdre*, *Le Figaro*'s Astrid de Larminat is frank in her critique of the novel, comparing it to the dismal, gray skies of Normandy that brood over the *HLM* Ali's family calls home: "il montre tout mais sans relief ni éclat. On aurait aimé lire un roman âpre, brûlant, plein d'ombres et de lumière, comme le soleil de Méditerranée qui aveugle et illumine" (4). Zeniter's efforts to "show all" in her "docu-fiction" (ibid) do not go unnoticed by *Diacritik*'s Christiane Chaulet Achour, who qualifies the novel's personal vignettes as "pesant[es]" (2), and the first segment "L'Algérie de papa" "[long] à lire tant les faits historiques rapportés et les situations sont connus, du moins pour qui s'est intéressé ou s'intéresse à l'histoire de l'Algérie" (3). In their forward to the issue of the *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* entitled "Fictions 'Françaises,'" Alexandre Gefen, Oana Panaïté, and Cornelia Ruheher would seemingly argue against Chalet Achour's claim that "le sujet a été amplement

[45] As I will show later in this chapter, *L'Art de perdre*'s main character, Naïma's investigations are encapsulated by those seemingly already conducted by the authorial narrator. Furthermore, Zeniter has spoken at length about the role her family history played in the writing of a novel, notably in an interview with *Librairie Mollat* and at a workshop I attended in which she was the keynote speaker ("Des vies mémorables," Université Rennes 2, May 2022).

[46] In addition to obtaining the *Prix Goncourt des Lycéens*, *L'Art de perdre* also received the *Prix littéraire du* Monde, the *Prix Landerneau des lecteurs*, and the *Prix des libraires de Nancy*, was a finalist for France's *Prix Goncourt*, and the sixth best-selling francophone novel in 2017.

[47] Respectively, those are: "La critique de L'Art de perdre d'Alice Zeniter, gagnante du Goncourt des Lycéens." *Le Figaro Culture*, 14 septembre 2017, "Goncourt des lycéens : Alice Zeniter récompensée pour 'L'Art de perdre.'" *Le Monde Culture*, 16 novembre 2017, and "Les 'innommables' s'adressent aux 'épargnés' : L'Art de perdre d'Alice Zeniter," *Diacritik*, 25 septembre 2017.

traité et il n'y a plus vraiment d'audace à y revenir" (4). *Fixxion*'s forward suggests that amidst a growing anxiety surrounding the notion of French heritage, Zeniter's novel is a part of contemporary French literature's "political gesture" that aims to "déconstruire les différentes formes d'identités françaises en tant qu'elles sont des formes de domination pour les réaménager par un discours d'accueil, ouvert au multiculturalisme" (3). That Algerian history is known only to those who deliberately research the topic is precisely why it merits a revisiting, and seeking to elucidate the grossly misunderstood Harki population is indeed, a bold statement. As *Le Monde*'s Raphaëlle Leyris observes, *L'Art de perdre* problematizes what it means to be French in a way that honors "la complexité avec laquelle la vie des individus se trame dans l'histoire, et…[installe] avec une force tranquille les Harkis dans l'histoire littéraire" (3) and as I argue, in French History.

I propose that if Zeniter's novel has not received more in-depth attention in the sphere of academic analysis, it is due to the very complexity Leyris' critique lauds. Given that complication pervade the characters' destinies, the text's methodological framework, and its stylistic approach, as Larminat and Chaulet Achour's observations demonstrate, *L'Art de perdre*'s ambitious historic project risks becoming cumbersome for its readers. In fact, in *Le masque et la plume's* discussion of the novel, Nelly Kaprièlian finds that Zeniter "a raconté presque trop…elle est presque trop excellente" (23:35), Jerôme Garcin adding that at times it feels as if the author herself is smothered by the weight of her project (24:37). Yet however unwieldy, *L'Art de perdre* is a pertinent endeavor, as is its in-depth analysis: *Le Masque*'s Michel Crêpu asserts that while the Algerian war has in many respects defined how the French collective thinks Algeria, in Zeniter's novel, "on a l'Algérie, on a une mémoire algérienne, *les*

Algéries, qui remontent à plus loin et qui nous ouvrent à une autre appréhension de cette histoire" (17:29).

Unlike historical literature that seeks to better *understand* our past through narrative, my reading of *L'Art de perdre* forwards that Zeniter's novel does quite the opposite: in order to confront the historically marginalized, one must *complicate* the very apparatus of history, disconcerting attitudes, approaches, and representations. Upsetting the boundaries that have divided populations, delineated disciplines, and influenced our manner of deciphering shared experience, *L'Art de perdre* introduces a new conception of historical literature that questions not only our knowledge of the past, but the way in which we decipher it. Espousing Jablonka's notion of a "research text" or "creative history," *L'Art de perdre* illustrates a concomitant engagement with history and literature in an endeavor to transform both historical content, and the discipline itself.[48] Expressly not a "texte téléologique" (Zeniter 506), Zeniter's novel neither victimizes the Harkis, nor justifies their role during the Algerian war. In fact, in refusing to limit Harki heritage to one, uniform trajectory, *L'Art de perdre* does not *explain* our past, but instead *explores* it, challenging the very notion of what it means to write history, and encouraging that we thicken our conceptions of disciplines by reconsidering the actors who inhabit our historical chronicles.[49]

In this chapter dedicated to *L'Art de perdre*'s reconfiguration of historical consciousness, I first examine the novel's aim to combat the historiographic precarity of sidelined narratives. Marginalized by a domineering Western historic tradition, exacerbated by a longstanding

[48] In *History is a Contemporary Literature* (2016), Ivan Jablonka posits that to write history "creatively" is "to reconcile research with creation, [and] invent new forms for embodying knowledge" (vii).
[49] Here, I am thinking of White's historical mode of emplotment, which when paired with the modes of argument and ideological implication he forwards produce an explanatory effect within written History. See White's introduction to *Metahistory*, "The Poetics of History" (pp. 1-41).

institutional gulf between Western and postcolonial ideologies, and compounded by a lack of transmission linked to trauma, sidelined narratives are those of voices missing from official historic discourse. Conducting a closeup of one Harki family, *L'Art de perdre* unearths and explores sidelined narratives, and the complexity they add to historical understanding. In so doing, the novel contests History's suitable narratives, a term I use to denote accounts founded on binaries and designed to accommodate certain populations at the expense of others. From here, I explore the novel's attention to heterogeneity; *L'Art de perdre* unpacks suitable narratives to consider the many points of view they dissimulate. Privileging a methodology of transversality, or addressing interdisciplinarity in a way that emphasizes the innate imbrication of disciplines and the productive "noise" their communication generates, the novel endeavors to re-sound historiography.[50] Representative of the discord inherent to our collective past, the novel creates a disharmonious narrative, which allows conflicting perspectives to coexist. Finally, I show that the novel's concern for historic divergence is indicative of what I forward is the novel's characteristic counter discourse, which refutes the suitability and coherence of accounts that endeavor to reason our past. By way of a conscious fiction that actively considers the dangers of determinist discourse, *L'Art de perdre* resists the act of nomination that too often defines characters in historical conscious. Deciphering Harki history in a way that complicates historical boundaries, narrative structure, and literary imagination, Zeniter's text seeks not to clarify historic accounts, but instead to challenge our ways of interacting with our past, and conceivably with our contemporary reality.

[50] My use of "noise" is taken from Wai Chi Dimock's article "A Theory of Resonance" (1996), in which she argues that literary texts are diachronic objects that accumulate layers of "noise," or divergent readings, through time. As opposed to impeding meaning-making, Dimock suggests that noise can instead be cooperative, and is what allows a text to continue to resonate through time.

Confronting the Confines of Suitable History

That an object as banal as a fly-swatter could be the portentous root of a complex history of conquest, domination, and revolution seems somewhat absurd. And yet to believe the myth propagated for nearly two hundred years, it was the dey Hussein-Pacha's fly-swatter attack on French consul Pierre Deval in 1827 that prompted France's siege of Algiers, and their ensuing occupation and colonization of Algeria. In his *Conquête d'Algérie* (1859), nineteenth-century historian Céline Fallet writes that during a showdown between the two Mediterranean neighbors over unpaid debts, the dey smacked Deval's face with his flyswatter, "oubliant ce titre qui devait rendre le consul inviolable" (46). Or was it a fan that caused the Regency's demise? Eugène Brieux's account of the story in *Les Beaux voyages : Algérie* (1912) corroborates the dey's tantrum, yet substitutes his arguably unremarkable tool for one of more esthetic importance: "Le Dey…s'emporta, et, dans un mouvement de colère, frappa notre consul au visage, d'un coup d'éventail" (28).

Yet, *L'Art de perdre* wonders what really happened in the Kasbah that fateful day. Rendering its project of historical reconfiguration explicit from the opening pages of the novel, the narrator conducts a meta reading of the now infamous moment in Western historiography, referred to by historians interchangeably as "the fly-swatter affair" and the "coup d'éventail":[51]

> "Si l'on accepte qu'il s'agissait d'un chasse-mouche, il faut, en se représentant la scène, ajouter au soleil de plomb les vrombissements des insectes d'un noir bleuté tournant autour des visages des soldats. Si l'on penche pour l'éventail, il faut se dire que l'image orientalisée, cruelle et efféminée du dey qui s'y dessine n'est peut-être que la piètre justification d'une vaste emprise militaire." (Zeniter 17)

[51] For more on "the fly-swatter affair," see Jennifer Sessions' *By Sword and Plow*, p. 25. See Benjamin Stora's *Histoire de l'Algérie Coloniale: 1830-1954*, p. 15 for more on the "coupe d'éventail."

With the use of the verbs "accepter" and "se pencher," Zeniter's first-person narrator underscores written history's potential for fictionality, in that its narratives are not true per se, but rather interpretations readers consent to believe in. Furthermore, in willing its readers to add the seemingly unremarkable flies to the narrative and to challenge the dey's Orientalized representation, the critical reading points to the historical practices of suppression and embellishment, used to craft specific versions of history for distinct goals. In so doing, *L'Art de perdre* peels away the fantastical layers that have accumulated over two-hundred years to critique the myth, and asks how the fly-swatter affair is indicative of a much larger issue pervading written history, and its potential to affect the collective vision of our past.

By calling into question the very narrative used to justify France's conquest of Algeria, Zeniter's novel isolates the myth as exemplary of the often-biased nature of accounts regarding the Algerian occupation and war of independence. Moreover, in opening the novel in such a way, *L'Art de perdre* presents its fundamental question: what fictions told in the name of History render unintelligible the finely nuanced realities of our past? The fly-swatter affair is one of many suitable narratives, or digressions of a shared reality produced according to the values and intentions of specific communities of affiliation that have come to define collective historical conscience.[52] While the ideological charge of such narratives seeking to meet France's larger political, economic, and nationalist goals varies, their lasting influence can be observed in the

[52] While as Djemaa Maazouzi shows in her chapter "Fabrication des mémoires et besoin d'Histoire," history and memory interact more than Maurice Halbwach's antithetical definitions of the two domains in *La mémoire collective* (1949) would have one believe (Halbwach defining history as "du côté de 'l'unicité', de 'l'objectivité absolue', le sujet-historien ayant seulement un rôle 'simple et strict de transcription,'" whereas memory is "du côté de la 'fragmentation, de la pluralité des groupes et des individus qui en sont des vecteurs éphémères'"), I do mean to separate Historical conscience from collective memory here. Though Maazouzi's chapter calls to rethink the imbrication between memory and history in the context of historiography's global turn since the 1980's, suitable historical narratives are those that have thought themselves, or continue to think themselves as having primacy over memory (30).

propagation of the fly-swatter affair in works of fact and fiction, such as Fallet's historical text and Brieux's novel, scholastic materials, and even artwork.[53]

Taking control of the narrative of a soon to be French Algeria was certainly of utmost concern.[54] However, likely more important was France's desire to craft their own image as a world power, their reputation reliant on a successful conquest of Algeria.[55] Contingent on how the conquest would be recounted, France's perceived victory necessitated the act of historical misappropriation. For as historian Mahfoud Kaddache shows in *L'Algérie des Algériens* (2003), the situation that led to the swat was not as simple as Fallet or Brieux led their readers to believe; in records of the dey's testimony to a French officer, the dey asserts that it was Deval who instigated the altercation, and voices his "surprise" at the offensive remarks of the consul, a supposed "friend" (567-8). Kaddache adds that "l'incident fut grossi: 'les trois coups violents sur le corps, frappés avec le manche,' dont parle Deval relèvent de son imagination," as it was a

[53] In *Histoire de l'Algérie Coloniale*, Benjamin Stora states that "pendant de longues années, des générations d'écoliers ont appris et rabâché qu'un coup d'éventail asséné par le dey d'Alger au consul de France, avait provoqué la prise d'Alger en 1830" (15), a phenomenon that Guillemette Tison examines in further depth in her article "La conquête de l'Algérie racontée aux enfants" (2012). Moreover, a Google Images search for "coup d'éventail" reveals approximately a dozen images representing the incident. In most, the dey appears aggressive whereas the consul adopts a posture of dignity. However, the body language in both the dey and the consul varies slightly from representation to representation.

[54] In a similarly historically critical novel, Assia Djebar's *L'Amour la fantasia*, the narrator describes France's preoccupation with documenting what would become Algeria from the point of view of the conqueror."Au départ de Toulon, l'escadre fut complétée par l'embarquement de quatre peintres, cinq dessinateurs et une dizaine de graveurs… Le conflit n'est pas encore engagé, la proie n'est même pas approchée, que déjà le souci d'illustrer cette campagne importe d'avantage. Comme si la guerre qui s'annonce aspirait à la fête" (17). In *Edge of Empire* (2005), Maya Jasanoff explains that such practices originated in post-revolutionary Napoleonic tactics, used during the imperial rivalry between France and England, when the First Consul ordered over one hundred scholars to study, document, and essentially purloin the Egyptian culture and territory, documented in the iconic *Déscription de l'Égypte* (1809). Napoleon's strategy aimed to ideologically reinforce military dominance with the creation of an image of cultural authority, evidence of having reached a pinnacle of utmost civilization and supremacy (123-5).

[55] In her preface to Tocqueville's *Sur l'Algérie*, Seloua Luste Boulbina writes that "depuis toujours en effet, le sens commun politique associe grandeur de la nation et domination d'autres parties du monde" (14). Jennifer Sessions substantiates this assertion in *By Sword and Plow*, writing "Often, Algeria served as a backdrop for narratives that had as much to do with domestic political and social concerns as with the colony itself…the cultural politics of colonialism were always also metropolitan politics" (14).

mere two to three "light slaps" instead (561-2). This version and the dey's testimony, however, remained curiously absent from France's suitable accounts.

Ever prone to sardonic imagery, *L'Art de perdre* likens this process of historiographic hegemony to digestion, conjuring the image of a greedy man's protruding belly from where the missing voices of History struggle to escape:

> "Ils savent déjà ce qu'est une histoire nationale, une histoire officielle, c'est à dire une vaste panse dans laquelle peuvent être incorporés de larges pans de terre pour peu que ceux-ci acceptent qu'on leur attribue une date de naissance. Lorsque les nouveaux venus s'agitent à l'intérieur de la grande panse, l'Histoire de France ne s'inquiète pas plus que l'homme qui entend son ventre gargouiller. Elle sait que le processus de digestion peut prendre son temps." (Zeniter 18)

Yet, in the amalgamation and swallowing up of autochthone Algeria, France's hegemonic "paunch" did more than simply overwrite Algerian history.[56] The subsequent process of "digestion," evident in Fallet and Brieux's texts, was an attempt to dissolve and therefore eradicate any remnants that remained of a territory, a culture, or a population worthy of a self-written record. In this respect, colonialism's dehumanizing agenda and the Western historiographic tradition worked hand in hand in denying Algeria's right to History, sequestering autochthone chronicles that would lay dormant for decades, and often more than a century.

Despite a generalized consent among contemporary historians that the dey's outburst was, indeed, a pretext for France's invasion, the fly-swatter affair continues to fascinate, and

[56] My use of "swallowing up" is a reference to *L'Art de perdre*'s continuation of the belly history metaphor: Because Algeria's plural history does not carry the same weight of France's unifying official History, "les livres des Français avalent l'Algérie et ses contes" (18). Moreover, when describing the ceremony celebrating the centennial of Algerian occupation, the narrator describes it as "une cérémonie de l'avalement au cours de laquelle les Arabes sont de simple figurants, décoratifs comme des colonnades d'un autre âge, comme des ruines romaines ou une plantation d'arbres exotiques et anciens" (ibid).

often serves as a point of departure for narratives on the Algerian war.[57] Though Benjamin Stora's *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale* (1991) presents the incident in order to broaden the narrative disseminated in France for generations – "'La conquête d'Algérie ? La réponse au coup d'éventail !'" (15) – Stora nonetheless harnesses the rich power of the fly-swatter myth to begin his narrative on "La colonisation française." Saber Mansouri's recent novel, *Une femme sans écriture* (2017), also commences with a close-up of the notorious object "qui fit basculer l'histoire" (25), though with an innovative twist that renders its heroine the fabricant of the dey's rigged fly swatter.[58] While these examples exhibit both History and literature's will to reexamine the previously marginalized dimensions of our collective past, and a renewed attention to histories pertaining to the Algerian war specifically, only Zeniter's novel explicitly exposes the image crafted of the dey to be as much a work of fiction as *Une femme sans écriture*'s metal fly-swatter:[59] "Parmi les différents prétextes à la déclaration d'une guerre, j'avoue qu'il se dégage toutefois de celui-ci une certaine poésie qui me charme – surtout dans la version de l'éventail" (Zeniter 17). The fly-swatter myth, which in its dissemination came to simplistically encapsulate the relationship between the two countries, posits that the French and the Algerians are fundamentally different, at opposite poles of a scale of humanity, possessing either the heroic stoicism of a leader, or conversely the puerile intemperance of a despot destined to fall. Exposing

[57] Mahfoud Kaddache, Jennifer Sessions, and Benjamin Stora, all make this point in their previously mentioned works. In particular, Sessions and Stora state that the pretext hypothesis is widely accepted among historians.
[58] Perhaps in an attempt to posthumously relieve the dey of some of the responsibility for "losing his nerves" (Mansouri 27), the novel's narrator, Sihème, claims she is the one to blame for the consul's "severe" (26) injury, as it was she who crafted the famous fly-swatter for the dey: "je l'avais trafiqué discrètement en y introduisant des fils de métal dans l'intention de faire très mal aux mouches" (27).
[59] In his article treating *Le Dehors ou la migration des truites* (2001), "La 'Migration des truites' en dehors de l'Histoire," Valerio Cordiner notes the return of "discours référentiel" in contemporary literature and historiography, and specifically in narratives seeking to elucidate the neglected memory of the Algerian occupation and war. "C'est…contre cette amnésie du mal accompli qu'une conscience non apprivoisée essaie, à travers le récit historique mais aussi par la fiction para-historique, de recueillir les fragments d'une Histoire abîmée par les puissances de l'oubli" (263-5). In "Guerre d'Algérie. Des mémoires apaisées ?" Claude Collin notes that between spring and fall of 2017, French editors published no less than eight novels treating Franco-Algerian relations, all of which he forwards possess a similar "tonalité" in their treatment of painful and polemic subjects (129).

the narrative for what it is – a ploy to forever trap Algerians in the role of the unruly villain, and elevate the Frenchman to the that of the dignified hero – *L'Art de perdre* demonstrates how this suitable narrative of epic proportions seduced collective conscience into romanticizing a violent enterprise of dire political, cultural, and social consequences.

L'Art de perdre's critique of Western historiography implies that if we are to balk at politicians in France who assert the historiographic inferiority of colonized populations, we must also examine our roles as "implicated subjects" in "digestive" historical practices and marginalization.[60] Though relocating his family to France should present the opportunity for Ali to reinvent his story, he and later Hamid are unable to do so. Whether in the Rivesaltes camp, Jouques forest hamlet, or suburban ZUP, Ali discovers a set of ready-made binaries waiting to write his family's story on the fringe of French collective conscious.[61] Thought of by the born and bred French as a "classe au rabais" (196), "sous-toyens" (282), or "citoyens de deuxième zone" (424), Ali's family is geographically, socially, professionally, academically, and politically marginalized in France, and immediately attributed a narrative negatively defined

[60] I am referring to the speech Nicolas Sarkozy gave in Dakar, Senegal on July 26, 2007, in which he asserted that "le drame de l'Afrique, c'est que l'homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire… Le problème de l'Afrique et permettez à un ami de l'Afrique de le dire, il est là. Le défi de l'Afrique, c'est d'entrer davantage dans l'histoire. C'est de puiser en elle l'énergie, la force, l'envie, la volonté d'écouter et d'épouser sa propre histoire." I am also borrowing Michael Rothberg's terminology from his book *The Implicated Subject* (2019). According to Rothberg, implicated subjects "occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without themselves being direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles" (1).

[61] The Camp Maréchal Joffre, also known as Camp de Rivesaltes, was a military camp that France used to intern civil populations from 1939 to 2007, including Spanish refugees during the Spanish Civil War, Jews during the Holocaust, and the Harkis post-decolonization. *L'Art de perdre* describes the camp as "depuis sa création… un lieu où l'on enferme ceux dont on ne sait que faire en attendant, officiellement, de trouver une solution, en espérant, officieusement, pouvoir les oublier jusqu'à ce qu'ils disparaissent eux-mêmes" (166). The Logis d'Anne in Jouques, France was a collection of prefabricated dwellings built to house Harki families, the fathers of which were allocated jobs working in the surrounding forests. Finally, ZUP is the abbreviation of Zone à urbaniser en priorité, or "des quartiers identifiés par les pouvoirs publics comme devant accueillir les constructions massives d'équipements et de logements, en particulier pour accueillir les classes populaires en habitat collectif" (GéoConfluences). The physical marginalization of Harkis to these places on the fringe of collective space in France is indicative of the inherent precarity of their identities in France, and mirrors their historical marginalization.

through difference. "Personne ne leur a demandé de réinventer ou rêver leur vie française" (197), nor paused to consider, as Zeniter does years later, that for immigrants, or in the Harkis' case asylum seekers of French nationality, it is France that is the anomaly.[62] In fact, in her *La Poudre* interview, Zeniter affirms that the ongoing historic and social marginalization of previously colonized populations incited her to write *L'Art de perdre*, stating that historiographic tradition is, in fact, doubly-transgressive: a system that first denied certain populations access to History has resulted in their inability to refute what has been written about them by others.[63] The author adds that without the veritable possibility to refute History and its determinisms, there is no emancipation possible, sidelined narratives remaining trapped in the margins of collective conscious. To escape the grasp of historic prescription, Zeniter's novel critiques historical conscious, explores divergent points of view, and complicates the idea that "une version de l'Histoire qui…conviendrait à tous" (429) exists.

Suitable narratives are not exclusive to Western historiographical practices, however. Take, for example, Frantz Fanon's idyllic portrait of the Algerian *couple régénéré* in *L'An V de*

[62] "Donc, je me disais mais oui racontez-ça non pas comme une tragédie dont les personnages ne seraient que les victimes, mais les faire exister et pouvoir peut-être opérer ce renversement qui fait que si on arrive à les faire exister dans leur pays au départ, si on arrive à faire exister aussi ce pays qu'ils vont quitter, on réussira à donner au lecteur l'impression que finalement c'est la France qui est l'ailleurs, qui est l'exotisme. Que tout ne tombe pas sous le sens que ces manquements qu'on a l'impression que les étrangers commettent face à notre culture etcetera, c'est pas des manquements. C'est pas des insultes. C'est pas de la malveillance ni de la bêtise, ni de la négligence. C'est juste que leur vie d'avant, elle les a formés, elle les a forgés, elle leur a donné un certain nombre de plis qui sont l'évidence. Et la France n'est que la bizarrerie et la littérature peut permettre d'opérer ce pas de côté et du coup changer un peu le regard" (La Poudre 1:02:57).

[63] When Lauren Bastide remarks Zeniter's preoccupation with advocating for a right to history, Zeniter responds: "Je pense qu'il y a un droit à l'Histoire pour que puisse exister aussi un droit au refus de l'Histoire…Il faut pouvoir y avoir accès avant de dire je refuse de prendre à plein ces déterminismes, parce qu'on ne peut pas refuser quelque chose qu'on n'a pas, fin qu'on ne nous offre pas" (La Poudre, Épisode 33, 1:04:15).

la révolution algérienne (1959):[64] "Le couple algérien, en devenant un maillon de l'organisation révolutionnaire, se transforme en unité d'existence…Il y a un surgissement simultané et effervescent du citoyen, du patriote et d'un époux moderne. Le couple algérien se dépouille de ses faiblesses traditionnelles dans le même temps où la cohésion du peuple s'inscrit dans l'histoire" (100). Fanon's work tracing colonialist practices was pivotal in denouncing its "gangrène dialectique," or the dissolution of subjugated identities and their reconstruction based on the binaries of oppressor and oppressed, and racial difference.[65] Still, the scholar's radical promotion of rebirth by way of a unified Algerian population fighting "un ennemi unique" (105) presents a romanticized vision of the revolution.[66] In a manner completely opposite, yet analogous to France's use of the fly-swatter affair, Fanon's conception of a renewal fed the burgeoning narrative of a new Algeria, one unified against the French enemy and free from colonial oppression.[67] *L'Art de perdre* exposes this allegedly homogenous Algeria as a contrivance meant to facilitate the country's independence movement and the implementation of its vision, and shows that the makeup of Algeria's population was much more nuanced, and

[64] My use of "régénéré" refers to Mona Ozouf's work on the French Revolution, and specifically *L'Homme régénéré* (1989), in which she forwards that at the heart of France's revolutionary project was the creation of a "new man" (8). While it would be a mistake to carelessly compare the French Revolution to the Revolution in Algeria, this theme of renewal is nonetheless present in Fanon's work. Moreover, in can be argued in both revolutions that the ideal of renewal was, in fact, detrimental to certain members of the population in that, as Ozouf argues, "qui entreprend de créer un homme nouveau prétend s'emparer des moindres pensées, abolit la distinction entre le privé et le public, part en guerre contre l'intériorité, s'engouffre dans un projet de visibilité absolue où l'indétermination est insupportable, réfute donc la démocratie" (120).

[65] Frantz Fanon *Pour une révolution africaine* (1964) p. 44

[66] In *Metahistory*, Hayden White writes that "radicals…are inclined to view the Utopian condition as *imminent*, which inspires their concern with the provision of the revolutionary means to bring this utopia to pass *now*" (24). Furthermore, he specifies that "the Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it…" (8).

[67] In her chapter "Fabrication des mémoires et besoin d'histoire," Maazouzi argues that not only the maintenance of France's national narrative, but also the creation of that of the newly independent Algeria contributed to a memory lapse regarding the Algerian war. "L'État algérien naissant calque sur le premier les idéaux de sa république (démocratique et populaire) une et indivisible avec la primauté exclusive de l'unicité d'un people, d'une religion, d'une langue. On pourrait bien voir également, dans cette fabrication de l'oubli, l'impératif du silence qu'impose l'édification d'une identité nationale, par-dessus tout unificatrice et homogène" (57).

particularly in the exceptional context of political unrest:[68] "Pays, drapeau, nation, clan, ce sont des mots qu'ils emploient peu. Des mots qui, en 1955, peuvent encore avoir des sens différents pour chacun, le sens que l'on veut leur donner, que l'on espère qu'ils prennent ou que l'on craint qu'ils ne revêtent" (Zeniter 64).

That Post-Colonial scholars like Fanon have enriched our historical understandings over the past century, adding a much-needed thickness to a previously one-dimensional view of our past, is irrefutable; it is here that the work of reclaiming sidelined narratives began, and continues to this day.[69] However, it appears that in some respects the partitioning between Western and Post-Colonial thought has produced a chasm that traps narratives not precisely belonging to one side or the other. Such is the case of the Harki population who, caught in "l'emprise de l'Histoire, à ses mâchoires métalliques aux longues dents noires" (Cordiner 276), found themselves divested of the opportunity to account for their past. Derived from the Arabic word for movement, "harka," the French dubbed the former Algerian soldiers they recruited to aid in their "anti-rebellion" efforts during the war of independence "Harkis," a nomenclature that became synonymous with "traitor" post-independence.[70] Though in the colonial context the

[68] One example among several in the novel is when the FLN lieutenant referred to as the "Loup de Tablat" and his troops surprise Ali's village with a nighttime visit to promote the FLN and an "Algérie algérienne," and to warn them against cooperating with the French moving forward. "L'orateur est habile, pense Ali : il soulève les poitrines de la foule suffisamment vite pour qu'elle ne puisse pas réfléchir au coût de ce qu'il vient de lui demander. Il a connu des hommes comme ça, il y a dix ans, de l'autre côté de la mer. Des officiers qui savaient mener leurs troupes à la mort en chantant, sans leur laisser le temps d'y penser" (Zeniter 71). After his brother Hamza's kidnapping, witnessing the horrific Milk bar bombing orchestrated by the FLN in Algiers, and coming face to face with his friend Akli's mutilated corpse, Ali seeks protection with the French troops. Fearing backlash from the village's inhabitants, he is surprised to receive their thankfulness instead. "Ali repensera plus tard à cette scène, c'est ce moment qui lui reviendra toujours à l'esprit, rendu incompréhensible par l'Histoire : personne ne lui crache à la face, personne ne lui reproche ses liens avec l'armée. Les villageois considèrent qu'il leur a sauvé la vie" (126-7).
[69] Though the discipline of Post-Colonial studies emerges twenty years after Fanon's death with scholars such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, his work quickly became canonical to the field, and is a mainstay to this day.
[70] In her memoir *Fille de Harki* (2005) Fatima Besnaci-Lancou substantiates Ali's treatment as a traitor by his fellow Kabylians in *L'Art de perdre*, writing that "'le Harki' égale 'traître' est malheureusement ancré dans l'inconscient collectif. Ce sentiment douloureux a pris naissance en 1962 lors de l'abandon des supplétifs par leur régiments" (18).

rationale behind joining harkas was complex, dialectical reasoning produced the fallacious belief that Harkis were in favor of the French occupation, and therefore against Algerian independence.[71] Yet, in what Fatima Besnaci-Lancou describes in *Fille de Harki* (2005) as "une histoire si douloureuse que chacun a voulu la récrire à son avantage, au mépris de la vérité" (18), little interest was accorded to the nuances that may have exonerated the Harkis from their perceived betrayal.

L'Art de perdre illustrates the crystallization of the traitor epithet and the Harki narrative with Algerian independence in 1962, resulting in the systematic murder of Harkis who remained in Algeria, and the figurative death of families like Naïma's who relocated to France: "Rien n'est sûr tant qu'on est vivant, tout peut encore se jouer, mais une fois qu'on est mort, le récit est figé et c'est celui qui a tué qui décide" (Zeniter 110). As Algeria's tales of *maquisard* heroism flourished, the binary pitting of the heroic *moudjahid* soldier against the Harki traitor intensified.[72] Decades later, Naïma observes the lasting resonance of the traitor myth in collective conscience as she conducts research prior to her departure for Algeria. Fear seizes the amateur *enquêtrice* as she scrolls through YouTube video comments:

[71] In *L'Art de perdre*, Ali experiences the lingering consequences of this misunderstanding when having a drink with a friend in Paris over a decade after the war. When discussing the brutal murder of their mutual friend by the FLN, Ali exclaims "contre l'indépendance ? *Ya hamar,* mais qui était contre l'indépendance ? Ça fait dix ans que je vis parqué avec des Harkis et je n'en ai pas trouvé un pour me dire qu'il était contre l'indépendance ! C'est ça que tu te racontais quand tu tuais pour le FLN ? Que ces gens étaient contre l'indépendance ?" (326).

[72] From the word "maquis," to mean underground or resistant, the Trésor de la langue française defines "maquisard" as a "combattant d'un groupe de résistance armée, qui pratique la guérilla." It is important to note, however, *L'Art de perdre* portrays the *maquisards* as legitimate members of the FLN army. So, while France may have been viewed *maquisards* as insurgents, in Algeria the word denoted veritable soldiers of the independence movement. While post-independence collective conscious in Algeria concentrated on the heroism of FLN soldiers, *L'Art de perdre* underscores that during the war, the opinion of the independence fighters was much more nuanced: "Les combattants du FLN…sont appelés tour à tour *fellaghas* et *moudjahadines*. *Fellag*, c'est le bandit de grand chemin, le coupeur de route, l'arpenteur des mauvaises voies, le casseur de têtes. *Moudjahid*, en revanche, c'est le soldat de la guerre sainte. Appeler ces hommes des fellaghas, ou des fellouzes, ou des fel, c'est – au détour d'un mot – les présenter comme des nuisances et estimer naturel de se défendre contre eux. Les qualifier de moudjahidines, c'est en faire des héros" (60).

> "tu dis que tu rêve de rentre en Algérie, sal Harki. Viens ! Je t'attend pour t'égorger." "Harki, batars et collabos : allah vous hais et moi aussi…la pute la fille du Harkis c est traitre et je lui dit que nous peuples algériens nous avons une envie de massacre les descendants des Harkis." (418).[73]

Simplified versions of Harki history therefore became of the utmost necessity, and their only form of protection when what they were promised in the Évian Accords revealed itself to be nothing more than political *langue de bois*. Years after their move, Hamid, who like other young adults in the 1970's concurrently exhibits a youthful insouciance and a penchant for Marx, joins his buddies for a carefree summer in Paris. One evening in their favorite local dive bar, Hamid's response to the Kabylian bartender's seemingly innocent question of when his family emigrated to France conjures the painful wound dividing Algerian conscience. "La date ferme le visage du patron…[Hamid] apprendra plus tard à Naïma à ne jamais répondre à cette question si elle ne veut pas que toute l'histoire de sa famille s'engouffre dans la brèche ouverte par cette date" (296). What Naïma refers to as "le ricochet, si faible et si bref du Couplet" (468), or the evasive narrative used to justify her lack of connection to her "home" country, thus replaces a veritable transmission of memory:[74] "le couplet évite de patauger du côté des fond troubles de l'Histoire, ceux dont Naïma n'a pu remonter que des morceaux : un grand-père Harki, un départ brutal, un père élevé dans la peur de l'Algérie" (368).

For Naïma it is also a matter of what, precisely, to tell. Induced by the severe trauma of war, the family's memorial breakdown begins even before their violent uprooting from Algeria, visually represented in the novel as "[un] soc dans la motte de terre" (154). What should be

[73] In this citation I have kept the grammatical and orthographic errors appearing originally in the novel.
[74] "Mon père attendait que mes sœurs et moi soyons un peu plus grandes pour nous emmener toutes les quatre. Mais en 1997, pendant la décennie noire, mon cousin et sa femme ont été tués dans un faux barrage et alors mon père a changé d'avis. Il a dit qu'il ne rentrerait plus jamais au pays" (368).

"well-worn, charming, pastel scenes" (120) of the family's past are replaced by the "dusty, warped fragments" provoked by years of silence and "disheveled dreams" (121). Their departure for France solidifies this loss, when from aboard the ferry Ali imagines the boat mercilessly dragging the entirety of Algeria into the sea in its wake (159). Years later Hamid wonders if his future wife could possibly comprehend the havoc that shaped, and now inhabits his being, to which *Fille de Harki* Besnaci-Lancou adds "d'ailleurs, qui aurait voulu entendre ?" (20).[75] Memorial suppression only compounding their historiographic precarity, the Harkis "taisent leur histoire individuelle et ses complexités, ils acceptent en hochant la tête une version simplifiée qui finit par entrer en eux" (204). While the ensemble of history pertaining to France and Algeria's tumultuous relationships merits a revisiting*, L'Art de perdre* recognizes that recollection becomes even more dire for the "fraternité de malheur" (Besnaci-Lancou 81) of Harki heritage.

In what has come to be seen as a collective amnesia post-independence, ostensibly France's rewriting of *les événements* implied the effacement of the Harki population altogether.[76] However, a return of the repressed appears to have surfaced in French letters, grappling with the precarious memorial dimensions of *la Grande Guerre*, *la Shoah*, and *la Guerre d'Algérie*.[77] Concurrently referred to as the *guerre sans nom* and the *guerre des mémoires*, the illumination of gaps in collective knowledge surrounding the Algerian war in particular, and the obligation to recover and to preserve memorial integrity is a part of what Djemaa Maazouzi calls in *Le Partage des mémoires* (2015) a *hypermnésie*, or memory that is "présente de façon 'continuelle et presque obsédante dans l'espace public contemporain' et favorisée par le contexte

[75] "Est-ce qu'une épargnée peut comprendre un bouleversé ?" (Zeniter 308)
[76] Cordiner asserts that "si de l'autre côté de la Méditerranée la mémoire glorieuse de la résistance armée à l'occupant français a été assumée subrepticement par l'appareil militaire et étatique du Parti unique de la bourgeoisie compradore algérienne, en France, le souvenir honteux des exactions de l'Occupation et des crimes de la répression a été longtemps relégué derrière les parois du non-dit de la démocratie libérale" (266).
[77] See D. Viart's preface in *Écritures contemporaines 10 : Nouvelles écritures littéraires de l'histoire*, pp. 3-8.

international…" (62).[78] Scholars such as Dominique Viart and Alexandre Gefen also attest to French literary production's role in this heightened state of memorial awareness by demonstrating contemporary literature's attention to history's sidelined narratives.[79] In particular, Gefen's *Réparer le monde* (2017) illustrates current French literature's concern for collective trauma, forwarding that "les individus fragiles, les oubliés de la grande histoire, les communautés ravagées sont les héros de la fiction française contemporaine" (9). Receiving nothing more than a post-it containing the phone number of a distant relative in preparation for her "return" to Algeria, this inheritance of precarity incites second-generation immigrant Naïma to exhume her family's past in *L'Art de perdre*.[80] "Elle trouve qu'il y a quelque chose d'absurde dans cette ligne griffonnée. Sa famille a vécu en Algérie pendant des siècles et tout ce qu[e sa tante] a été capable de lui fournir pour la guider au moment de son départ tient sur ce minuscule morceau de papier" (Zeniter 444). If she is to hope to afford more meaning to Algeria than silence and Yema's "conte de fées pétri d'un symbolisme archaïque" (501), Naïma must put the pieces of the puzzle together herself.

[78] Maazouzi identifies four stages in the treatment of memory of the Algerian war: the *amnistie* of the 1960's, an *amnésie* lasting until 1980, an *anamnèse* between 1981 and 1991, and finally our current *hypermnésie*. See pages 59-62 for Maazouzi's "*Quatre séquences de remémoration*." Maazouzi also identifies several manifestations of this *hypermnésie* in French collective conscious, noting the release of previously censored information pertaining to torture practices used by the French in Algeria and testimony from both victims and torturers, the trial of former civil servant and politician Maurice Papon, convicted of crimes against humanity in 1998, and the construction of controversial memorials among other examples (62-6).

[79] Dominique Viart has an extensive amount of work on what he refers to as "littérature de terrain," and specifically the "roman historien," a term he employs to distinguish contemporary works of historical interest from traditional historical novels. "Il rompt…avec l'exploitation romanesque du donné historique au profit d'une recherche historienne déployée pour éclairer des événements méconnus ou demeurés obscurs et n'est pas sans manifester envers les archives une certaine forme de fascination proche" (Littératures de terrain, par. 6). In his monograph *Réparer le monde* (2017), Alexandre Gefen argues for current French literature's therapeutic treatment of history, in that contemporary literature endeavors to reveal and recognize victims of historical marginalization in order to offer them a narrative of "retrospective justice" (221-235).

[80] That her boss and love interest Christophe, and at times Naïma herself see her trip to Algeria as a "return" to her familial roots is a reoccurring theme throughout the third part of the novel: "elle ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser ce mot, retour, alors qu'elle ne sait même pas où elle va" (472).

Considering *L'Art de perdre* in the context of a larger return of the repressed, this chapter would like to question the role that voices such as Naïma's, and I advance Zeniter's, have to play in historical reconstruction. A testament to the novel's awareness of its own literariness, Naïma's Algerian friend, Rachida wonders if contemporary literature's propensity for life stories is nothing more than "de la thérapie narcissique…Ils n'ont qu'à aller voir des psys" (493). Or could it be that Naïma's, and in turn Zeniter's investigation of historical conscious is a veritable effort of repair, restoring missing voices to History's suitable narratives? Suggesting that novels like Zeniter's are, indeed, restitutional projects, Gefen writes "quand l'écrivain arrive trop tard pour intervenir dans le présent, ce sont les blessures encore ouvertes de l'histoire qu'il entend guérir" (221). However, faced with the collective trauma of the Algerian war – 130 years of colonial oppression, divisionary politics, the Algerian diaspora, and countless acts of violence – one must ask if words are capable of healing the wounds that continue to pass from generation to generation. Though I agree with Gefen's ethical esthetic in literature's concern for marginalized narratives, I emphasize that perhaps more essential to questions of ethics than a will to "repair" is *L'Art de perdre*'s critical function. While it is uncertain if literature can "[compenser] par le récit" (221) the innumerable injustices that arose from the Algerian occupation and war, it seems that Zeniter's novel aims to change the very attitudes and practices that allowed these injustices and ensuing biased histories to materialize, and to propose a historiography that supports such a change.

Adopting an ostensibly illogical approach, *L'Art de perdre* considers, and refuses Harki precarity by embracing an additional layer of marginality: tracing one family's legacy, from Ali's successful olive farm in pre-war Algeria to Naïma, a young professional in the Parisian art world, the novel is a microhistorical fiction, or a case study, of Harki heritage and Franco-

Algerian relations.[81] In comparison to large-scale projects that strive to account for disparate groups under the umbrella of a shared past, the micro-historical level, or "the scale of life in which people actually experience and shape global networks and feel their influence," proves an entryway to the nuances and the very humanity missing from History's suitable narratives.[82] Such gradations of meaning are often muddled through enumeration, a practice characteristic of Western History. Take, for example, an entry on Benjamin Stora's timeline delineating events from the Algerian war: "**1945** *8 mai* : début des violentes répressions dans le Constantinois, à Sétif et Guelma. 103 morts parmi les Européens, plusieurs milliers de morts algériens musulmans" (Stora 125, emphasis original). Just how many is several thousand? According to French General Tubert, that number was 15,000, whereas Algerian nationalists advanced 45,000 (91). Figures aside, the ambiguous "several thousand Arab Muslims" stands in stark contrast to the precise "103 Europeans," indicating a, perhaps unconscious, dissimulation of autochthone humanity in narratives tracing colonial history. In Alex Jenni's equally critical novel of colonial warfare, *L'Art français de la guerre* (2011), his narrator points to this historiographical "dissymmetry": "dans les guerres coloniales on ne compte pas les morts adverses, car ils ne sont pas morts, ni adverses : ils sont une difficulté du terrain que l'on écarte, comme les cailloux pointus, les racines de palétuviers, ou encore les moustiques. On ne les compte pas parce qu'ils ne comptent pas" (31).

Zeniter's text critiques France's obsession with figures, Ali voicing his puzzlement in regard to a French tendency to itemize everything from possessions to family members: "Combien, combien, combien…Les roumis ne comprennent pas que compter, c'est limiter le

[81] My definition of "microhistory" comes from the Oxford English Dictionary, where it describes such a project as a "historical study which addresses a specific or localized subject."
[82] "Microhistory and the Historical Imagination: New Frontiers," p. 3

futur, c'est cracher au visage de Dieu" (Zeniter 26). Seemingly, Naïma inherited more from Ali than his silences; as she conducts her research, she finds herself lost in meaningless figures that, even when "screamed," "cried out" or "spit" by Harkis and their descendants, block our access to any possible pathos, our innate human recourse to emotion rendering their cold calculations absurd. "Elle bouffe de la dizaine, elle s'étrangle sur des centaines, elle a – coincés au fond de la gorge – plusieurs blocs de milliers qui ne passent pas et ça continue à s'empiler…si bien qu'elle ne peut plus penser les chiffres ni tenter d'imaginer des personnes derrière eux…ils ne lui disent plus rien" (420). Ali and Naïma's visceral reactions to figures lead me to suggest that because enumerative practices limit the future, and extract the humanity implicated in our collective past, they in turn restrict historical possibility. Whereas numbers suggest finite, and in the colonial context inequitable narratives, by operating a close-up of Ali, Hamid, and Naïma's journey, *L'Art de perdre* forwards that we have not reached the limits of our historical knowledge.

This is not to say, however, that historiography does not have its limits. While the reconstitution of historical identity forms a common thread of *L'Art de perdre*, returning thickness to a narrative where there was only silence, I argue that the novel does not endeavor to repair history, or even to suggest that such a phenomenon is possible. To endeavor to repair history would be to afford the novel's narrator and her discourse a historical omniscience, which I will later show is precisely the position of authority Zeniter's novel speaks against. In fact, it is not the results of Naïma's investigation, but the act of research itself that the narrator describes as "une pâte, comme du plâtre qui se glisserait dans les fentes, comme les pièces d'argent que l'on fond sur la montagne pour servir de montures aux coraux parfois gros comme la paume" (121). Like the soft, ductile metal that "slips between the dust particles" (ibid) that forge her family's memory, I forward that as opposed to conducting reparational history, *L'Art de perdre*

advances a historiographic lens of *plasticity*. Identifying points of entry in existing narratives through which we may access History's sidelined narratives, the novel shows how from such access points we might imagine a history that is less rigid, and become more receptive to the innate malleability of the human experience.

In placing more value in questions than answers, *L'Art de perdre's* plastic lens does not prescribe new parameters by which to view our past, but instead renders those in existence flexible, while simultaneously offering a privileged role to voices previously on the fringe of History. In so doing, historiographic plasticity encourages these voices to challenge the determinisms present in suitable historical narratives, and to become differently. In fact, Zeniter believes that the right to history is inextricably tied to a plasticity of identity, forwarding that identities are not, in fact, durable and solid, but rather in a constant state of flux.[83] Altering historical perceptions of Harki identity, therefore, implies manipulating our modes of consideration. *L'Art de perdre*'s reclaiming of Harki identity and history shows that it is not humanity that must adapt to the confines of History, but instead History that must accommodate the dynamic, and inherently complicated human experience. Unlike Ali's *mektoub*, which assumes that "l'Histoire est déjà écrite…elle ne fait que se dérouler, se révéler" (19), plasticity proposes that History is never fully compositionally or epistemologically realized. "Il ne s'agit plus de déchiffrer pas à pas un destin déjà écrit au ciel mais d'écrire le présent comme une histoire que les siècles futurs sauront lire" (282). When afforded plasticity, it becomes conceivable that Harkis like Ali were also pro-independence, that Algerians with a traditional Muslim education like Hamid can also be atheists, and that the *petite-fille de Harki* has not

[83] In her La Poudre interview with Bastide, Zeniter says that "dans L'Art de perdre il y a beaucoup cette idée que l'identité n'est pas une construction solide et pérenne, enfin c'est quelque chose de plastique qui change avec le regard des autres…" (Episode 33, 31:32).

necessarily "oublié d'où elle vient" (12), or become an "arabe de service," (394) but is instead on a journey to "pouvoir être simplement Naïma" (434).

In expanding the breadth and depth of our historical lens, *L'Art de perdre* creates room for divergent perspectives in what it shows is history's inherent plurality. Yet, it does so in a way that not only recognizes difference, but also celebrates it. As Achille Mbembe writes in *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013), "…le désir de la différence n'est pas non plus nécessairement l'opposé du projet de *l'en-commun.*"[84] Mbembe's reflection highlights that identities in the francophone world have been founded not only on difference, but on what that word has come to signify. Surely, asserting one's differences, or what was once thought of as "distinguishing characteristics, features, or qualities" is a pertinent element in establishing an authentic dialogue.[85] Yet, when we conceive of difference only as conflictual, which in turn quickly becomes hierarchical, we limit not only the possibilities of others, but also our own.[86] Reframing difference through a lens of productive complication, in response to the myths written in the name of History *L'Art de perdre* privileges a methodology of transversality in constructing a heterogeneous history representative of the larger collectivity.

Re-sounding History

As observed in the mythical renderings of the dey and the consul's infamous faceoff, when narratives seek to logically package history in a way that fulfills larger political goals, components at variance with this aesthetic project are undesirable. Such binary reasoning is the cornerstone of suitable historical narratives, which pit "good" against "evil," and distribute roles

[84] Mbembe, Achille. *Critique de la raison nègre*. Éditions La Découverte, 2015, 262-263.
[85] Definition provided from the Oxford English Dictionary. Now obsolete, this meaning attributed to "difference" was used from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. In perusing how the word's meaning and has changed over time, it is interesting to note how "difference" has acquired an increasingly negatively connotation as of late.
[86] Informing my thinking here is Jacques Derrida's seminal lecture "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966).

according to the communities that narratives mean to accommodate, leaving no room for growth among their characters. Clarisse points to the troublesome nature of engrained historical norms when reflecting on when, or rather if, she should introduce Hamid to her parents:

> "Le problème ne vient pas de ce que Hamid serait un étranger : au contraire, en arrivant d'Algérie, il appartient déjà, sans rien y pouvoir, à l'histoire de [son oncle] Christian, à l'histoire de la famille de Clarisse et dans ce livre-là, il ne fait pas partie des bons personnages. Il faudrait que Clarisse puisse écrire un palimpseste et faire disparaître sous son histoire d'amour avec Hamid les inscriptions plus anciennes de Christian. Elle ne sait pas si elle en est capable." (313)

Clarisse's hesitation signals what the novel identifies as a question of prime importance: of what are we capable when faced with a seemingly omnipotent History? Though Clarisse wishes she could eradicate biased knowledge, the word "palimpsest" evokes the difficulties associated with this task. Though one may strip a manuscript page of its contents to make room for the new, the previously recorded history leaves a trace. Accepting this reality, *L'Art de perdre* contests the feigned coherence of suitable narratives in proposing, not an elimination of dominant historical conscious, but its complication, unpacking divergent perspectives, reconfiguring roles, and in so doing upsetting the convention and fixity of historiographic parameters.

Distancing itself from the inveterate labels of good and evil, *L'Art de perdre*'s profound retelling of the Ambush of Palestro illustrates that in times of war, the two are often indistinguishable.[87] Panning in on the gorges with the cinematographic precision of a Hollywood

[87] What is referred to in French as the "Embuscade de Palestro" denotes an ambush that took place on May 18, 1956, during which a segment of the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN), the armed branch of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), attacked twenty-one French Army reservists on a reconnaissance mission in Algeria. Of the twenty-one French soldiers, there was one sole survivor. Though historical opinions of the event diverge, *L'Art de perdre* suggests that the ambush provoked the strong emotional reaction it did due to the young age of the soldiers, and the reports of their mutilated corpses in the French press (Zeniter 84-6).

film, the reader first encounters a picturesque tableau of lacy limestone rocks, garlands of greenery, sparkling silver eels, and the peaceful flow of the rivers nestled among the hills of Algeria's Isser Valley. Staining the idyllic portrait, however, are the blood-red petals of poppy flowers, foreshadowing that the "décor de western" (Zeniter 84) will soon live up to the genre's characteristic harshness and violence.[88] The scene, portraying what François Buton calls the "massacre clé de la guerre d'Algérie pour la France" (83), opens to reveal the French soldiers of *la section Artur* sunbathing, playing volleyball, and enjoying convivial cafeteria meals, one young serviceman writing to his parents "'qu'il serait bon de venir ici pour les vacances !'" (Zeniter 85).[89] Yet, the once highly-favored European vacation destination quickly comes to embody the FLN soldiers who descend on the regiment: "les gorges…se referment sur eux et les broient…coincés qu'ils sont dans un goulet étroit, ils sont presque trop faciles à abattre" (ibid).

However, much about how the dramatic scene has been forged in French collective conscious is misleading, beginning with its name. As Raphaëlle Branche underscores in *L'Embuscade de Palestro* (2010), the ambush on May 18, 1956 did not, in fact, take place in in the European town of Palestro, but instead near Djerrah, a village situated north-west of the colonial hamlet. As one might suspect, this act of "onomastic displacement" (Branche 85) is not

[88] In *L'Embuscade de Palestro* (2010), Raphaëlle Branche emphasizes the importance of the locale's geography in the production of collective memory of the ambush. "Avec son caractère dangereux, menaçant, coupant, la géographie donne le ton et colore l'ensemble de la situation…les 'gorges de Palestro' sont le décor adapté pour un massacre. La 'nature[…] hostile', 'un terrain montagneux, haché et défavorable'" (85-6). Branche then forwards that the French assimilated the "hostile nature" of the ambush's terrain with the autochthone populations in the construction of their narrative justifying the colonial paradigm, writing "ils y voient confirmé un des discours les plus prégnants sur les indigènes d'Algérie : celui d'un peuple sauvage et cruel. L'existence de structures culturelles coloniales anciennes s'y trouve en même temps révélée et attestée" (86).

[89] Branche includes similar testimony from the *section Artur* soldiers in her book, citing a card sent from Jean Nicolas to his church community where Nicolas writes "'Le pays est enchanteur, du style des *Mille et une nuits*,'" and a letter from Serge Bigot to his mother in which Bigot relays a similar, yet more telling message to that found in Zeniter's novel: "Quel beau pays pour passer des vacances. Si l'on pouvait s'y promener en ne craignant rien autour de soi'" (85).

without significance, but rather as Branche argues indicative of Palestro as a de Certeauian "lieu pratiqué," or a space conditioned by the actions of its historical subjects:[90]

> "Près d'un siècle auparavant, en 1871, les habitants de ce tout nouveau centre de peuplement européen furent massacrés. Parler de l'embuscade 'de Palestro', c'est inscrire l'action militaire de la guerre dans la continuité de ce massacre. C'est faire de cet événement la résurgence d'un passé ancien. Est ainsi suggérée une similitude de situation entre les deux faits : les soldats de la section Artur sont identifiés à des innocents réduits à la défensive face à une horde déchaînée. L'embuscade du 18 mai 1956 n'est plus simple surgissement de brutalité ou même actualisation d'un atavisme collectif, elle devient accomplissement d'un destin." (93)

In this context, I forward that *L'Art de perdre*'s cinematographic reconstitution of the scene concerns itself less with historical accuracy, and more with the portrayal of how France *chooses* to remember the ambush. Such elective remembrance is evident in Benjamin Stora's *Les mots de la guerre d'Algérie* (2005), the historian's entry for the word "Palestro" qualifying the ambush on the "young, and Parisian" soldiers as a "nightmare" that "la hiérarchie militaire saura utiliser pour vaincre les résistance des appelés qui manifestaient pour 'la Paix en Algérie'" (93-4). Branche's tome takes a decidedly different approach, devoting its final chapter "Un récit ?" to a retelling of the ambush from the Algerian point of view. A historiographical commitment not unlike Zeniter's lens of plasticity, Branche explains that "le regard doit être décalé afin de saisir tous les acteurs" (10).

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[90] In *L'Invention du quotidien* (1980), Michel de Certeau's study of "espaces" and "lieux" identifies a distinction between the two words, the scholar suggesting that a "lieu" is an instantaneous configuration of positions implying stability, whereas an "espace" is unstable, and considers the many variables that animate and afford circumstantial, temporal, and functional meaning to space. "En somme, *l'espace est un lieu pratiqué*. Ainsi la rue géométriquement définie par un urbanisme est transformée en espace par des marcheurs. De même, la lecture est l'espace produit par la pratique du lieu que constitue un système de signes – un écrit" (172-4, emphasis original).

As Branche and Zeniter both highlight, evoked in less detail in France's suitable narratives on the Palestro ambush is the French army's subsequent retaliation, "l'opération Remou" (182 Branche), a "justified" revenge "en libre service" (Zeniter 86). Before panning out from the scene, *L'Art de perdre* depicts French soldiers enraged by the news of the ambush, "les informations – réelles ou mensongères – les piquent comme des frelons…En mai 1956, les représailles de l'armée française rayonnent autour de la ville de Palestro, colonnes de soldats qui…vengent. Tuent…D'autres sortent juste pour tuer taper fendre, n'importe qui, n'importe où" (ibid). Willing French memory to communicate with the latent realities of the army's retaliation, the novel seemingly endeavors to modify the script of French memory.

The expansion of the ambush narrative to include the French army's revenge demonstrates that when simplistic resolutions are substituted for the complexities of colonization and war, historical narratives run the risk of taking on the mythical proportions of a blockbuster film. Responding to the biased, and histrionic dimension of France's collective memory, Naïma provides a theatrical counterpart to symbolize the French Army's retaliation on neighboring Algerian villages. Pausing on the Croke Park scene from *Michael Collins* (1996), the narrator muses "c'est ça une guerre d'indépendance : pour répondre à la violence d'une poignée de combattants de la liberté qui se sont généralement formés eux-mêmes…une armée de métier, étincelante de canons en tous genres, s'en va écraser des civils qui partaient en promenade" (87).[91] Imagining how such retaliation may have played out, French soldiers wearing "masques de colère" (ibid) storm Ali's village, force men, women, and children to the ground, thrash an elderly deaf woman with a cane until it breaks, and arbitrarily take Ali's brother Hamza into

[91] The scene depicts the infamous "Bloody Sunday" of the Irish war of independence, when English tanks open fired on players and spectators during a rugby match.

custody, along with two other men who "disappear."[92] In its depiction of the French Army as simultaneously victim, perpetrator, and arguably instigator, *L'Art de perdre*'s emphasizes the multidimensionality of human roles in history, and their impossibility to be clearly defined.[93]

Moreover, unlike the teleological approach of Hollywood films, the novel's juxtaposition of perspectives opens a figurative and literal space for critique where readers can question, as *L'Art de perdre* pauses to do between the renderings of the ambush and retaliation, the many elements that converge in the formation of historic memory:

> "Est-ce parce qu'ils sont jeunes que l'armée oublie que sa vocation, tout comme celle du FLN, est, précisément, de combattre, de tuer et peut-être de mourir ? Est-ce parce qu'on refuse encore en métropole d'employer le mot 'guerre' ? Est-ce parce que l'embuscade n'a duré que vingt minutes, un temps si court que c'en est insultant ? Est-ce parce que les corps sont retrouvés égorgés, lardés de coups de couteau et les yeux crevés ? Toujours est-il que de ce jour de mai, en France, on parlera comme d'un massacre auquel personne ne pouvait s'attendre." (85)

In its speculation of the complex web of ideological, linguistic, temporal, and corporeal implications of warfare, the novel's inquiry becomes its critical technique. In so doing, *L'Art de*

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[92] It is important to stipulate that the French Army's use of "disparu" for an autochthone prisoner of war designated that they had likely been tortured and murdered. Though in French the verb "disparaître" may also signify "to die," in the colonial context its use corresponds to what Roland Barthes calls "La Grammaire africaine," where "le verbe…subit un curieux escamotage" (159) in its reluctance to fully recognize the reality of circumstances.

[93] According to Branche's *L'Embuscade de Palestro* and *L'Art de perdre*, France's formation of a very specific memory of the ambush finds its origin in the public, and exceedingly biased representations of the event. Branche's work examines the anthropological signification of the event in collective conscious, and notably its transmutation from a wartime ambush to a "massacre" in rendering the soldiers' mutilated bodies the focal point of the event. Zeniter's novel ostensibly supports Branche's thesis, explaining as Branche does that "la presse soulignera le raffinement écœurant de la barbarie. Elle montrera à la métropole que l'on *meurt* en Algérie et dans un même temps, elle laissera entendre que l'on meurt davantage lorsque l'on meurt jeune et que l'on meurt encore plus quand on est mutilé" (85-6, emphasis original). Though the precise nature and context of the mutilations are unknown (the press recounted horrific stories, but it is uncertain what, exactly was done to the soldiers, when it took place, and by whom), Branche forwards that with this mental picture the ambush ceased to be a wartime event, and became instead an episode among others to reinforce the violence specific to Algerians.

perdre responds to Clarisse's powerlessness vis-à-vis History, showing that transforming the historiographical process begins with the careful reading of suitable narratives.

Operating a displacement of France's "interpretation dominante" (Buton 81), *L'Art de perdre* does not intend to erase one narrative in the profit of another, nor to strip the ambush of its tragic consequences. Established in the opening fly-swatter scene and extended to depictions of the massacre at Sétif, Algier's Milk Bar bombing, World War II's battle of Monte Cassino, and the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Zeniter's text asks how obdurate historical practices have come to influence the memory and post memory of past events. Furthermore, its inclusion of history's previously marginalized points of view champions productive complication, becoming synonymous with possibility in the reconfiguration of historiographic roles. Modifying the very boundaries of what was once considered to be central in historical conscious, *L'Art de perdre* refuses to classify historical accounts according to a system of centrality, offering each complimentary value. This added richness becomes the opportunity for populations to circumvent the designations of marginality, moving from the fringe of historical conscious to a shared center of a global narrative.[94] In this way, Zeniter's novel advances that returning to historiographic silence is no longer a question of writing marginality, for their perspectives are not seen as negligible, but instead central to understanding the history of the Algerian occupation and war. Revisiting Gefen's reparational thesis in this context, I suggest that it is not the historical narrative itself that *L'Art de perdre* intends to repair, but rather the circumstances in which it is written, and read, and therefore remembered.

[94] Informing my thinking is bell hook's seminal text that revolutionized feminism theory, *De la marge au centre* : *Théorie féministe* (2021), in which hooks argues that if we are to transform gender power dynamics, we must first change the very system of values that creates predetermined roles in society (178-9), and as Zeniter shows in History. "…Nous avons besoin d'une idéologie émancipatrice qui puisse être partagé avec tout le monde. Cette idéologie révolutionnaire ne peut être construite qu'à condition que les expériences des personnes à la marge, qui subissent l'oppression sexiste en plus d'autres formes d'oppression sociale, soient comprises, prises en compte et incorporées" (286-7).

L'Art de perdre's move to complicate historical remembrance necessitates a reconfiguration of the discipline itself, and particularly its relationship with literature, a pertinent topic of conversation in contemporary historiography. While History and Letters are often seen as separate entities, and furthermore used to negatively define one another, scholars such as Ivan Jablonka assert their fundamental partnership, underscoring their shared act of creation.[95] Advocating for a creative turn in the domain of historiography, Jablonka proposes the "Research Text," "a work of social science in a form partaking of investigation, testimony, biography, autobiography, narrative, and literature all at once: the book does history by implementing a line of reasoning, and performs literary creation in making the text live. This hybridization makes it possible…to…[produce] an emotion" (236-7). Jablonka suggests that when viewed as complimentary, history's knowledge and literature's artistry may surpass a level of creation than they could on their own, their designations shedding the weight imposed by disciplinary divides through collaboration.[96] When thought of as literary, history escapes the demands of omniscience and omnipotence in its interpretations of our past. Similarly, when thought of as historical, literature acquires an edifying dimension. Similar to Zeniter's use of a lens of plasticity in the reconsideration of historical identities, when we emphasize the common goal of creation as opposed to divisionary boundaries, history and literature cease to be defined by their differences, and instead make each other stronger.

L'Art de perdre challenges the disciplinary norms regulating writerly methods, and demonstrates the depth narratives acquire when the scientific procedures of history and the

[95] "Everybody knows that history is not literature. But since when is that the conventional wisdom on the subject?" (*History is a Contemporary Literature*, Jablonka, 15)

[96] Borrowed from the Greek *ἱστορία* meaning "knowledge," the Oxford English Dictionary defines "history" as "the branch of knowledge that deals with past events." The Oxford English Dictionary defines "literature" as "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit."

artistic techniques of literature cooperate in the reconstitution of our past.[97] Such practices are apparent in Naïma's choice of documentary materials, marrying the conventional and unconventional in her efforts to piece together her family's Harki heritage. The reproduction of official government documents, such as the Évian Accords and posters promoting the Algerian Independence referendum, descriptions of archival materials from newspapers and the *Institut National Audiovisuel* (INA), and transcriptions of testimony are fundamental in informing the novel's depiction of the war and the Harki diaspora. Yet, equally as important is the novel's use of cultural works and popular forms of media. Far from isolated occurrences in the novel, the transcribed YouTube comments and Naïma's juxtaposition of the Palestro ambush with the scene from *Michael Collins* mentioned above are examples of *L'Art de perdre*'s characteristic intertextuality. Peppering the narrative from start to finish are references to literature, films, works of art, television broadcasts, comics, websites, graffiti tags, and even a t-shirt proclaiming "ta main dans mon afro, ma main dans ta gueule" (311), often accentuated by text that is typographically distinguished from the novel's prose. This technique not only operates on a mimetic level in that it situates each part of the novel in its respective time period, it also demonstrates that cultural products, too, are pertinent monuments in our collective history. Testaments to specific attitudes and mentalities that come to shape how we remember the past, *L'Art de perdre*'s use of cultural objects as a source of knowledge becomes an argument for the value of the novel itself.

[97] Laurent Demanze's *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête* (2019) attributes such "transversal" literary thinking to the renewal of *enquête* literature, a form open to interdisciplinary projects and methodological hybridization (17-18). While unlike the contemporary *enquête*'s proclivity for nonfiction Naïma's investigation is a work of fiction, it is for *L'Art de perdre*'s penchant for such disciplinary, methodological, and literary cooperation that I consider Zeniter's text to be a work of *enquête*.

Like *A History of the Grandparents I Never Had*, in which Jablonka employs everything from patchy police records, to testimony from Holocaust survivors, to novels, plays, film, and sheer conjecture to retrace his grandparents' footsteps, Zeniter's novel embraces the creativity familial silences demand. Moreover, in the manner of Jablonka's research text *L'Art de perdre* transparently relays its documentation, distinguishing itself from the traditional French historical novel. For, an author's preparatory research is not a contemporary innovation; take, for instance, Émile Zola's detailed *Notes sur Anzin* that fueled his creation of the emblematic *Germinal*, today preserved in the thick volume *Carnet d'enquêtes* (1986).[98] While Zola concealed his investigations and documentation within a fictional world, Zeniter's novel not only overtly exposes its sources, it reveals its research process through the voice of the narrator. A practice mirrored in Naïma's character, who Zeniter refers to as her *cheval de Troie*, like a detective hot on the trail of a major breakthrough Naïma loses herself in her research, the grayish-blue glow of her computer replacing that of the capital city:[99]

> "Les nuits désormais se ressemblent : elle ne reste pas prendre un verre avec Kamel et Élise au sortir de la galerie, elle n'appelle personne et ne répond pas non plus aux textos de Christophe…Elle reste chez elle à regarder des documentaires sur YouTube en mangeant de la bouffe chinoise achetée au traiteur en bas, sauveur de tant de journées de gueule de bois…et ne s'endort qu'à l'aube sans se lever de son fauteuil, la tête pleine de récits de torture et de lente soumission à la violence ambiante." (Zeniter 417)

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[98] Gathered and presented by Zola scholar par excellence Henri Mitterand, Zola's *Carnet d'enquêtes : Une ethnographie inédite de la France* compiles the author's documentation for his larger oeuvre, including the research he conducted for *Germinal, L'Assommoir,* and *Le Ventre de Paris* among other novels.

[99] "Naïma, plus que mon double, c'est un peu mon cheval de Troie. En fait, grâce à elle je peux aussi montrer des choses de la fabrication du livre, et notamment voilà ce travail de recherche qui fait qu'il y a une sorte de "making-of" du livre qui est compris dans le livre. Et c'était important pour moi parce que je voulais aussi montrer qu'on n'a pas une connaissance innée de l'Histoire et de la sociologie, de la géographie, enfin qu'un pays ça s'apprend et ça s'apprend par des moyens divers…" (La Poudre, Episode 33, 8:25).

And the books she reads during her metro commute, in cafés, and in bed at night quickly replace boozy nights out with her friends: "elle descend les livres comme on boit cul-sec un verre de tord-boyaux" (419-20). While the novel's forthcoming approach is similar to that of Jablonka's, unlike the historian whose scientific profession requires that he constantly call into question his conclusions, Zeniter's *romanesque* framework allows for a fuller development of Naïma's hypotheses, taking shape in the lives of the novel's fictional characters.

The goal, however, is not to state what, precisely, *L'Art de perdre* is within the realm of history, an arguably liminal discipline in which degrees of creativity fluctuate and vary from project to project.[100] Instead, I would like to propose that Zeniter's novel is an epistemological product.

> "If we consider history to be an investigation, and historians investigators driven by a problem, we can then *draw the literary consequences of our method*: using the 'I' to situate one's approach and perspective, telling the story of the investigation as well as its 'results,' going back and forth between the past and the present to which we belong, using emotion as a tool for a better understanding, placing the cursor at the right spot between distance and empathy, choosing the right words, and allowing for the languages that the investigator usually does not share with the people (living or dead) that he or she encounters." (Jablonka viii, emphasis original)

L'Art de perdre encapsulates Jablonka's contemporary definition of History, but with one important difference. The historian forwards literary methods as a *consequence* to the writing of history, a statement in which literature risks assuming a negative role as a potentially inadequate

[100] *In The Writing of History*, de Certeau asserts historiography's inherently liminal nature, writing that "[history] plays between [legend and criteriology], on the margin that separates these two reductions, like Charlie Chaplin at the end of *The Pilgrim*, running along the Mexican border between the two countries both chasing him in turn, with his zigzags marking both their difference and the seam joining them" (de Certeau 44-5).

means through which to transmit our past. In considering literature to be a form of history, Zeniter's novel shows that history's literariness is not a consequence, but rather is *consequential* in historiography, and a valuable framework with a unique set of methodological tools.

The space between the knowing of history and the artistry of literature can prove problematic, however, and particularly when faced with the temptation to muddle the border between fact and fiction, which I explore later in this chapter. Take, for example, Jules Michelet's emblematic first volume of *Révolution française* (1847), thanks to which anecdotes on the French Revolution bring forth images of a Bastille ablaze and angry mobs of famished Parisians. Through Michelet's lens of historiographic romanticism, "le peuple" and Paris become synonymous, one entity united in their hunger for justice, working together tirelessly to combat the common enemy of the monarchy embodied in the former prison. Michelet's work demonstrates an imbrication between the domains of History and Literature and epistemology and fiction, that results in what Michel de Certeau identifies in *The Writing of History* (1975) as the creation of History as myth.[101] A monophonic narrative founded on temporal and cultural differentiation in order to promote a common heritage, "History would fall to ruins without the key to the vault of its entire architecture: that is, without the connection between the act that it promotes and the society that it reflects" (44). In lucid recognition of history's problematic position between knowing and artistry, *L'Art de perdre* renders this space one of reflection instead as it distances itself from suitable narratives. Speaking against History as myth, and the notion that "quand l'Histoire se met au pluriel, elle commence à flirter avec le conte et la légende" (Zeniter 18), *L'Art de perdre* ascribes to a contrapuntal conception of history. When

[101] De Certeau explains that "History is probably our myth. It combines what can be thought, the 'thinkable,' and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can understand its own working" (21).

used strategically, polyphony affords an evolution in historical thought, allowing for independent, and often discordant perspectives to coexist.

L'Art de perdre's attention to the manifold nature of historiographical roles and deployment of transversal methods culminate in the novel's creation of a polyphonic narrative. As a technique, polyphony proves not only a means to refute the monophony of suitable narratives, but also a way to recreate identities in a way that honors their innate plasticity. When reflecting on the "piètre rôle" the Harki population had incarnated in her history textbooks,

> "sur lequel personne – ni les auteurs du manuel ni son professeur – ne paraissait avoir envie de s'étendre…[Naïma] regarde la pile de livres qui oscille à côté de son ordinateur…De l'orteil, elle repousse le plateau de verre de la table et les livres s'écroulent les uns sur les autres dans un fracas mou de carton et de papier. Ils se confondent, versions des Harkis et version [sic] des moudjahidines éparpillées au hasard." (428)

As one sole entity, the pile of books representing the monophonic myth of a unified Algeria is unstable. Ostensibly, it is only when history succeeds in escaping its fabricated unity that it can reach its full potential.

Accordingly, polyphony emerges as the only tool capable of deciphering Algeria's complex past. What is known today as Algeria was long a hub of multicultural contact and exchange, its location on the Mediterranean Sea connecting the four corners of the world. Long before France staked its claim on Algiers, the Carthaginian-Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, and the Turkish had all occupied the viable port city.[102] While France's takeover of Algeria was therefore not unprecedented, theirs was unique in that it underestimated

[102] For a detailed history on the different groups that have contributed to Algeria's cultural, religious, and political plurality, see Mahfoud Kaddache's *L'Algérie des Algériens : de la Préhistoire à 1954*.

the inherent heterogeneity of the territory's population.[103] France's move to settle, and centrally govern Algeria surely came as shock to the autochthone population: for over three centuries under the Ottoman Regency, while the territory then known as the Maghreb Central pledged its allegiance to the Calif in Istanbul, Algeria "[jouissait] d'une large autonomie, souvent même indépendant…les Algériens ont gardé la direction de leurs groupes, surtout au niveau des tribus, soit avec leurs chefs féodaux…, soit dans le cadre des institutions démocratiques traditionnelles" (Kaddache 551-2). Consolidating Algeria's indigenous population into one people, France's Algeria was indeed double, yet in a duplicitous manner that rendered the autochthone "Other" in their own home. As Rami Belamri notes in his text analyzing colonial ideology,[104]

> "le qualificatif d'Algérien, aussi paradoxal que cela paraisse, ne s'adresse pas aux 'indigènes' mais aux 'allogènes.' Sont reconnus Algériens, les Européens vivant en Algérie, de même que sont reconnus Africains et Indochines les Européens vivant en Afrique et en Indochine. La revendication de la nationalité du pays conquis est une des manifestations de la volonté du colonisateur de déposséder le colonisé." (200)

In an effort to reclaim Algeria's plural identity, *L'Art de perdre*'s demonstrates that "un pays n'est jamais une seule chose à la fois" (505), and uses both generational and linear polyphony to divest conglomerate historic perspectives of their significance and honor individual experience.

For a family saga to adopt a polyphonic approach is relatively commonplace. Whether in generational polyphony that passes a narrative down from one family member to another, or through linear polyphony's coeval familial perspectives, the portrayal of divergent outlooks

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[103] In *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale*, Stora writes that at the time when French military initiatives began, "ce pays ne se concevait pas…comme espace unifié, socialement, économiquement, ni même culturellement" (Stora 6). In *L'Algérie des Algériens*, Kaddache details the dissimilarities already present in medieval Algeria, then known as Central Maghreb, when the Turks stepped in to help protect the capital, El-Djazaïr, against the threat of Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century (320-337). According to Kaddache, it was over the course of the three centuries of the Ottoman Regency that the inherently plural state of Algeria emerged, "héritier du Maghreb Central" (551).
[104] *L'Œuvre de Louis Bertrand : Miroir de l'idéologie colonial*, (1980)

brings a family to life on the page. Where *L'Art de perdre* is innovative in its use of polyphony, however, is in its use of generational soliloquy, with Naïma in particular inhabiting her grandfather and father's segments of the novel as she puts the pieces of her family puzzle together: "Ali se rend désormais souvent à la caserne pour échanger quelques informations avec le capitaine…Il fait le choix, se dira Naïma plus tard en lisant des témoignages qui pourraient être (mais qui ne sont pas) ceux de son grand-père, d'être protégé d'assassins qu'il déteste par d'autres assassins qu'il déteste" (133). Though the novel's inquiry privileges the marginalized Harki history, *L'Art de perdre*'s linear polyphony extends beyond the family to include the outlying, and often dissenting, perspectives that form Franco-Algerian conscious. The text's depiction of quotidian life in Ali's *mechta* reveals that even a common Kabylian heritage obscures the intrinsic diversity of each "petit monde" (26), or the social, professional, and gender-specific nuances of individual experience.[105] Much like its demystification of Harki heritage, in its pre-independence narrative *L'Art de perdre* renders manifest the multitude of voices hidden within the blanket terms of "Algeria" and "Kabylia" in order to unfurl and juxtapose these many existences.

Exemplary of *L'Art de perdre*'s propensity for heterogeneous perspectives is the novel's depiction of Hamid's circumcision ceremony which, unlike the book as a whole that alternates perspectives according to chapters or larger sections of text, concentrates polyphony into eight contrapuntal pages.[106] The scene depicting Hamid's rite of passage represents the different worlds of Kabylia demarcating family associations, childhood from adulthood, men from

[105] The word *mechta* means small village in Arabic. Ali's family is from an area the novel refers to as *Sept Mechtas*, or *Sept Crêtes*, seven neighboring villages located in the mountainous region of Kabylia in Northern Algeria.
[106] A second example is when Naïma asks her father, grandmother, aunt and uncle to tell her what they remember from their time in the Jouques forest camp: "…personne ne répond la même chose. Hamid, son père, parle de l'humiliation d'avoir été à nouveau parqué. Kader se souvient d'une grotte où il allait jouer et c'est comme si le Logis d'Anne tenait entier dans cette grotte. Yema évoque l'assistante sociale honnie. Dalila dit, en s'excusant, que c'était le paradis, si, pardon, pour des enfants c'était le paradis, les arbres, la lumière, la rivière" (213).

women, and autochthones from settlers.[107] As Hamid moves from an existence of peering out from behind his mother's skirts to a life of "bravoure…décence, fierté, force, pouvoir" (75), rising together are the voices of Ali, Yema, the *hadjem*, women singing in chorus, and soliloquies from an adult Hamid, and Naïma.[108] All the while, punctuating the narrative of the rite's festivities are presumably parallel vignettes from the lives of *pied-noir* store owner Claude, his sister Michelle, and his daughter Annie, who in spite of cultural divides have become close acquaintances of Ali and Hamid. While Claude relaxes in the day's last sunrays (77), Michelle torpidly reads *Paris Match*, and jokes with a female client about how men like Général Bigeard who "strike like lightning bolts" are frankly, nothing to write home about (79).[109] But perhaps most crucial are the snippets from Annie's day at school that, like Hamid's rite of passage initiating his "vie de dents et de poings serrés en silence" (82), determine how she will view and make sense of the world. Annie learns that, like the Seine traverses Paris, the Mediterranean traverses France, and then dutifully rehearses a "poem" from François Mitterrand: "Des Flandres jusqu'au Congo…partout la loi s'impose et cette loi est la loi française" (ibid). Finally, the deafening silence of the Amrouches haunts the chapter, the notable family's absence at the festivities signaling Ali's passage from a position of esteem in the village, to one of dishonor.

[107] The village's men and women, too, lead very different existences. In an instance of art imitating life, Yema only accessorily appears in part one's narrative, dedicated almost uniquely to Ali, and to Hamid their first-born son. In the circumcision scene in particular, the women prepare for the festivities, and watch over Hamid prior to the ceremony, but must not occupy the same room as the adult men (Zeniter 76).
[108] The *hadjem*, "un vieil homme de la crête dont la date de naissance se perd dans le temps" (Zeniter 80), is the specialist who performs the circumcision rite. The novel ascribes the *hadjem*'s role neither to one of religion nor medicine, but instead as a sort of local sage "avec des gestes de magicien" (82). According to the Algerian newspaper *Liberté Algérie*, the circumcision ritual, once as important as marital or engagement ceremonies, has become less and less popular, and particularly with the Algerian Health Minister's recent order that medical professionals must now perform the procedure ("Cérémonie de circoncision : une tradition qui se meurt," 2009).
[109] In Michelle's copy of Paris Match, she reads the title "Bigeard frappe comme la foudre," referencing the French Général's retaliation operation in Souk-Ahras in March 1956.

While in contrasting the disparate realities of its characters this chapter shows concern for individual experience, I argue that it endeavors to do more. The rise and fall of divergent voices and the back and forth movement between milieus instigates cacophony, and a clear narrative trajectory disappears. In this way, the narrative dissonance generated in this chapter prepares its reader for the following chapter that examines the Palestro Ambush, exemplary of what I contend above is *L'Art de perdre*'s complication of history. In fact, the ambush chapter's rhizomatic representation of the physical pandemonium present in war-time Algeria visually reconstructs the vocal disharmony of the preceding chapter. Describing the mayhem produced by the French army's retaliation, the narrator captures the scene from a distance:

> "Ces colonnes qui partent venger croisent des colonnes de villageois qui partent, tout simplement, qui s'enfuient, sans but, rien, juste la panique. Si l'on pouvait trouver un point d'observation plus haut que les sommets des montagnes, on verrait les versants de[s colonnes de personnes] sont parcourus en tous sens, on verrait des lignes mouvantes, une fourmilière devenue folle." (86)

As it addresses the pertinence of marginalized perspectives, *L'Art de perdre* nonetheless recognizes a historical responsibility to include distinct, and at times dissenting voices.

The novel's critical readings of tumultuous events endorse the method with which *L'Art de perdre* approaches familial history, Harki history, and Franco-Algerian relations. In order to grasp the generational, cultural, political, and social distinctions and interests involved, it becomes necessary to withdrawal from the confines of monophonic, and as it were myopic narratives. For, in juxtaposing varying perspectives on what it means to be "Algerian" and "French," *L'Art de perdre* does not seek to further fuel the dichotomies nourishing "belly" histories that pit ways of thinking against one another. Jean Daniel and Jean Lacouture might

suggest that the novel is a part of what they argue is a necessary "equitable reexamination" of Harki history, or a reexamination of unresolved historic tragedy in order to determine the difference between error, crime, coincidence, misfortune, and the affliction of blind fate (Besnaci-Lancou 9).[110] Yet I would venture that *L'Art de perdre*'s use of polyphony demonstrates the difficulty of such an endeavor. While historiography may become more equitable in showing concern for marginalized narratives and divergent perspectives and in expanding its disciplinary borders, to think that any party involved in the Harki tragedy could somehow impartially, or fairly tell the story seems improbable, if not impossible given that error, crime, coincidence, misfortune, and affliction so often coincide. Instead, I offer that as its musical etymology suggests, *L'Art de perdre*'s use of polyphony allows for the superposition of individual narratives, but also circumstances, which like polyphonic melodies, alternate between points of harmony and disharmony.

This historical technique renders the reader lost as to which melody predominates, reminiscent of Wai Chi Dimock's conception of a text as a diachronic "echo chamber" that creates meaning from the resonance of disparate interpretations across time.[111] In this sense, disharmony does indeed contribute to rendering the domain of History more equitable. Yet, this same approach also creates an experience of unknowing for the reader as to what a fair and just retelling of our past might be: "this shift of emphasis from original to interpretive context suggests that resonance is a generative (and not merely interfering) process, one that remakes a text while unmaking it…" (1062b), or in the case of *L'Art de perdre*, remakes History while

[110] See Daniel and Lacouture's preface to Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de Harki* (2005).
[111] In her article "A Theory of Resonance," Dimock writes that "the note a text resounds comes from its lack of insulation against the currents of semantic change. For every language resembles an echo chamber, the tones and accents of former users interacting with those of subsequent ones. And so meanings are produced over and over again, attaching themselves to, overlapping with, and sometimes coming into conflict with previous ones" (Dimock 1062a).

unmaking it. Investing value in unknowing, the novel proposes a problematic framework to combat monophonic History. Recognizing historical narratives for what they are, "difficult to resolve, doubtful, uncertain, questionable,"[112] and a point of departure for further reflection, the novel champions a historical posture "qui concerne les problèmes et non les solutions."[113]

Complicating Discourse with a Contradictory Imagination

Affording its retelling of history with a lens of plasticity through which to conceive of individual and disciplinary identities, and a polyphonic narrative in which to encapsulate Algeria's inherently plural history suggest that, as a work of history, *L'Art de perdre* imagines itself not as another historical discourse among many, but a counter discourse, or more aptly, a discourse that contests unyielding and one-dimensional accounts of the past. Indispensable to the novel's critical function in its examination of existing historical narratives, the novel's counter discourse reveals itself to be equally valuable in problematizing discursive practices in historiography. Proposing a conscious fictionality, *L'Art de perdre* challenges the efficacy of historic diction and the feigned experience of knowing deployed in suitable narratives, resisting the confines of a necessarily "intransitive" fiction.[114] Zeniter's retelling of Harki history as a heuristic investigation recognizes its own fictionality, and in so doing circumvents the unconscious fictionality of historical myth and the determinisms it conceals. Neither a stance that attempts to makes sense of history, nor a mistrust of language's ability to tell history at all,

[112] Definition of "problematic" from the Oxford English Dictionary.
[113] Definition of "problématique" from the Trésor de la langue française informatisé (TLFi).
[114] In *Fiction and Diction* (1991), Genette argues for the intransitive characteristic of poetic discourse, which is to say that the meaning it produces is inseparable from its form, "[determining] a paradoxical function of pseudoreference, or of denotation without denotata" (25). While Genette forwards that if the text includes elements known to the reader to be "authentic," or factual, it may incur connections to phenomena outside of the text (27), critic Dominique Viart argues for the transitivity of contemporary literature, to include works of fiction. "Il s'agit d'une littérature redevenue transitive, qui fait retour aux questions du sujet, de l'Histoire, du réel, ou plutôt qui s'intéresse au sujet, au réel, à l'histoire, au monde social comme questions, en tant qu'ils font question, et qui propose pour cela des formes littéraires nouvelles…" ("Comment nommer la littérature contemporaine ?," par. 4).

Zeniter's contradictory imagination complicates discursive forms and messages so that we may begin to grasp the very complexity of our collective past.

I would like to first return to my argument that Zeniter's text identifies literature as a consequential aspect of writing history by looking at how History is literary, or as Gérard Genette puts it *Fiction and Diction* (1991), "when" it is literary, and why this matters. If like Genette we espouse Jakobson's definition of literariness, which argues that a text's aesthetic implications are what transform a verbal message into a work of art, *L'Art de perdre*'s critical reading of engrained historical narratives and proposition of its own historiographic counter-discourse suggests that all history is, in fact, always literary, whether imparted through fiction or nonfiction.[115] In addition to their common trait of narrative elucidated above, inherent to all historical narratives is an aesthetic project concerned with relaying specific messages to certain audiences. Such subjective practices have been explored by Hayden White, who details the nineteenth-century practice of historical narrative "emplotment" in *Metahistory* (1973), and Michel de Certeau, who theorizes historiography as a praxis inhabited, albeit often unconsciously, by a historian's epistemological and socio-ideological predilections in *The Writing of History*.[116] Seemingly, *L'Art de perdre's* attention to history's inherent literariness is

[115] Directing Genette's thinking is his adherence to the definition of literature as the "art of language" (2), all the while recognizing that language lacks the specificity of other artistic mediums, in that it may be used for a variety of other purposes outside of art. "And it is clearly with reference to this propensity of language to exceed its aesthetic investment that Roman Jakobson declared the object of poetics to be not literature as a raw or empirical phenomenon but *literariness*, understood as that which 'makes a verbal message a work of art.' I propose to accept, as a convention the definition of literariness as the aesthetic aspect of literary practice…" (ibid, emphasis original).

[116] As opposed to an exact science, de Certeau's conception of historiography asserts that "every 'historical fact' results from a praxis. The sign of a subjective act, and therefore a statement of meaning, historical praxes allow a mode of comprehension to be articulated as a discourse of 'facts' (30). The scholar further elucidates history's inherent instability between objectivity and subjectivity in delineating the historian's "two positions of the real": "The real insofar as it is the known (what the historian studies, understands, or 'brings to life' from a past society), and the real insofar as it is entangled within the scientific operations (the present society, to which the historian's problematics, their procedures, modes of comprehension, and finally a practice of meaning are referable). On the one hand, the real is the result of analysis, while on the other, it is its postulate. Neither of these forms can be eliminated or reduced to the other. Historical science takes hold precisely in their relation to one another, and its proper objective is developing this relation into a discourse" (35).

not the potentially inescapable subjectivity of historical narratives. More problematic is when accounts deny such literariness, presenting history as truth via an Aristotelian aesthetic of poetic unity.[117] Following Aristotle's reasoning that asserts history as what happened, and poetry as what could have happened, uniform historical narratives that solely offer one recollection on memory are not unlike poetry.[118] In subverting this binary to show that collective remembrance is instead an accumulation of heterogeneous and conflictual memories, Zeniter's historiographical approach proposes an aesthetics of complication that (re)considers the many fragments that make up our past, the novel shows that when history *allows* itself to be literary, it may not become more veritable, but perhaps more valuable.[119]

While much of historiographical literature says "what it is" (Genette 22) in titles such as James McDougall's *A History of Algeria* (2017), or Jacques Simon's *Algérie : le passé, l'Algérie Française, la révolution, 1954-1958* (2007), *L'Art de perdre* is more interested in what such narratives do not say: namely their aesthetic projects, or unconscious fictionality. In its critical readings of the fly-swatter scene, the Évian accords, the Palestro ambush, and even Naïma's own "épopée familiale" handed down from her grandmother, *L'Art de perdre* reveals practices that

[117] In *La Poétique*, Aristotle states the necessity of unity of action in poetry, writing "Il faut donc que, de même que dans les autres arts imitatifs, l'imitation d'un seul objet est une…puisqu'elle est l'imitation d'une action, soit celle d'une action une et entière, et que l'on constitue les parties des faits de telle sorte que le déplacement de quelque partie, ou sa suppression, entraîne une modification et un changement dans l'ensemble ; car ce qu'on ajoute ou ce qu'on retranche, sans laisser une trace sensible, n'est pas une partie (intégrante) de cet ensemble" (11).
[118] Ibid
[119] It then becomes a question of how a historical work considers itself as a referential product. As Françoise Lavocat differentiates in *Fait et fiction* (2016), "on peut même estimer que les opérations référentielles ne sont généralement pas ce qui importe le plus dans la communication littéraire…Par conséquent, la question de la vérité (au sens sémantique de correspondance) n'est pas ce qui définit principalement les œuvres d'imagination : c'est précisément, ce qui fonde leur différences avec celles qui ont une visée principalement référentielle, comme les ouvrages historiques…Il faut aussi reconnaître que ce ne sont pas forcément les relations référentielles qui apprennent au lecteur quelque chose…mais bien, plutôt, les vérités non référentielles qu'il déduit par inférence" (387-8).

lock historical figures into specific roles through an aesthetic of unification.[120] Such unconscious fictionality seemingly arises from what Marielle Macé calls a "pulsion de fiction," deployed first in the narrative and extended to its audience, a phenomenon that can be understood through the aforementioned unconscious dimension between fiction and epistemology de Certeau associates with the production of History as myth.[121] This "unsettled and shifting frontier of fiction" (Genette 24) is easily identified in Michelet's *Révolution française* and larger *œuvre*, however unconscious fiction can be found with equal ease in contemporary historical narratives. For example, despite admonishing French colonialism, Stora's *Les Mots de la guerre d'Algérie* (2005) uses the dated term "'Algériens' musulmans" to describe the Algerian autochthones, and as I have shown above appropriates the biased recollections of French memory in its definition of "Palestro." As Genette points out, what appears to some as true may very well appear fictional to others.[122] Anchored in temporal and cultural differentiation in order to produce the monophonic unity of similitude and national heritage, unconscious historical diction is as much an act of creation, and I posit a work of fiction, as Zeniter's novel. I do not mean to imply that any historical narrative should be discarded; all should, however, be read critically, and alongside texts like *L'Art de perdre*, which commits not to *saying*, but to *showing* what it is.

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[120] *L'Art de perdre* deploys meta readings of other historical events taking place prior to, during, and following the Algerian war, such as the massacre at Sétif (44), Algier's Milk Bar explosion (94-7), the battle of Monte Cassino (209-10), the recent terrorist attacks in Paris (375-7), and l'Affaire Kradaoui (423).

[121] "Qu'est-ce qui, dans la diction, fait fiction ? En narration, ce sont probablement les mécanismes d'identification, de projection, d'empathie : toute histoire bien racontée entraîne le même type d'attitude mentale que le roman ; la fiction n'y est plus question d'effets véridictionnels, mais de modalités de la narration, de rapports intersubjectifs, qui suscitent un comportement de lecteur, et de critique. C'est cette pulsion de fiction dans la lecture des textes de diction, habitus de lecteurs intériorisés (comportements de ce « liseur de romans » dont parlait Thibaudet), cette contamination du plaisir et du savoir, qui me semble pouvoir apparaître, en résonance, dans la belle paronomase de Fiction et diction. La fictionalité se rapprocherait alors comme un mouvement de lecteur, la capacité à prendre toute histoire pour un monde possible" (Fabula, Macé, par. 9).

[122] "Just as a sentence whose meaning leaves us perplexed, disgusted, or indifferent may seduce us by its form, in the same way, perhaps, a story that others take to be true may leave us wholly incredulous while appealing to us as a kind of fiction: here is indeed a sort of conditional fictionality, a true story for some and a fiction for others. This is more or less the case with what is commonly called myth…" (Genette 24).

L'Art de perdre realizes its self-awareness not only through its critique of history that at times mimics literary analysis, and overt problematization of contemporary literature's navel-gazing tendencies, but also by way of stylistic techniques that bring its consciousness to the forefront of the narrative.[123] A testament to its self-reflexivity is the adverb "peut-être" that pervades the novel, suggesting the many possibilities available to writers of history.[124] When a bartender, annoyed with Ali's accent, refuses to serve him a beer at a local watering hole, Ali would tell the story in such a way that established the bartender's prejudice from the moment he walked in the door. "Mais ce n'est peut-être pas si simple" (Zeniter 205), intervenes the narrator, whose monologue oscillates between empiricism, critique, irony, and soliloquy. In fact, the authorial "je" that continually punctuates the narrative confirms itself as both a fictional and factual authority, asserting that the family's history would be lost forever "si je ne l'écrivais pas" (320). Naïma employs similar narrative practices, interrupting her grandfather and father's narratives, and at times, even her own. In addition to its presentation of a model for historical thought, *L'Art de perdre* is above all a novel that thinks itself, to include the inevitability of fiction in History, and particularly in regard to its blind spots: "La fiction tout comme les recherches sont nécessaires, parce qu'elles sont tout ce qui reste pour combler les silences transmis entre les vignettes d'une génération à l'autre" (23).

In Zeniter's book, it is no longer a question of fact or fiction, but instead of fact *and* fiction. Investing fiction with epistemological value, Zeniter's novel challenges the frequently derogatory confines of a literature defined as "arbitrary," "feigned," "imaginary," "mere

[123] As mentioned earlier, Naïma becomes involved in a conversation with her newfound friends in Algeria during which they debate whether or not contemporary literature is nothing more than "de la thérapie narcissique" (493).
[124] *L'Art de perdre*'s transparently documented fiction seemingly argues for a positive conception of fiction within historical narratives, exploring what Françoise Lavocat calls "possible worlds" (386). While Lavocat's *Fait et fiction* distinguishes our actual world from an infinity of possible worlds (ibid), whether written, oral, or filmic, History on the Algerian occupation and war shows that each person's "actual world" may differ drastically from that of another person, dependent on lived experience at the individual level.

invention," and "as opposed to fact."[125] While Zeniter's novel is documented, perhaps even "too documented" for some, fiction is essential not only to address historical silences, but also to introduce an opening to what Francoise Lavocat denotes in *Fait et fiction* (2016) is a plural model of possible worlds in literature, a "[modèle cosmologique qui admet] des ordres de réalités différentes" (397).[126] In other words, a *L'Art de perdre* is conscious of itself as an "interpretive operation" in a non-actualized and fictional world that nevertheless contains many possible worlds, and moreover acknowledges those existing outside of its pages.[127]

With this argument, I do not mean to transgress what Lavocat argues are the necessary frontiers between fact and fiction. Rather, I posit that fiction in history is omnipresent: it may be used to produce a cohesive, rigid historical narrative, or conversely to further complexify our perceptions of past experience, rendering reception an opportunity for historical critique, and quite possibly for growth. Such conscious fiction points to a larger trend in contemporary French literature, an influx of works that critic Dominique Viart calls "fictions critiques," texts that "[portent] un regard critique sur un certain nombre de réalités…qui [s'envisagent] comme recherche, et peut-être plus précisément d'ailleurs comme enquête…et non plus comme représentation, comme imagination" ("Dispositifs" 10:13). Unlike historic narratives that unconsciously deploy fictional techniques, in candidly engaging with its fictionality, and at times questioning it, *L'Art de perdre* inhabits the same problematic space between epistemology and fiction as its nonfiction counterparts, yet in a way that eschews the production of myth and

[125] Definition of "fiction" from The Oxford English Dictionary
[126] During a discussion of Alice Zeniter's most recent novel *Comme un empire dans un empire* (2020) during France Inter's *Le Masque et la plume*, literary critic Arnaud Viviant proposed that there was a problem with Zeniter's novel, stating "…et d'ailleurs je pense que c'est un problème qu'on rencontre dans d'autres livres. C'est une maladie qui attrape beaucoup d'écrivains français en ce moment. C'est que la documentation, si vous voulez, l'information tue l'imagination. C'est très informé, mais vraiment est-ce qu'Alice Zeniter avait besoin d'aller à la cantine de l'Assemblée Nationale pour décrire la cantine de l'Assemblée Nationale ?"
[127] De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 30

renders the unstable space if fiction visible. Paradoxically, *L'Art de perdre* emphasizes that to "know" in history is often an unconscious act, whereas approaching our past from a position of "unknowing" leads to possibility, and often discovery. By heuristically deciphering history, the novel therefore divests "knowing" fictions of their power, and invests the "unknowing" of conscious fiction with value. Complicating both what it means to write history, and what it means to be fictional, *L'Art de perdre* privileges transformation, seeking to reshape not only historical epistemology, methods, and narratives, but as I will demonstrate the very names used to designate its actors.

To argue that history is fictional is, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot puts it in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), "almost as old as history itself" (5). Like Trouillot, however, *L'Art de perdre* digs deeper into this postulate to ask "what makes some narratives rather than others powerful enough to pass as accepted history if not historicity itself? If history is merely the story told by those who won, how did they win in the first place? And why don't all winners tell the same story?" (Trouillot 6). The novel discovers the answer to such queries in its analysis of the many ambiguous words and phrases that slyly denote governmental, social, national, religious, and gender affiliations bearing upon Franco-Algerian relations. While the book's study of the production of the Harki identity is of primary concern, at the root of *L'Art de perdre*'s critique of historiography is a preoccupation with the act of nomination, and particularly the clandestine role it plays in writing suitable histories. Extending to countries, populations, disciplines, and narrative form, it is the act of designation that locks subjects into unyielding roles and temporalities from which they cannot escape. From the circumlocutory discourse of colonialism and war, to the ideologically-charged labels given the actors involved, *L'Art de*

perdre shows that the way we talk about the Algerian war and occupation is inherently flawed, for it is based on an anachronistic discursive system meant to divide in order to better dominate.

The troublesome linguistic dimension of Franco-Algerian relations began long before the French invaded modern-day Algeria. Known as "la Berbérie" in France – from the Latin *barbarus* denoting foreign, savage, or uncivilized – a population who referred to themselves as the "Imazighen," or free men, were negatively defined in relation to a supposed Roman standard in Western History.[128] Once the Barbary Coast became a "partie intégrante de la France" (Stora 122) however, its Otherness necessitated an overhaul. Rabah Belamri argues that in French colonialism's project of cultural and historic confiscation, "il s'agissait de trouver à l'Algérie une âme latine, un caractère latin" (234). At the forefront of France's colonial project was the campaign to make Algeria French, "son simple prolongement outre-Méditerranée" (Stora 23). Yet first, France needed to make "Algeria," debuting a long history of usurpation exemplified in its reconceptualization of the territory itself.

If Algeria is known as such today, it is in large part because for France, Algiers, or more appropriately "El Djazaïr," *was* Algeria, a belief that reduced an inherently plural territory to an image of French conquest.[129] While El Djazaïr was, in the fashion of capital cities, a headquarters for the Ottoman Regency, its surrounding region *Algérois* was but one of many, politically diverse areas that emerged in Central Maghreb in the Middle Ages.[130] Kaddache

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[128] Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie Coloniale*, pp. 9-11

[129] The view of Algiers from the Mediterranean Sea, that of the conqueror, is a leitmotif in colonial literature, and specifically a "whiteness" that pervades descriptions of the port city nestled in rolling green hills. Tocqueville provides such a description in his "Notes du voyage en Algérie de 1841," which he begins with his arrival in the city: "En tournant le cap Caxine, Alger se découvre : immense carrière de pierre blanche étincelante au soleil" (61). Nearly two-hundred years later, a conquering and quasi-erotic perspective of Algeria persists in France's collective imagination, as observed in *L'Art de perdre* when Naïma's boss and married love interest, Christophe, breathily evokes the coastline of Tipaza post-coitus: "Il y avait la mer sous le soleil, souffle Christophe, elle brillait comme un bouclier, et la stèle avec la phrase de Camus… Naïma, presque machinalement, complète : – *Je comprends ici ce qu'on appelle la gloire : le droit d'aimer sans mesure*…" (Zeniter 369-70).

[130] See Kaddache's description of Central Maghreb in the fifteenth-century, *L'Algérie des Algériens* pp. 317-22).

argues that France's transgressive act of imaginative geography stunted the territory's development and *L'Art de perdre* underscores this progressive encroachment:[131]

> "La conquête connaît plusieurs étapes parce qu'elle nécessite des batailles contre plusieurs *algéries*, celle du régent d'Alger tout d'abord, celle de l'émir Abd el-Kader, celle de la Kabylie et enfin, un demi-siècle plus tard, celle du Sahara, des Territoires du sud comme on les appelle en métropole et ce nom est à la fois mystérieux et banal. De ces algéries multiples, les Français font des départements français. Ils les annexent. Ils les rattachent." (Zeniter 17-8)[132]

Much like the suitable narratives they crafted to justify colonial enterprises, France amalgamated, and reimagined Central Maghreb as a physically singular entity, "un pays neuf sur lequel le surplus de la population et de l'activité française pourra se répandre'" (Kaddache 560). Taking a part for the whole, France's metonymic conception of Algeria set a linguistic system in motion that made possible what *L'Art de perdre* identifies as France's "digestive" history, "un univers parallèle au leur, un monde de rois et de guerriers dans lequel [les voix algériennes] n'ont pas de place, pas de rôle à jouer" (Zeniter 19). Just as the French misappropriated the Algerian nationality, *L'Art de perdre* suggests that the name *Algérie* designates not the plural territory in existence when France seized Algiers, but instead that of the occupant, a linguistic displacement from which the country's history would be written.

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[131] Kaddache writes that "l'évolution de l'Algérie – de son état et de sa Nation – a été stoppée par l'intervention française de 1830 qui fit de notre pays la première victime, en Méditerranée occidentale, de la colonisation européenne" (*L'Algérie des Algériens* 553). My use of "imaginative geography" draws from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which he defines as "this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours,' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary." Said proceeds to stipulate that this act does not require the recognitions of the "barbarians," or Other, and that "all kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own" (54).

[132] Of note, too, is her choice to use a lower-case instead of upper-case "a" for Algeria, which I read as a means to further convey that at that time, Algeria was not a unified territory, and furthermore, not known as "Algeria" (17).

L'Art de perdre exposes a similar French practice of transformative, and at times decorative discourse in their effort to disguise what was actually taking place in Algeria: "'des événements', ou des 'troubles', ou de la guerre – vous pouvez appeler cela comme bon vous semble" (127). Parallel to the physical conflict was an ideological combat with the notion of war itself; if the government were to admit that the "events" in Algeria were indeed, a war, it would mean France was at war against itself.[133] Efforts to stave off such notions through the use of creative language are evident in the Plan Challe, which the novel critiques for its bejeweled monikers: "Conformément au plan Challe, une pluie de pierres précieuses s'abat sur le pays à l'automne [1958] : opérations Rubis, Topaze, Saphir, Turquoise, Émeraude. La mort qui tombe sur la région du Constantinois a rarement porté d'aussi jolis noms" (123).[134] Furthermore, the Plan's accompanying territorial "redistribution" was, in fact, the sequestration of autochthone land, resulting in "processions d'hommes escargots portant sur leur dos, presque comme dans la comptine, leur maisonnette" (ibid), forced by the French army to move to slums constructed in undesirable areas: "les autorités françaises qualifient sobrement ces populations de 'regroupés'" (124). Such coded, cosmetic, and "axiomatic" vocabulary is what Roland Barthes terms in *Mythologies* (1957) "La Grammaire africaine": "c'est dire qu'il n'a aucune valeur de communication, mais seulement d'intimidation. Il constitue donc une écriture, c'est-à-dire un langage chargé d'opérer une coïncidence entre les normes et les faits, et de donner à un réel

[133] In "The Algerian War, the French State and Official Memory," William Cohen writes that "from the beginning of that conflict until 1999 the state was reluctant to acknowledge that this was a war. Algeria, it will be remembered, consisted of French *départements*, thought to be as French as the *département* of the Isère or the Jura. If the French state had recognized its activities in Algeria as a war, that would have implied French recognition of Algeria as a separate nation. Hence it was not a war, but a police action, 'maintien de l'ordre'" (Cohen 219-20).

[134] Plan Challe was a military project named after French Army commander during the Algerian war, General Maurice Challe, which included a series of military operations occurring from 1959-1961 that aimed to dismantle Algeria's revolutionary army the ALN, and in so doing its revolutionary political party the FLN. The presentation, however, was altogether different: *L'Art de perdre*'s narrator describes it as "une longue liste de chiffres et de promesses : construction de logements, redistribution de terres, industrialisation et création de dizaines de milliers d'emplois, exploitation du pétrole et du gaz découverts dans le Sahara" (123).

cynique la caution d'une morale noble" (155). In denouncing language designed to enchant, or to dissimulate, *L'Art de perdre* reveals France's war discourse for what it is: propaganda used to mitigate growing concerns in the metropole, and perhaps as Barthes suggests, mythical.[135]

In effect, at stake in the occupation, colonization, and "cette guerre [qui] avance à couvert sous les euphémismes" (Zeniter 124) were human lives, the linguistic reorganization of whom proved essential to France's fabrication of a French Algeria. For the occupant, utilizing lexicon to render autochthone Algerians dangerous outlanders, anachronic relics, and nescient children in their own home justified their presence in Algeria.[136] Such rhetoric appears in Tocqueville's early writings on colonization, the diplomat predominantly using "Arabe" to denote the indigenous population, who he describes in "Travail sur l'Algérie" (1841) as having a "cœur [de] sauvage" (110). Attending to the occupant's system of "asymmetric classification," *L'Art de perdre* reckons with the "chapelet de désignations pour les locaux qui semble n'avoir pas de fin : crouille, bicot, l'arbi, fatma, moukère, raton, melon, Mohamed, tronc-de-figuier, fellouze" (Zeniter 313), and particularly with the ongoing use of "Arabe," and its presumed synonym "Musulman" in contemporary France.[137] Yet, of prime importance in the novel is the disentanglement of the terms used to designate who would come to be known as Harkis. Ironically, a France so quick to name Algerians overseas was silent when faced with the former

[135] "La codification du langage et sa substantivation vont ainsi de pair, car le mythe est fondamentalement nominal, dans la mesure même où la nomination est le premier procédé du détournement" (*Mythologies* 159).
[136] "Le vocable 'arabe' conforte le colonisateur dans son désir de refouler le colonisé hors de la cite. C'est un terme qui se réfère à un pays étranger, un pays lointain, qui est l'Arabie. Il prétend rappeler à l'Algérien que ses ancêtres sont arrivés en Algérie en colonisateurs, treize siècles auparavant. Le vocable 'musulman' renvoie à une communauté théocratique, à une forme sociale peu évoluée, sclérosée depuis des siècles. Quant à celui d''indigène' il est chargé de mépris et de paternalisme. L'indigène n'a pas d'histoire, c'est un grand enfant innocent, simple et fruste" (Belamri 200-1).
[137] As Reinhart Koselleck points out in *Futures Past* (1979), it is not so much the terms themselves that are the issue, but instead the underlying concepts they represent, realized within a system of "asymmetric classification," with social and political groups deploying terms in one sense so as to define themselves, all the while inaccurately or insufficiently identifying the Other (159-63).

colonial troops once back on French soil. The Algerian population post-independence, however, was exceedingly more vocal: "L'Algérie les appellera des rats. Des traîtres. Des chiens. Des terroristes. Des apostats. Des bandits. Des impurs. La France ne les appellera pas, ou si peu. La France se coud la bouche en entourant de barbelés les camps d'accueil" (166). Contemplating how one might best designate the newly arrived French citizens of Algerian origin – Repatriates? French Muslims? Harkis? (ibid) – the novel ostensibly resigns itself to language's inherent insufficiency. "Peut-être vaut-il mieux qu'on ne les appelle pas. Aucun nom proposé ne peut les désigner. Ils glissent sur eux sans parvenir à en dire quoi que ce soit" (ibid).

I forward, however, that in complexifying the story of the Harki "traitor," and in rebuking the surreptitious practices present in the production of discourse on Algeria as a whole, *L'Art de perdre* does not admit defeat; on the contrary, its resistance to nomination deploys its counter discourse on a linguistic level in the text.[138] Furthermore, in an effort to combat the stigmas names can evoke, the novel exposes and contravenes the "fantasmes" (311) that have played an essential role in forming collective conscious.[139] In contrast to the act of nomination which immobilizes its subject, often "à la mauvaise place et semble-t-il pour toujours" (166), the novel's call to resist designations speaks to its concern for plasticity of identity. Human life is

[138] As I mention above, one could consider *L'Art de perdre* a *roman engage* due to the literary responsibility its project seemingly assumes. Yet, by investing importance in acts, and particularly the contexts within which they took place, and not words, I forward that *L'Art de perdre* is not necessarily concerned with morality. As Barthes notes in "La Grammaire africaine," what often appears as moral concern in writing is actually ostentation, focusing not on objects or acts but mere theoretical notions, tasking various grammatical elements with the permeation of discourse with myth (159-61).

[139] While the text abounds with biting anecdotes, putting into words the preconceptions that silently pervaded French opinion, some examples of note are when a client at Claude's store expresses her fear at Claude allowing Ali's son Hamid to play with his daughter – "Pour elle, les Arabes comme les animaux se développent à une vitesse supérieure à celle des Français" (57) – and over a decade later in France when a women coos over Hamid's younger siblings descending from the train wagon, "comme si elle parlait de petits animaux : *Ils sont adorables. Je voudrais les adopter*" (349).

ostensibly "unqualifiable" (339), in the sense that it cannot be "modified, limited, or restricted."[140]

Yet, as Ali, Hamid, and Naïma and those closest to them fumble for a means to adequately account for their situation in words,[141] *L'Art de perdr*e wonders how the seeming absence of a designation for the Harki population and History's problematic silences might be connected.[142] "Peut-être même que c'est cette absence [d'une désignation] qui a naturellement entraîné des années de silence" (339). Could it be that Naïma's family, and the Harki population as a whole are caught in a vicious cycle, to either acquiesce to the insufficient names allocated to them or to remain silent, or even both? Seemingly in a challenge to itself, the narrator queries, "quand le substantif principal vous manque, comment bâtir un récit?" (339). *L'Art de perdre* shows that it is indeed possible, as in a surprising twist, Ali, Hamid, and Naïma's surname does not appear until page 476 of the novel.[143] Revealing "Zekkar" in the sixty-second chapter is a gesture to give back to Naïma's family what was taken from them when they, like many Harki families, were forced to leave their home in 1962. In delaying designation, the novel's counter discourse respectfully affords its subject the opportunity to define themselves, through actions, and not words. Recognizing in discourse what Vinciane Despret describes in "The Body We Care For" to be a "clear cut distribution [that] dramatically and paradoxically disorganizes reality" (120),

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[140] Definition from Oxford English dictionary.

[141] When Claude, *pied-noir* and friend of the family in the *Sept Crêtes*, uses the word "musulman' to refer to his local customers, the narrator intervenes to specify that "Claude ne sait jamais comment les appeler, il passe d'un terme à l'autre sans que jamais aucun d'eux ne le satisfasse" (58). Clarisse, Hamid's future wife, has a similar struggle when she first refers to her then boyfriend as an "Arabe," and then an "Algérien," both of which Hamid refuses, before pronouncing him "innommable" (339). Finally, Naïma is furious to have to choose between two predominating stereotypes in French society, the "good" or the "bad" *Arabe*, "l'un qui trahirait…la cause des immigrés pauvres et moins chanceux qu'elle, l'autre qui l'exclurait du cœur de la société française (433-4).

[142] The novel depicts the danger associated with historical silences, asserting that "le silence n'est pas un espace neutre, c'est un écran sur lequel chacun est libre de projeter ses fantasmes." (311).

[143] During her visit, Naïma seeks out her remaining family in Algeria with the help of a mutual friend. When she arrives at what is presumably Claude's former shop, she encounters an adolescent: "– Zekkar, c'est moi, déclare le gros garçon en se désignant du doigt pour être sûr que Naïma comprenne. Et elle, lentement, avec application, reproduit exactement le même geste (on se croirait dans *E.T.*) et dit : – C'est moi aussi" (476).

L'Art de perdre resists the reductive act of nomination. In its place, the novel extracts Algeria, Harki, and other nomenclatures from the rigid confines of History, and allows them to take shape differently, of their own accord, and across temporal boundaries.

In an effort to create a flexible portrait of Algeria, past and present, "un pays en vie, en mouvement, fait de circonstances historiques modifiables et non de fatalités irréversibles" (501), Zeniter's text identifies that in order to create a narrative reflective of its counter discourse, it is not only the confines of fiction and nomination that it must challenge, but also those of the literary imagination. Distinctive to what Dominique Viart posits in *La Littérature française au présent* (2008) is French Letter's *littérature déconcertante* is the contemporary author's realization of the ineptitude of existing discourse:[144]

> "L'artiste, l'écrivain, découvrent…combien les discours déjà constitués falsifient le monde. Il doit alors en imaginer d'autres. La littérature ne se donne certes pas pour tâche de résoudre ces questions, mais ne se résigne pas à les laisser silencieuses. Elle écrit là où le savoir défaille, là où les formes manquent, là où il n'y a pas de mots – ou pas encore. C'est pourquoi il y faut d'autres mots combinés selon des syntaxes improbables." (11)

Recognizing that existing accounts have frequently failed to encapsulate the intricacies of Harki heritage and Franco-Algerian relations, *L'Art de perdre* creates an antithetical narrative all its own: deciphering historical complexities not through explanation or organization, but through a contradictory imagination, *L'Art de perdre* strives to bring latent misunderstandings in French collective conscious to light.

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[144] Unlike what he argues is littérature *consentante*, or literature that corresponds to society's expectations, littérature *déconcertante* seeks to upset such boundaries, and considers itself a "critical activity" in that it "manifeste à la fois une certain conscience de son temps, des inquiétudes et des désirs qui le traversent, et une lucidité sur les moyens littéraires qu'elle met en œuvre…[ces œuvres] arrivent là où on ne les attend pas. Elles échappent aux significations préconçues, au prêt-à-penser culturel" (*La littérature française au présent* 8-11).

Yet, I would argue that the novel's greatest critique is not of the collectivity itself, its exceedingly human, and therefore fallible characters all succumbing to their own engrained biases at various points in the novel.[145] If the Harki population lacks a proper *lieu de mémoire* in collective conscious, *L'Art de perdre* suggests it is the language used in political discourse that has, perhaps willingly, failed to encapsulate Harki identity. On matters pertaining to colonialism, France has, in the past, resisted engaging with the many complexities involved in their relationship with former colonies, and has purposefully omitted or codified information which in turn, has produced incomprehension. Cracking open these tightly woven discourses of power, *L'Art de perdre* contends that "il est nécessaire d'imaginer sans cesse des possibilités de vie nouvelle pour déjouer le discours du pouvoir qui nous assure qu'il n'en existe qu'une et que seul le pouvoir est à même de la garantir" (Zeniter 263). Indeed, *L'Art de perdre*'s memorial recovery work participates in what Mary Stevens argues in her article "Visibility, Equality, Difference" is an ongoing paradigm shift toward globality and inclusivity, "defined by the emergence of 'a "language" for the discussion of memory,' and the 'democratization of access to culture and the media' which '[helps] social movements to articulate specific identities not based around the Republican national model'" (Stevens 107). In order to conduct "more nuanced, less rapacious memory work" (108), Zeniter must invent a language of her own.

While in Zeniter's counter discourse plasticity and polyphony invalidate the rigid and monophonic confines of suitable narratives, the contradictory imagination provides the space that makes such techniques possible. Situated at the junction of science and fiction, *L'Art de perdre*'s

[145] For example, as Ali prepares for his family's departure, he makes a list of his priorities, "plus ou moins consciemment," which attest to the influence of a patriarchal culture on his values : "1. Sauver Hamid ; 2. Se sauver lui-même ; 3. Sauver Yema, Kader, et Dalila ; 4. Tout le reste" (153). Hamid and Kader seemingly inherit such values, as "malgré toute ouverture d'esprit qu'ils sont persuadés d'avoir," neither consider Dalila's doubly marginalized situation in France as both female, and Harki (289). Even Naïma, herself "un moment d'exotisme" for the men she sleeps with (363), succumbs to notions of exoticism in Algeria, describing Lalla's ex-wife Tassekurt as having "l'allure d'une actrice en fin de carrière qui interpréterait une dernière fois le rôle de Cléopâtre" (464).

phraseology writes *with* the ineluctable contradictions present in the domain of historiography.[146] The novel's deployment of conflictual language not only addresses the differing, and at times diametrically opposed ways we remember our past, but also what de Certeau shows in *Histoire et psychanalyse : entre science et fiction* (1987) is the antithetical nature of a discipline that negatively produces truth only by determining error (64):

> "Envisagée…comme discipline, l'historiographie est une science qui n'a pas les moyens de l'être. Son discours prend en charge ce qui résiste le plus à la scientificité…, c'est à dire ce que chaque discipline scientifique a dû éliminer pour se constituer. Mais…il cherche à soutenir, par la globalisation textuelle d'une synthèse narrative, la possibilité d'une explication scientifique…Aussi l'historiographie juxtapose-t-elle des éléments non cohérents ou même contradictoires, et elle fait souvent semblant de les 'expliquer'…Une affirmation de scientificité régit le discours qui, en lui-même, conjugue l'explicable à ce qui ne l'est pas encore. Ce qui s'y raconte, c'est une fiction de la science même." (96-7)

Illustrating its own paradigm shift from prescriptive, to descriptive historiography, in response to Naïma's suggestion that perhaps it is better to "tout expliquer tout le temps à tout le monde plutôt que de les laisser projeter sur le silence" (494), her Algerian friend Medhi contests: "il y a des états que l'on ne peut pas décrire comme ça…des états qui demanderaient des énoncés simultanés et contradictoires pour être cernés" (ibid). Literature's complicated, or as I will conclude disorderly, medium is a prime conduit for incongruity, encouraging contrapuntal

[146] In *Histoire et psychanalyse : entre science et fiction,* Michel de Certeau describes historic discourse as a "new species of fiction," its accounts capable of establishing coherency that produces order, progress, and history. "Détachées de leur fonction épiphanique de représenter les choses, ces langues formelles donnent lieu, dans leurs applications, à des scenarios dont la pertinence tient non plus à ce qu'ils expriment, mais à ce qu'ils rendent possible" (65).

utterances to occur simultaneously, and without attachment to truth or falsity.[147] Much like the multiform populations it depicts, *L'Art de perdre* demonstrates that through literature, history can become many things at once.

In this way, the contradictory imagination is not a dimension *L'Art de perdre* invents, but one the novel investigates before reappropriating it as its principle form of critique. Noting that in regard to the Algerian war "il subsiste de part et d'autre de la Méditerranée des versions contradictoires qui ne paraissent pas être l'Histoire mais des justifications ou des revendications, qui se déguisent en Histoire en alignant des dates" (429), *L'Art de perdre* first concerns itself with unmasking the ubiquitous contradictions pervading History. In so doing, the novel becomes a discursive intermediary, using literature as a platform to examine and critique oppositional narratives. This is what Jean Bessière would call the mediating function of the contemporary novel, characteristic of its "problematicité," or the novel as "le questionnement des discours et des représentations sociaux" (70).[148] In the spirit of contemporary literary production in France, and as Bessière argues throughout the world, *L'Art de perdre* is a novel of contradictory imagination first and foremost because it does not endeavor to represent the past, or furthermore *donner raison* to one community over another, but instead "configures" existing discourses (Bessière 63) alongside those, such as that of the Harkis, which have gone missing altogether. In

[147] Jean Bessière describes the contemporary novel's technique of discursive mediation, and reticence to ascribe to positions of truth or falsity in *Le Roman contemporain ou la problématicité du monde* (2010), writing "les indices de l'imagination qui permettent de rendre compte de la composition ou de la recomposition des divers discours et représentations du roman, du lecteur. Il n'indique ou n'oblige à aucune reconnaissance d'une position de vérité ou de fausseté qui soit attaché au roman" (60).

[148] Bessière writes that "le roman est destiné à être reçu comme un supplément d'énonciation, d'énoncé, comme un supplément de médiation, par comparaison avec les discours disponibles sur le monde, avec les savoirs, avec les représentations qu'ils constituent. Il n'a pas d'abord pour finalité d'interpréter le monde, le réel, ou quoi que ce soit, ni de se donner pour une manière de vaste signifiant, mais d'ajouter aux discours disponibles, passés et actuels, une configuration de ces discours" (63). The scholar defines his key term "problématicité" in his introduction: "le roman contemporain se construit suivant la mise en évidence de questions, qui ont une fonction structurante, et qui ne sont pas dissociables du changement des perspectives anthropologiques, qu'illustre ce roman" (10).

this respect, Zeniter's novel reconceptualizes Algeria's historiographic framework, an effort depicted in Naïma's character, who in response to Mehdi's observation that some circumstances necessitate simultaneous and contradictory utterances to be grasped, states she is "en train d'en expérimenter un" (494). Naïma's experimentation with dissonance, likely a *mise en abyme* of Zeniter's literary approach, reflects not only a will to mediate oppositional historical narratives, but also a need to complicate the language used to write them.

Urging its readers to engage with our past in new ways, *L'Art de perdre* abounds with conceits that turn orderly language on its head.[149] As Algerian independence draws near, and "les veuves de la libération commencent à fleurir" (Zeniter 148), Ali notes a sea change in *la crête* when once-friendly faces begin to insult and hiss at the formerly esteemed public figure, and children unabashedly hurl rocks at him in the road. "Il ne pourrait même pas dire quand s'opère la transformation, elle paraît être une sorte de croissance naturelle et continue, comme pour une plante dont les bourgeons lentement deviennent fleurs puis fruits" (146). The passage foreshadows the Zekkar's impending displacement from Algeria to France, and its antithetical likening of a situation in decay to flowers in bloom illustrates the family's paradoxical situation, citizens of both Algeria and France, yet without a country to call their home. Moreover, the metaphor suggests that the bourgeoning of independence in Algeria meant a concomitant downfall for others – on dirait des fleurs qui ont pourri" (147) – the rebirth of the Democratic Republic of Algeria occurring at the expense of the death of "l'Algérie de papa."[150]

[149] Among the many examples in the text are references to Naïma's "return" to Algeria, though she has never been there, Hamid's nickname of "l'homme aux mille gueules" though he is actually characterized by his silence (279-83), and a description of the painter Lalla's artwork as "empreints de finesse et de brutalité à la fois" (388). Additionally, the text highlights the use of the contradictory terms and expressions employed in discourse on the Algerian war, occupation, and diaspora, such as the "sourire Kabyle (104)," an expression used to denote when that an FLN soldier had slit someone's throat, and the "temporary" transit camps (425) that despite their name sometimes housed families for up to seventeen years.

[150] "L'Algérie de papa" is the title of the first of three parts of *L'Art de perdre*.

Taken from Charles de Gaulle's now infamous quote, the title of *L'Art de perdre*'s first section suggests that behind every historical enunciation exists a potentially infinite number of differing realities, often at odds with one another. When former president de Gaulle pronounced "L'Algérie de papa est morte, et si on ne le comprend pas, on mourra avec elle," he presumably meant *l'Algérie française* and the fates of the *pied-noir* population, and not those of the Harkis such as Ali, his home country seeming to crack and split into pieces before his eyes as he gazes upon Algiers for the last time "(pas le dernier, six mois maximum)" (159).[151] *L'Art de perdre*'s greatest challenge, then, is to reimagine our past so as to expose such contradictions. Engaging with incongruities in a way that affords new readings of history, *L'Art de perdre* purposefully renders its epistemological lens, narrative, and imagination "disorderly," demonstrating that to grasp absurdity of the Algerian occupation, war, and colonialism's residual effects, one must destabilize the very system of that thinks our collectivity.[152] In reinventing the language it uses to write history, the novel not only renders vulnerable discourses of power, but also endeavors to foster an ongoing dialogue on the complexities of our past and present.

In fact, that History requires thorough, and ongoing reconsideration is arguably the most distinct claim of *L'Art de perdre*'s counter discourse, appealing to historiographic practices more generally though its rapt attention to the enduring discourses that permeate collective conscious in the *Hexagone* speak to France in particular. Naïma's realization comes when she understands

[151] According to *Le Monde*'s "Dico-citations," former president Charles de Gaulle pronounced this phrase to then director of the French-Algerian newspaper *L'Echo d'Oran* Pierre Lafont on April 29, 1959.
[152] In her article "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Maryse Condé argues for an evolution away from the restrictive norms presiding over West Indian literature, and notably its lack of feminine voices. In an effort to reconceptualize West Indian literature, she introduces disorder, analyzing the work of overlooked women authors whose incorporation seemingly provides the solution to achieving the creative imagination this literature lacks. She writes, "in a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth, and the organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman. Disorder meant the power to create new objects and to modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant creativity" (130).

that despite being raised in a supposedly "bicultural"[153] home, she knows nothing about "la vraie Algérie" (400), "et comme une petite musique, reviennent toujours les mots 'ne pas comprendre', conjugués, déclinés sous toutes les formes possibles, un défilé haute couture de l'incompréhension, dans tous ses modèles de saison, dans toutes les couleurs disponibles" (329). Could it be that when it comes to Algerian history, the many nuances at stake in Franco-Algerian heritage, and the Harki legacy in particular, like Naïma "la France ne comprend rien" (457)?

While the novel forwards that historical incomprehension pervading France is symptomatic of a pervasive bias inherent to its institutionalized discourse, it also admits that when it comes to France and Algeria's convoluted past, "c'est compliqué" (ibid). In fact, if Zeniter chose the contradictory incipit from Elizabeth Bishop's poem "One Art" as the title for her novel, it is not without reason: the poem's villanelle structure is among the most complicated of fixed poetic forms, composed of five tercets and a closing quatrain, and incorporating two repeating rhymes and two refrains.[154] Emblematic of *L'Art de perdre* not only in form but in its content, much like the Zekkar family, the poem's speaker accumulates loss at dizzying speeds:

> The art of losing isn't hard to master;
> so many things seem filled with the intent
> to be lost that their loss is no disaster.
>
> Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
> of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
> The art of losing isn't hard to master.
>
> Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
> places, and names, and where it was you meant
> to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

[153] The narrator refutes Naïma's claim to biculturality: "Double culture, mon cul. À dix ans elle a fait des makrouds avec sa grand-mère. Elle sait dire : merci, je t'aime, tu es belle, ça va – et sa variante quasi obligatoire : merci mon Dieu ça va –, casse-toi, je ne comprends pas, mange, bois, tu pues, le livre, le chien, la porte. Ça s'arrête là, même si elle refuse de le reconnaître" (364).

[154] *Poets.org* describes the rules of the Villanelle form in further detail: "The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated alternately in the last lines of the succeeding stanzas; then in the final stanza, the refrain serves as the poem's two concluding lines. Using capitals for the refrains and lowercase letters for the rhymes, the form could be expressed as: A1 b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 A2."

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster. (Bishop)

Transcribed in the novel in French, the five tercets represent Naïma's loss of a country she never had, but also the greater deprivation that comes with memorial ellipses.[155] Her friend, Ifren, confirms that "personne ne t'a transmis l'Algérie. Qu'est-ce que tu croyais ? Qu'un pays, ça passe dans le sang ?…Ce qu'on ne transmet pas, ça se perd, c'est tout" (Zeniter 497).

Or maybe it is not so simple. Zeniter's omission of the final quatrain leaves the poem's form in suspension, much like Naïma, who at the close of the novel "n'est arrivée nulle part au moment où je décide d'arrêter ce texte" (506). Leaving the poem, Naïma's destiny, and the novel's historical narrative unresolved demonstrates that from loss may come curiosity, and subsequently a continued renewal. Yet, consistent with *L'Art de perdre*'s characteristic critique, it seems that the omission does more than suggest we reexamine our past; in destabilizing the rigidity of a fixed form, Zeniter presumably contests the notion of an immutable history. History is not "One Art," but rather much like Maurice Blanchot's conception of literature in *Le Livre à venir* (1959) "[elle] n'est jamais déjà là, elle est toujours à retrouver ou à réinventer" (293-4). In fact, forfeiting the notion of a knowing, cohesive history is part of the art of losing, one Naïma grapples with in the novel. In this way, perhaps it is not France's duty to remember their past with Algeria in a certain way, but instead to explore its complexities. "Though it may look like…disaster,"[156] a richer history is available to us, and if we commit, like Naïma, to facing

[155] Zeniter 496. I have chosen to include the original version of the poem so as to preserve the integrity of its villanelle form, the rhyme of which is lost in the French translation.
[156] Bishop, "One art," closing quatrain, verse 4

complication head-on and obliging Bishop's call to "(Write it!)," we have everything to gain, and nothing to lose.[157]

[157] Ibid

"Les 'blancs,' en effet, assument l'importance, frappent d'abord."

Mallarmé, Un coup de dés*, Préface*

"Reprendre là où on s'est arrêtés tous" : Creating Resistance in Nathalie Quintane's *Un œil en moins* and *Les Enfants vont bien*

Introduction

L'Art de perdre's concern for the Harki migration crisis speaks to a generalized preoccupation with immigration in France today. Alice Zeniter's novel is one among many contemporary texts engaging with controversial discussions on national identity, and the refugee population in particular has become a leitmotiv in current French literature. Their ubiquity in novels, creative non-fiction, and essays is such that literary critic and author Frédéric Beigbeder contended that the "migrant" novel has become a genre in and of itself in French literary production.[158] Seemingly, the omnipresence of the "European migrant crisis" in political and media spheres, and an increased number of makeshift camps housing transient populations throughout France has rendered the refugee trajectory impossible to ignore. Or, as author and poetess Nathalie Quintane intimates in her book, *Un œil en moins* (2018), it is our unfamiliarity with "migrant" trajectories that has become increasingly evident. If what Oana Sabo has argued to be twenty-first-century France's "migrant canon" confronts the growing number of refugees in the European Union, I suggest that it is not solely out of concern for the refugee figure.[159] Their

[158] In putting the word "migrant(s)" in quotations, I follow *Un œil en moins*'s critique of France's phraseological difficulties with the refugee population: "des 'migrants,' des 'réfugiés,' des 'demandeurs d'asile,' etc. En France, nous sommes toujours encore aux problèmes de terminologie" (129). As I will show, these terminological variations are symptomatic of more significant issues pervading discourse on refugees. Regarding Beigbeder's comment, in a recent episode of *France Inter*'s "Le Masque et la plume, when commenting on Milena Agus' recent book *Une saison douce* he stated that "les romans de migrants, ça commence à être un genre en soi…il y en a dix par mois."

[159] Sabo's monograph, *The Migrant Canon in Twenty-First-Century France* (2018), analyzes the recent proliferation of literature that speak to statistics delineating Europe's recent "migrant wave." According to the Pew Research Center's report, in 2015 a record number of 1.3 million people applied for asylum, an increase the report attributes to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

texts respond to what Quintane observes in *Les Enfants vont bien* (2019) to be a frightening collective "indifférence (quand ce n'est pas de l'hostilité) à l'égard des réfugiés qui, par petits groupes errants et épuisés, traversent nos villes" (10). With Quintane's unofficial diptych, "migrant" literature seems to ask how France (and much of the Western world, for that matter) can be appalled at sordid *fait divers* in the news, but feel a relative disinterest upon learning of yet *another* shipwreck in the Mediterranean. Do we have our priorities straight?

In her essay *Sauve qui peut la vie* (2015), social anthropologist Nicole Lapierre solicits France to remember its heritage, and the countless existences spared through immigration during the interwar period. Comparing the plights of today's refugees with those of her Polish ancestors, Lapierre advocates for "la fidélité d'une mémoire en alerte" (Lapierre 199). In like fashion, *Un œil en moins* approaches collective vigilance by reminding France of its legacy of cruelty, cautioning "mais, l'Histoire n'est pas un toboggan" (227).[160] In other words, it is not possible to outrun our past, and complacency before the denial of human rights runs the risk of repeating France's darkest moments. The book's concise, yet jarring reflection on Vichy France wonders how anyone could possibly miss *that* France, "celle de l'ordre nazi acclimate au catholicisme angevin, celle de l'imparfait du subjonctif justifiant la torture" (229). Yet, *Un œil en moins* suggests that a similar discursive window dressing found in the rhetorical use of the formal, and arguably condescending imperfect subjunctive tense is unsettlingly reminiscent of France's past authoritarian political regimes.[161] In the French government's "retorts" to Europe's growing

[160] The epigraph for *Un œil en moins*' "Livre 2," which focuses primarily on the author's experience as a volunteer in a local Centre d'accueil et d'orientation (CAO) is an excerpt from Voltaire's article, "Torture" for the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764): "Ce n'est pas dans le XIII^{e} ou dans le XIV^{e} siècles que cette aventure est arrivée, c'est dans le XVIII^{e}. Les nations étrangères jugent de la France par les spectacles, par les romans, par les jolis vers, par les filles de l'Opéra…Elles ne savent pas qu'il n'y a point au fond de nation plus cruelle que la française" (125).
[161] *Le Figaro*'s "Le Conjugueur" describes the French imperfect subjunctive tense as a complicated and rarely used tense, but that "il arrive parfois qu'un écrivain ou un orateur utilise une de ces formes pour relever le niveau de son langage et obtenir ainsi un niveau de langue plus que soutenu. Snobisme ou pas…une fois qu'on le connaît, l'imparfait du subjonctif n'est pas si compliqué que ça."

"migrant" crisis and "les événements concomitants dont la liste est trop longue" (227), Quintane, like Lapierre, detects a downward spiral of which the end result will likely be "un monde de fafs – dit poliment" (ibid).[162]

As Lapierre points out, however, reducing immigrants and refugees to a permanent state of victimhood is quite possibly as deleterious as disregarding them altogether; despite a surplus of social, political, economic, and cultural adversity, "ils sont acteurs dans la société et sujets de leur vie" (Lapierre 182). In fact, the avid participation of refugees in France's recent popular protests may also explain their literary prevalence. Among the country's precarious populations who emerged as pivotal protagonists in the crystallization of 2016's *Nuit Debout*, in their article "Contre la loi travail et son monde" Alexis Cukier and Davide Lassere assert that France's "migrants" and "sans-papiers" were "l'un des nœuds politiques structurants" (134). This is likely why *Un œil en moins*' narrative delineating Quintane's involvement with the protest movement quickly turns to chronicle her volunteer initiatives with local refugee aid networks in her hometown in southern France. Partitioning the author's activism in the book's two parts, "LIVRE 1 : Notes blanches" endeavors to demystify popular and administrative tactics deployed during *Nuit Debout*, but instead leads to a discovery of "le monde dans lequel nous sommes" (390) during her involvement with the *Centre d'accueil et d'orientation* (CAO).[163] A seeming springboard into her subsequent book project, *Les enfants vont bien*, "LIVRE 2 : Un œil en

[162] Both Quintane and Lapierre use the same expression, "spirale infernale," (Quintane 227, Lapierre 195) to refer to the immigrant experience in France. The word "fafs" also merits elucidation: in her article, "L'innovation lexicale chez les jeunes Parisiens," Henriette Walter ascribes the abbreviation "faf" to the word "fasciste," which according to Walter possesses a doublet of abbreviations in French (both "faf" and "facho"). We can therefore read "un monde de fafs" as "un monde de fascistes."

[163] Generally, a "note blanche" refers to an unofficial government report, which *France Terme* defines as a "note brève, d'une page le plus souvent, non signée, émanant généralement d'un service de renseignement et rédigée à l'attention de hauts responsables d'un gouvernement ou d'une administration." Using "notes blanches" as a title for her narrative devoted to *Nuit Debout* is likely a facetious gesture, characteristic of the author's pervasive use of irony.

moins" discloses the urgency to address the common thread of these stratagems: "ceux qui entendent nous gouverner par la parole et par le fait accompli" (Les enfants 11), to which the collective turns a blind eye.

While it may seem that "la France soumise, et qui soumet, est de retour" (Un œil 229), *Les Enfants vont bien* examines what Lapierre argues is France's confining logic of social position that preserves hierarchies and caters to prejudice (Lapierre 189), and shows how one might contest discriminatory regimes by using their weapons of choice against them: their words. As is customary of the author, Quintane is forthcoming with her literary project, which identifies and hierarchically represents discourses of power related to the "migrant crisis" and in so doing, concretely illustrates the symbolic violence plaguing refugees in France. "Un livre de montage" (Les Enfants 7), the unofficial sequel to *Un œil en moins* vertically juxtaposes discourse from political speeches, law texts, what appear to be internal emails from the local *CAO*, media outlets, and aid-worker testimony in respective order.[164] Graduations in font size and typographies emphasize the critique infused in this seeming cut and paste gesture, moving from larger-than-life political declarations at top of the page, to regally italicized legal excerpts, to generically formatted professional exchanges, to polemic media headlines featured in bolded text, and finally to the miniscule musings of volunteers at the very bottom. At each of its five levels, *Les Enfants vont bien* isolates attitudes and practices participating in the biased logic to which Lapierre refers. Yet, the book acknowledges that "tout le monde n'est pas à mettre *dans le même sac* – ce livre, aussi bien, n'est pas un sac" (8, emphasis original). If France is to overhaul its collective conscious, dismantle domineering discursive practices, and afford refugees with the

[164] I have located the majority of these excerpts in the French government's "Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile" (CESEDA). I suspect that the few that I was unable to locate in the document have now been eliminated from the CESEDA, as it is amended at frequent intervals and uploaded to the French government's website www.legifrance.gouv. The version I used for my research is dated 25 Jan 2021.

regard their humanity demands, more pertinent than assigning culpability is the study of these discursive frameworks, how they function, and potentially reflect social realities in France. "L'essentiel se joue, comme pour les réfugiés (et pour nous tous), dans l'implicite, dans ce qui n'est pas dit – l'officieux…" (Les Enfants 9). While *Un œil en moins* investigates the recesses of collective conscious, the striking assembly in *Les Enfants vont bien* explores the discursively hyper visible, and calls our attention to France's unspoken national monologue.

From Quintane's "Le François-Xavier" column in the early 1990's satirical poetry review *R.R.*, to her reassessment of the Algerian war's convoluted, and enduring heritage in France in *Grand Ensemble* (2008), in its propensity for the polemic her literary approach has long been contentious. Justine Huppe's article "L'insurrection qui vient par la forme" identifies the author's bifurcation toward the explicitly political in 2010. Citing Quintane's own doubts that writing poetry is an intrinsically political act, the sociologist of literature asserts that with *Tomates* (2010), the author's writing becomes increasingly transitive, in that it manifestly engages with the political.[165] "Désormais elle citera les noms des gouvernants, chroniquera l'actualité sociale et sortira de sa réserve de 'fillette des classes moyennes qui comme un écrivain des colonies tâche d'écrire correctement en français ce qui ne lui plaît pas'" (2). Despite a growing political engagement beginning in "les années 10," however, the author's oeuvre conserves a proclivity for formal experimentation.[166] This likely explains why much of the scholarship devoted to her work in recent years primarily focuses on its formal qualities, such as implications of genre, stylistic devices, and authorial and textual performativity.

[165] An essay that begins by reflecting on the "Tarnac Nine," or a group of allegedly anarchist French men and women who were arrested in 2008 for purportedly sabotaging SNCF electrical lines, *Tomates* questions the collective's conformist tendencies in contemporary society.
[166] This is a reference to Quintane's book, *Les années 10* (2014), a collection of nine essays devoted to current events, (pop) culture, and the role of literature in contemporary France.

This is not to say that collections such as Benoît Auclerc's *Nathalie Quintane* (2015) do not question how stylistic choices speak to Quintane's authorial *posture*, which Jérôme Meizoz defines as the institutional and enunciative acts through which an author establishes their literary identity.[167] In fact, in his introduction Auclerc advances that literary posture is as much a preoccupation for Quintane as it is for those who study her work. Characterizing the author's corpus as combative, interventionist, and in support of a minority point of view, the critic suggests that Quintane's works actively seek an "efficient" literary stance, "étant entendu que la solennité de 'l'engagement' n'est pas (plus ?) une option viable" (8). In contrast, Noura Wedell's chapter, "Formage ininterrompu," describes Quintane's political stance as "une sorte de bartlebisme" (149), an *anti-engagement* inhabited by an ambivalent sense of humor that doubts literature's capacity to adequately harness social phenomena.

In my analysis of *Un œil en moins* and *Les Enfants vont bien*, I would like to reconsider Quintane's interventions in matters of social, political, and ethical importance as evidence of her *engagement*, or socially responsible writing.[168] In fact, I posit that the texts in question are emblematic of an emergent form of what critics refer to as France's contemporary "gestes politiques de la littérature" that privilege matters of national interest and in so doing problematize Republican values, identity and belonging.[169] When read together, the unofficial

[167] See the Introduction to Jérôme Meizoz's *Postures littéraires : mises en scène modernes de l'auteur* (2007).
[168] Here, I am thinking of France's contemporary literary engagement in terms of Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of *littérature engagée*. In *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement* (2006), T Storm Heter defines what Sartre considered to be the writer's responsibility "to speak to the political themes of [their] times. If [they] do not then [they are] implicitly recommending the status quo, which is likely to contain some measure of ugliness and brutality" (102). It is worth noting that that the author chose the editing house P.O.L to publish the two books in question, as well as a significant percentage of her corpus (along with the editing house La Fabrique that houses the remainder of her oeuvre). During a recent interview, Quintane noted that a work's political gesture comprises not only subject matter and formal characteristics, but also the choice of editor; for the author, selecting an editing house that espouses a political conception of literature is of the utmost importance. Though housed within the larger editing conglomerate Gallimard Group, founded in 1983 by Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens P.O.L is regarded as having a politically engaged literary catalogue, including works from authors such as Emmanuel Carrère, Marie Darrieussecq, Marguerite Duras, Guillaume Dustan, Leslie Kaplan, and Georges Perec.
[169] "Fictions françaises."*Fixxion*, n. 19, Dec 2019, p. 3

diptych is a call to action in the increasingly vital task that is reconfiguring institutional frameworks in France, asking "pourquoi faudrait-il rester à 'sa' place ou s'y laisser enfermer ?" (Lapierre 190). Precisely, in the spirit of texts that critique the notion of a "parti pris narratif," I would like to think outside of the impasse that pitting efficiency against incapacity engenders to imagine a richer, more complicated manifestation of literary responsibility.[170]

Quintane's texts decidedly articulate their project to reach beyond the literary sphere to stimulate political conversations and thought in France: presenting her process in the beginning pages of *Un œil en moins*, Quintane writes that "depuis vingt-cinq ans j'ai écrit des livres qui voulaient *reprendre* : reprendre Jeanne d'Arc, reprendre la question de la transmission et de l'oubli politique dans ma génération, reprendre là où on s'était arrêtés, tous" (*Un œil* 28-9, emphasis original). A transitive verb rich with meaning, according to context *reprendre* can signify to "take back," but also to "resume," "correct," or even "reprimand," among other connotations in English. In this chapter, I work with the author's *modus operandi* to *reprendre*, and delve more deeply into the verb's many nuances to show how its complexity facilitates our understanding of the two texts' narrative trajectories, techniques, and combined significance. Specifically, I posit that Quintane's sinuous narratives and their equally complex endeavor to take back collective potential through the review and revision of common conscious is a paragon of France's complicated literature.

Using these three meanings of the verb *reprendre* as points of departure for my analysis, part one explores *reprendre* as a gesture to resume politically-charged conversations on current events in contemporary France *Un œil en moins*. Ubiquitous in mainstream forms of media, but

[170] In the unofficial foreword to *Les Enfants vont bien*, Quintane explains her choice to return to the subject of France's refugees, writing "Pourquoi ce choix ? Dans un précédent livre, Un œil en moins, j'avais déjà abordé la question des réfugiés (des 'migrants,' comme on dit), mais son parti pris narratif me semblait, au moment même où j'écrivais, insuffisant à rendre compte de la violence faite, en France, à ces hommes, ces femmes et ces enfants" (7).

often granted a superficial attention, Quintane's book renews, and in a sense preserves discussions devoted to the country's pressing issues. I then turn to *Les Enfants vont bien* to examine how *reprendre* affords a valuable opportunity for critique, and particularly in the authors calculated appropriation (*reprise*) of speech and communications regarding refugees in France that hones in on the implicit significance of discourse. Finally, the concluding section of this chapter considers how Quintane's narratives might provide the methodological framework and tools to reclaim literature's role in learning to "parler et d'écrire autrement" (*Les Enfants* 10). Similar to Isabelle Stengers' philosophy in her article "Gaia, the Urgency to Think (and Feel)," the texts' will to *reprendre* resists engrained patterns of thought in a way that moves to collectively "think and feel" rather than to "reason and progress" (Gaia 6). More than the wakeup call France urgently needs, Quintane's diptych provides a model for moving forward: literary transformation becomes a pathway to transformative literature which, in turn, solicits action.

Un œil en moins *: From Pathology to Presence*

It is March 2016, banners emblazoned with the slogans "le monde ou rien" and "démocratie réelle" decorate the newly formed *Nuit Debout* village in Paris' place de la République. Throughout France, protesters chant the movement's canonical mantra, "on ne rentre pas chez nous," vowing to stay "up all night" to support their cause. Following a year characterized by horrific terrorist attacks, and subsequently a sustained state of emergency in France, what began as popular contestation against the El Khomri law, or the "loi travail," soon became the catalyst to address other socio-political issues affecting contemporary life in France.[171] As Cukier and

[171] The El Khomri law, initiated by *Ministère du travail* Myriam El Khomri and adopted in 2016, was promoted as "relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels" (*Légifrance*). While the law created more support measures for young professionals and a centralized system for tracking personal and sick leave between jobs, it provoked the strong reaction it did because it also made it easier to lay off workers, and reduce overtime compensation and severance packages.

Lassere demonstrate, the *Nuit debout* movement not only opposed the new, unpopular labor law, but also everything the Manuel Valls government represented, and particularly "la France de l'état d'urgence, de la xénophobie et du racisme institutionnel" (Cukier 134).[172] Students, precarious populations, and "migrants" in France were among the first to establish their presence in the Place de la République, and the movement came to be characterized by its "convergence des luttes" (129); over the course of the occupation, nearly eighty thematic committees set up shop in the public square, a testament to the movement's diversity. Humanitarian, feminist, anti-racist, economic, and pedagogical initiatives intersected, encouraging farther-reaching, popular ambitions in France's socio-political sphere.

Documenting her active involvement with *Nuit Debout* in *Un œil en moins*, Quintane traces the movement from its "idée de départ qu'on ne rentrerait pas chez nous" (Un œil 47), to its recognition as a significant moment in the history of French protest. The book's first-person narrator, who is manifestly the author herself, describes the movement as "'le plus beau moment de [sa] vie'" (57), writing that "par instants lève quelque chose de très rare, que je n'ai connu qu'une fois dans ma vie, le deuxième jour du mouvement, à Paris : une voix collective" (20).[173] Still, it is unlikely that the author would describe *Nuit Debout* to be quite as cathartic and as groundbreaking an experience as Cukier and Lassere suggest (126) – that is to say one that had a profound effect on the larger French collectivity. Pessimism dominates her account, which illustrates the French collectivity's lack of "entrain" (Un œil 64), and incapacity to inscribe itself in an enduring movement for change. Quintane fears that "dans quelques mois ou dans quelques

[172] Cukier and Lassere's article forwards that the *Nuit Debout* mentality and the movement's unique organization can only be understood within the context of an overarching movement against neoliberalism, an ideology attributed to the French government during the François Hollande's presidency.
[173] Neither *Un œil en moins* nor *Les enfants vont bien* is a *roman*, and *Un œil en moins* in particular is a work of investigational literature in which the author's fieldwork, and thus the author become a part of the text.

semaines, on dise qu'il ne s'est rien passé, y compris et surtout en France" (31), and documents the movement's decline, even in Paris where *Nuit Debout* proved most influential.[174] Initially, it appears that the French population's waning interest and the movement's loss of momentum is what fuels the author's desire to *reprendre*, or to continue the *Nuit Debout* narrative, and in so doing perpetuate its legacy: "Il se passe quelque chose en France : vous en êtes les témoins" (ibid). To this effect, nested within the narrative is a hectic, hand-drawn image of the manifestation site, seemingly scribbled on the fly between speeches before a quick meal at the *kebab*, as if literature were a time capsule that could somehow preserve the ephemeral movement and the unity the author perceived during this chaotic, yet powerful locus of collective contestation. [175]

Figure 2.1: Nuit Debout "Village," Un œil en moins*, p.53*

[174] *Un œil en moins* specifically insists on a lack of enthusiasm in southern France. Seemingly, even with social contestation, Paris remains the standard, or ideal against which *Province* is judged : "À Paris, ils sont toute la nuit sous la pluie ; de jour comme de nuit. S'ils devaient attendre que la pluie cesse ! / Oui mais ici on est dans le Sud. / Personne ne sortira sous cette pluie" (23).

[175] The image appears to be a scan of a previously folded, self-drawn map of the *Nuit Debout* Village in *Un œil en moins* (Figure 1), which she annotates in Chapter 11 of Livre 1 (51-2). As the illustration shows, the nocturnal "occupation" of the *place de la République* endeavored to create a veritable community and in so doing, a venue for discussion and exchange. The choice of the *place de la République* was also significant, in that it had been the city's gathering place after both the *Charlie Hebdo* (January 2015) and November 2015 terrorist attacks.

Yet, I would like to suggest that *Un œil en moins* is not solely a book about *Nuit Debout*, or even about France's "migrants," to whom the narrative turns in the text's second part. Tackling current events from *zadiste* activity in Notre-Dame-des-Landes (200), to France's systemic "racisme comme une radio" (246), *Un œil en moins* problematizes ideologies and activity threatening contemporary France's socio-political well-being.[176] Quintane's nearly ethnographic inquiry into pressing issues is nonetheless a far cry from dystopian narratives depicting an irrevocably damaged France, a motif in contemporary French literature scholar Christy Wampole calls "degenerative realism."[177] Though charged with critique, *Un œil en moins* is neither a wistful recollection on what could have been, nor a mechanism meant to incite fear or guilt in the collectivity. Instead, I argue that the text invites the collective to reevaluate what they think they know of the country they call home.[178] If the book accords more attention to *Nuit Debout* and the European refugee crisis specifically, it is because these two topics are prime vectors through which to observe pathologies in French collective conscious and those underpinning two domineering influences that mold and shape the country's imagination: France's political and media spheres.[179] More imperative to the book's project of collective reevaluation than the description of current events is its analysis of the deep-seated mentalities perpetuating the

[176] Derived from the neologism ZAD, or *Zone à défendre*, *zadistes* are militant activists who occupy territories in order to resist their development. For example, beginning in 2007 *zadistes* occupied a significant expanse of territory in France's Notre-Dame-des-Landes to contest the building of a new airport for the nearby city Nantes, a project that was eventually shelved after unsuccessful attempts to evict the *zadistes* from the land.
[177] In her book *Degenerative Realism: Novel and Nation in Twenty-First-Century France* (2020), Wampole associates the work of Michel Houellebecq, Frédéric Begbeider, and Jean Rolin with "degenerative realism," which she defines as "a type of literary realism marked in both content and form by a poetics of cultural and biological degradation. Its themes are clear: relying on a logic of decline, the novels…tell of a *collective worsening of life in the contemporary moment*" (2, emphasis original).
[178] I draw my use of the term "re-evaluate" as a possible translation of *reprendre* from one of the verb's many definitions in the *TLFi*: "se remettre à travailler à quelque chose, étudier de nouveau quelque chose."
[179] I borrow this term from Pierre Rosanvallon, whose work uses it to refer to breakdowns in democracy. In his preface to Rosanvallon's book Democracy: Past and Future (2006), Samuel Moyn concisely summarizes these as being Rosanvallon's "trinity of pathology – voluntarism, rationalism, and liberalism" (22). I, however, use this term not to reference the notion of democracy as a whole, but instead the very specific case of the French collective.

country's malaise. *Un œil en moins* asks "how did we get here?" and conjectures on how France might emerge from what it suggests is the collective's state of paralyzing indifference.

Mitigating Collective Myopia

As Wampole suggests in her essay "On Distraction," perhaps it is not that the collectivity is completely incapacitated, but rather increasingly preoccupied. In our digital age, we have access to an overwhelming quantity of information, literally at our fingertips thanks to smartphones. Yet, Wampole is not convinced that human kind is any the more knowledgeable, asking "what is the *nature* of this information?" (86, emphasis original). Even the briefest glimpse inside a waiting room, public transportation vehicle, or office building nearly anywhere in the Western hemisphere reveals that we are increasingly engrossed, and with arguably inconsequential objects and matters at that. Citing a number of first-world fixations, *Un œil en moins* ironically muses on that which we choose to expend our energy:

> "nous, on se plaint quand on attend une heure à la préf' pour refaire une carte grise, on supporte pas que le boulanger nous refile une baguette avec du sel quand on a commandé une baguette sans sel, on constate les urgences engorgées et les médecins indisponibles au bled entre le 22 décembre et le 11 janvier, on est déjà en train de prévoir les manifs de l'automne quand la retraite passera à soixante-cinq ans et la semaine à quarante heures, on se plaint d'un dégât d'eau parce qu'il a fait une tache en forme de flaque au plafond de la salle de bains, on râle que les tomates sont fades…" (Un œil 260).

The passage's numerous digressions and paratactic style recreates the internal ruminations of a bustling French citizen. But what is the cost of this constant brooding, and consequently, our lack of presence? From shopping lists, to play dates, to the *métro, boulot, dodo* grind, our obligations and egocentrism may have led to a generalized inattentiveness to topics with exceedingly higher

stakes. As Wampole points out, busyness has also become an *excuse* in the Western world. Turning our lives into endless to-do lists "provides the pretense for a less than-superlative investment in any given relationship or other kinds of social contact" (On Distraction 74-5), and I would add for our lackluster engagement with the world we live in.

If, as Wampole argues, our distracted lives are equivalent to the "drawing and quartering of the mind…the dissipation of the human" (72), *Un œil en moins* illustrates that France is in dire need of the "locus of focus" the written book provides (79). More than emphasize our inattention, however, I contend that Quintane's text becomes such a site, where readers may rehabilitate their capacity for attention, and in so doing experience not only a personal awakening, but also one that tunes us in to the shared humanity of the collective. That Quintane elects to begin her inquiry into contemporary France by recounting her participation in *Nuit Debout* is indicative of her own eye-opening experience. To describe her unawareness and that of the French collectivity, the author likens this impairment to possessing "un œil en moins":

> "c'est-à-dire comme si je voyais le monde à travers le tissu blanc et fin d'une taie d'oreiller usée… Nous voyons tous le monde à travers le tissu blanc et fin d'une taie d'oreiller usée…Même le plus lucide des sages, le plus épuisé des ouvriers, le plus exploité des stagiaires, le plus érudit des philosophes, le plus militant des militants, les plus critiques des poètes. Mais il y a différents degrés." (390-1)[180]

The text suggests that this partial blindness, from which one dissociates with difficulty given that it has shaped who we are (390), may be a measure of self-preservation. Pondering the decision to remove her cat's eye due to complications with an ulcer, Quintane muses "plus d'œil, plus de

[180] In speaking with the author, she also shared an anecdote about how one of her friends had initially refused to read her book because they thought the title was a reference to politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, who is believed to wear a glass eye.

soins, plus de souffrance" (315). In some cases, not seeing, or dodging harsh realities is a tactic to avoid suffering and emotional distress, but also the physical trauma one can incur. A spreadsheet delineating wounds sustained during a 2016 demonstration in Bobigny reveals that political activism is not without its risks, though "tous ces blesses, énucléés, brûlés…ça ne passe pas aux infos…" (370-1). And yet, *Un œil en moins* forwards that it is these tumultuous experiences that afford the opportunity to think beyond our collective handicap, or rather to facilitate its discernment. It is when Quintane acknowledges her "œil en moins" that, "[elle vit] le voile soudain se lever" (390).

In order to locate and transcend the limitations of our individual experience, the book argues that "Les actions / Sont le plus important, avec la logistique" (64). Aside from a motivated few and "les tchouls" (83), however, France's seeming reticence to engage with popular mobilization becomes impossible for Quintane to ignore during her involvement with *Nuit Debout*.[181] Pondering the French collectivity's lack of enthusiasm, she presents a question that orients her reflections to come:

> "Quelle colle nous tient chez nous ? / Quelle colle assez puissante nous tient chez nous pour que même par beau temps en week-end et en vacances, sans obligations particulières, les enfants grands ou gardés, la télé étant ce qu'elle est, peu de goût pour la lecture et les jeux de société, certes une bonne série certes *Call of Duty* – mais tout de même? / Quelle colle, / sinon l'habitude." (65)

More than imply that our routines to which we cling are the taproot of indifference in contemporary France, the above passage inscribes activism within the text. Commencing each of

[181] In Livre 1, Chapter 18, Quintane wonders whether it might be a fear of "les cassos" or "les tchouls" that keeps citizens from participating in the political debates held in her village's town square. She decides it is not the "cas sociaux," or "les fous," that discourage people, but the "tchouls," a figure she describes as a self-important know-it-all who exploits their alleged marginality to scorn others (80-4).

the three sentences with "quelle colle" is exemplary of the rhetorical device anaphora, a common practice for public speakers in the political sphere. Furthermore, adding line breaks (/) for emphasis before proceeding to answer her own questions in the final line suggests that the preceding questions are, also, rhetorical. And while the French "colle" and English "call" have rather different phonetic pronunciations, it is worth noting that when pronounced with a French accent, "call" is nearly homophonic for "colle." The choice to include the first-person shooter, war-themed videogame as an example of the habits we cannot seem to shake thus has less to do with its popularity, and everything to do with its name. Insinuating that the collective has a *Call of Duty* elsewhere, and namely in France's socio-political combats, *Un œil en moins* is not merely providing the reader with evidence of collective indifference, it endeavors to convince them of it.

The book's persuasive writing techniques and observation of the country's "silence socialisé" (376) are exceedingly reminiscent of the message Stéphane Hessel communicates in his essay *Indignez-vous !* (2010). According to Hessel, we are more interconnected than ever, and on a global scale at that. Yet, the former resistant and Holocaust survivor asserts that France's core value of "l'intérêt général" seems to have disappeared, even with the emergence of increasingly dire national and global socio-political climates. He writes that "…dans ce monde, il y a des choses insupportables. Pour les voir, il faut bien regarder, chercher" (Hessel 14). Much like Quintane urges readers to shed their veils of indifference, Hessel impels the French population to respond to the injustices pervading our contemporary world by finding their reason for indignation in order to defy collective indifference (22). Hessel's prose presents a convincing argument: a former speech writer for the United Nations, he was likely as well-versed in the art of rhetoric as Quintane, who beyond her career in the literary sphere is also a secondary French

instructor. Yet, while Hessel's comparable brief essay more closely resembles the political pamphlet physically, it is *Un œil en moins* that resorts to the satire common to the pamphlet genre to influence its readers.

While hanging up banners for demonstrations in her home town, a self-important security guard mocks Quintane and her fellow protestors, shouting "vous n'êtes RIEN…vous n'êtes RIEN" (14). Later, the author is insulted when passing out flyers at a local toll booth by a driver who jeers "travaillez, bande d'enculés" (76). The reactions of her fellow *villageois* to the town's humanitarian efforts are seemingly Quintane's opportunity to ridicule them in return. Depicting the author's transition from *Nuit Debout* to her implication with asylum seekers, "Livre 2" creates a parody of the scene inside the townhall when elected officials break the news of a forthcoming *CAO* meant to "désengorger Calais" (167), France's notorious "migrant" territory. Despite their attempts to assure that "la SÉCURITÉ est la priorité absolue…que / Ce n'[est] que PROVISOIRE, ils ne resteront que SIX MOIS…" (171), the announcement gives rise to heated debates. Amidst the *villageois* concerns for the safety of the town's women – "vous avez prévu des péripatéticiennes ?" (170) – and worries about how the refugees' presence will affect the local economy – "maintenant tout est FOUTU…FOUTU…J'ai plus qu'à partir !" (171) – a cross-legged woman with "pretty shoes" the text calls "la choucroute locale" intermittently intervenes to shout "c'est un scAndale !" (171-2). More than indifference, the narrative's rendering of the locals' heckling and ensuing clamor inside the town hall intimates the group's generalized ignorance, which is only emphasized through the use of capital letters and the included comments from what was likely a larger conversation on the forthcoming *COA*.

While contentious in its critique, Quintane's book project nevertheless provides food for thought on a potential collective blindness to socio-political matters, and how it may have

materialized. *Un œil en moins*, and I will later show *Les enfants vont bien*, extend their critical reading of the collective to State officials by identifying them as cultivators of this pernicious mode of thinking, to include the French President. In office at the time of *Nuit Debout*, one could find in François Hollande's arguably unremarkable presidency the same apathy Quintane encounters when she tells her peers about her activism: "'ah bon, ça existe encore?'" (19). Conversely, at times "Manu" (97) Macron's decidedly more aggressive presidency appears to cultivate division among the French population; just one month after taking office in 2017, at the inauguration for Paris' new startup campus *La Station F* the president differentiates between "les gens qui réussissent et les gens qui ne sont rien."[182] Macron's maladroit statement symbolizes a preoccupation with distinction in France, which reflects what Emmanuel Blanchard forwards is the *Hexagone*'s growing preoccupation with borders.[183] While the State continues to endorse the Republican model of universalism, increasingly manifest discriminatory practices during the country's prolonged state of emergency corroborated the presence of invisible, but nonetheless harmful frontiers governing France.[184] With practices like the *control de faciès* on the rise, what has become impossible to ignore is the suspicion that "sous la V^{e} République, toutes les vies ne se valent pas," and that France is perhaps not so colorblind, or other blind, a term I use to evoke

[182] See *Le Figaro*'s article from July 3, 2017, "Les gens qui réussissent et les gens qui ne sont rien : ce que révèle la petite phrase de Macron."
[183] In his article "Les 'indésirables.' Passé et présent d'une catégorie d'action politique," Blanchard writes that "l'heure est en effet à la réaffirmation des frontières et de leur pouvoir protecteur contre les dangers d'une mondialisation incontrôlée. Des centaines de kilomètres de murs ont même été érigés ces deux dernières décennies afin de mettre fin au trajet de celles et ceux des migrants dont la venue n'est pas souhaitée des lignes de fracture économiques et géopolitiques qui strident les atlas contemporains" (16).
[184] For more on discriminatory policing practices, see Bremen Donovan's recent report, "Field Notes: Liberté, Égalité, Contrôle d'identité."

the many imbrications of Otherness beyond race to which France hypothetically turns a blind eye, such as religion, socio-economic status, gender, and sexuality.[185]

Though ephemeral, *Nuit Debout* brings discursive and physical violence to the forefront of collective conscious. Certainly, the movement had its fair share of "casseurs," or disgruntled protestors known for breaking storefront windows, and throwing projectiles at CRS agents.[186] Yet in a recent interview, Quintane asserted that "la repression était encore plus forte," with unjustifiably brutal responses from the police.[187] *Un œil en moins* vividly depicts the seeming impossibility of the purely peaceful insurrection for which Hessel calls, juxtaposing the nonviolent début of the movement's June 14 installment with its sinister ending through typographically differentiated text.[188] "On, syndicat1solidaires [sic], est à présent sur la place, toujours derrière le camion avec le groupe dessus, qui joue…Je ne sais pas qu'à Paris **nous nous battons contre les CRS**…**Une pluie de lacrymos continue de nous atteindre. C'est l'enfer. On crie pour qu'ils arrêtent**" (79, emphasis original). When read figuratively, the physical

[185] In a 2015 tribune in the newspaper *Libération*, this sentiment of inequality in France is said to have inspired the protest the tribune announces, the "Marche de la dignité," an initiative spearheaded by women to combat what it observes is France's "politique d'exclusion." Blanchard, too, brings attention to latent, but rampant inequalities in French society. Of note, Blanchard transcribes a portion of former president Nicolas Sarkozy's speech from Toulouse on April 28, 2012: "La *frontière*, c'est l'affirmation que *tout ne se vaut pas*, qu'entre le dedans et le dehors, ce n'est pas la même chose, qu'entre nous et les autres, il y a une *différence*, qu'entre chez soi et la rue, ce n'est pas pareil, qu'on ne se comporte pas de la même façon. Tracer une *frontière* entre les cultures, tracer une *frontière* entre le vrai et le faux, tracer une *frontière* entre le bien et le mal, tracer une *frontière* entre la beauté et la laideur, vous savez ce que c'est ? C'est rien d'autre que le long travail de la civilisation. La civilisation sert à cela" (16-17, emphasis mine).

[186] CRS is an acronym for *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*, France's reserve police force devoted to maintaining public order.

[187] Interview material is taken from the round table with Quintane, "La Crise : Que faire ?," which I co-organized for the 20th and 21st-Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium in 2021, and from conversations with the author in preparation for the round table. In *Un œil en moins* she substantiates her comment, writing that "on ne se rend pas compte de la violence et de la répression" (369).

[188] In his essay, Hessel urges the French collectivity to break their habit of indifference to privilege "l'insurrection pacifique contre les moyens de communication de masse" (22). When asked to comment on Hessel's call to action in a recent interview, and specifically if writing is the best means to resist the collective indifference of which Hessel speaks, Quintane commented that she found the expression "insurrection pacifique" to be an oxymoron.

choking the demonstrators experience proposes that if silence has become a social practice in France, "une *asphyxie* sociale" (376, emphasis mine) may also be to blame.

Ostensibly, the French population's taciturnity is symptomatic not only of a generalized indifference, but also of what Stéphane Beaud asserts in *La France invisible* (2008) are the concerted efforts of political figures, the media, researchers, and citizens alike to construct and perpetuate a biased representation of French society (7-8). Furthermore, if the French collectivity turns a blind eye to many of its socio-political issues, Beaud would likely suggest that not only are biased representations to blame, so are France's equally impaired *forms* of representation. Similar to Wampole's observations regarding our paradoxical decrease in knowledge amid the Information Age, though France has seen an increase in the number of tools and platforms used for social inquiry, Beaud denotes a decrease in proposed solutions to its crises. The sociologist compares the "transparency" of data concerning French society to a "kaléidoscope borgne" (8), one plentiful with images, but appearing in nearly indecipherable ways. Concurring with Beaud's assessment of an "illegible" French society, Pierre Rosanvallon argues that the population's ensuing invisibility "laisse en effet le champ libre au développement d'un langage politique saturé d'abstractions, qui n'a plus de prise sur le réel et s'enfonce dans l'idéologie, c'est à dire la constitution de mondes magiques et factices" (Le parlement 18-9). As both scholars demonstrate, this vicious circle of doublespeak is most detrimental to France's precarious populations, who are often misrepresented when represented at all. Invisibilized within the country's social and political spheres, marginalized France remains trapped in an impasse that renders all the more possible *Un œil en moins*' hypothesis that "ça va péter" (Un œil 119).[189]

[189] "Le témoin direct que je suis peut dire que le ça-va-péter est dit ou entendu avec de plus en plus d'intensité, de force de conviction, d'attente" (120).

France's collective and scientific deficits in vision may very well explain contemporary literature's recent endeavor to intervene in the social. In her article "La force des faits dans l'écriture du présent," Alison James suggests that the recent "return of the real" in current literary production is the result of our contemporary era's "soif du réel accrue" (10), a thirst that Quintane's narratives suggest is far from satisfied by political claptrap.[190] Much like *Un œil en moins* critiques today's "diffusion immédiate et virale d'informations non vérifiées" (Un œil 133) and highlights the discrepancy between reality and the stories we are told (200), James holds the media responsible for the fake and beguiling worlds to which Rosanvallon refers, discourses that the collective has come to accept as their reality: our thirst for the real is, in fact, "exacerbée par une culture médiatique saturée d'histoires (plus ou moins) 'vraies'" (La force 10).[191] Given the significant influence of France's political elite on the country's media sectors, it is tempting to conflate the media's manipulative tactics with those apparent in the political sphere.[192] However, as Raymond Kuhn underscores in his book, *The Media in Contemporary France*, though the executive's civil servants go to great lengths to ensure the wide dissemination of "official" versions of events, developments in news culture and the expansion to digital media in recent years have rendered media management increasingly difficult.[193]

To believe Yves Citton, this is because the media now controls us. His monograph, *Médiarchie* (2017), advances that it is no longer democratic values, but rather the media's experiential and influential regime that informs collective consciousness today: "les médias ne

[190] James notes that this slogan is now widely used among literary critics to denote current French literature's "return" to realism practices, its creation of innovative documentary forms, and what she calls its "écriture impossible, suivant la conception lacanienne du réel comme dehors de toute représentation" (La force par. 1).
[191] "Je m'étonne toujours de la différence entre la réalité et ce qu'on raconte" (200)
[192] In *The Media in Contemporary France*, Raymond Kuhn writes that "A long-standing integral part of media policy has been regulation of content. While the press and internet operate in minimally regulated environments, in the case of the broadcasting sector the French state continues both to prohibit and encourage certain types of content for cultural and economic reasons" (100).
[193] See Kuhn's chapter, "The Political Executive and News Management," pp. 101-120.

sont pas seulement des moyens d'information ou de communication, mais des formes d'expérience qui sont en même temps des multiplicateurs de pouvoir" (14). Following his argument, reports communicated in *TF1*'s "JT," *Le Monde*'s daily *une*, or *France Inter*'s "Le 13/14" are "nuages de discours" (ibid) that bear the traces of and perpetuate the power structures facilitating their production. In this way, the media France consumes does not inform the collectivity so much as it influences how it perceives the world (15-19). It is in this reproduction of reality itself that media tactics most closely resemble those Quintane points to in France's political sphere, where "l'important c'est que le réel ne soit pas remarqué" (Un œil 137). In effect, the real time of reality is not what boosts ratings: *Un œil en moins* points to the media's impatience with the on-again, off-again momentum of 2016's demonstrations: "qu'on en finisse ! (thème récurrent des médias à chaque manif)" (106).[194] Lacking the excitement headlines and news tickers demand, in its later months *Nuit Debout* lost its status of feature piece and became nothing more of an interruption to regularly scheduled programming.

Much of what media platforms *do* include in their newsreel reads as absent-mindedly as our heedless smartphone scrolls. While the French media recounts "les aventures des dirigeantes" (167) with great enthusiasm, despite the quantity of news pieces devoted to immigration and "migrants," *Un œil en moins* notes that "ce sont les réfugiés, qu'on traite ici, en France, comme des épluchures" (273). With Quintane, authors Maylis de Kerangal and Alice Zeniter address the superficial manner in which the media tackles humanitarian crises in calling attention to the Mediterranean's recurrent refugee shipwrecks in *À ce stade de la nuit* (2015) and "Le Roman,

[194] A proclivity for impatience is yet another parallel that can be drawn between the French political and media spheres, concerning the *Nuit Debout* demonstrations but also in regard to the "migrant" crisis. *Les enfants vont bien* illustrates this impatience by including an excerpt from Xavier Bertrand's interview with *Le Journal du Dimanche* on the "migrant crisis" in which he says "au bout d'un moment, ça suffit" (154, A), and in a newspaper article fragment, which ostensibly refers to the "migrant" question as being "un sujet qui fait aujourd'hui encore l'actualité" (184, D).

l'archive et le mensonge" (2017), respectfully.[195] Specifically, the three authors relate how the news of these disasters is experienced through French radio, and in so doing disclose the platform's underlying mechanisms and their effect on listeners. Pausing to contemplate the death tolls implicated in the countless capsized boats departing from Libya, and the humanity these numbers dissimulate, their three passages stand in stark contrast to the enumerative tactics deployed in the radio broadcasts. Together, they seem to suggest that we may trace the collectivity's growing indifference toward refugee populations back to a desensitization caused by the dehumanization of "migrants" in popular forms of media.

Upon hearing the news, "encore onze morts au large de la Libye" (362), Quintane panics, and thinks of a young Eritrean woman she met volunteering at the *CAO* whose husband was preparing to depart from Libya. Could he have been on that boat? Kerangal, with her lukewarm coffee and cigarette in hand sits in her kitchen, transfixed by the news that "saturates" the radio waves (10): "un bateau venu de Libye, chargé de plus de cinq cents migrants, a fait naufrage ce matin…près de trois cents victimes seraient à déplorer" (ibid). Zeniter analyzes her own illogical, though seemingly common reaction to the broadcast's numbers rather than the humanity those figures represent (Le Roman 50): "je voyais un cinq et deux zéros" (ibid). Faced with this "tragédie sinistre" (À ce stade 10), the three writers each experience a moment of stupefaction, with Quintane chanting "merde…/ merde et merde," Kerangal's radio seeming to grow louder as names and numbers "déboulent en bande" (À ce stade 10), and Zeniter repeating the death toll with "une sorte d'horreur respectueuse : 'cinq cents…'" (Le Roman 50).

[195] It is also worth mentioning that in each of these texts, the author is seemingly writing as themselves. This is abundantly clear in Zeniter's essay, and more or less evident in *Un œil en moins* given the large quantity of paratextual documentation in which Quintane asserts her involvement with *Nuit Debout* and the *CAO*. Though Kerangal as narrator in *À ce stade de la nuit* is less obvious, the pronoun "je" is used throughout the text, and on pages 36-7 of the book the narrator describes the rectangular road signs designating cities in the departments of Landes, "MAYLIS," and Finistère, "KERANGALL."

It is not by chance that Quintane, Kerangal, and Zeniter share similar reactions, for this is ostensibly the dramatic effect sought by the media. "La radio en rajoute, que c'est le passage le plus difficile, qu'il y a sans cesse des morts, des naufrages, que les bateaux sont de plus en plus chargés, que je ne sais quoi va ouvrir une enquête parce que la Libye, ce qu'on sait depuis longtemps, c'est viols, traite, meurtres et camps" (Un œil 362). Yet, in their respective contemplation of refugee trajectories, the authors also attend to their reactions in similar ways; as Marielle Macé has illustrated, they move from positions of *sidération* to *considération*.[196] Asking "Est-il possible, alors, de dégager ces récits de vie du système de pouvoir qui les forme ou déforme ? De retrouver quelque chose au-dessous ?" (Le Roman 53), Quintane, Kerangal and Zeniter's ensuing literary investigations provide a means to (re)sensitize ourselves to the humanity lacking in popular forms of information, and moreover an opportunity to shed indifference for consideration, a concerned form of attention. In fact, as Lapierre point out, the esteemed consideration of refugees and other precarious populations can provide the collectivity with the opportunity to perceive the world in new, and more meaningful ways. Moving their position of marginality to the center of national and global understandings "peut aussi favoriser une vision dépaysée du monde, un point de vue débarrassé des évidences du (bon) sens et des certitudes familières, étonné, décalé et, par là même, stimulant pour la pensée" (Lapierre 201).

Kerangal and Zeniter would seemingly agree with Quintane that literature is a "vecteur de sensibilisation" (Un œil 377): as I have shown in the previous chapter, through its concern for the sidelined Harki history and examination of contrapuntal historical narratives, *L'Art de perdre* "[fait] entendre des voix et pas uniquement des noms et des dates" (Le Roman 51) in a form of

[196] In her essay *Sidérer, considérer : Migrants en France* (2017), Macé proposes that we move from observing the Other with bewilderment, an emotion that serves to further distance us from others, to considerate observation, "c'est-à-dire d'observation, d'attention, de prévenance, d'égards, d'estime, et par conséquent de réouverture d'un rapport, d'une proximité, d'une possibilité" (23).

literary historiography that enriches and re-sounds the Algerian war and independence in a manner that, much like Algeria, is inherently plural. Meanwhile, Kerangal's stream of consciousness narrative unites personal memory with reflections of cultural, geographic, and linguistic importance, and in so doing recreates the far away island of Lampedusa and the perilous shipwreck scene within the book's pages. Macé has argued that Kerangal "[porte] la responsabilité de son imaginaire" (Porter 398), and I would add that Zeniter, too, seeks to increase collective awareness, or "élargir notre demeure mentale" (388). In this same vein, Quintane's project seizes literary imagination to extend collective hospitality toward the Other. According to Macé, this is current literature's most pertinent responsibility, and particularly if it hopes to "toucher au vif du présent" (ibid).

"…Et si pour une fois je sortais un pavé ?"[197]

In light of the lack of presence it observes in the French collectivity, *Un œil en moins* avidly seeks to harness the present, reminding readers of what Matthew Crawford asserts in *The World Beyond Your Head* (2014) is the "moral imperative to *pay attention* to the shared world, and not to get locked up in your own head" (13, emphasis original). Providing frequent jolts in consciousness through typographic play, variations in language registers, and asking questions in the second person at regular intervals, *Un œil en moins* employs a myriad of attention-grabbing techniques that implicate the reader in the call to conscious for which the book advocates. In particular, an exceptional sense of immediacy dominates Quintane's depiction of the radio broadcast. In swift, log book fashion, the chapter commands reader attention by addressing the grave subjects of the shipwreck, crimes against humanity in Libya, and Paris' 1848 June Days Uprising in a mere two pages.

[197] The sentence "Alors, je me suis dit : Tiens, et si pour une fois je sortais un pavé ?" appears on the back cover of *Un œil en moins*, though not within the narrative itself.

> "Ces excités de gauchistes qui politisent tout, c'est ce qu'on disait au XIX^e^ siècle à propos des socialistes et des républicains, et que l'important c'est de prendre soin les uns des autres, au cas par cas, chaque cas est différent, a son histoire, privée, intime, chacun mérite une attention particulière, est un singularité, ça ne sert à rien de les exciter politiquement et même, ça les dessert, ils ne veulent pas, ils ont bien compris que ça ne leur servait pas, expliquait-on au XIX^e^ siècle, du moins avant 48, il s'agit de s'occuper des pauvres, il s'agit de dépasser la question posée par Locke, *Que faire des pauvres ?*" (363)

Informally-written fragments punctuated with even shorter snippets, single words, and a plethora of commas pull the reader from one line to the next with increasing speed before finally affording the reader a pause with the passage's philosophical question. The breathless ramblings read as it was thought, then swiftly recorded, the author having discussed her process of taking notes quickly and regularly during the writing process in a recent conversation.[198] Johan Faerber qualifies this narrative celerity characteristic of Quintane's larger corpus as her "poétique de la vitesse," which in affording a lightness to language transforms words into action.[199] Read in this manner, the book's energy of urgency symbolizes both that of the author, and that which the text suggests that the collective must, in turn, consecrate to the issues it features.

Urging readers, "il faut que ce soit dit…il faut que je le dise immédiatement et qu'ensuite ceux à qui je l'ai dit le disent à leur tour" (Un œil 95), *Un œil en moins* does indeed aspire to incite action in the collectivity. Unlike the Realist or Naturalist's project to objectively problematize socio-political issues in France however, *Un œil en moins* does not feign an

[198] Taken from a planning meeting in preparation for the round table "La Crise : Que faire ?"
[199] See Faerber's chapter "Écrire : verbe transitif" in his monograph *Après la littérature* (2018) in which he forwards that "pour Quintane, parce qu'on ne peut pas abroger le langage mais au mieux l'abréger, écrire doit gagner en rapidité pour donner une puissance d'action à la parole" (223).

omniscience that would authorize a moralizing critique of French society.[200] As Huppe has suggested, the author's posture is one of an intermediary: "Quintane n'adopte ni la langue ni la posture des écrivains et philosophes qui s'intéressent au quotidien en reproduisant malgré eux la distance qui les en sépare" (Huppe 7). Though *Nuit Debout* sparks her awakening, Quintane nonetheless catches herself distributing a sandwich to a Black man whom she mistakes for a refugee (Un œil 301), and worries that she may be exploiting the asylum-seekers with whom she works for her own political objectives (363). In the manner of Laurent Demanze's contemporary *enquêtrice* from his monograph *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête* (2019), Quintane is "un individu ordinaire, dans la foule de ses contemporains, sommé de composer des œuvres avec une valeur d'usage, d'entrer à nouveaux frais en dialogue avec le monde, d'être partie prenante des enjeux collectifs (19). Deploying an ensemble of techniques that recreate the present, Quintane's text ambitions not to write the real, but to "interroger les conditions de sa fabrique, d'inquiéter les institutions qui le construisent et de questionner les conditions de son exploration" (21).

A project that began as an endeavor to enhance her own awareness (Un œil 373), in *Un œil en moins* the author's struggle to harness the ever-fleeting present is palpable. By way of illustration, the juxtaposition of temporally differentiated narratives in the book's passage dedicated to Paris' tumultuous June 14 manifestation recreates the instability and unease one might experience in trying to make sense of such an encounter: "je décide alors de remonter en marchant vite toute la manif voyant **un homme un peu âgé surgit sur la chaussée la tête en**

[200] Informing my analysis is Gérard Gengembre's *Réalisme et naturalisme* (1997), in which he defines and delineates the two related, though distinct movements. According to Gengembre, Realism's objectivity can be traced back to the movement's belief in art's mimetic function, what Champfleury would refer to as its "sincerity" (4). Realist novels were not mere copies of the world; instead, their authors presumed objective stance rendered them "interpreters of their time," capable of representing "la nature telle qu'elle est, sans mensonge ni ornements" (5-6). As Gengembre shows, Naturalism's objectivity stems from its avowed ties to science; for Zola, the novelist was both an observer and an experimenter whose combined actions produced both social and scientific knowledge (*Le roman expérimental*, 7-8). "Nous partons bien des faits vrais, qui sont notre base indestructible, mais…il faut que nous produisions et que nous dirigions les phénomènes ; c'est là notre part d'invention, de génie dans l'œuvre" (10).

sang après l'espace de séparation rituel entre les groupes, que syndicat3CGT est en fait l'une des branches de la CGT, CGTchimie, CGTsanté, CGTportuaires, etc." (77). At times, the narrative even seems to reject the reader, discordantly punctuating lived experience with ambiguous philosophical musings, rendering readers observers not of socio-political activity in France, but of the author's efforts to gather the many elements that shape how we experience the world. Adding to Faerber's "poétique de la vitesse," I would also like to suggest that *Un œil en moins* incarnates a poetics of *justesse*, not only in the pertinence of its project and topics, but also through its *just* depiction of the complicated human experience.[201] The brisk lyricism observed in the shipwreck and manifestation scenes is indicative of Quintane's own difficulties when faced with the present, which comes to represent a larger, collective grappling with events marking French imagination.

Responding to what she observes is the collective's "peur de percevoir le présent (événements, détails), de le sentir avec trop d'acuité" (374), *Un œil en moins* asserts that before France can address *presence*, it will first be necessary to explore its reluctance to confront the *present*. Indeed, Quintane's will to *reprendre* stands in stark contrast to what she observes is a generalized tendency to *suspend*, resulting in a progressive desensitization to the world around us: "un petit souci personnel, une *contrariété*, est capable… de suspendre l'attention portée au fait, à l'événement, à ce qui n'est pas toi. Le souci surprend d'abord l'attention, pour mieux la suspendre, et cette suspension, à la longue, atteint les dimensions d'un problème mental collectif" (314-15, emphasis original). Much like her predecessor Georges Perec advocated that we rediscover our capacity for astonishment in examining "*l'infra-ordinaire*," Quintane's narrative questions how we experience the events that shape our lives, or "the real," though with

[201] I have chosen the French word, *justesse*, not only because it phonetically compliments *vitesse*, but because the word's definitions speak to both the relevance and precision of the book's narrative.

one significant difference: *Un œil en moins* suggests that the disasters Perec once characterized as "l'événement, l'insolite, l'extra-ordinaire" (Perec 9) have, in fact, become ordinary in contemporary France.[202]

If France suffers from myopia, the seeming quotidian nature of collective trauma appears to be a vital factor. As a result of the onslaught of terrorist attacks in 2015, *Un œil en moins* depicts an irrevocably damaged collective, unable to accurately discern the stakes of current events: "seul un acte sidérant pourrait produire un effet de réel…ce qui est grave, ce sont les attentats. Les attentats étaient indéniablement le foyer de la gravité. En comparaison, le reste, tout le reste, ne faisait pas le poids : n'était pas grave" (374). A phenomenon that Perec identifies in *L'infra-ordinaire*'s "Approches de quoi ?" (1989), the larger than life nature of current events coupled with their omnipresence in today's boundless medias have only upped the ante in our twenty-first century.[203] Asking how literature might rehabilitate our relationship with the present in a climate where everything but mass murder has become banal, while Perec imagines a language able to grasp reality's "*choses* communes" (11, emphasis mine), *Un œil en moins*'s swift and complicated poetics entangles reader attention in what it shows are France's critical common *causes*.

Yet, Quintane's most recent publication, *Un hamster à l'école* (2021), reminds us that literature, too, must confront its own issues with the present: "le problème de la poésie, c'est le même que celui de l'Histoire : c'est le présent. Ni la poésie-pâtissière ni l'Histoire-pâtissière ne

[202] In *L'infra-ordinaire* (1989), Perec advocates for the importance of the most outwardly mundane aspects of our existence, and encourages his readers "interroger ce qui semble tellement aller de soi que nous en avons oublié l'origine. Retrouver quelque chose de l'étonnement que pouvaient éprouver Jules Verne ou ses lecteurs en face d'un appareil capable de reproduire et de transporter les sons. Car il a existé, cet étonnement, et des milliers d'autres, et ce sont eux qui nous ont modelés" (12).

[203] "Les raz-de-marée, les éruptions volcaniques, les tours qui s'écroulent, les incendies de forêts, les tunnels qui s'effondrent, Publicis qui brûle et Aranda qui parle ! Horrible ! Terrible ! Monstrueux ! Scandaleux ! Mais où est le scandale ? Le vrai scandale ? Le journal nous a-t-il dit autre chose que : soyez rassurés, vous voyez bien que la vie existe, avec ses hauts et ses bas, vous voyez bien qu'il se passe des choses" (L'infra-ordinaire 10).

savent quoi faire du présent" (39).[204] At issue, here, is not the present itself. Creating compound nouns of both poetry and history by adding the adjective "pâtissière," Quintane hints at the methodical fabrication common to the two forms of writing, a subject she tackles in *Un œil en moins*. Defining history as "les événements qui sont mis en récits (en histoires)" (Un œil 136), Quintane forwards that it is our penchant for story-telling that blocks our access to events themselves.[205] Over time, the collective accumulates layer upon layer of tales producing what she describes as a "croûte" (ibid), a crust, or even scab in the context of history, that progressively takes hold of collective imagination. So as to avoid adding to France's already sizable national narrative "crust," Quintane chooses instead to attend to the country's distorted sense of magnitude and engage with the present altogether differently.

Creating "une poésie qui ne consiste pas à raconter des histoires" (377), *Un œil en moins* demonstrates that to *reprendre* in literature is to transform how we suspend our attention. With Crawford, the book shows that the ethical responsibility of the collective is not bound up solely in *what* it chooses to pay attention to; *how* we attend to these phenomena is equally as consequential in determining our reality, and the fact that "we're in it together" (20) is what makes this attention political, not the act itself. Moving away from our crippling fixation on "les soucis personnels [qui] minorent, dissimulent et même suppriment l'élan qu'on croyait avoir" (Un œil 314), and an inclination to use monumental events from our collective past to invalidate the present (374), literature can help us to disengage from the filters that cloud our vision. Drawing from a now uncommon definition in which the verb "suspend" is to "keep in a state of

[204] The page number listed refers to a Word Document of *Un Hamster à l'école* that that I received from the author. I do not yet have the hard copy of the book but will be ordering it soon.
[205] "On raconte que les récits ou filtres forment une telle croûte par leur nombre qu'on n'aurait plus accès qu'à cette croûte, et que nous serions tous, tels que nous sommes, pris dans la croûte jusqu'à pourquoi pas être la croûte même" (Un œil 136).

mental fixity, attention, or contemplation; to rivet the attention of" (OED), we can read "Mais l'histoire n'est pas un toboggan" (Un œil 227) differently; though history is indeed a collective legacy, it is not necessarily a dead end to a foretold future of continued cruelty. *Un œil en moins* shows how literature can function as an escape route of sorts, a zone where we may temporarily pause the press of time to consider, if not the real itself, at the very least the difference between "stories" and events. In this respect, Quintane's just poetics affords readers an exercise in presence, an opportunity to reevaluate their relationship to reality in a space free from daily drudgery, political prevarication, and media spectacle. I would like to suggest that the book's will to *reprendre* thus becomes the collectivity's opportunity to *se reprendre*, or to get a grip, which Wampole artfully describes as the process of "[learning] to become a visitor in our own house" (On Distraction 98). In attending simultaneously to the present and reader presence, *Un œil en moins* is the *pavé* that lands in our living room, wrests us from our contemporary slumber, shatters unconsciousness, and dares us to envision a more promising fate for the collective.[206]

***Dismantling Discourse in* Les Enfants vont bien**

In repurposing current events to assert breakdowns in France's free, egalitarian, and fraternal Republic, *Un œil en moins* implores readers to reflect on their potential roles in promulgating social malaise. Its unofficial sequel takes this initiative a step further and provides a model in overcoming collective blindness: *Les Enfants vont bien* is an inquiry into the *Hexagone*'s wolf in sheep's clothing, or the furtive nuances present in the country's highly ordered discursive system. As Gayle Rubin argues in her seminal essay, "The Traffic in Women" (1975), "we cannot dismantle something that we underestimate or do not understand" (198). In

[206] It is important to note that the word "pavé" in French refers to both a cobblestone, traditionally used for barricades and at times, weapons during demonstrations in Paris such as those of May 1968, and a sizeable book, which *Un œil en moins* is at nearly 400 pages.

order to escape what the author refers to as "l'ère de la défonce" (*Un œil* 61), more than reassess our own proclivity to indifference and prejudice, we must learn to recognize the deployment of discriminatory discursive tactics and reflect on how this practice informs collective imagination.[207]

Quintane is forthcoming with her decision to reiterate concerns for France's asylum seekers; taking issue with the text's "parti pris narratif" (Les enfants 7), the author deems *Un œil en moins* "insuffisant à rendre compte de la violence faite, en France, à ces hommes, ces femmes et ces enfants" (ibid). By contrast, *Les enfants vont bien*'s uncommon poetic structure becomes a close reading of the symbolic violence endured by refugee populations and the discursive trends that participate in their stigmatization and exclusion. If *Un œil en moins* emphasizes the importance of creation, in that the enduring testament that is the book encourages the collectivity to proactively engage with reality and thus draw new conclusions about life in France, *Les Enfants vont bien* attends to the logistical foundation necessary to realize collective resistance: "l'idée, c'est de faire quelque chose qui n'existe pas encore" (Un œil 341).[208] For creativity to become effective, developing one's critical dexterity is paramount. Similar to what Matthew Crawford calls a "disciplined attention…the kind of action that joins us to the world" (26), Quintane's meticulous reading of the oppressive discursive web entangling refugees in France becomes a means to form more attentive readers, listeners, and as I will later suggest, *résistants*.

[207] In Livre 1 Chapter 14, Quintane describes a protest at a local high school during which the CPE (*conseiller principal d'éducation*) yells "dégagez où (sic) je défonce vos petites gueules !" (60). From this anecdote she begins to reflect on how France has entered an "ère de défonce," in which one risks physical and psychological harm not only if they protest, but also if they challenge France's established norms.
[208] "Les actions. / Sont le plus important, *avec la logistique*" (*Un œil* 64, my emphasis).

Concretizing Symbolic Violence

In *Les Enfants vont bien*, to *reprendre* can first be understood as the author's strategic use of the words of others, which are divided into five distinct groups that comprise the book's textual rendering of discursive power. Seemingly, each group's position in this hierarchy corresponds to their level of influence within this framework. The large-font attributed to the words of French politicians domineers the book's pages (A), reinforced by graceful, italicized excerpts from law texts (B), colloquial snippets from *CAO* staff emails (C), and bolded clippings from news items (D).[209] It is only at very bottom of the page, "un peu à part – parce que le vocabulaire, la syntaxe, la ponctuation n'ont pas le même ton et témoignent d'une vision réellement différente de la situation" (Les Enfants 8-9), that the reader catches a glimpse of the population affected by this accumulation of dominance (E). However, even at the very bottom of Quintane's literary mock-up of France's hierarchical discursive system, one perceives only a faint echo of France's refugees. As Gayatri Spivak has famously asserted, "the subaltern cannot speak," and the refugees' despair passes through the words of aid network volunteers.[210] In one volunteer's testimony, the words "plaignant," "lui," and "il" are the only indications of the asylum seeker's presence in the court hearing they describe:

> "Je suis donc passé en citoyen dans cette fourmilière de gens muets au regard fixe, suis rentré dans une salle et j'ai essayé de me mettre à la place du '*plaignant'* qui voit mais ne comprend pas…On *lui* traduit, *il* essaye de parler de ses souffrances. On leur traduit. Pas de problème, c'est fini vous pouvez rentrer, votre pays est démocratique et calme" (Les Enfants 222, E, emphasis mine).

[209] I will be adding the letters A-E to my in-line citations of *Les Enfants vont bien* to reference both the genre and placement of the varying discourses featured within the book.
[210] See Spivak's seminal article "Can the Subaltern speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture."

Juxtaposing the primacy allotted to political orations with the immediate dismissal of refugee speech, *Les Enfants vont bien* wonders if refugees could speak, let alone assuredly understand the convoluted language of court proceedings in a foreign tongue, would France hear them?

Les Enfants vont bien's discursive approach is an essential component to understanding the collective blindness its prequel addresses. The work of concrete poetry forwards that concomitant to France's visual impairment is a deficit in audition inhibiting the collectivity from hearing its most precarious populations. As Quintane's organizational strategy shows, this is in part because populations such as the refugees are quelled by discourses of power that show little interest in marginalized perspectives. In his book delineating the immigrant condition in France, *La Double absence* (1999), sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad posits that rather than investigate issues confronting today's refugees, it is the refugees themselves that the French government views, and accordingly treats as the problem, "…un phénomène qui risque de perturber l'ordre public (social, politique, moral, etc.) (317-18). Still, it appears that there is a concurrent effort to tune out refugee discourse, either strategically, out of discomfort, or even ignorance. *CAO* emails portray volunteers who show more interest in logistical matters than the individuals with whom they work, a disregard evident in an inconsiderate speaking prompt used to structure a FLE class session – "imaginons-nous voyageant dans un pays étranger : de quoi avons-nous besoin ?" (16, C) – and the importance assigned to student notebook protocol (25, C). Moreover, a palpable infantilization in these correspondences supports Sayed's claim that in France, the immigrant

figure remains a minor (374).[211] Like the proverb stating that children should be seen and not heard, the place allotted to immigrants in France is often corporeal, a supporting role opposing body and mind, and thus physical and cognitive capacities, "ce qui sous-entend l'exclusion du langage verbal, langage de la tête" (ibid).[212] Deprived of a veritable arena through which to vocalize their struggles, and disregarded when they attempt to do so, today's refugees are "doubly absent" in the French collectivity and furthermore, portrayed as a hindrance to the Republic's well-being.[213]

In their absence, snippets from political speeches included in *Les enfants vont bien* reveal an abundance of discourse depicting immigrant problems, or immigrants as *the* problem, which has a significant, and negative impact on their representation in French society (Sayed 317-18). In fact, the proliferation of this discourse seems to have resulted in the magnification of France's refugee "crisis." According to surveys conducted in fall of 2018 and 2019, 47% of French citizens surveyed overestimated the immigrant population in France, 61% deemed the country's immigrant and asylum policies "trop laxistes," and 63% advanced that there are too many "foreigners" in France.[214] Quintane's montage illustrates how the production of this "migrant"

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[211] Sayed writes that "l'immigré reste un mineur. Ainsi s'explique le grand nombre d'entreprises de 'sollicitude' philanthropique dont le travailleur immigré (notamment maghrébin ou originaire d'un pays du tiers monde) est l'objet : elles lui apportent une assistance (publique ou privée) qui, au fond, revient à un travail pédagogique et à une action d'inculcation comparables à l'œuvre éducative qui s'exerce sur l'enfant, même si en agissant de la sorte elle contribuent aussi à maintenir l'immigré dans la situation qui lui est faite d'éternel assisté et d'éternel 'apprenti'" (374). I would like to note that Sayed is writing of immigrants rather than refugees, and Northern African immigrants specifically. While I draw a parallel between immigrants and refugees here, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that their situations are quite different, and also that every individual immigrant or refugee carries with them their singular circumstances that affect their experience in France.

[212] "L'immigré, c'est avant tout son corps, sa force corporelle et sa présence par son corps biologique différent des autres corps…le 'corps' est aperçu généralement comme l'opposé structural de la 'tête'…ce qui sous-entend l'exclusion du langage verbal, langage de la tête" (373-4).

[213] While Sayed intimates that the immigrant is doubly absent in that they are no longer recognized as veritable citizens of their home country, and denied full access to their current country, I would also like to suggest that we use this expression to evoke that they are doubly-silenced within the French collectivity.

[214] See the survey conducted by *ELABE* in October 2019, "1 Français sur 2 surestime la part de la population immigrée en France," and the September 2019 article from *LCI* "L'immigration inquiète les Français, qui sont 63% à penser qu'il y a 'trop d'étrangers' en France."

mentality comes full circle: the enigmatic fragment "il faut qu'ils sachent que beaucoup de français pensent" (218, A) and the abovementioned data implies that most French citizens would agree that, "au bout d'un moment, ça suffit" (154, A). Yet, "a lot of French citizens" is not all, and among those who suspect that the arrival of refugees is something to fear, it is important to consider the extent to which provocative statements like "si nous ne prenons pas le taureau par les cornes," (108, A) may have swayed collective opinion.

In fact, the exacting critique of political musings in *Les Enfants vont bien* is complementary to *L'Art de perdre*'s inclusive historiographical project. If *L'Art de perdre*, which likens History to a "vaste panse" (Zeniter 18) of suitable narratives that it must circumvent in order to privilege sidelined histories, *Les Enfants vont bien* extracts from this crowded space the oppressive voices that participate in the silencing of voices, in History, and elsewhere. In the absence of narrative, these isolated fragments deprive readers of the persuasive rhetoric in which such statements are usually enmeshed, and through the modification of how these messages reach readership, *Les Enfants vont bien* inhibits the consumption of political speech as it is designed to be consumed. While borrowing phrases already in circulation may at first not appear as inventive as other works in the author's oeuvre, I would argue that concrete poetry is an original alternative to the manifesto, a genre she explores in *Un œil en moins*. *Les Enfants vont bien* approaches the refugee cause in a converse manner, speaking not through the author's words, but through her calculated gesture of compiling refugee-related discourse that speaks volumes in the absence of a narrator. Moreover, Quintane borrows from politicians the practice of extracting orations from their original context and manipulating them to further one's political cause, and in this way using not only their words, but also their own tactics against them.

Quintane is not the first to utilize the montage method to isolate and analyze discursive trends. Inspired by works such as Heimrad Bäker's *transcript* (1998), and Jacques-Henri Michot's *Un ABC de la barbarie* (1998), more than a collection of borrowed discourse, Quintane's classification of written and spoken word is a borrowed artistic medium method.[215] Like *Les Enfants vont bien*, Bäker and Michot's texts are works of concrete poetry that glean their poetic content from a myriad of sources.[216] A member of the National Socialist German Worker's party as a young adult, in his later years Bäker's poetry bridges the divide between art's formal and political concerns in its analysis and assembly of documents depicting the planning and implementation of the Holocaust. French author and chronicler of polemic language Michot sketches France and its prestigious world of art at the turn of the twenty-first century in an alphabetical inventory of terms, phrases, and references to songs, and works of fine and performance art. Though their subjects diverge, Bäker, Michot, and Quintane's concrete poems are all intense studies in discourse, a method Quintane seemingly meditates on adopting in *Un œil en moins*.

The author ponders how the "équipe légère" of an unadorned textual form may better illustrate a literary project's ethical and methodological implications (Un œil 302):

> "sauf que les objectivistes ne retapaient pas des phrases sympathiques, au contraire ils retapaient les phrases de procès horribles, des témoignages plus insoutenables les uns que les autres, et comme pour qu'on les lise d'une traite, que rien nous échappe, et qu'on

[215] In *Les Enfants vont bien*'s preface, Quintane explains that her book "hérite d'une forme et de façons de faire inventées ou utilisées par d'autres ; il me reste à les remercier et à les citer "Charles Reznikoff, dont les éditions P.O.L ont publié une traduction de *Témoignage* en 2012 ; Heimrad Bäker, dont les éditions Héros-Limite ont publié en 2017 *Transcription* ; Jacques-Henri Michot, dont *Un ABC de la barbarie*, publié chez Al Dante en 1998, a durablement marqué ma génération" (10-11).

[216] As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, a work of poetry considered "concrete" is one "in which the significance and the effect required depend to a larger degree than is usual upon the physical shape and pattern of the printed material."

> n'échappe à rien, ils avaient adopté cette méthode, qui consiste à ressaisir presque telles quelles des phrases terribles, si bien que l'effet, au bout d'un moment, c'est qu'on repose le livre, on ne peut plus continuer ce livre à la fois si facile à lire et insupportable, de telle sorte que je me demande si ce n'est pas le seul genre de phrases qu'on peut moralement récrire telles quelles, parce que sinon à quoi ça sert de récrire des phrases sympathiques pour les rendre encore plus sympathiques ? Voulez-vous être dans un livre comme dans des pantoufles ? Aimeriez-vous pantoufler dans ce bouquin?" (303-4)

Readers, and particularly the avid readership of France's *production restreinte* are at home in traditional narrative. By comparison, *Les Enfants vont bien*'s predominating starkness is disconcerting, and with P.O.L's price tag of eighteen euros, even the most devoted and open-minded of bibliophiles may wonder what it is they are purchasing. Yet, as Arnaud Viviant explains in a recent interview with *Ouest-France*, for Quintane literature is not merchandise, but rather a means of political commitment: "[elle] est l'exemple type d'un écrivain qui fait un travail littéraire et politique important, sans chercher à vendre. Elle est professeure, ce n'est pas un écrivain professionnel, qui gagne sa vie avec ses livres" (Pitard 6). Furthermore, it is precisely this unsettling effect Quintane's book seeks to engender in readers. The author's use of "pantoufles" and "pantoufler" suggests that there is much to gain from leaving comfort behind and specifically, from presenting discourse in a such a way that readers cannot avoid its aggressive and violent connotations.

The selection of concrete poetry as the medium of choice demonstrates that *speaking about* the political may no longer be adequate to make a political statement.[217] With *Les enfants vont bien*, I posit that the author signals literature's responsibility to *show* the very underpinnings

[217] In *Les années 10* (2014), Quintane asserts that "le livre, pour être politique, devait parler de politique" (197).

of its operations. Concretely illustrating the trickle-down effect political enunciation has on the texts it produces, and the government agencies it sponsors, *Les enfants vont bien* points to the normalization of nationalistic discourse in France. From the government's reminder that "dans la République, les fonctionnaires appliquent les mesures du gouvernement" (Les Enfants 29, A), to laws bestowing French law enforcement with "*de nouvelles capacités d'investigation dans le cadre de la retenue pour vérification du droit*" (192, B, emphasis original), to the *CAO*'s warning that assisting asylum seekers with their barrage of paperwork is, strangely enough, not permitted within the scope of organization's professional project, "[financé] par l'état" (207, C), with each discursive level more power is stripped from the refugees in the name of the Republic.[218] The juxtaposition of these three groupings of speech emanating from institutional spheres accentuates the written trace attesting to a state-sponsored deprivation of human rights in France, "au pays des droits de l'homme" (205, E).

Moreover, Quintane's poetic framework disrupts the notion that the discourse she mobilizes, and that of the political sphere, law documents and internal emails in particular is, in fact "normal," or speech we should accept at face value. The poem's capacity to engage our senses and mobilize critical thinking skills draws attention to what the author qualifies as "le double sens, le vide à peine masqué et le ridicule de certains de ces 'éléments'…de plus en plus établis" (10). Unlike the linearity of narrative, which one typically reads from beginning to end, with its intense focus on form the poem seemingly suspends time, its reader pausing to reflect on a word, return to an earlier stanza, skip ahead, or speak a verse aloud. As Paul Valéry writes in "Rhumbs," his collection of notes that is part dictionary, part verse, and part essay, the poem is

[218] This excerpt is strikingly similar to a phrase Emmanuel Macron pronounced in his speech in Calais on January 16, 2018: "Et dans la République, les fonctionnaires appliquent *la politique* du gouvernement" ("Discours du président de la République auprès des forces mobilisées," emphasis mine).

"cette hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens" (79). Typically conceived of within the negative context of doubt, in *Les Enfants vont bien* the hesitation proper to poetics becomes an ally; the poem's discursive reformatting interrupts familiar speech which, when read in an unfamiliar context, renders readers increasingly perceptive to its content so that we might regain our ability to listen, and read with earnest.

Cut and Paste: Constructive Critique

It is not merely the fragments' content that *Les Enfants vont bien* calls into question: Quintane's montage quite literally illustrates that certain Republican voices are valued over others. Of note in the book's organizational strategy is that it is not the container that determines a phrase's placement, but rather the orator or body responsible for transmitting the message, and their level of influence within France's bureaucratic sphere. By way of example, while level D is devoted to content from the media, an excerpt from an article in *Le Dauphiné Libéré* appears in line A, seemingly because it was spoken by a representative of the French State.[219] Advancing the necessary work that is "le repérage et l'analyse des 'éléments de langage'" (Les Enfants 11) of the discursively imperious, the book demonstrates that in order to (re)locate the voices of France's asylum seekers and other precarious populations, it is first imperative to scrutinize France's presiding discourses. Quintane's discursive appropriation thus becomes more than an act of show and tell: in showcasing France's phraseology on foreigners, *reprendre* becomes a critical endeavor, to "faire à quelqu'un des observations à propos d'une erreur ou d'une faute qu'il

[219] In the book, the phrase reads "l'efficacité opérationnelle entre les forces de l'ordre françaises et italiennes" (176, A). However, the full text of the article reads: "le représentant de l'État Préfet souligne, également, l'efficacité opérationnelle entre les forces de l'ordre françaises et italiennes."

vient de commettre," or even to "faire des reproches à quelqu'un sur sa conduite [et] son attitude" (TLFi).[220]

What Quintane described in a recent interview to be her "saut formel" in *Les Enfants vont bien* was an effort to amply capture the collection of disparaging narratives encompassing the refugee figure in France today.[221] A technique that simultaneously renders violence manifest and commits violence in return, the text's montage format demonstrates literature's potential to become an act of resistance.[222] Most apparent in its attention to form is the book's representation of the hierarchical frontiers governing the country's discursive system. A seeming challenge to France's popular political slogan, "La République, c'est tous ensemble !," the montage's discursive groupings proposes that "tous" is subjective, and highly ordered in a country that is increasingly preoccupied with what it means to be French, to include how acceptable standards of living vary according to a population's position in this hierarchy."[223] As far as France's refugees are concerned, "il ne faut pas s'attendre à un hébergement de luxe qui serait supérieur en confort à certains Français…" (76, E). Pitting the increasingly contested notion of "les Français.es de souche" against the Other, the book's format mimics the opposition played out in

[220] This nuance of the verb is derived from its Latin origins: like reprendre, the Latin verb *reprehendere* can mean to recover, but also to critique, to blame, or even to refute.
[221] Taken from a planning meeting in preparation for the round table "La Crise : Que faire ?"
[222] I use the term "montage" here (as opposed to collage for example) because it is a term the author herself has used to describe her text during our interviews, and also due to the word's definition in French, which incorporates not only the idea of assembly, but also a hierarchical nuance in the "action de porter ou de mettre quelque chose dans un endroit plus élevé" (TLFi).
[223] This slogan is frequently used in political campaigns in France, the newspaper *Le Parisien* noting in 2014 that "ensemble" was the word most frequently used by political candidates in municipal elections with 86 occurrences, with "avenir" in second place (39 occurrences), "union" in third (23 occurrences), and "pour tous" in fourth (22 occurrences). In 2016, the French government used the slogan as a title for a series of videos created to teach children about the country's values, (see the website "La République, c'est tous ensemble !" included in bibliography).

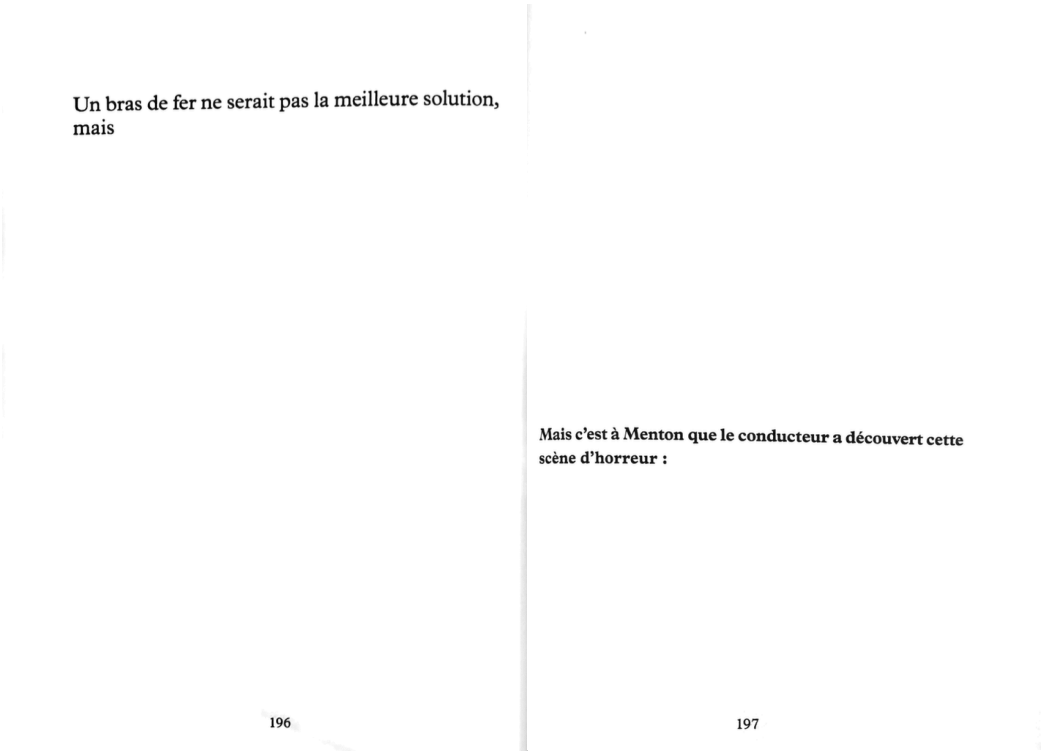
debates over who belongs to and in France, and those who do not.[224] Exemplifying this phenomenon is a newspaper article that, by commencing its subtitle with a hashtag and ending with a reference to Calais' "jungle," seemingly contrasts a tech-savvy French population with an implied primitive intruder. The article alerts, "#FrançaisesFrançais – Ce village des Alpes-de-Haute-Provence se prépare à accueillir, d'ici un mois, une centaine de migrants érythréens et soudanais, à la suite du démantèlement de la 'jungle' de Calais."[225] More than display the oppressive and compounding weight generated within France's discursive system, however, skillful decoupage incarnates the work's critical method. Disrupting the continuity of a discourse that promulgates wholeness while it simultaneously divides, *Les Enfants vont bien* is the tool that cuts through France's "tous ensemble" to reveal what it proposes is a biased reasoning underpinning Republican ideals.

Yet, as Bruno Latour queries in his monograph *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013), what are we to expect from political discourse, which "moves crab-wise, [and] is the 'Prince of twisted words'" (336)? Or, are we the ones to blame for confounding the political with a practice designed to inform (335)? Avoiding the impasse Latour presents in which political speech is deemed either entirely reasonable or unreasonable, and in which we lose all basis from which to develop a critique (328-36), through the act of decoupage *Les Enfants vont bien* treats political discourse among others neither as information nor as misinformation, but rather as

[224] An article from *Le Figaro* explains that the expression "Français de souche" was first used in the nineteenth century to refer to colonialists settled for prolonged periods, and then by Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s to distinguish "pieds-noirs" from autochthones in Algeria, both of whom were "French" at that time. The expression acquires its ideological connotation when it is appropriated by France's far-right political movement in the 1980s, and Michèle Tribalat crystallizes the expression in this context in 1991. In *Cent ans d'immigration, étrangers d'hier, Français d'aujourd'hui*, she specifies that "Français de souche" are those born in France to two parents who were also born in France.

[225] "Champtercier, village tranquille rattrapé par la crise migratoire." *Le Monde*, 17 October 2016. An excerpt from this article appears on page 159 of *Les Enfants vont bien*: " 'Mais si demain quelqu'un écrit 'c'est beau, dommage qu'il y ait un camp de migrants à côté,' vous pensez que les gens vont continuer à venir ? Moi, je ne crois pas" (159, D).

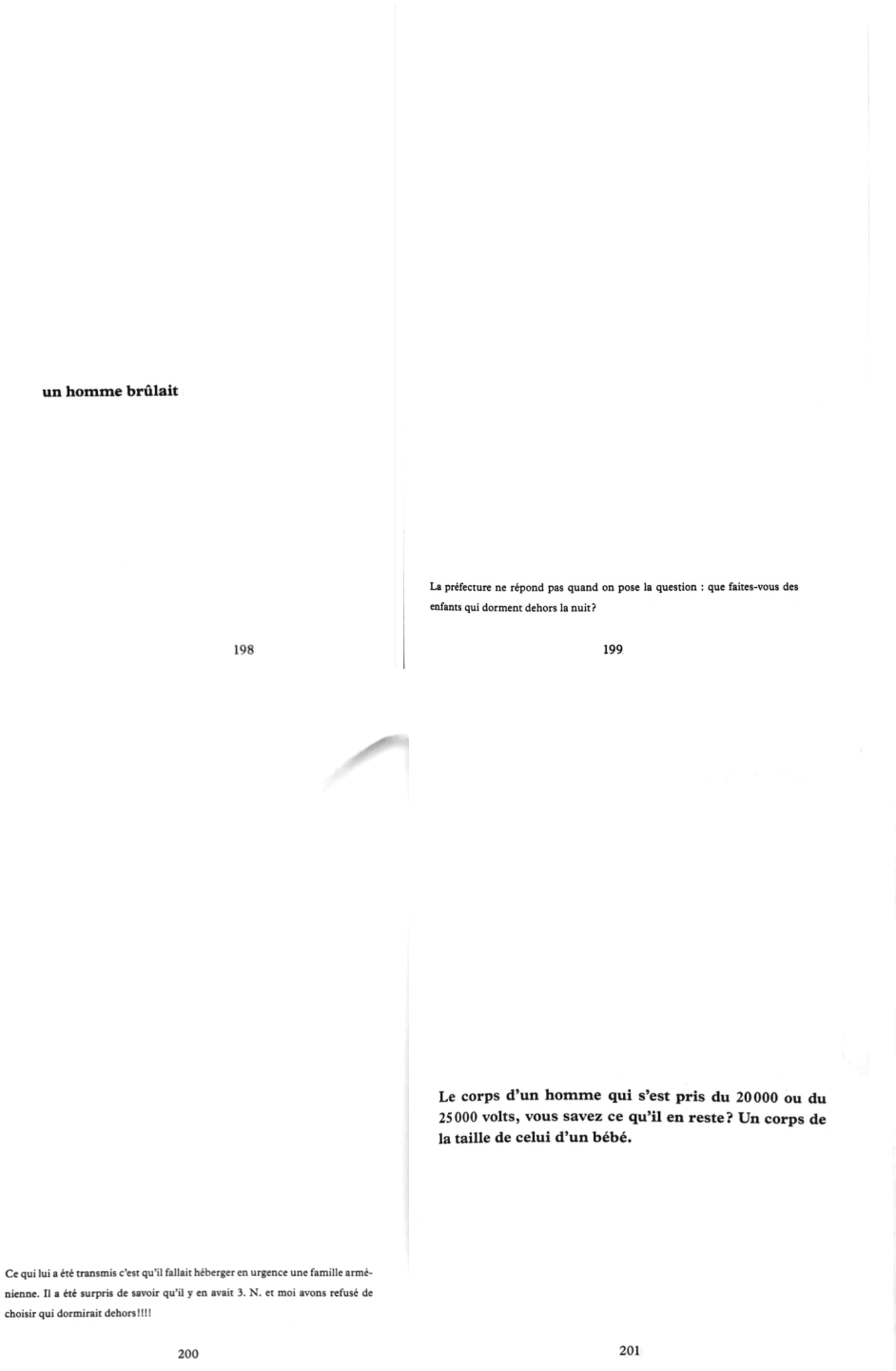
forms to detect, dissect, and analyze. Unlike *Un œil en moins*'s caustic remarks, *Les Enfants vont bien* diverges from commentary in favor of calculating cuts that serve to *couper la parole*, or *couper court* France's anti-immigration diatribe. However, Quintane's text does more than interrupt France's refugee debate: the cutting and pasting action affords a new medium to these discursive trends in which readers may espy their unmitigated violence. For, while their remarks are arguably callous, staunch opponents to immigration speak a language born from reason, in that they exploit logic as a means to condemn asylum seekers. "La question est de savoir jusqu'où le gouvernement est prêt à aller pour les amoindrir" (233, E).


Un bras de fer ne serait pas la meilleure solution, mais

196

Mais c'est à Menton que le conducteur a découvert cette scène d'horreur :

197


un homme brûlait

198

La préfecture ne répond pas quand on pose la question : que faites-vous des enfants qui dorment dehors la nuit?

199

Ce qui lui a été transmis c'est qu'il fallait héberger en urgence une famille arménienne. Il a été surpris de savoir qu'il y en avait 3. N. et moi avons refusé de choisir qui dormirait dehors!!!!

200

Le corps d'un homme qui s'est pris du 20000 ou du 25000 volts, vous savez ce qu'il en reste? Un corps de la taille de celui d'un bébé.

201

Figures 2.2 through 2.4: Excerpts from Les Enfants vont bien*, pp. 196-201*

A combative hostility pervades the book's top tier in the phrases of an elite who, "d'une manière générale…ne s'interdit rien" (Les Enfants 65). Though France was forced to reckon

with its domineering, colonial agenda in the twentieth century, Quintane's book denotes that the language used to speak about the Other has not yet been decolonized.[226] Often treated as pariahs, or even criminals, one internal email describes the refugees' activity at the *CAO* as "anarchique" (53, C), while one aid-worker's testimony emphasized that from the moment they step on French soil, "depuis le début, le 'plaignant' est l'accusé : accusé de mensonges et de calomnies contre un pays respectable" (221, E). Subject to a strategic and pejorative distinction deployed to rationalize their expulsion, at best asylum seekers are viewed as being "un peu trop revendicatifs" (204, E) in a country that is not their own. In delineating the varying degrees of violence refugees confront on a daily basis in France, the montage manifestly reconstitutes the implicit, yet vicious discursive and administrative cycles in which they have become trapped:

> "La préfecture du 04 les envoie sur Mxxxxxxxx avec un ticket de car aller simple. À Mxxxxxxxx, on leur dit de revenir d'où ils viennent car on ne peut leur trouver d'hébergement…/ Une fois revenus, on leur dit que non on ne peut rien faire et qu'il faut redescendre, désolé c'est pas notre faute, on y peut rien. / Et ça recommence. (67, E)[227]

As Quintane notes in the text's unofficial foreword, despite the tenacity shown by refugee aid workers, one cannot help but sense their fatigue and discouragement vis-à-vis the *langue de bois* pervading the upper echelons of bureaucratic discourse (9). When voices and initiatives in support of refugees are met with authoritative condescendence, arguing that "il faut bien comprendre que les solutions gentillettes, les demi-mesures ne régleront plus rien" (62, A), what

[226] In *Mythologies Postcoloniales* (2018) Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno argue that contrary to popular belief, France is not a "post-racial" or "neutral" society. The two scholars associate the prevalence of ongoing, quotidian discrimination with the fact that "le langage n'est pas décolonisé, parce que les corps sont préjugés en fonction de toute une histoire de racialisation de l'autre non-blanc." Moreover, they compare the functioning of the insidious, racialized representations of the Other that continue to circulate in France and influence collective imagination to that of Barthesian mythologies (12).

[227] Quintane does not include city names in the book, and instead uses only the first followed by the letter "x" for each of the missing letters in the city name. For example, we could read "Mxxxxxxxx" as "Marseille."

is a well-intentioned citizen to do? *Les Enfants vont bien* proposes that we reappropriate and physically fracture speech in order to redirect discourse and transfigure its persuasive power in favor of marginalized France. Juxtaposing refugee families "sans logement, sans aucune aide" (56, E) with the promise of "une prime exceptionnelle de résultats" (57, A) for police officers in Calais, the government reveals its contradictory "cœur intelligent" (19, A) through the book's montage format. Before realizing this critical technique in *Les Enfants vont bien*, in *Un œil en moins* Quintane imagines how literature might enact retaliation:

> "Dans l'état où est la littérature, et qu'on en déduit, au mieux, une place dans un manuel scolaire, une décoration proposée par une conseillère du ministère-moignon de la Culture, un entretien avec un sociologue, *qu'au moins une phrase tapée là plante potentiellement une aiguille* de vingt centimètres de long dans la poupée Juncker, et qu'elle (la poupée) se torde en plein conseil, qu'elle s'agrippe au rebord de la table les dents dans le bois, et disparaisse dessous sous les regards effarés des Allemands et des Français, des Belges (mais qu'ont bien pu encore inventer les Muslims, et qu'est-ce que c'est que cet attentat corporel, cet ennemi intérieur logé direct dans le corps de cet abruti de Juncker, pensent-ils)." (Un œil 99, emphasis mine)

Though France's enthusiasm for Letters may not be what it once was, Quintane proposes that more than commit violence to discourses of power by literally chopping it up, literature can become the collective's weapon of choice. Far from decorative and in fact, mighty, literature possesses a piercing power capable of attacking even the highest of political authorities, a force the author illustrates through alliteration ("plante potentiellement") and consonance (the repetition of "poupée"). If Quintane's texts are enemies of the State, it is because literature is an unsuspecting "insider" in a country with a veritable "politique du livre," a government program

that provides subsidies to support and promote the literary sphere and render books more accessible in France.[228] But, the typed page can also "taper," or strike, and *Les Enfants vont bien* imagines itself to be the voodoo needle that stabs the former President of the European Commission as it initiates the self-destruction of political language by turning it against itself.

As a compilation of borrowed discourse, the document is of the utmost importance to the book's montage construction and critique. Inscribing evidence of France's pervasive political word, *Les Enfants vont bien* is a collection of what Alison James calls "speaking facts." In her book, *The Documentary Imagination in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (2020), James describes documents as paradoxically active and passive objects that appear to convey truth, but require contextualization and expatiation if they are to become evidence (4). Considering how the document becomes an "operator of factuality" in literature, as a form of proof concomitant to testimony, as an "imprint" guiding reader reception, or as an inscription of social reality, in her conception of a "documentary imagination" the scholar emphasizes that it is not solely the document itself, but "through a particular use and organization of documents – which are recorded, assembled, and investigated– that the work presents itself as a documentary – where the latter term serves as an adjective rather than a noun" (17). While its hierarchical structure, typographic variations, and differing font sizes certainly guide readers through *Les Enfants vont bien*, it is important to consider if the book's fragments, that are not documented in the traditional sense, are indeed facts as well as the kind of documentary imagination Quintane's interactions with resources deploy within the text.

[228] For more on "La politique du livre," see the Ministère de la culture's website dedicated to this program: https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Regions/Drac-Occitanie/La-Drac/La-Drac-et-ses-services/Creation-et-diffusion-artistique/Livre-et-lecture/La-politique-du-livre.

In effect, the document is arguably nowhere to be found in *Les Enfants vont bien*, and not solely because Quintane does not cite her sources. Neither Alice Zeniter nor Joy Sorman provide references for the documents they inscribe in their narratives, though the citations of all three authors are arguably *documentable*, in that they "*can be* demonstrated or supported by means of documentary evidence" (OED, my emphasis). Yet, there is something decidedly different in how Quintane incorporates secondary resources when compared to her peers. As I will show in the next chapter, Sorman's *L'Inhabitable* alternates narratives delineating her investigations into Parisian insalubrity with shorter, interstitial texts providing definitions, statistics, and references to her influential predecessor Georges Perec, among other precisions. Data on the average monthly revenues of those living in precarious housing (Sorman 19 [2016]) follows a passage detailing the significant rent increase in renovated social residences, and precedes an address portrait describing the progressive gentrification of Belleville. In this way, Sorman's statistics are "an inscription of social reality" in that they corroborate the author's observations of 125 rue du Faubourg-du-Temple and 31 rue Ramponeau. As I will soon show Quintane's fragments, and excerpts from legislative texts in particular, certainly speak to one another, and to the larger issue of refugee discrimination in France. However, in *Les Enfants vont bien* the fragments rarely *coherently* communicate with each other. For example, juxtaposing a headline featuring a detainee suicide with an amendment to a law that seemingly outlines appropriate circumstances for an asylum seeker's repatriation, for example (Les Enfants 156-7) purposefully introduces ambiguity in the text, as if to reference the enigmatic language used to speak about the refugee population.

L'Art de perdre's appropriation of the Evian Accords, the 1962 peace treaties between France and the new Algerian Republic, is more similar to the strategic recasting of

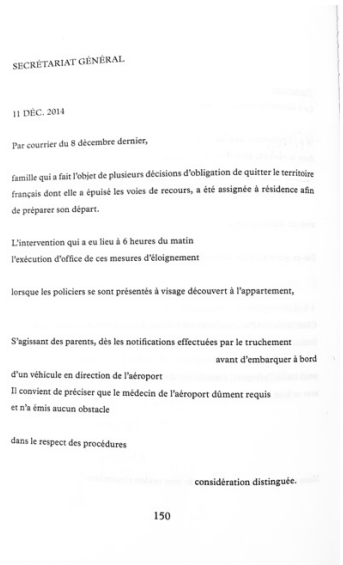
documentation present in *Les Enfants vont bien* (Zeniter 138-142). Zeniter elects which chapters and articles from the lengthy accords to include in the novel, omits phrases, and italicizes elements that point to the partiality towards France with which the document was produced. In her article "Prélèvement/déplacement : le document au lieu de l'œuvre" (2012), Marie-Jeanne Zenetti forwards that this authorly gesture is one of "prélèvement," a term often used in medical or scientific contexts to denote the collection of samples, which are then used for study.[229] Not unlike a biopsy, this authorial procedure is concentrated and deliberate; similar to surgeons who seek out infected tissues to examine, writers select documentary excerpts with discernment to enhance their literary projects and reinforce what it is the text endeavors to communicate. The "prélèvement" documentary method is thus a form of rhetoric, in that the compositional technique is designed to persuade its audience, *L'Art de perdre* denoting France's abandonment of those who the country had once insisted were "French," and *Les Enfants vont bien* the country's prejudice against refugees.

However, Zeniter takes her interactions with the document a step further, which we read through protagonist Naïma. In *L'Art de perdre*'s chapter dedicated to the Evian Accords, following the initial transcription of the document Naïma reflects on her takeaways from her study of the document, and proceeds to question and analyze subsequent articles *with* the reader. In underscoring the unjust aspects of the featured treaties, like *L'Inhabitable*'s study of housing inequities and inquiry into humanitarian crisis in *Les Enfants vont bien*, *L'Art de perdre*'s *prélèvement* appeals to its audience's *ethos*. Yet while Sorman and Zeniter's texts predominantly invoke *logos* through interactive investigations, Quintane's text arguably calls more on her

[229] "Prélèvement" is defined in the *TLFi* as the "action de prélever une partie d'un tout à des fins d'essai ou d'analyse."

audience's *pathos*, and specifically what Hessel argues in *Indignez-vous !* is the politically productive sentiment of outrage.[230]

Les Enfants vont bien orchestrates discursive violence with *prélèvements* that more than draw attention to the polemic, foster it. The text insists that "l'État intervient dans ses domaines de compétence" (Les Enfants 203, E, emphasis original), which after highlighting the administrative refugee runaround and media excerpts describing ravine-filled corpses (193) and fatal accidents involving refugees (190) leaves readers wondering what, exactly, these competencies are. A transcribed letter from the *Secrétariat Général* detailing one refugee family's expulsion tangibly manifests this method (150, E). The book preserves the official government letter's format, but strategically erases lines and words to produce striking fragments that draw attention to the physical and symbolic violence associated with the expulsion process, and the codified language the State uses to evoke it:



SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL

11 DÉC. 2014

Par courrier du 8 décembre dernier,

famille qui a fait l'objet de plusieurs décisions d'obligation de quitter le territoire français dont elle a épuisé les voies de recours, a été assignée à résidence afin de préparer son départ.

L'intervention qui a eu lieu à 6 heures du matin
l'exécution d'office de ces mesures d'éloignement

lorsque les policiers se sont présentés à visage découvert à l'appartement,

S'agissant des parents, dès les notifications effectuées par le truchement
avant d'embarquer à bord
d'un véhicule en direction de l'aéroport
Il convient de préciser que le médecin de l'aéroport dûment requis
et n'a émis aucun obstacle

dans le respect des procédures

considération distinguée.

150

Figure 2.5: "Secrétariat Général" letter from Les Enfants vont bien*, p. 150*

[230] "Une des composantes indispensables [qui fait l'humain] : la faculté de l'indignation et l'engagement qui en est la conséquence" (Hessel 14).

In the context of the letter's referenced "mesures d'éloignement," which at six in the morning have the appearance an abduction, the formal closing "considération distinguée" reads as absurd. This is precisely the goal: the vast majority of the discourse appearing in *Les Enfants vont bien* is fragmented to such an extent that the book becomes a collection of *non sequiter* communication. And this is especially true of the featured political discourse, such as "faut pas abuser de notre patience" (146, A), which was seemingly derived from the headline in *Le Journal du dimanche*, "Xavier Bertrand aux Anglais : Il ne faut pas abuser de notre patience…."[231] Omitting the headline's "il ne," Quintane's *prélèvement* modifies the text's register of language and ridicules Bertrand's statement by transforming it into a phrase one is more likely to hear from a racketeer. The montage shrouds other instances of political speech with ambiguity, one contribution reading only "les belles âmes qui" (191, A). More than transcribe, Quintane's take on *prélèvement* disturbs the discourse it features, which becomes apparent when juxtaposing the book's excerpts with their original sources.

Invoking Roland Barthes' *Degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953), Zenetti's analysis of concrete poetry forwards that despite this medium's potential shock value, in the absence of "écriture," it becomes impossible to invoke any notion of a "morale de la forme" (39).[232] For Zenetti, poems such those from Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* (1934) and Alexander Kluge's *The Battle* (1964) are works of display in which their authors "apparaissent sous les traits de *monteurs* et de *montreurs* de documents" (36, my emphasis). Rather than consider *écriture* as a *result*, or what comes to form the text and consequently authorship, I would like to analyze *écriture* as Barthes

[231]"Xavier Bertrand aux Anglais : Il ne faut pas abuser de notre patience…." *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 20 June 2017.
[232] In *Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Barthes writes: "Placée au cœur de la problématique littéraire, qui ne commence qu'avec elle, l'écriture est donc essentiellement la morale de la forme…" (15).

does: a *process* that determines an author's formal identity, not at a grammatical, stylistic or linguistic level, but instead as a "un signe total, le choix d'un comportement humain" (Barthes 14). Considering *Les Enfants vont bien* as one, integral sign, the author's formal identity, or *écriture*, concerns itself not with a matter of facts, a focus on the document itself, but rather a *manner of facts*, or orchestrating documents to communicate in a certain fashion. In other words, *Les enfants vont bien* speaks its outrage *through* form, and Quintane's technique exacts and assembles fragments to interfere with the production of meaning, and particularly to *couper l'effet*, or "empêcher de produire l'impression désirée" (TLFi) in the discursive trends promulgating anti-refugee sentiments in France. More than a formal initiative, however, the text's "cutting" critique is inherent to what I propose is the text's retaliatory rhetoric.

If Reznikoff and Kluge's montages seek to build and show through documentation as Zenetti suggests, I would argue that *Les Enfants vont bien* endeavors to disassemble and destroy symbolically violent language pertaining to the refugee figure in France. Indeed, beyond its study in discourse, the book's dissection of language is the needle vehemently exacting revenge on the Juncker voodoo doll from *Un œil en moins*. In turn, the semantic breakdown provoked by the concrete poem gives rise to the doll's demise: "elle s'agrippe au rebord de la table les dents dans les bois et disparaisse dessous" (Un œil 99). As the author put it in our recent round table, at the conclusion of any text "ce qui reste doit être une forme d'énergie." In crafting a work of literature aimed at provoking ire among its readers, Quintane's retaliatory rhetoric is a collective call to protest – against infractions to human rights, generalized injustice, and the discourse that makes this possible – and an inherent component of her oeuvre's unique literary responsibility.

Reprendre pour Répondre

Les Enfants vont bien enacts the cacophonous forum of a rowdy demonstration, with the book's fragments calling and responding to one another across the pages of the book. At times the poem's parlance seems sequential: the aforementioned letter from the *Secrétariat Général* (150, E) appears to be the government's reply to a refugee's letter requesting the reexamination of their application for asylum on the preceding page (149, E).[233] Often, however, the excerpts speak together more figuratively, and associations are to be made by the reader. Take, for instance, the condescending "Je ne vous fais pas un dessin" (39, A) that is in many ways is suggestive of the text's verbose, yet incomprehensible legal documents that devote as much time to stipulating the conditions of their language as they do to governing the right to enter the French territory: "*6° Au deuxième alinéa du A de l'article L. 311-13, au 1° de l'article L. 314-8, aux trois alinéas de l'article L. 314-8-2 et au premier alinéa de l'article L. 832-2, la référence : « L. 313-13 » est remplacée par la référence : « L. 313-25 »*" (227, B).[234] Returning to *Un œil en moin*'s encouragement to *se reprendre*, it seems that certain enunciations hold themselves accountable, as if to say "do you hear yourself?" In one newspaper article excerpt, for example, an incredulous interviewee wonders why his female neighbor would consider temporarily housing a refugee, insisting "**Tu te rends compte, 100 hommes, pas une femme, ni un enfant. Elle n'a qu'ouvrir une maison close**" (107, D, emphasis original).

[233] A similar technique can be noted with excerpts from a newspaper article reporting the death of a refugee man, electrocuted by an electric arc while riding on the roof of a TER train ("Vintimille-Nice : danger mortel sur la ligne de TER"). Though not always in consecutive order, the excerpts speak to one another over nine of the book, which serves to increase the dramatic effect of the horrific news item (193,197-8, 201).

[234] It is also worth mentioning the law texts' endless stream of acronyms, for which Quintane provides a key on page 13. Livre 2, Chapter 8 of *Un œil en moins* illustrates the absurdity of governmental acronyms in its four-page description of the administrative hoops a refugee must go through to apply for asylum: "Le dossier OFPRA est à renvoyer dans les vingt et un jours ; il y a droit au CADA, à l'HUDA, à l'AT-SA, à la CMU et à l'ADA" (189).

In addition to this interplay among the text's excerpts, *Les Enfants vont bien* is also Quintane's response to what refugees are currently facing in France. Though the text's critique may not reveal itself in the form of an expressed judgement, the author need not be loquacious in order to leave her mark on the text. Instead, Quintane's *engagement*, or commitment to problematize France's refugee quandary is realized through a series of actions that knit the text together, actions that we may attribute to the author as one would her words in *Un œil en moins*.[235] Even in borrowed discourse we see traces of the author, reading the wry remark "statu quo pour la plupart des familles, si ce n'est qu'elles ont toutes du mal à se procurer à manger !" (103, E) as a *mise en abyme* of Quintane's characteristic irony. In arguing for the author's response, however, I do not wish to suggest that Quintane responds *for* the refugee population, or feels it is her place to do so. Rather, her textual response underscores that a population who must constantly answer for their every move rarely receives a response in return: "**Ils nous parlent pas, juste pssht, pssht**" (220, D, emphasis original).[236] Despite an excess of discourse *about* the "migrant crisis," the book reveals a generalized unwillingness to grant refugees with the acknowledgement and interpersonal communication their humanity demands: "**sollicitée, la préfecture n'a pas souhaité apporter de commentaires**" (214, D, emphasis original). This is not to say that *Les Enfants vont bien* denies the complexity of France's refugee situation or what

[235] Informing my analysis here is Marielle Macé's article, "L'assertion ou les formes discursives de l'engagement." For Macé, a discourse's veracity is tied to its assertiveness, which has the capacity to conjoin enunciator and discourse so that they "become one." The "engagement" or "désengagement" of discourse therefore becomes a question of what she calls "imputabilité": "il faut que le lecteur puisse imputer à l'énonciateur ses paroles, c'est-à-dire les lui attribuer mais aussi l'en incriminer" (3). While the lack of authorial enunciation in *Les Enfants vont bien*'s montage is what Macé would call "sous-assertion" (compared to the author's "sur-assertion," or expressed judgement in the book's preface), I would like to suggest that we consider the author's gestures within the montage as engaged actions, just one would an author's words in a traditional essay.

[236] If this excerpt is indeed from the article "Macron critique les 'incohérences' de l'Europe sur l'immigration" in *VOA (Voice of America) Afrique*, it seems that the "pssht, pssht" is a reference to the sound of tear gas being sprayed: "Pendant ce temps, un groupe d'Ethiopiens témoignait des opérations policières menées la nuit. 'Ils gazent les tentes pensant qu'on dort. Ils prennent les tentes, les sacs de couchage, même les médicaments donnés à l'hôpital. *Ils nous parlent pas, juste pssht, pssht* (le bruit des gaz lacrymogènes)', raconte Dawit, 21 ans" (emphasis mine).

is asked of government officials, the text rendering these many obstacles manifest in its intricate excerpts from the *CESEDA*. And logistics aside, the ideological currents affecting immigration policy further complicate the issue, and particularly given France's current climate in which immigration is frequently associated with terrorism.[237] While Quintane's book does not claim that it is capable of providing an answer to this complex web of questions, it does seek answerability, from "La préfecture [qui] ne répond pas quand on pose la question : que faites-vous des enfants qui dorment dehors la nuit ?" (199, E).

The diptych's incarnation of *reprendre* is a call for accountability in the public sphere, and is emblematic of Quintane's literary responsibility – *reprendre pour répondre* – to which I turn in more detail by way of conclusion.[238] Yet, as I briefly mention in my reading of *Un œil en moins*, the contemporary author in France has, as Laurent Demanze observes, "[abandonné] son magistère d'intellectuel" in support of a democratization of knowledge.[239] Therefore, the practices that Quintane models are "[ouverts] à tous" (Les Enfants 11), and are perhaps even a collective obligation. Seemingly, literary responsibility is no longer limited to the text as a finite, "engaged" object. In his article "Responsabilités de la forme," Alexandre Gefen distinguishes between a Sartrian "littérature engagée," and today's "engagement littéraire" (6), which displaces the emphasis from the writing itself to the action for which it advocates. Furthermore, just as important to literature's answerability is what the reader can give back to a text. Contemporary literary engagement engenders what Gefen, likely drawing from Sartre's pact of

[237] For one example of this contemporary ideology, see *Le Monde*'s article from November 2020 "Le lien entre terrorisme et immigration à l'épreuve des faits."
[238] Here, I am thinking not only of Sartrian literary *engagement*, but also of Laurent Demanze's description of the *enquêteur*/*enquêtrice* figure in *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête*: "L'écrivain mène l'enquête en marge des institutions de savoir et des normes académiques, en son nom, parce qu'il est intimement requis par une énigme, l'irruption d'un événement ou l'appel d'une injustice" (26).
[239] See the section "Politiques de l'enquête" in Laurent Demanze's introduction to *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête*, pp. 25-9.

generosity, describes as a "co-responsibility" between author and reader, tasking readers with "un effort d'organisation mais aussi un travail de comblement informatif et herméneutique" and at times, the acceptance of a "manque de littérature" (12).[240] In this context, we can reinterpret Sartre's pact of generosity as an effort that articulates not only the literary work itself, but also the very questions of responsibility driving its inquiry and thus its sense of moral obligation.

Les Enfants vont bien communicates its project of co-responsibility from the onset, eliciting reader curiosity through its unusual form that is likely to puzzle and intrigue even the most avid reader. However, the book's predominantly white pages solicit the intellectual readership of France's *production restreinte* to envision this textual space not as emptiness, but rather as a notebook-like repository appealing to the reader in an invitation to further research, reflection, and as I will show (inter)action, and even resistance. But as Sartre intimates, more than a space to collect evidence of our supporting research, the text is designed to be read, albeit not necessarily in one specific way. In *Les Enfants vont bien*'s foreword, Quintane acknowledges the book's "progression lacunaire, [sa] chronologie trouée" (9), which further confirms its project of co-responsibility. In the manner of a "Choose Your Own Adventure" gamebook, the montage's format fosters a variety of readings, a system that trains readers how to critically interact with discourse. One may choose to read the book from "start" to "finish," but may elect instead to read the discursive levels together (all A's together, all B's, etc.), and perhaps even in varying order (reading "D's" before "C's" for example). Yet another approach is to consult

[240] In "What is Literature?," Sartre writes that "it is the conjoint effort of the author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others. Reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation" (37). He later elaborates on this concomitant relationship, describing reading as "a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much" as he demands of himself. For this confidence is itself generosity" (49).

pages in isolation with the help of secondary resources. Regardless of which path the reader chooses, each transforms our relationship to the text and I argue, *forms* responsible readers.

The critical interaction the text deploys leads its audience to formulate our own sense of responsibility. *Les Enfants vont bien*'s thought-provoking reception is similar to that described by Patrick Greaney in his reading of Bäker's concrete poem *transcript*: "at every stage, the reader is aware that there is something else to read and something more to learn. The Shoah is transformed from something that readers thought they already understood into something that they have yet to grasp and that *transcript*'s apparatus allows them to examine" (transcript 151-2). Each of the books's excerpts becomes a pathway to a host of resources, through which one might learn that Emmanuel Macron's ceasefire discussion with Libyan leaders Sarraj and Haftar in 2017 was an initiative designed to dismantle Libyan migration routes.[241] Or, that the food vouchers the French government distributes to refugees may only be used in *épiceries sociales et solidaires*, segregated grocery stores that further marginalize already precarious populations.[242] In this way, the book's response is a question, or rather a call to question the discourse pervading, and in many ways shaping collective imagination and life in France. In his article "Pushed to the Margins," Robert Shaw describes how *Nuit Debout*'s occupational strategy appropriated space in the *place de la République* in order to "[disrupt and challenge] the

[241] The excerpt "J'étais il y a deux jours dans la région parisienne avec Messieurs SARRAT [sic] et HAFTAR, deux responsables politiques et militaires en Libye" (90) can be found in Emmanuel Macron's speech from a naturalization ceremony in Loiret on July 27, 2017. In reading the entirety of Macron's speech, one finds that he uses this normally festive occasion to denounce asylum seekers "qui viennent de pays sûrs et qui suivent les routes de migrations économiques, qui nourrissent les passeurs, le grand banditisme, parfois le terrorisme," and to promote the French government's initiatives to aid in stabilizing the political situation in Libya in order to "démanteler ces routes des migrations contemporaines."

[242] An excerpt from aid-worker testimony addresses the extreme difficulty refugees encounter in obtaining enough food to feed their families, and specifically the issue with France's government-issued *bons alimentaires*. Though these French equivalents to food stamps could once be used at the grocery store chain *Intermarché*, they are now only valid at the local *épicerie sociale et solidaire*, or grocery stores designed specifically for populations receiving government aid (see https://www.gesra.org/presentation-des-epiceries-sociales-et-solidaires). "Malheureusement cette épicerie manqué douloureusement de produits, notamment alimentaires" (136, E).

strategies of governance within the broader city" (8). In like manner, *Les Enfants vont bien* is a textual manifestation of protest, laying claim to discourses of power to complicate their face value, and dispute their project of dominance. Yet unlike the ephemeral online platforms on which we now conduct a large percentage of our research, or even the *Nuit Debout* village, which was neatly stowed away each morning, the trace of literary engagement is harder to erase, for "les livres, ça se nettoie pas. Quand vous écrivez dans du vieux, ça reste" (Un œil 153).

Reclaiming the Collective

Quintane's diptych explores, and then concretizes the larger population's role in the promulgation of injustice and anti-refugee sentiments and practices in France. From those directing the Republic's institutions, "forces de l'ordre appuyant trop fort du genou sur une nuque ; agents aux frontières regardant crever des Soudanais ; préfet représentatif dublinant à tour de bras et envoyant à une morte sûre" (Un œil 367), to France's "concitoyens qui croient bien faire" (Les Enfants 8), to varying degrees we are all involved in the systemic violence affecting refugees. Moreover, France's recent "Racial Spring" speaks to overarching structural prejudices perpetuated through universalism, a "myth" that scholar Mame-Fatou Niang argues is imperative that we collectively unravel.[243] Like *Les Enfants vont bien* that typographically differentiates between degrees of implication, Michael Rothberg's work on the "implicated subject" can help us to understand the many imbrications of how action, and inaction, and jointly ignorance and indifference (re)produce injustice:

> "Implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection. Modes of implication – entanglement in historical and present-day

[243] See Mame-Fatou Niang's article, "2020 : année du printemps racial français."

injustices – are complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, but are nonetheless essential to confront in the pursuit of justice." (1-2)

Still, Rothberg reminds readers that "the implicated subject is not an identity, but rather a figure to think *with* and *through*" (199, my emphasis). When read together, *Un œil en moins* and *Les enfants vont bien* becomes this figure of implication and an opportunity to transform our participation, which as Rothberg develops is to "acknowledge and map implication in order to reopen political struggles beyond the defensive purity of self-contained identities" (201). Quintane's diptych, too, is a call to reconsider implication by encouraging readers to "self-consciously [grasp] one's position as an implicated subject and [join] with others in collective action" (200). In so doing, Quintane complicates, or folds together the destiny of the French collective with those of its refugees, introducing a new vantage point from which we may reassess ourselves individually, and as a part of something greater.[244] (*Se*) *reprendre* to *rapprendre*, then.

Quintane's methodology to *reprendre* makes the transformation of implication possible, exemplifying how one might resume, review, regain awareness, reappropriate, critique, and respond to subjects of paramount importance. More than symbolic of these analytical exercises, however, the verb's construction literally brings forth the change for which it advocates: when added to the verb "prendre," the prefix "re-" expresses a return, creating an opportunity to change direction, or course of action, and engaging the verb in a continuous cycle of reflection. The contemplative activity *reprendre* introduces thus becomes a way to gain insight into the difficult issues the collective must tackle in the course of its transformation. Moreover, yet another possible definition of this verb rich with meaning illustrates how it actively contests what

[244] From the Latin "complicāre," "com" meaning "together," and "plicāre" meaning "to fold" (OED).

Quintane shows is the most problematic obstacle in this process: indifference. An antonym of the verbs "to release" and "to leave," both of which suggest abandon and resignation, *reprendre* is to "saisir de nouveau quelque chose ou quelqu'un qu'on avait lâché ou laissé de côté" (TFLi). In the context of the collective affliction presented in *Un œil en moins* and *Les Enfants vont bien*, I would like to propose "reclaim" as a pertinent translation of *reprendre*, an action to which Isabelle Stengers calls attention in her article "Reclaiming Animism":

> "Reclaiming means recovering what we have been separated from, but not in the sense that we would just get it back. It means recovering, or recuperating, from the very separation, regenerating what it has poisoned. The need to struggle and the need to cure us of what threatens to make us resemble those we have to struggle against are thus irreducibly allied. A poisoned soil must be reclaimed, and so must many of our words, those that…carry with them the power to hold us hostage." (6)

Though Quintane's texts challenge milieus of power, they do not vilify the collective, nor do they wish to provoke the unproductive sentiments of guilt or shame. Rather, the diptych is what Stengers refers to as "the smoke of burned witches…in our nostrils," or the recognition of our implication "as the heirs of an operation of cultural and social eradication – the forerunner of what was committed elsewhere in the name of civilization and reason" (ibid). The real work of reclaiming collective regard, or curiosity, interest, and compassion for the Other, is for readers to continue outside the pages of Quintane's books.

The author's oeuvre advocates for literature's role in inspiring and actualizing a powerful form of resistance within the collective. Insisting in *Indignez-vous !* that "CRÉER, C'EST RÉSISTER." RÉSISTER, C'EST CRÉER" (22), Hessel's essay arguably launched the *Nuit Debout* occupation and similar movements around the world. And the chiastic structure of

Hessel's call to action proves a meaningful vector for his invitation: phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty imagined the chiasmus as a "figure for thinking through…relationships between mind and body, self and world, self and other, fact and idea, silence and speech, imaginary and real, past and present, Being and beings, philosophy and non-philosophy" (Toadvine 339). Similar to Rothberg's description of the implicated subject, the chiasmus as a figure of thought collects the collective, becoming a point of assembly in and through which we can confront important issues and in so doing, propagate renewal. Furthermore, Hessel's choice to relay this timely message to the world through a literary medium is significant, and particularly in an increasingly digital age and amid claims that not only French literature, but also French culture in general, are dead.[245]

That the *résistant*'s call heard around the world first appeared in printed form is an argument for literature's potential, if not fundamental role in reclaiming, and transforming collective imagination. Like *Indignez-vous !*, *Un œil en moins* and *Les enfants vont bien* "create to resist," and "resist to create," and it is precisely in this constant negotiation between creation and resistance that Quintane's diptych becomes a medium through which to (re)think collective responsibility and to responsibly (re)imagine the collective. Moreover, her books speak to an emergent literary responsibility in contemporary French Letters of which the verb *reprendre* is symbolic. Rather than assume a posture that claims to explain, or provide answers to difficult questions in the name of the collectivity, Quintane's creative resistance "tests the relevance of the [questions themselves]… Correlatively, the answers that follow…always coincide with the creation of new questions" (Reclaiming Animism 2). While Quintane's inquiries admit the daunting nature of the work ahead, they also remind us that much like the layers of meaning harnessed in the verb *reprendre* that join to form her methodology, every nuance of France's

[245] See pages 9-11 of Faerber's Introduction to *Après la littérature* (2018).

complex makeup that we uncover is the opportunity to ask new questions and to begin again, perhaps discordantly, but together.

"Les pays d'au-delà les horizons de sa petite patri exerçaient sur lui une séduction irrésistible. Voir Paris qui, au dire de tous était un El Dorado, Paris, ses beaux monuments, ses spectacles féériques, son élégance, sa vie puissante que l'on admirait au cinéma. Et tout l'intéressait qui pouvait fournir à son imagination un élément de plus, utilisable dans l'architecture du monde merveilleux, bâti et placé au-delà des mers : les récits des marins noirs, ceux des anciens combattants sénégalais, ceux des colons, qui, dans leur nostalgie, enjolivaient leurs souvenirs."

Ousmane Socé, Mirages de Paris

"Ici c'est chez moi": Patchworking Paris in Joy Sorman's *L'Inhabitable*

Introduction

If you have ever visited Paris, chances are that you have used, seen, or even kept as a souvenir a copy of the now iconic *Galeries Lafayette* map heralding aggrandized images of the city's most famous monuments. For nearly a century, Parisian department stores have been pointing tourists in the "right" direction: the 1930 map from the now defunct *La Belle Jardinière* identifies five routes designed to afford tourists a glimpse of the capital's most iconic neighborhoods which, needless to say, all leave and depart from the *maison mère*. As Vincent Coëffé and Jean-René Morice have shown in their article "The Parisian Department Store as a Paradigmatic Place, " the *grand magasin*, emblematic of Michel Lussault's *hyper-lieux,* is particularly conducive to the tourist imagination, as it "[introduces] a system capable of offering a total experience" (21).[246] If the department store map has become a tradition in Paris, and that of the *Galeries Lafayette* specifically, which for Coëffé and Morice embodies the luxury store

[246] Michel Lussault defines *hyper-lieux* as "points of maximum concentration" (56), resulting in iconic spaces often at odds with globalization standards, where collective attention is crystallized (17). For the author, New York City's Times Square is a prime example of a *hyper-lieu*. With their use of "total experience," Coëffé and Morice refer to Michel Lussault's definition of "une expérience totale" delineated in *Hyper-Lieux* (2017): "un engagement qui mobilise les ressources physiques, sensorielles, cognitives, économiques, sociales et culturelles d'un individu ; elle est faite d'ancrages, de mouvements, de télécommunications et d'interactions (avec d'autres humains, des non-humains, des formes et des paysages, des objets)" (58).

paradigm, it is because the aesthetically pleasing, yet efficient guide has come to symbolize the key to, and even the *promise* of an unforgettable, and magical stay in *Paname*.[247]

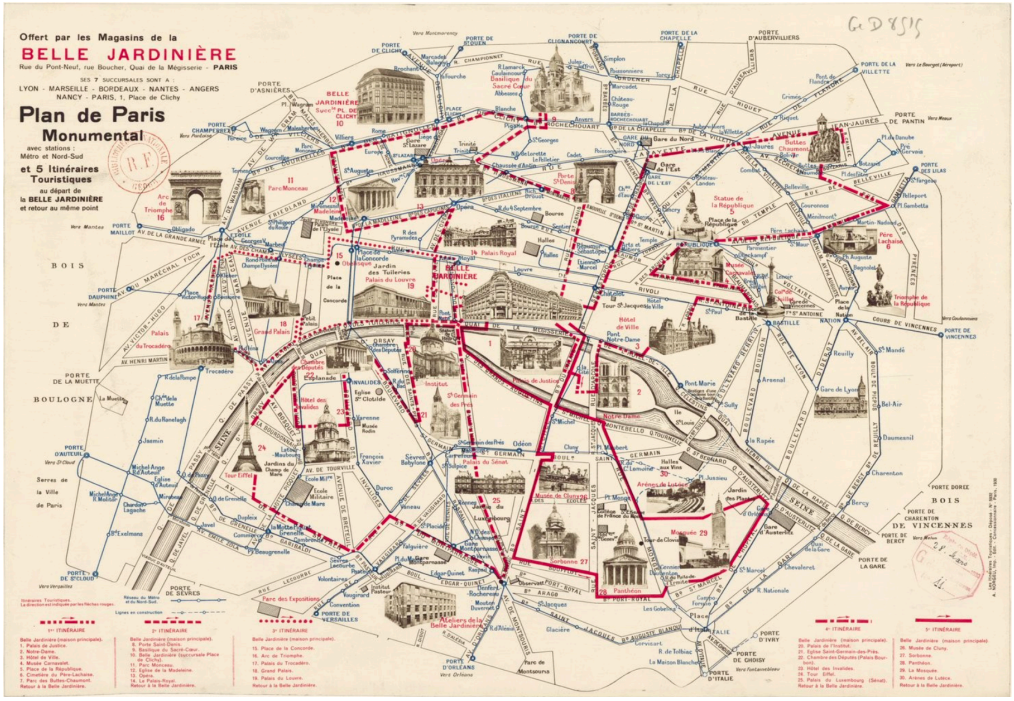


Figure 3.1: "Plan de Paris Monumental," La Belle Jardinière*, 1930 (Gallica)*

However, such maps are produced within what the scholars argue is the department store paradigm's utopian, and moreover heterotopian dimension, where the conflicting notions of rationality and imagination converge (18). And with the Grand Paris megalopolis projects well underway, questions regarding how spatial representations of all sorts affect and reflect our vision and understanding of the capital city are increasingly timely and, as it turns out, of particular interest to contemporary French literature. *Un œil en moins* (2016) conducts a close reading of the *Galeries Lafayette* map that engages such a discussion: sitting with her fellow protest organizers at a table featuring the unfolded document, Nathalie Quintane quickly locates

[247] Parisians and Provincials alike use this common, if not somewhat dated nickname to affectionately refer to the capital city. Yet, as journalist Claude Duneton points out in his article for *Le Figaro*, "Mais d'où vient 'Paname' ?," the moniker was once less adulatory. The nickname first appears in 1892 when blue-collar workers used "Panam" to associate the city with its "panamistes," or the 104 politicians who received payouts in exchange for their support of the Panama Canal. During World War I, however, Parisian soldiers wanted nothing more than to return to "Paname," at which point the nickname acquires the positive connotations it has today.

Nuit Debout's "maison" (48) – the Place de la République – thanks to the surrounding constellation of boulevard names recognizable the world over. But amid discussions regarding the upcoming demonstration, her mind wanders to consider the production of the map itself, and its symbolic power:

> "Le plan a été gracieusement offert par les *Galeries Lafayette* lors d'un précédent séjour dans un hôtel situé vraisemblablement du même côté du fleuve que le lieu principal. On y repère en simili-relief des monuments et bâtiments remarquables, tous massés au milieu, avec des égarés à droite à gauche et principalement en bas. À gauche du plan, un zoom sur le centre apprend que les *Galeries Lafayette* sont quatre fois plus grandes que l'opéra posé sur la même place. À droite, c'est-à-dire à l'est, deux rectangles blancs portent, le premier, l'adresse d'un hôtel, le deuxième, la mention 'notes' au-dessus de sept lignes grises (invitant à prendre des notes) ; sous ces rectangles, on imagine une partie de l'est, le périph, et l'autre côté du périph." (ibid)

Discernable in the text's description is the juxtaposition of the larger-than-life tourist traps and veritably gigantesque department store with parcels of less-frequented Parisian space that the store's cartographers deemed insignificant enough to erase altogether. In like manner, *La Belle Jardinière* appears two, or even three times the size of the neighboring Palais du Louvre and Palais Royal. And while an often-stigmatized northeastern Paris does figure in the 1930 map, and even in the guide's first itinerary, its sole purpose is to reach *Les Buttes Chaumont*, which the map proposes is the only site worth visiting in that area, and to indicate the lengthy return route back to the store.

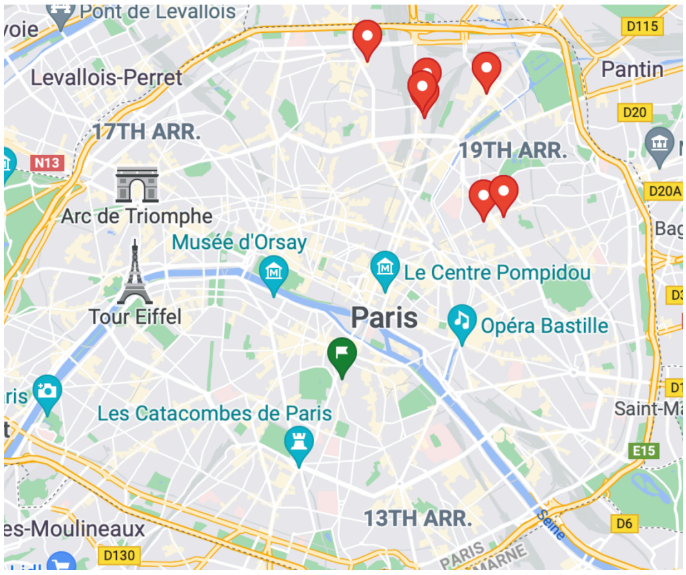


Figure 3.2: Map of Addresses Featured in L'Inhabitable

Investigating this very zone that serves as a means to an end on *la Belle Jardinière*'s map, and serves no geographic purpose at all in that from the *Galeries Lafayette*, Joy Sorman's *L'Inhabitable* (2011, 2016) conducts a close reading of Parisian space that often eludes the attention of tourists, map creators, and city-dwellers alike. This fortuitous, but significant interaction between Quintane and Sorman's texts is indicative of what Laurent Demanze describes in *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête* (2019) to be contemporary narratives' interest in our geographic blind spots, realized through a renewal of Perecquian-inspired endotic exploration.[248] In effect, Sorman's "voyages de proximité" (24) in *L'Inhabitable* join an extensive list of what Ari Blatt terms in his article "Traversing the *Territoire*" (2017) the "toponymical and topographical" texts proliferating in twenty-first century French literature.[249] As Blatt argues, these arresting narratives render territories "sensible" to readers in the age of the Anthropocene,

[248] Laurent Demanze employs *explorations géographiques* to reference current French literature's narratives that "tournent le dos aux fantasmes de l'exotique pour saisir l'endotique…les écrivains mènent des exercices de défamiliarisation et interrogent les angles morts de l'espace commun, pour se rendre attentifs aux événements minuscules du quotidien et aux marges invisibles…" (24).

[249] In his article, Blatt defines toponymical and topographical texts as being "sensitive to place names as much as they are committed to mapping the micro-level urban, peri-urban, and rural landscapes that make up metropolitan France today." His corpus includes works from the likes of Jean Rolin, Michel Houellebecq, and Jean-Christophe Bailly.

and are a call to presence in a culture prone to egocentrism and retrospection (288-90). Alexandre Gefen's thesis in *Réparer le monde* (2017) similarly underscores literature's curative powers, claiming that while today's geographic works disclose the country's social and political concerns, they also possess the potential to "refaire un univers commun" (195) amid debates on national identity, borders and immigration control, and a generalized sentiment of division in France.[250] Indeed, faced with these feelings of physical and psychological detachment, Joshua Armstrong demonstrates in *Maps and Territories* (2019) that books from the likes of Jean-Philippe Toussaint, and Virginie Despentes deploy land and cityscapes in literature so as to repair the protagonists' relationship to the world, and even to "un-map" reality, both of which contribute to "an ongoing pursuit to…apprehend, inhabit and forge meaningful relationships to local geographies of increasingly globalized cognitive and ethical parameters" (15).

According to Jacques Dozenlot in "La Nouvelle question urbaine," there is no better locus than the city to observe a territory's "incivilité," or the social disorder threatening collective wellbeing (39). To this end, no delimitations are more omnipresent in the *Hexagone*'s geographic bent than those of Paris, which since the turn of the twenty-first century has once again become a leitmotif in French literature.[251] While today's literary rereadings of the capital city often pause to consider the social, political and ideological implications of boundaries, Sorman's investigation into seven noteworthy examples of insalubrious housing stands apart in its illustration not of boundaries themselves, but the consequences of their implementation. And while many of her contemporaries use the city's beltway as a means to distinguish "central" from

[250] In his article "Les 'indésirables.' Passé et présent d'une catégorie d'action publique," Emmanuel Blanchard denotes a reaffirmation, and even an idealization of borders in France in recent years (16-17), of which one can view the country's polemic "loi confortant le respect des principes de la République" passed on August 24, 2021 (also referred to as the "loi contre le séparatisme") as its most recent manifestation.

[251] In addition to *L'Inhabitable*, Sorman's *Paris Gare du Nord* (2011), Thomas Clerc's *Paris, Musée du XXI^e siècle* (2007), Philippe Vasset's *Un livre blanc* (2007) and *La Conjuration* (2013), and Eric Hazan's *Le Tumulte de Paris* (2021) and *Une traversée de Paris* (2016) are emblematic of this trend.

marginalized Paris, the author's fieldwork reveals the latent marginalization within *intra muros* Paris and furthermore, in neighborhoods that have seen a rise in gentrification in recent years. The author's *enquête* shows concern for how the tangible and invisible borders demarcating Parisian space have crystallized to shape lives, neighborhoods, and though they may not always appear as such, homes. More than a reflection on the city's boundaries, however, *L'Inhabitable* is an immersive experience in the very places we tend to scurry past, manifesting and meditating on the latent disorder within the limits of the idealized, metonymic and ostensibly orderly capital city of France. In the manner of Google's infamous Pegman, Sorman's narrative drops readers in the heart of a Paris far-removed from the eminent itineraries of guidebooks and maps.

Like much of France's geographically inquisitive literature, cartography is a foundational element of what began as a collective project with urban planning expert Éric Lapierre and photographer Jean-Claude Pettacini. Published by the Parisian Center of Urbanism and Architecture, the *Pavillon de l'Arsenal*, *L'Inhabitable*'s 2011 volume explores the capital city's historically insalubrious neighborhoods and assembles narrative, statistics, and archival materials with Pettacini's revelatory snapshots in an effort to "redécouvrir Paris, relire cette histoire à l'aune de l'actualité, en montrer les évolutions récentes, regarder les Parisiens dans leur ville d'aujourd'hui" (L'Inhabitable 4 [2011]). Architect of reference in turn of the century renovations in Paris, Lapierre employs a variety of maps and diagrams to illustrate the squalid legacy of the Parisian faubourgs, and structure his commentary on the importance of both history and salubrity in current urban planning initiatives in Paris.[252] By comparison, the apparent disregard for cartography in Sorman's text is striking, a point of departure I use in the first section of this

[252] Lapierre is the director of the *Pavillon de l'Arsenal*'s volume, *Aménager Paris : Actualités parisiennes II* (2005), which delineates the many divergent urban planning projects taking place in the capital city at the turn of the twenty-first century, impacting approximately ten percent of the Parisian landscape.

chapter to ask how her narrative challenges orderly blueprint psychology that focus on location, function, and form. Unlike contemporaries Thomas Clerc, whose literary rendering of the map in *Paris, musée du XXI^e siècle* (2007) delineates the tenth arrondissement's every nook and cranny with cartographic precision, or Philippe Vasset, whose *carte n° 2314* becomes "un lieu en elle-même" (Vasset 122, emphasis original) and *Un livre blanc* (2007) a literary map of the city's "ville parallèle" (81), Sorman's narrative for *L'Inhabitable* asks what literature can gain from leaving the map behind. Disentangling the city's insalubrious crescent from its notorious *faubourien* legacy, Sorman's text reveals the processes of marginalization at work in precarious housing, a matter that has historically come second to questions of urban aesthetics, and seemingly still does today.

Tackling subjects from gender norms and fluidity in *Boys, boys, boys* (2005) to the tenuous dichotomy between human and animal in *La Peau de l'ours* (2014), Sorman's larger corpus is emblematic of what I argue is current French literature's endeavor to honor and relocate marginalized perspectives, populations, and places. Moreover, *L'Inhabitable*'s proclivity for Perecquian-meets-journalistic exploration is a profound example of Sorman's literary investigations into milieus on the fringe of collective conscious, evident in *Gros œuvre* (2009), *Paris Gard du Nord* (2011), and her most recent publication, *À la folie* (2021). Yet, rather than reduce their protagonists and the environments they occupy to their apparent precarity, Sorman's investigations provide a space where ostracized populations may reside free from borders and limits that reinforce their Otherness. As Judith Butler points out in her introduction to *Frames of War* (2010), however, to rethink precarity is not solely to become more inclusive, but also to consider how norms produce discrepancies in the ways we recognize, or know others (2-8). The second section of this chapter considers how *L'Inhabitable* both reveals and combats the

invisibility shrouding precarity in Paris. Like Butler, Sorman ostensibly asks "what might be done…to shift the very terms of recognizability in order to produce more radically democratic results?" (Butler 6), *L'Inhabitable* sheds an anonymous, Otherly understanding of precarity to privilege faces, names, trajectories, and communities that prevail, even in the most grievous of living conditions.

Not unlike the other works of this dissertation's corpus, *L'Inhabitable* encourages readers to vigilantly rethink our past, present and future with increasing breadth and depth. In this vein, Sorman's investigations into the paradoxes and repercussions of precarity speak to the larger project of a much-needed cognitive recalibration, without which Paris' insalubrious *faubourien* heritage will perpetuate. Working from Marielle Macé's formative essay *Sidérer, Considérer* (2016), in part three I posit that Sorman's disconcerting narrative inaugurates what I will show is her socio-journalism of consideration, a methodology and medium that imagine a world in which we may collectively thrive, rather than independently survive. More than a meditation on what it means to "habiter," or to dwell in insalubrious space, *L'Inhabitable* reflects on what it means to allow Others to inhabit us (or not).

Seemingly, it is not the demolition and reconstruction of buildings, nor the reeducation of marginalized populations in the hopes of assimilation and integration that will remedy the capital's enduring issues with insalubrity. To conclude, I posit that Sorman's text sets in motion not solely the reconfiguration of how we experience marginalized Paris, but also a concomitant affective exchange capable of transforming how we live together in the world.[253] While as Armstrong, Blatt, Demanze, and Gefen have respectively argued, many of France's

[253] Admittedly, the word "world" is highly ambiguous. For the purpose of this chapter, I would like to propose the definition provided by Michel Lussault in his recent essay *Hyper-lieux* (2017), in which he qualifies the "world" as being "cet espace social d'échelle terrestre" (14).

geographically inquisitive narratives endeavor to unmake, or remake maps to promote a call to conscious, or potentially to rebuild territories through literature and in so doing, reposition the role of the contemporary author, herself, in Sorman's narrative these concerns converge; asking how literature might rehabilitate our cognitive map so that all become more meaningful to and in our shared world, *L'Inhabitable* urges readers and authors alike to become more responsible, and respectful inhabitants of both our physical and literary spheres.

Muddling the Map

With so many contemporary authors illustrating Paris with cartographic precision, Sorman's narrative, which neither illustrates with maps nor invests textual language with mapping strategies, may seem like an odd choice for a chapter devoted to charting space in the capital city. Yet, if Sorman leaves the tangible showing and telling of the map behind, it is to bring focus to the places maps cannot, or *will not* show. Omitting the deployment and production of maps altogether not only points to the limits of these documents, it also reveals that the disconnect that Gefen and Armstrong advance literature endeavors to repair, or even transcend is not solely due to the map's inefficacy, but also to the primacy accorded to the meanings spatial documents generate, and project onto reality. Rather than implement documents to reason and render (subjectively) meaningful our surroundings, *L'Inhabitable* shows that as with issues of historical and socio-political importance, complication can enrich what we know of even the most familiar of locales, and contribute to the renewal of our relationship to them.

It is not solely with spatial documents that *L'Inhabitable* takes issue, but also with what I forward is a blueprint psychology underpinning renovation projects in Paris. While blueprints are invaluable and necessary diagrams in urban planning, there is a risk of according these documents and notably the theorization and aesthetic practice of space precedence over city

dwellers. Blueprint psychology is thus the disposition to grant the modeling and planification of space primacy over those urban planning affects. This perspective is inherited, internalized and then perpetuated through the documents delineating our world, such as the *grands magasins* maps. A prime example of blueprint psychology at work is the capital's esteemed and invaluable François Mitterrand site of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. Since its reveal in 1996, the site now known as "Tolbiac" has been the subject of rife critique, from its geographic placement in the city's *Seine Rive Gauche* area, to its exorbitant budget, to its practicality. Indeed, though the building's four glass towers modeled after open books make an impressive and artistic statement, beyond the library's extensively rich catalogue, how user-friendly is the building? The Guardian's scathing review of architect Dominique Perrault's "maze" points to the dangers in accessing the building, writing that when its team arrived to review library, "luckily there was neither rain nor gale…the team escaped the daily hazards of broken limbs and ankles caused by the extensive windswept terrace above the Seine, before venturing into the sinister corridors linking the tower blocks" (Webster 1). Another write-up critiques the library's vast organizational system resulting in significant delays to the delivery of materials, and suggests that the site was literally before its time, opening though staff had not yet received proper technological training.

In response to idealistic perceptions and practices of space, Sorman's text muddles the map, and through her fieldwork introduces disorder into our internalized, and as it were, often erroneous cognitive diagrams of *Paname*. An epistemological project to locate and challenge the conditioned attitudes spatial documents foster, Sorman's inquiry does not suggest we remap, repair, or even unmap the world, and particularly using familiar tools and approaches in which we are the determining factors of spatial significance. Rather than adopt a fixed, bird's-eye-view

of Paris, Sorman's text orients readers not within space, but toward how the perceived need to control space has taken precedence over those who occupy it. The text's project to rewire blueprint psychology suggests that to release control and remove oneself from the center of meaning-making serves to quiet minds and prejudices so that space may to speak to us. For, unless we learn new ways of being in and interacting with the world around us, we will have missed the very thing we came to see.

Rewiring Blueprint Psychology

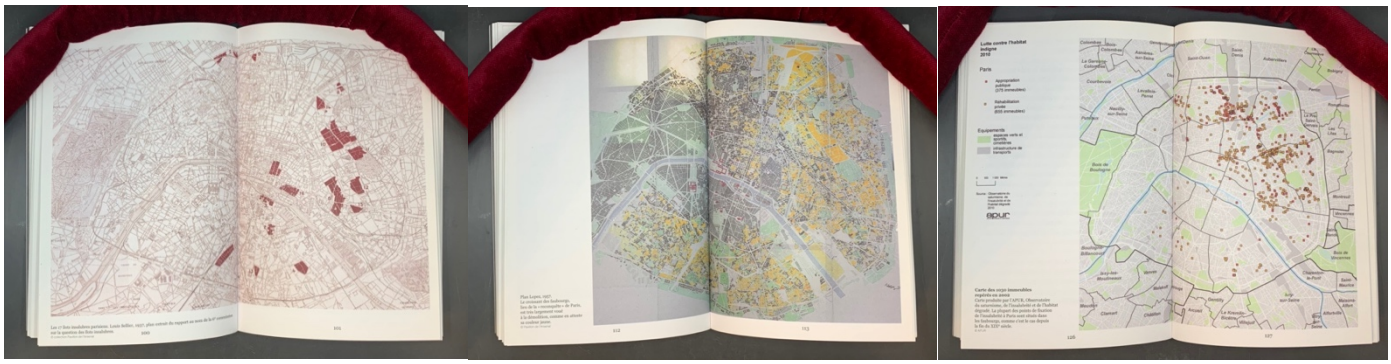
Seemingly, it is not only the protagonists of French novels who are out of touch with their contemporary world;[254] urban planning initiatives in the early twenty-first century suggest that the very makeup of the city is at odds with how we ask it to perform. The *Pavillon de l'Arsenal*'s informative volume *Aménager Paris* (2005) details the city's "urban revival" project, launched in 2001 by the *Mairie de Paris* "pour que Paris puisse vivre et s'adapter au monde d'aujourd'hui" (5).[255] Beyond the showy, state of the art plans for the city's Paris-Rive Gauche and Clichy-Batignoles, at that time French legislation took a particular interest in the country's lack of subsidized housing with the *loi SRU*, or the "loi relative à la solidarité et au renouvellement urbains."[256] Instating the creation of municipality-specific urbanization projects (*Plans local d'urbanisme* or *PLU),* for Paris these legislative developments meant addressing an

[254] In *Maps and Territories* Joshua Armstrong advances that in the contemporary French novel, protagonists "are constantly called upon to renegotiate their relationship to space and place in order to maintain any sense of belonging within the troubled territories they call home" (7). I will return to this argument at the close of the chapter.
[255] I would also suggest that the keen attention to renovation visible in *The Pavillon de L'Arsenal*'s catalogue at the time *L'Inhabitable*'s first edition was published resonates with a recurring turn-of-the-century hyper focus on reorganization and innovation in the capital city. This is evident at the turn of the nineteenth century during Napoleon's First Empire when Paris saw its reorganization into twelve distinct arrondissements, the construction of new bridges, cemeteries, the Ourcq canal, and the prodigious Arc de Triomphe, Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, and Place Vendôme, again at the turn of the twentieth century with the city's development for the 1900 *Exposition Universelle*, and as Paris approached the twenty-first century through François Mitterand's *Grandes Opérations d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme.*
[256] To the existing decree of "insalubrious housing," the *loi SRU* added a political nuance, "…celle d'indignité. La lutte contre le logement indigne recouvre toutes les situations où le droit au logement et la dignité de la personne sont atteints" (Baud 200).

ongoing problem: the capital's insalubrious faubourg crescent, or what Lapierre calls in *L'Inhabitable* the "face cachée du projet Haussmannien" (L'Inhabitable 88 [2011]). Effectively, shortly after the *loi SRU* is enacted on December 13, 2000, the SIEMP, or "Société immobilière d'économie mixte de la ville de Paris qui construit, réhabilite, rénove et gère des ensembles immobiliers" (16 [2011]) embarks on acquiring the city's insalubrious properties.[257]

It would appear that concomitant to reorganization initiatives of past and present is the location and rectification of these chaotic hubs purportedly behind urban disorder in the capital. Lapierre's narrative abounds with documents illustrating one hundred years of reckoning with this problematic Parisian space, and shows that the very notion of insalubrity is conceptualized through the city's faubourgs in early twentieth-century research and mapping initiatives (92 [2011]). As the following maps included in Lapierre's narrative show, spaces with the highest percentages of insalubrity in contemporary Paris have shifted slightly north since the isolation of the city's seventeen insalubrious *îlots* following World War I. However, one constant remains in the progression the Louis Sellier (100-1 [2011]), Plan Lopez (112-3 [2011]), and L'APUR (126-7 [2011]) blueprints present: northeastern Paris, or the "Notes" section from the *Galeries Lafayette* map, and the very areas containing the addresses Sorman investigates in her narrative.

[257] Introducing the concept of a "logement décent," the *loi SRU* introduced the possibility for renters to more easily sue their landlords if "decent" conditions are not met (Baud 201), perhaps inciting the city's slumlords to offload their properties to the SIEMP.



Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.5: Louis Sellier, Plan Lopez, and APUR maps (respectively), L'Inhabitable (2011), pp. 100-1, 112-3, & 126-7

Sorman's inquiry into deleterious residential buildings in Paris opens the 2011 edition of *L'Inhabitable*, and demonstrates that the insalubrity of concern to urban projects has returned to the capital city, or rather, never left. The author's tour through the Sun family's modest, three-room *rez-de chaussée* home at 31 rue Ramponeau commences with the peeling plaster-board walls, "colonisés par les moisissures" (20 [2011]). The overgrowth of fungus is not without consequence; upon entering the apartment, Sorman encounters a boy of five or six breathing loudly and convulsing in his sleep (16 [2011]). Annie, the SIEMP nurse tasked with checking in on the children "passe en revue tous les gamins, comme un gradé ses réservistes" (ibid), which is no small task. What began as a family of four is now seven, soon to be eight, forcing the Suns to become savvy with their use of the small space. Covering the walls are an array of colorful plastic bags, neatly tacked in place to create an improvised storage system containing everything from foodstuffs to clothing: "Il n'y a aucun autre rangement" (21 [2011]).

The Belleville apartment's exiguity, sleeping children, and clothing-strewn walls bring to mind another dwelling situated just a few kilometers north on the Boulevard de la Chappelle. Written over a century before Sorman's narrative, the incipit to Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) evokes a similar makeshift existence. A pair of pants, "mangé par la boue" (22) hangs on the wall of Gervaise and family's cramped abode, along with a tattered shawl and "les dernières

nippes dont les marchands d'habits ne voulaient pas" (ibid). Though the "miserable" room is the nicest of the building (21), its incomplete set of chairs, missing dresser drawer, dirty clothing, chipped water pot, and *Mont-de-piété* loan coupons confirm Gervaise's financial struggles.

Much like Gervaise's home, in which an iron bed takes up two-thirds of the space, in Belleville the Sun family "vit sur ces lits" (L'Inhabitable 20 [2011]) that occupy the entire surface of the apartment's one bedroom. An iron bed also takes center stage in an eerily similar historic photograph from Lapierre's text of a family of six residing in one sole room, "condition habituelle des habitants des faubourgs pauvres au début du XX^{e} siècle" (92 [2011]). In the stained clothing and dirty faces and hands of the children amassed on and around the bed, one imagines that SIEMP nurse Annie would have a similar observation for the photograph's four children as that made at 31 rue Ramponeau: "*Ils sont toujours malades ces gosses, toute l'année*" (16 [2011], emphasis original). Moreover, peeling walls, errant wires, a pile of soiled garments and bric-à-brac furnishings attest to the *faubourien* family's precarity, and resonate with both Gervaise's and the Sun family's habitations.

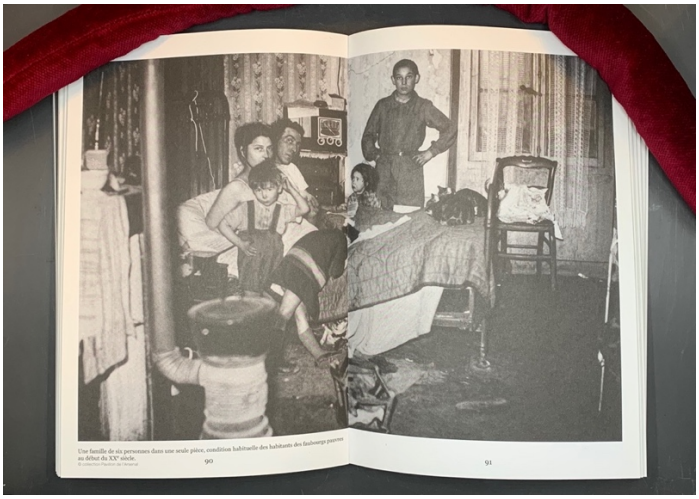


Figure 3.6, "Family of six," L'Inhabitable (2011), pp. 90-1

Though literary critics often associate today's geographically-inspired authors with the likes of Georges Perec, if Sorman's detailed accounts of *L'Inhabitable*'s addresses bear a striking

resemblance to that of *L'Assommoir*, it is because today's "nouvel âge de l'enquête" (Demanze) harks back to Zola's meticulous mapping practices within the capital city. In effect, Sorman's keen attention to markers of poverty and insalubrious space, and her illustration of the detrimental effects precarity has on its inhabitants are, in many ways, reminiscent of Zola's Naturalist techniques. Yet while Zola heralds the nineteenth century as an age of inquiry in his essay *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), in "Enquête et culture de l'enquête au XIX^{e} siècle" Dominique Kalifa indicates that *enquête* culture was long in the making: "c'est donc tout armé que le régime de l'enquête fait son entrée dans [le] XIX^{e} siècle" (3).[258] Michel Foucault argues in in "La vérité et les formes juridiques" (1974) that surveillance measures soon took precedence over those of investigation, but for Kalifa the collective effort to explore "le sentiment d'opacité, d'illisibilité ou de dysfonctionnement d'un monde social en pleine mutation" (4) rendered the nineteenth century a privileged moment in *enquête* culture's expansion.[259] In *L'Assommoir*, shedding light on social disfunction becomes an authorly obligation for Zola, the author stating in his preface his project to "peindre la déchéance fatale d'une famille ouvrière, dans le milieu empesté de nos faubourgs…c'est de la morale en action" (Zola 19). With today's resurgence of investigative practices in French literature, however, it seems that the approach to *enquête* and its stakes have broadened once again; in Sorman's narrative, for example, it becomes less a question of an inherently flawed social world, and more a matter of elucidating the structural disfunction of social systems.

[258] Reading Foucault's "La vérité et les formes juridiques" (1974), Kalifa traces the transition from prophetic to retrospective discourse to ancient Greece, which would become a foundation for modern judicial procedures that develop during the Middle Ages, and crystallize during the Enlightenment (3).
[259] As Kalifa notes in his article, enquête culture flourished not only in French literature during the nineteenth century, but also in the fields of medicine, economics, public hygiene, philanthropy, and the budding domain of Social Sciences (4).

If Sorman's investigations specifically target Paris' northeastern faubourg sector, reaching from the upper limits of Belleville northwest through the Goutte d'Or to Boulevard Barbès, it is with good cause. While cartographers have distinguished this area on maps tracing insalubrity for over a century, this is not to say that it has been a priority in urban planning conscious. As Lapierre's timeline of Parisian insalubrity indicates, other more central areas took precedence in the Plan Lopez's "reconquête de Paris" (L'Inhabitable 112 [2011]), such as le plateau Beaubourg, l'îlot Bièvre, and la Place d'Italie (105 [2011]), which today boast, respectively, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Mail de Bièvre park, and a *Provence*-style plaza housing the thirteenth arrondissement's impressive city hall, a plethora of bars and restaurants, and a large shopping mall. Sorman's narrative intimates that preferential urban practices have not changed much since the mid-twentieth century: returning to her addresses five years later to verify renovation progress in her 2016 monograph edition of *L'Inhabitable*, at 73 rue Riquet Sorman remarks the rickety beams and ragged ceilings of a building still under construction. Observing that renovations in the now sought-after Belleville neighborhood have advanced much more quickly and efficiently than in other insalubrious areas, the author conjectures that "il faut peut-être en tirer des conclusions" (58 [2016]). While Belleville has become trendy among populations that, as Lapierre puts it, "se reconnaissent dans ce mélange d'esthétique urbaine et villageoise" (Lapierre 21), the less sought-after areas of the former faubourg garner significantly less attention. Seemingly, "l'invisibilité est toujours le revers de l'insalubrité" (L'Inhabitable 17 [2011), in addition to what I will later demonstrate is the paradoxically parallel hypervisibility associated with precarity.

Yet another map featured in the architect's narrative, "Recensement des édifices et ensembles urbains du XIX^{e} siècle à Paris," correlates an indifference toward *faubourien* territory

with its gradual effacement from the map. Lapierre's caption for this inventory of Parisian buildings according to their period of construction reads: "le croissant des faubourgs, dont le bâti date pourtant en grande partie du XIX^{e} siècle, est laissé blanc, marque du peu d'intérêt qu'on lui portait alors" (120-21 [2011]). And nowhere is this detachment more obvious than at the La Chapelle and La Villette city gates, where the white of allegedly unbuilt sections of the suburbs and *intra muros* Paris amalgamates to obscure any tangible frontier between the two. Conversely, the lime green of Lutèce and its environs buzzes with energy, the lively orange of Haussmann's *percés* illuminates the page, and a modicum of austere maroon and navy shapes create contrast that brings the city into focus on the page. The inventory map distinguishes active and animated Paris from its dormant, lifeless faubourg crescent and periphery, and appears to the reader as would a scan denoting brain activity.[260]

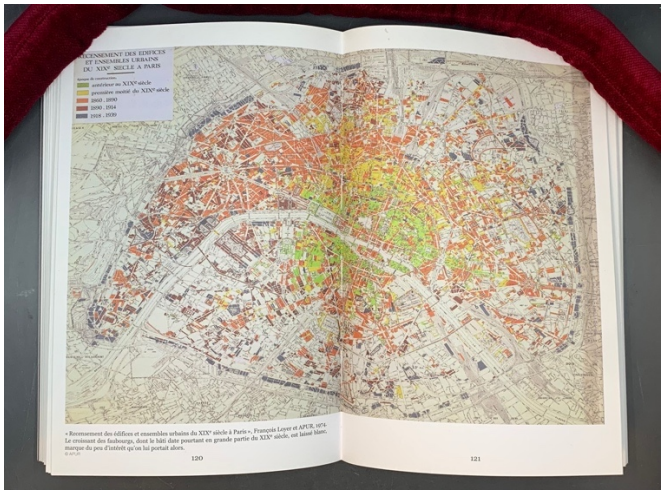


Figure 3.7: "Recensement des édifices et ensembles urbains du XIX^{e} siècle à Paris"

In this way, the image not only reveals what areas of the city stimulate our interest, it also becomes a map of how we conceive of Paris, and I suggest a visual representation of blueprint

[260] Moreover, as it appears in figure 3.7 below, the somewhat oblong shape of the city is reminiscent of a human brain, its "rive gauche" and "rive droite" forming two distinct hemispheres, albeit unequal in surface area.

psychology. Moreover, the 1974 inventory illustrates how blueprint psychology reproduces inequalities inherited from skewed visions of collective space, which marginalize certain sectors, or put them on the map for all the wrong reasons. In contrast, Sorman's text on the uninhabitable suggests that it is not these hubs that form the crux of urban disorder, but rather conceptions of space that reinforce their Otherness that contribute to their isolation and the prolongation of their insalubrity.

Blueprint psychology at work is particularly evident in the author's accounts from the city's eighteenth arrondissement. At 46 rue Championnet, Sorman records that the ironically-named *hôtel du progrès* remains in a state of disrepair. And, it is only after an exercise in her journalistic detective skills that she is able to locate the building at all, whose appearance reflects the little attention it has been accorded in blueprint psychology:

> "Il faut chercher des indices, repérer les herbes sauvages devant l'entrée et au pied de la façade, et la porte blindée grise – elle signale un chantier interdit au public – qui n'a pas été ouverte depuis longtemps. Une végétation dense a crevé miraculeusement le bitume, de petits buissons bas qui dessinent une frise le long du trottoir." (L'Inhabitable 68-9 [2016])

The reader discovers that the apparent neglect for the *hôtel du progrès* dates not to 2010 when Sorman penned the first edition of the narrative, but rather 2006, when she first began documenting the address: "En 2010 je notais que rien n'avait changé depuis 2006, année de l'acquisition de l'immeuble par la Siemp, je le note à nouveau en 2015: l'hôtel du Progrès est toujours là, dans le même état de délabrement" (68 [2016]). Yet another, more radical example on the rue Pajol discloses that one address has vanished altogether: "le 23 a disparu, l'immeuble a été démoli, à la place un trou attend d'être comblé…un simple terrain vague" (50 [2016]).

Indeed, this lack of attention or perhaps, this *intentional inattention* suggests that blueprint psychology has deemed certain areas in Paris unfit for urbanization, and thus uninhabitable, Perec's "*bidonvilles, les villes bidons*" (33, emphasis original [2016]) within the walls of *Paname*.

Sorman's interaction with blueprint psychology as it appears to her in the field, and presumed exposure to other documents included in *L'Inhabitable*, like the Sellier, Lopez Plan, and APUR maps, lead her to question the intentions behind the emphasis on these spaces. A petition, "À qui vend-on Belleville ?" (31 [2016]) posted outside 31 rue Ramponeau's brand-new building denounces the city's systematic destruction of artist workshops in Belleville and warns against the demolition of the neighborhood's last remaining metal workshop in favor of a hotel project, prompting Sorman to consult the SIEMP website's description of the renovated property. It is not without irony that the author includes the website's description of 31 rue Ramponeau in italicized text, which boasts that "la parcelle enclavée reflète l'esprit caractéristique des ruelles du quartier de Belleville, *émaillées d'ateliers d'artistes* d'où ressort une forte ambiance de village" (32, emphasis mine).

Seemingly, her narrative asks if insalubrious Paris was, and is a sincere concern for government officials, city planners, and authors, or if instead today's mapped representations of noxious space function as would urban MRIs, in that they locate pathology to be eradicated for the wellbeing of the larger organism. It is not by chance that medical vocabulary abounds in Sorman's narrative, attesting not only to buildings' unsoundness, but also to the hygienist heritage of urban planning initiatives that correlated contagious illness and death rates with unfit

habitations.[261] It is difficult to imagine that anyone could thrive in the building she enters at 10 rue Mathis in the city's nineteenth arrondissement, which Sorman describes as "gangrenous," "contaminated," "swollen," "rotten" and observes that "sous le papier moisi le mur reste à vif comme un corps desquamé" (L'Inhabitable 48-9 [2011]). Similarly, at 125 rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, "il faudra détruire, amputer, éradiquer…Les bâtiments aussi meurent" (10 [2016]). In representing the edifices in a state of decay, the author simultaneously suggests the perilous social position of their inhabitants, such as Djibril, suspicious of policy officer Sarah's attempts to relocate him (40 [2016]), and Fatima, a mal-nourished seventy-year-old widow who intends to spend the rest of her days there with what have become her pet pigeons (41 [2016]).

Moreover, in the few buildings that have been renovated, Sorman records that their original residents have been permanently dislodged in favor of populations deemed "*proche de l'insertion*" (70, emphasis original [2016]). Indeed, the original occupants could likely not afford the new buildings' higher rent rates – ranging from 411.26 to 674.50 euros at 125 rue Faubourg-du-Temple's new social residence (15 [2016]) – given that "40% des ménages occupant un logement insalubre vivent avec moins de 300 euros par mois, 40% gagnent entre 300 et 800 euros, et 20% plus de 800 euros par mois (chiffres 2010)" (19 [2016]). That these residents have been evacuated despite the fact that many of these dilapidated buildings remain untouched suggests that while early twentieth-century initiatives like the *Casier Sanitaire* equated noxious housing with disease outbreaks, in blueprint psychology it is certain populations, and as Sorman's interviews with the buildings' tenants reveal particularly those *issu d'immigration*,

[261] Specifically, for scholar Yankel Fijalkow the capital's *Casier sanitaire des maisons de Paris* is a model of hygienist *enquête* occurring at the turn of the twentieth century. While the in-depth, building by building investigations confirmed the elevated presence of illness in the city's insalubrious *îlots*, it also reinforced the concretization of causality between dwelling and social status: "[l'enquête sanitaire] légitime à plusieurs échelles le déterminisme du milieu, physique en raison de la densité bâtie, sociale en raison de l'identité des espaces désignés" (Fijalkow 103).

who have come to be seen as the carriers of pathology, and insalubrity. In "La nouvelle question urbaine," Dozenlot substantiates the tendency to associate poverty with disrepute, and warns against the geographic and social division it provokes within the cityscape:

> "Dans le temps même où l'on commence à analyser la pauvreté comme le résultat de handicaps multiples et variés, l'évitement des plus pauvres que soi devient une manière de fuir le handicap qu'ils représentent. La ville éclate ainsi, comme les nations se balkanisent, par l'effet d'une logique qui porte chacun à ne plus subir le préjudice économique, sécuritaire, éducatif qu'entraîne la proximité avec ceux qui n'ont pas les mêmes avantages que soi." (Donzelot 30)

Sorman's narrative forwards that if we hope to remedy insalubrious space, it is first necessary to locate the source of infection. References to statistics, relocation procedures, Georges Perec's *Espèces d'espaces* (1974), and the defining characteristics of insalubrity in shorter texts inserted between those of the seven address portraits are of great consequence, in that they provide a window into the author's critical lens. Despite the author's relatively restrained critical posture in the book's first edition, these interstitial texts appearing in both editions demonstrate that Sorman not only carefully considers the insalubrious buildings themselves, but also the influence of larger, systemic issues. In this way, Sorman's reading of insalubrious Paris is akin to what Joseph Slaughter terms an "unmasking," or reaching beyond façades to reveal the bigger picture behind forms of quotidian violence in the capital.[262] Take, for example, the text's unmasking of the Parisian real-estate market: despite its relative undesirability when compared to other Parisian neighborhoods, property in the eighteenth

[262] Joseph Salughter's recent talk, "Smokescreens: Human Rights, (Third) World Literature, and the Struggle Against Neoliberalism," examines the various "unmaskings" of multinational corporations that occurred during the Russell Tribunals examining cultural suppression in Brazil, Chile and Latin America in the 1970s.

arrondissement runs 5,975.00 euros a square meter (L'Inhabitable 50 [2016]).[263] Furthermore, tenants should be wary of making improvements to their rented properties, as the owner may very well may increase their rent afterwards (58 [2016]).

Such critical observations are only strengthened in the second, "corrected" version of her narrative (79 [2016]), in which asides wandering from the more objective, journalistic lens deployed in the first edition become more prevalent.[264] When addressing Monsieur Al-Mansari's disbelief that he would be rehoused in Paris proper, in the 2011 edition Sorman comments: "Pourtant, tous les habitants relogés au titre de l'insalubrité le sont intra-muros : manière de préserver un peu de mixité sociale dans une ville qui s'embourgeoise" (31 [2011]). However, a significant revision appears in her 2016 monograph. After referencing "mixité sociale," or the presence of socially diverse groups within geographic locations, the author adds "– ou une apparence de – dans une ville embourgeoisée" (67 [2016]). Not only do these modifications suggest that gentrification practices in Paris have come full circle, from "a city in the process of gentrification" to "a gentrified city," the marked pause the dashes introduce adds weight to Sorman's wry remark, pointing to the surreptitious practices and discourse behind such projects. And while both editions of *L'Inhabitable* hint that economic and historical concerns outweigh those of a social nature in urban planning initiatives, as I will later show, the 2016 monograph's "*Cinq ans plus tard*" segments in particular are most telling of the author's critical stance. Yet, more than provide an opportunity to revise, elaborate and add candid critique to her

[263] According to a study conducted by the Paris Property Group on real estate prices by arrondissement, in 2022 the price per square meter in this area is now closer to 10,000 € to 10,500 €, depending on building type. See https://parispropertygroup.com/blog/2018/updated-paris-price-maps-by-neighbourhood/ for more information on real estate prices in Paris.

[264] The 2016 edition's postscript reads: "La présente édition est une version entièrement revue, corrigée et augmentée d'un texte de Joy Sorman publié en 2011 dans un recueil intitulé L'Inhabitable, aux Éditions Alternatives en coédition avec Le Pavillon de l'Arsenal. Il était accompagné d'un texte de l'architecte Éric Lapierre et de photographies de Jean-Claude Pattacini" (79).

investigations. I argue that the reedition signals the author's move to distance herself from Lapierre's tangible maps and consequently, blueprint psychology. Through her continued investigations, Sorman localizes points of entry that complicate how spatial documents communicate, their unrealistic portrayals of Paris, and the reception of her own text.

Disorienting Insalubrious Paris

Inherent to the text's project to complicate blueprint psychology is a sense of disorientation that pervades Sorman's narrative, which I argue is key to her critical posture to complicate our modes of thinking, and in turn producing the capital city.[265] *L'Inhabitable* subtly, but skillfully takes issue not with the SIEMP's theoretical project to eradicate insalubrity, but rather what her decade-long investigations have revealed to be concerns to aesthetically remake Paris masquerading as a social project. This renovation emerges not as a naturally-occurring transformation, such as the immigration trends that have resulted in the high-density diversity one finds at the crossroads of Belleville and République:

> "La rue du Faubourg-du-Temple est dense, compacte, amalgamée, une profusion d'échoppes et de nationalités. On y mange turc, cambodgien, malien, grec, ou couscous. On y achète de la viande hallal, des épices, des fruits exotiques, des pièces montées, un grille-pain coréen dans un bazar pakistanais. Il y a des taxiphones pour appeler en Tunisie, des boutiques de

[265] To reference the "production" of the capital city merits a mention of Henri Lefebvre's influential essay, *La production de l'espace* (1974). Lefebvre reconsiders Hegelian, Marxist, and Engelian philosophies of production to render the concept more concrete in asking, "who produces? What? How? Why and for whom?" (84). Through a case-study of Venice, Italy (which, incidentally is the same example used by Michel Lussault in his approach to *Hyper-Lieux*), often esteemed to be a work of art, Lefebvre argues that the city, and space in general cannot be "œuvres," as they are neither irreplaceable nor unique (85). Rather, for the theorist space is a product of what he terms is the "common language concerning the city" that reveals collective practices, symbolism and imagination, and the productive forces at work in a given era (89-92). The production of space is therefore the ongoing, collective (re)composition of space, realized through repetitive actions (and it is important to note that for Lefebvre, within the collective there is not one "espace social," but instead "une multiplicité indéfinie dont le terme 'espace social' dénote l'ensemble non-dénombrable" [103]).

valises à roulettes, de téléphones portables et de T-shirts dégriffés, un Monoprix, des bars kabyles, des dancings rétro et des théâtres." (9-10 [2016])

Evocative references to the crux of cultural vivacity that is this frontier separating Paris' tenth and eleventh arrondissements powerfully engage the senses. Yet, more than celebrate the diversity prevalent at this crossroads, the disorientation that the passage's heady mélange introduces becomes a mode for thinking through, and with Paris in Sorman's narrative. Whereas Haussmann's tidy, Lutecian limestone-lined boulevards are of primary concern in blueprint psychology, in what Sorman shows to be the dynamic, multicultural capital city, disorder reads not as problematic, but rather as a sign of life.

Certainly, disorder can suggest affliction to bodily and cognitive functions, and in its worst manifestations a source of demise. However, disorder may also be understood as an infringement of recognized order, which in respect to blueprint psychology becomes synonymous with cognitive renewal. This is not to say that *L'Inhabitable* celebrates the dire conditions in which the tenants she interviews live; on the contrary, Sorman's narrative ethically contemplates the noxious physical and social conditions of insalubrity, and their harmful effects on building tenants, a topic I will address in the second section of this chapter. Still, the narrative's attention to the city's innate cultural richness, and what I would like to suggest is the author's disorienting approach to journalistic literature create much-needed nuance in our understanding of Paris, paramount to its project to rewire blueprint psychology.

To understand how, and why Sorman's narrative is disconcerting to its audience, it is first worth conjecturing on who, precisely, the author's readers are. The book's first edition appears in a volume from the *Pavillon de l'Arsenal*, a "centre d'information, de documentation et

d'exposition d'urbanisme et d'architecture de Paris et de la métropole Parisienne."[266] The second edition, however, is published with *L'Arbalète Gallimard*, "une collection de littérature contemporaine. Sa ligne éditoriale : des textes de fiction, des premiers romans et une attention particulière accordée aux formes neuves."[267] As Gisèle Sapiro writes in *La Sociologie de la littérature* (2014), publishing houses and the influence they have on everything from collection affiliation, to catalogue presentation, to back cover summaries, play a crucial role in a work's diffusion and thus, its readership (86).

Texts from the *Pavillon de l'Arsenal* are likely to attract architects, artists, and more generally those interested in urban planning in Paris and its environs. Therefore, the transition to a Gallimard collection not only expands *L'Inhabitable*'s potential readership, it also implies a shift in audience to literary critics, scholars, and the French and Francophone literati. And, what Sapiro terms the texts' "packaging," or book cover, jacket, and advertising strip (ibid) reflects such a transition.[268] The 2011 edition's front and back covers feature a close-up photograph of an insalubrious interior, exposed beams, wires, rough walls and missing floor tiles illuminated by a sole, nude lightbulb hanging from the ceiling. Superimposed on the photograph are what appear to be two large, white paint splotches that on the cover are reserved for contributor names, and on the back cover for narrative summary. Here, we read that "c'est dans ces îlots [insalubres] *heureusement appelés à disparaître* que Joy Sorman est allée voir de plus près qui vit là et comment" (back cover [2011], emphasis mine). In the summary's definition of the uninhabitable and its introduction to Sorman's narrative, it is the concept and architectural elements of

[266] Here, I am using the description provided from the Pavillon de l'Arsenal's website, which can be found at the bottom of the welcome page: https://www.pavillon-arsenal.com/fr/.
[267] Again, here I use the description provided by Gallimard on a page dedicated to the L'Arbalète collection on the publishing house's website: https://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/L-arbalete-Gallimard#.
[268] It is also worth noting that, according to Sapiro, a book's packaging is indicative of its affiliation to either "mass market" or "upmarket" literature, with packaging elements more pronounced, colorful and iconographic in mass market literature, and more discreet and typographic in upmarket texts (86-7).

insalubrity that take precedence: “ces histoires de vie… *suivent* la géographie des lieux” (ibid, emphasis mine). In effect, the edition’s packaging elements suggest that, like the smudges of paint progressively coating the building interior and foreshadowing the renovations to come, resolving insalubrity in Paris is above all, a structural and aesthetic enterprise.

Figure 3.8: L'Inhabitable *(2011), Front and Back Covers*

The packaging from *L’Arbalète Gallimard* edition seemingly reverses this strategy: the stark white background of the front and back covers emphasizes their black type, with author name, title and collection appearing on the front, and narrative summary and author biography on the back. Encased in the cover’s white background is an illustration of an insalubrious building sans façade, floating kite-like through the sky with a sheaf of electric cables in place of the traditional, aerodynamic manja. Though the building has been mostly emptied of its contents, a few odds and ends remain: graffiti tags on the roof, a crooked wall-hanging, a tattered poster and a

bathroom mirror all suggest that not long-ago dwellers occupied the run-down building. Indeed, the traces of life evident in the edition's front cover insinuate that rather than follow, or come second to insalubrious environments, tenant trajectories prove revelatory in deciphering Paris' "réalité sociale souvent à peine croyable" (back cover [2011]). Accordingly, the 2016 edition's summary stipulates that it is only through a combination of fieldwork and tenant interviews that the author "tentait de trouver le moyen de dire ces lieux qui échappent au regard" (back cover [2016]).

Figure 3.9: L'Inhabitable *(2016) Front and Back Covers*

Both the packaging and subject matter for *L'Inhabitable*'s two editions correspond to the understated aesthetics of what Pierre Bourdieu terms in "Le Champ littéraire" (1991) *production restreinte*, or literature's subfield of production geared toward other cultural producers (7). According to the sociologist, France's *pôle de production restreinte* possesses more symbolic

capital, and thus more legitimacy than its traditionally profit-focused counterpart, the "sous-champ de grande production" (ibid). What is important to consider, here, is not necessarily the respective texts' aesthetic or literary merits, but rather *who* reads upmarket literature in France. Following Bourdieu's arguments in *La Distinction* (1979), Sapiro notes that "la hiérarchisation sociale du public sous-tend en bonne partie la hiérarchie des produits culturels…[les lecteurs] les mieux dotés [de capital] tendent à choisir les catégories d'ouvrages les plus légitimes…" (La Sociologie 99). That readers of upmarket texts are typically involved in the sphere of cultural production themselves suggests that they are invested in its symbolic capital, and therefore share a similar *habitus*, "renvoyant à leurs dispositions héritées (par la famille) et acquises (dans le cadre de leur formation intellectuelle)" (25).[269] Though we can only conjecture as to whether these readers also possess similar quantities of economic, cultural, and social capital, it is probable that the milieu that Paris' architects, engineers, literary critics and scholars frequent and inhabit are worlds apart from the noxious spaces portrayed in Sorman's narrative. Thus, while *L'Inhabitable*'s audience surely grasps the challenge the city's insalubrious housing presents, and in some cases may be professionally implicated in its resolution, few have experienced it as they do in the author's immersive portraits.

Take, for example, the passage featuring 125 rue du Faubourg-du-Temple in which 175 single men reside. The author underscores that the poorly isolated building, ravaged by the elements, counts among 100 insalubrious structures in the city's tenth arrondissement (L'Inhabitable 10 [2011, 2016]). Sorman's detailed reporting plunges the reader inside the

[269] Here, my use of symbolic capital refers to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the term. François Denord's entry in the *Dictionnaire International Bourdieu* (2020) defines *capital symbolique* as a symbolically valuable, yet ambiguous network of acts of recognition. In the field of Sociology, symbolic capital "renvoie aux profits que l'appartenance à une lignée ou à un groupe procure, en particulier le prestige et le renom. L'intérêt de l'adjectif symbolique est double : il signale que la valeur d'un individu dépend de la perception que les autres ont de lui : il permet contre toute forme d'ethnocentrisme, d'étudier des pratiques qui n'ont pas l'intérêt économique comme unique moteur" (114-6).

crumbling structure, perhaps best exemplified in her account of the apartment occupied by Amine, who is (ironically) a retired workman of BTP – "#BATISTESREVES"– France's building and roadwork sector:[270]

> "La pièce est rapiécée de planches en agglo et chutes de caoutchouc qui colmatent les trous formant un patchwork multicolore, les murs suintent de crasse et d'un liquide sombre comme le pétrole – larmes de la Vierge noire. Les fenêtres sont bouchées pour isoler un peu, un filet de lumière naturelle filtre là où le film plastique se décolle, aujourd'hui il neige, la lumière est laiteuse et sale. Le papier peint en lambeaux fait apparaître les couches d'un palimpseste formé de peintures écaillées et motifs anciens de fleurs." (12 [2016])

Though fragments of flowered wallpaper suggest that the dwelling was, at one time, decorated with care and intention, the peeling walls have become a timeline of insalubrity, and bear witness to the building's progressive demise. Diametrically opposed to the deliberate order introduced in mapped Paris, the apartment is haphazardly pieced together, with each scrap serving a pragmatic function to protect Amine from the cold and humidity. And while "chez Amine, il pleut" (11 [2016]), the only glimpse of the outside world is the small, sliver of light piercing through the loosened plastic. In fact, the day's snowfall is imperceptible from the apartment without the author's remarks, her presence in the building accentuating the passage from one Parisian microcosm, where snowfall is yet another aesthetic layer of the city, to another, where the elements become a menace to one's well-being.

The reference to a weeping Black Madonna suggests that the grime seeping from the walls is not only a testament to the toxicity of the location but also, sorrowful tears shed in honor of a man who dedicated 32 years of his life to constructing buildings only to find himself in a

[270] Today, BTP uses the domain name "batistesreves" for their website, which includes this hashtag on its welcome page: https://batistesreves.fr/le-btp-c-est-quoi/.

home as unsound as this. Moreover, the author's parenthetical comment, "– les larmes de la Vierge Noire" (12 [2016]), reveals her own melancholy reaction to Amine's home. A former philosophy professor and a prominent author and participant in France's literary and media spheres, Sorman possesses a similar *habitus* to that of her readers.[271] The author's own disorientation, then, becomes a model for her audience. Indeed, she describes Amine's home as "indéfinissable" (12 [2016]), that which "on ne peut pas définir d'une façon exacte parce que l'on en ignore la nature ou la signification" (TLFi). Sorman's narrative teems with concerned bewilderment facing the extent of the insalubrity her investigations expose, of which much of Paris, and particularly those of a similar *habitus*, are unaware. Disclosing her own reaction serves to disorient away from cartographic conceptions of Paris, and reorient toward specific areas of increased consequence, thickening and redefining the word "insalubrious" through lived experience, and as I will soon show, through dialogue with building tenants.

Despite its disorienting techniques, however, *L'Inhabitable* is far from devoid of order. On the contrary, the text's narrative progression is carefully constructed, alternating each interstitial text with its series of seven address portraits, and closing with a chapter devoted to "rehousing," which the author qualifies as the book's epilogue in the second edition. Though Sorman's narrative endeavors to distance itself from blueprint psychology, it is important to recognize that any narrative containing precise addresses will inevitably chart space. In addition to its closeup of northeastern Paris, of note in the progression of address portraits is that Sorman changes their order from one edition to the next. While in edition one, the meandering circuit

[271] In fact, If the author details Belleville and its progressive gentrification with such keen precision, it is because she may very well live, or have lived in one of its restored buildings. In its chapter, "La conquête de l'Ouest," the authorial narrator in Sorman's *Gros œuvre* (2009) details renovation proceedings: "Sur la façade en ravalement de mon immeuble parisien de la rue de Belleville, l'échafaudage est fixé comme une excroissance du bâti…Je suis au deuxième, l'ouvrier me salue au premier étage et demi, j'aperçois le casque jaune, le haut du visage – yeux et front – et la main levée mais sans l'avant-bras" (165-6).

takes the reader from Belleville, up to the northern limits of the eighteenth arrondissement, south through *La Goutte d'Or*, back north toward *La Chapelle*, then east to *La Villette*, the author reorganizes the itinerary for the second edition in such a way that the progression of addresses becomes a distinct north-eastern course when plotted: *Belleville*, *La Villette*, *La Goutte d'Or*, *La Chapelle* and finally, the limits of *intra muros* Paris at the *Porte de Clignancourt*.

If the text's first edition recognizes Paris' inherent disorder, and records it in an arguably disorderly fashion, we can read the second edition's replotting as a call to reconfigure how we interact with Paris and in so doing, the ensemble of its inhabitants. It is almost as if, in her monograph, Sorman creates an alternative itinerary to rival those put forth by tourist organizations, encouraging readers to more authentically experience the capital city. In this way, perhaps it is not necessarily blueprinting with which the narrative takes issue but rather, what of Paris is mapped, how, and why. Specifically, Sorman's text asks how, through a collective rewiring, we might reinvent our ways of showing and telling insalubrity in the capital city. For merely drawing attention to areas of concern is insufficient in altering blueprint psychology and furthermore, runs the risk of reinforcing already deeply-engrained stigmas. As Mame-Fatou Niang has argued in *Identités françaises* (2020), space in Greater Paris has been demarcated in such a way that has produced pockets constituting an "anti-France," or zones deemed antithetical to a symbolically central community (15). According to Niang, "la banlieue doit exister afin de légitimer, par un effet de miroir, les valeurs du centre" (ibid). And while reconfiguring discourse

on the Paris/*banlieue* divide is currently a hot topic in both French criticism and literature, *L'Inhabitable* points to similar stigmatization practices within Paris proper.[272]

Rather than afford primacy to the map in rendering it a narrative feature, in *L'Inhabitable* the map assumes a structural role, and becomes what Robert Stockhammer calls an "operator of reading and understanding." An inquiry into the use of cartography in works of fiction, Stockhammer's essay analyzes the map as an organizational tool that enhances narrative credibility. I would add that in creative non-fiction, too, spatial diagrams can serve such a purpose. Furthermore, in the case of *L'Inhabitable* I suggest that to credibility we add awareness, not solely of the facts presented in the text, but the awareness of our *unawareness* of how our practices of and discourse on the capital city underpin conceptions of space and more specifically, the precarity inherent to insalubrity. In this respect, while *L'Inhabitable* contributes to an exceedingly rich literary map of Paris, one in rapid expansion in contemporary literature, it responds to today's pressing call to remediate mindsets regarding marginalized and as it were, invisible populations in the capital and quite possibly, in the *Hexagone* as a whole.

In fact, I posit that *L'Inhabitable*'s project transcends the realm of plotting space altogether to ask how we might allow the city, and in so doing its inhabitants to emerge differently; that is to say authentically, when observed with what Vinciane Despret calls in *Devenirs femme* a "polite" interest, or a manner of conducting research that privileges the point of view of the subject rather than project the researcher's own knowledge and preoccupations onto observation practices and thus, gathered data. Despret underscores that adopting a "juste

[272] A powerful example of inquiry into this subject in French literature can be found in Jean-Christophe Bailly's *Le Dépaysement: Voyages en France* (2010). Beginning with the observation that "Paris, on le sait, est encore aujourd'hui une ville fermée à double tour par un rigoureux système de ceintures" (68), in his chapter "La France commence à Gentilly, Portugal," Bailly travels to one of Greater Paris' plentiful "poches communautaires" (79) to question the complicated relationship between *intra muros* Paris, and its suburbs.

milieu" between intellectual authority and vulnerability affords researchers the knowledge they need to make sense of their observations but more importantly, allows them to remain open to the unexpected. Leaving the stark, fixed lines of the map behind, and reconfiguring one's position to one of genuine interest therefore makes room for the possibility to discover all that is missing from the produced documents and concomitant discourses delineating Paris. Rather than remake, complete, or unmake the map, Sorman's book is an annotated guide to our collective *rewiring*, a research-text, model and critique that from maps and the blueprint psychology behind them explores and rethinks not only the world around us, but also how we engage with it.

Paradoxes of Precarity

If "pièces *sans* ouverture sur l'extérieur" figures in the long list of criteria used to denote insalubrity (L'Inhabitable 7 [2016], emphasis mine), *L'Inhabitable* underscores just how exposed and vulnerable the seven buildings are, despite tenants' attempts to hermetically seal windows and entryways: "L'insalubrité c'est aussi la porosité de l'habitat…une porte toujours ouverte sur la rue, un espace individuel qui ne ferme plus" (62 [2016]). Possessing neither the structural soundness to fend off the elements, nor security features to protect from intruders, the buildings' permeability does, however, facilitate Sorman's investigations. While the majority of Parisian buildings are equipped with an intricate system of door codes, interphones, and locks, to access 125 rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, the author "effortlessly" pushes open the door – "elle ne ferme plus depuis longtemps" (10 [2016]). When a principal entryway is not an option, as is the case at 23 rue Pajol's entrance, blocked from use by a large pile of garbage, the author is afforded access thanks to a narrow, but nonetheless human-sized fissure in the building's frame. This porosity extends to the buildings' interiors as well, affording their tenants little to no privacy. Through the hole-filled ceiling in Djibril Diolas' second-floor apartment at 10 rue Mathis, "parfois un pied ou

une jambe traverse, un œil effrayé et effrayant se colle dans la fente" (52 [2011]). But even within one's own apartment a lack of privacy can become problematic. Scanning the Adélaïde family's 27 m^2 studio, in which Patrick and his wife share a bed with one of their three children, Sorman adds that "l'entrave à la sexualité devrait figurer au nombre des critères de l'insalubrité" (58 [2016]).

Yet, despite this ease of access to insalubrious habitats and their prevalence on urban planning documents, *L'Inhabitable* demonstrates that these spaces, and moreover their inhabitants, are systematically invisibilized, an obfuscation that, according to Marielle Macé, requires much resolve. Written in response to a "migrant" camp located on Paris' Quai d'Austerlitz, paradoxically positioned among the riverfront's Cité de la mode, Le Wanderlust nightclub, and Banque Populaire headquarters, her essay *Sidérer, Considérer* (2017) explores the inclination to suppress that with which we are uncomfortable, that which leaves us "sidérés," or stupefied. While Macé admits that there is something quite staggering about the city's adjacent "pockets of space that must not communicate" (17), in exploring the verb's Latin etymology her text emphasizes the quiescence that "sidérer" engenders : "il y est question de subir l'influence néfaste des astres, d'être frappé de stupeur ; et il faut y associer d'emblée tous les verbes de l'immobilisation dans le spectacle de la terreur ; méduser, atterrer, pétrifier, interdire…" (25). Thus, succumbing to a state of "sidération" creates a cognitive distance that we can understand as being in opposition to Despret's "juste milieu." In *Gros œuvre* (2009), Sorman's equally telling reflection on habitat, and what it means to "habiter" in France today, the authorial narrator provides an example of "sidération" in action when discussing the cardboard sheds that the "Welcome Homeless" project placed around Paris for its homeless population: "Le problème de ces cabanes c'est leur situation. Pas à l'abri, pas en retrait, pas tranquilles, *beaucoup trop visibles*

alors qu'on ne veut pas les voir et qu'on détourne le regard, à la sortie des bouches de métro, sur des places, à des carrefours, en plein passage" (138, emphasis mine). The actions described here, not wanting to see the harsh reality of homelessness and quickly averting one's eyes, have arguably become instinctual for many Parisians. What Macé encourages her readers to understand is that despite the normalization of this reaction, the willing suppression of that which stupefies us only further reinforces beliefs of alterity, resulting in what she asserts is a form of quotidian violence against these populations (Macé 22).

The buildings themselves are "insoupçonnable[s]" (L'Inhabitable 10 [2011]), as are often the concealed hazards they present, like the lead paint-induced poisoning particularly prevalent among children. Seemingly, insalubrious Paris and its "[vies bricolées] dans l'ombre" (59 [2011]) are imperceptible to the city that surrounds them. From 23 rue Pajol's "vitres rapiécées de bâches, de cartons et de papier calque" (35 [2011]), to windows at 73 rue Riquet that no longer open (43 [2011]), to Monsieur Ladera's apartment at 10 rue Mathis where "il n'y [en] a plus" (50 [2011]), *L'Inhabitable* depicts a series of covered or condemned windows that typify this seclusion. Paradoxically, the same porosity that renders these buildings excessively accessible also inhibits access to the outside world; by isolating their homes for protection, tenants in turn become increasingly invisible within buildings already on the fringe of collective conscious. Though I will analyze the photographs from the 2011 edition in greater detail later in this chapter, because Pettacini's contributions further reinforce the narrative's leitmotif of invisibility, they merit a bit of attention, here.

If little to no natural light penetrates these images, it is because among the twelve photographs, five do not include windows, and five others picture what appear to be windows shrouded in layers of curtains (62-85 [2011]). Only two images contain open casements: in one,

a group of women stand chatting on their building's laundry-sheathed balcony, yet rather than a view of the city-scape, theirs contains a concrete building façade and cinder blocked window (84-5 [2011]). In the second photograph, a woman rests her elbows on the windowsill, perhaps for a bit of fresh air, but once again her line of vision is blocked by clotheslines in use and in the background, a cement wall fills the remaining space (74-5 [2011). The woman's white shirt creates a stark contrast with the image's somber background depicting the dwelling, replete with piles of cloths, bags, and heavy brocade curtains. Pettacini's photograph renders the woman's isolation and yet another paradox of insalubrity manifest: though she is visibly pushed out from the confines of her overflowing home, her escape is hindered by layer after layer of obstruction.

Figure 3.10: Woman in window, L'Inhabitable *(2011)*

While Macé's essay, and much of contemporary literature today, look to "migrant" trajectories to illustrate marginalization, insalubrity, and social invisibility, *L'Inhabitable* reminds readers that the squalor in which some Parisians live is not always blindingly obvious. As Claire Levy-Vroelant indicates in her interview for *La France Invisible* (2008), those

deprived of what 2000's SRU law deemed acceptable housing – "de logement décent" – are often completely assimilated members of French society. While Vroelant agrees that immigrants and their families are most affected by housing issues, she stipulates that "la période contemporaine offre la triste exemple de formes nouvelles d'exclusion du logement, qui touchent des personnes par ailleurs 'intégrées' en région parisienne, un SDF sur trois n'est pas coupé de l'emploi" (Beaud 210).

While conducting fieldwork at 31 rue Ramponeau, Sorman questions the integration construct, a process that France's Ministry of Interior defines as "la compréhension par l'étranger primo-arrivant des valeurs et principes de la République, l'apprentissage de la langue française, l'intégration sociale et professionnelle, et l'accès à l'autonomie."[273] Noting the careful attention the Sun family's daughters have accorded to their appearances, Sorman juxtaposes their irreproachable silhouettes with the stained, cockroach-infested walls of their apartment, and imagines them instead in one of the neighborhood's trendy bars:

> "Belles filles sur lesquelles on se retourne dans la rue, dont on envie la dégaine impeccable, belles filles de la ville, ce serait ça l'intégration ? L'intégration dans une ville. Éclatantes au grand jour, refoulées le soir dans des taudis, des habitants invisibles. Non pas des individus invisibles – ils travaillent, peuplent les rues –, mais des habitants insoupçonnés." (L'Inhabitable 21 [2011]).

The author's speculation on what it means to "integrate," or "to bring (racially or culturally differentiated peoples) into equal membership of a society or system" (OED) suggests that in order to be considered an equal in Parisian society, one must conceal any struggles related to the

[273] For this definition and more on social assimilation in France, see "Le parcours d'intégration Républicaine" on the French Minister of Interior website: https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Integration-et-Acces-a-la-nationalite/Le-parcours-personnalise-d-integration-republicaine2.

difficulties of assimilation. In other words, it seems to be in one's best interest to remain (discreetly) marginalized if one hopes to escape the determiners related to marginalized populations, perhaps in accordance with France's Republican vision of what I term elsewhere Otherblindness. Thus, more than a form of quotidian violence committed by dominant populations as Macé has suggested, it appears that invisibility bears the weight of an inborn symbolic violence:[274] as *L'Inhabitable* shows, those residing in the uninhabitable have internalized dominant frameworks of thought, and willingly participate in their own domination.

Moreover, *L'Inhabitable* illustrates that restoration, too, is an attempt to realize a more harmonious *Metropole*, or assimilate Paris. Lapierre confirms a shift in view of the city over the course of the twentieth century, from one envisioning the capital as inherently harmful, to one oriented toward historicism, and its conservation. If the outskirts of *intra muros* Paris appear lifeless on the aforementioned APUR map, it is because the atelier's project, led by art historian François Loyer, neglected insalubrity to privilege the superior buildings within the city's urban landscape:[275] "[L'enquête APUR] vise à réhabiliter la ville haussmannienne, désormais admirée pour la capacité des immeubles qui la constituent à définir des espaces publics de grande qualité" (L'Inhabitable 119 [2011]). So, why the renewed interest in insalubrious housing with 2000's

[274] In her article "Les formes d'engagement de l'écrivain: continuité et ruptures," Gisèle Sapiro defines Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence as "une violence douce et méconnue comme telle, parce qu'elle s'exerce avec la complicité des dominées, du fait qu'elles ont incorporé les schèmes de pensée dominants et participent ainsi à leur propre domination : la reconnaissance de la légitimité de la domination entraîne la méconnaissance de son arbitraire et l'intériorisation de la relation de domination par les dominés" (7). I will delve further into this concept and its influence on what I argue is an emergent form of literary responsibility in contemporary French Letters in the conclusion of this dissertation.

[275] Created in 1967, L'APUR conducts its vast project to map Parisian edifices according to age and quality between 1974-1978. With nineteenth-century, Haussmannian structures its key interest, the study divides structures into four categories: pre-nineteenth century, the first half of the nineteenth century, the second half of the nineteenth century/beginning of the twentieth century (pre/post-Haussmannian), and the twentieth century. The study is published in 1981 and according to L'APUR's website, "l'écho en est notoire au niveau international, pour la connaissance de l'architecture parisienne des XIX^{e} et XX^{e} siècles comme pour celle de la morphologie urbaine." For more information, see https://50ans.apur.org/fr/home/1978-1987/paris-xixe-siecle-limmeuble-et-lespace-urbain-1316.html.

SRU law, what Lapierre terms a "reconciliation" between salubriousness and history? (122 [2011]) In the given context, perhaps it is that in their states of decay, Paris' insalubrious buildings have become intruders to the historical narrative promoted through the city's architecture. As Cole Stangler asserts in his article "The Death of Working-Class Paris," current economic and real estate trends confirm an imminent consecration of France's capital "museum city," or what he writes will become "a theme park for tourists and wealthy visitors paying eternal homage to [the city's] past (3)."[276]

Take, for example, the twentieth arrondissement's rue Denoyez, where gentrification practices have given way to nondescript, white buildings punctuated with colorful storefronts and an abundance of graffiti art. Just one block over, Sorman returns to the 31 rue Ramponeau structure that once accommodated an ensemble of 60 households, clandestine workshops, and dormitories for undeclared workers, to find that the edifice has been transformed into a pristine prototype of social housing:

> "Au 31, je retrouve l'impasse qui débouche désormais sur une impressionnante résidence, un bâtiment flambant neuf, à la façade de briques et carreaux blancs, agrémenté de verdure et de bambous, traverse par une charmante rue intérieure. Je relève une légère audace architecturale, la seule : l'encaissement asymétrique des fenêtres dans la façade. Là aussi, un bout de mur décrépi et tagué est comme un vestige de l'insalubrité, une trace de ce qu'on a éradiqué, une preuve." (L'Inhabitable 30-31 [2016])

[276] Stangler adds that the dynamics born from the Covid-19 pandemic may be the coup de grace in this transformation, calling it the "last nail in the coffin of Paris as a place where ordinary people can afford to live" (3). Moreover, according to the journalist the pandemic has rendered increasingly visible the vast housing disparities in the capital city (14).

Figure 3.11: 31 rue Ramponeau, May 2019

The vegetation Sorman denotes in her follow-up visit appears the only marker of life surrounding the now calm, but sterile environs the author describes as "à peine habités" (31 [2016]). The brand-new building at 10 rue Mathis seems similarly uninhabited, and flagrantly lacks the sense of community the author observed only five years earlier; when Sorman dials at random on the building interphone, "une voix de synthèse, féminine et aiguë, me répond que mon correspondant est absent" (42 [2016]). Indeed, *L'Inhabitable* implies that renovations have only further invisibilized the former tenants who, much like the centralized pockets of the poverty-stricken Paris during Haussmann's grandiose embellishments, seem to have vanished into thin air.

Stangler might attribute this disappearance to the city's transformation into what he calls "a global magnet for financial services, tourism, tech, and high-creative industries…many [low-income Parisians] are being erased from the cityscape entirely, decamping to the sprawling suburbs in search of affordable housing, or simply leaving the metropolitan area altogether

(3)."[277] As Yonah Freemark and colleagues illustrate in their article "Housing Haussmann's Paris," demographic patterns in Paris today are strikingly similar to those at the time of the city's Haussmannization (17). In fact, they write that the former prefect's name has become a buzzword in debates on the city's current housing projects, symbolic of political rhetoric deployed both to support and contest various developments in Paris' housing policy: "Whether Haussmann conjures up a beneficent, elegant landscape or whether he stands as shorthand for brutal policies of class-based exclusion, his presence lingers in discussions of Parisian housing policy" (18). However, as Freemark's research demonstrates, claims ascribing Haussmann's work to an intentional project to segregate the Parisian cityscape according to class are, in fact, exceedingly more nuanced.[278] Nevertheless, during and following the architect's renovations, stratified Paris becomes a common theme in French literature, much like it is today.

In Charles Baudelaire's poem, "Les Yeux des pauvres," the narrator connotes that the displacement of the poor is part of what has become for the poet *Le Spleen de Paris*, or the affective state of melancholy provoked by France's "capital infâme" (146). The narrator sits in a resplendent new café, "a bit tired" after a long day of leisure with his female companion (74). Suddenly, he catches a glimpse of veritable fatigue when he spots an awestruck father and his two sons staring in from the pavement outside. Perhaps it is the seriousness of the "famille

[277] Stangler notes that while the working class made up 35% of Paris' population in 1999, today) that figure has dropped to 26% (his article went to press November 10, 2020), and despite the fact that labor-force workers constitute approximately half the nation's population (51%).

[278] Freemark and colleagues analyze the claims of Louis Lazare, editor of *La Revue Municipale*, who was a staunch critic of his contemporary, Haussmann. Lazare argued that Haussmann's projects privileged luxurious edifices that neglected working classes need from smaller, affordable apartment units, and therefore relegated low-income populations to the periphery of the city (11). However, the article posits that "the statistical evidence of such class privileging, whether it was intentional or not, does not support the same conclusion. An examination of the spatial distribution of public works in relation to the distribution of poverty demonstrates that the prefect introduced new boulevards in wealthy and poor communities alike. Both the 8th and 9th arrondissements, marked by low levels of poverty, as well as arrondissements marked by high levels – including the 13th – were heavily impacted by Haussmann's new boulevards. In other words, the positioning of new streets cannot easily be reduced to a single-minded search for poor neighbourhoods to remake" (11-12).

d'yeux," the rags in which they are dressed, or their apparent weakness that touches the narrator, and incites his shame amid the excess of drink at his table (75). Or maybe it is what the café's dividing window represents, encapsulated in the words the narrator lends to the eldest son: "c'est une maison où peuvent seuls entrer les gens qui ne sont pas comme nous" (ibid). Following Haussmann's renovations, Baudelaire's poem insinuates that France's fundamental belief in equality became manifestly ambiguous in terms of the allocation of urban space.

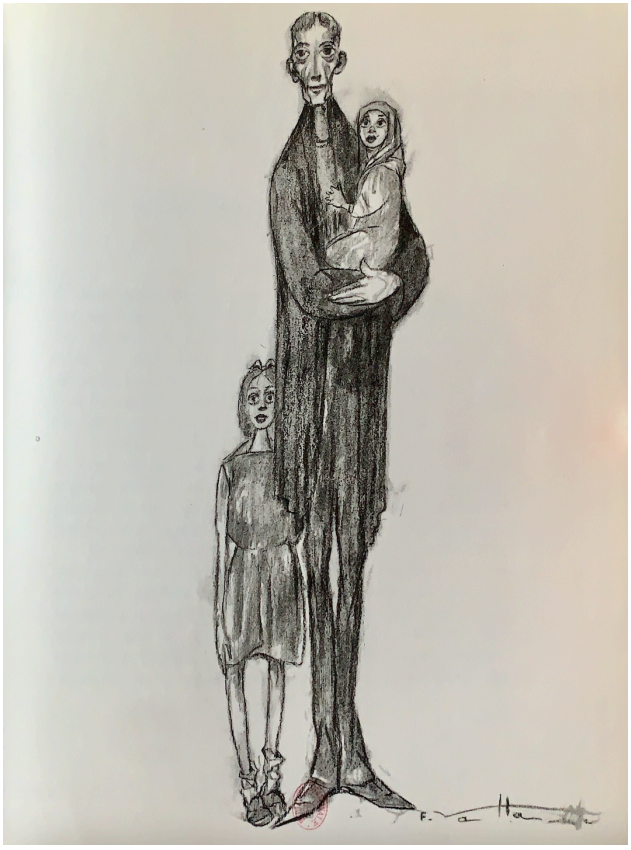


Figure 3.12: Illustration of "Les Yeux des pauvres" from Baudelaire's Le Spleen de Paris

The fascination with which the man and his children gaze into the café, which the narrator describes as a "joie stupide et profonde," illustrates how following its redevelopment, Paris has become unrecognizable, and even exotic for the trio (ibid). Similarly, *L'Inhabitable*'s

epilogue “Le Relogement” demonstrates that in conforming to the aesthetic demands of the *ville musée*, the freshly renovated buildings have become foreign to their new renters. As Sorman explains, the inhabitants of formerly insalubrious buildings are generally wary of their new abodes, and at times even squarely refuse the rehousing process altogether (L’Inhabitable 73 [2016]). Contributing to their reticence is the violent uprooting from their respective communities that bloom and prosper in spite, or even because of insalubrious conditions. Furthermore, the epilogue underscores that along with relocation comes the task of once again adapting their living quarters to fit their needs, detailing the extent to which the Sidibé family’s apartment is ill-suited for their lifestyle: “L’appartement est bricolé pour s’adapter aux modes de vie traditionnels du foyer, les architectes n’y avaient pas songé avant, pas songé qu’il s’agit d’accueillir au sein de la ville occidentale des mœurs héritées d’une vie rurale et communautaire” (74 [2016]).

Lapierre details at length the impacts of renovations on the cityscape, and emphasizes the importance in marrying conservation (when possible), contemporaneity and context in architectural plans (122-32 [2011]). There is, however, no mention of the conceptualization of individual units in the renovated buildings themselves, and how they were to be outfitted. While it is probable that the buildings’ interiors were designed with the best of intentions, that Sorman emphasizes the Sidibé’s substantial modifications to their dwelling suggests a certain degree of conformism expected from rehoused families. Yet, if the division present in Baudelaire’s poem illustrates class-based social exclusion, today France’s rehousing projects promulgate a seemingly inclusive discourse: namely, the country’s project of “insertion sociale,” defined by L’IIDRIS as an “action visant à faire évoluer un individu isolé ou marginal vers une situation caractérisée par des échanges satisfaisants avec son environnement ; c’est également le résultat

de cette action, qui s'évalue par la nature et la densité des échanges entre un individu et son environnement."[279] This statement is problematic for a number of reasons, the first of which is the use of the causative faire with the verb "évoluer," suggesting that this action is not voluntary, but rather enacted by a subject other than the "isolated or marginalized individual." Herein lies another slippery slope: despite the use of the conjunction "or," the juxtaposition of "isolé" and "marginal" suggests that the individuals in question are isolated *because* they do not conform to the standards of the dominant group, by which the principle behind *insertion sociale* becomes the remolding of Otherly citizens to conform to Republican norms, and forcefully at that. Beyond other questions the definition as a whole provokes, such as how one assesses and measures a social insertion candidate's behavior, the first phrase of the definition is particularly telling. Indeed, it opposes "marginalized" and "central" French citizens and therefore upholds the isolation the program purportedly seeks to eliminate. In the words of Freemark, "as in Haussmann's time, there are reasons to be both optimistic and concerned about the government's interest in housing" (Freemark 18).

More than an exiguity-induced lack of intimacy, *L'Inhabitable* demonstrates other detrimental effects the rehousing process can have on one's personal life in its interstitial text devoted to a polygamous man from Burkina Faso and his family, former residents of an insalubrious building in the Goutte-d'Or. Sorman breaks with her predominant use of the present tense to sardonically recount their "anti-tale" in the passé simple, typical of the genre in French:

> "Ceci n'est pas un conte…Il fut sommé de choisir la femme avec laquelle il serait relogé. La première épouse – installée en France depuis plus longtemps – avait ses papiers et

[279] The acronym IIDRIS stands for the "Index international et dictionnaire de la réadaptation et de l'intégration sociale." This definition and more information can be found at the following website: https://www.cnle.gouv.fr/insertion-sociale-integration.html.

> revendiquait donc la place de relogée. Mais la seconde épouse était mère d'enfants en bas âge et à ce titre fut prioritaire. L'époux n'eut finalement pas à se prononcer, ce qui l'arrangea. La première épouse, qui occupe la plus haute place dans la hiérarchie familiale, en conçut beaucoup d'amertume et de ressentiment. Elle fit la gueule plusieurs années." (L'Inhabitable 71 [2016])

If Sorman writes that the supposed fairness of the system responsible for the rehousing process is "cet équilibre bancal et approximatif" (25 [2016]), it is not solely because it often results in breaches of equality (ibid). Rather than recognize the infinite ways lives, and accordingly homes and households take shape in the *Hexagone* today, this system imposes a set of housing and family-related norms onto those it serves. As interviewee Claude Dujardin puts it in the chapter "Habitants des taudis" from *La France invisible*, "'l'insalubrité, ce n'est pas que des histoires de tas de briques, il y a de l'humain derrière'" (Beaud 203).

In *L'Invention du quotidien. Volume 2 : Habiter, Cuisiner* (1980), Michel de Certeau and Luce Girard underscore the danger in contemplating the city's insalubrious dwellings solely from the standpoint of buildings in need of renovation. What they term "museology politics" occurs when "[le musée] soustrait à des usagers ce qu'il présente à des observateurs" (196).[280] Or in other words, by taking more interest in the buildings than their occupants, restauration engenders a misappropriation of property, often earmarking the newly-renovated edifices for a different clientele altogether (198). Take, for example, the ground floor of the pristine building at rue 10 Mathis, which as Sorman documents "a été conçu pour accueillir des bureaux, peut-être un

[280] The authors describe this politically-motivated aesthetic practice as "une politique remontant à la loi Malraux (1962) sur la sauvegarde (encore ponctuelle) d'architectures anciennes, civiles et quotidiennes, et, plus loin encore, à la loi du 2 mai 1930 sur les sites à protéger (des ensembles déjà), ou même à celle de 1913, qui ne concernait que les monuments. Une tradition s'amplifie, dont l'origine serait le discours de l'abbé Grégoire contre le vandalisme (1794) : elle articule sur la destruction nécessaire d'un passé révolu la préservation de biens sélectionnés qui ont un intérêt 'national.' Placée d'abord sous le signe de 'trésors' à extraire d'un corps voué à la mort, cette politique muséologique prend déjà, chez Malraux, le caractère d'une esthétique" (190-1).

commerce" (L'Inhabitable 42 [2016]). Moreover, the text's compelling "anti-tale" insinuates that the separation that arose from an administrative disregard for culturally-specific social hierarchies could have been avoided had the rehousing process considered, and legitimized the family's practices.

Macé would likely argue that the newly renovated structures fail to "faire cas des vies, et avoir des égards pour les lieux de vie" (Macé 47). For the literary specialist, it is not enough to address those residing in precarity according to their afflictions and deficiencies. Rather, *Sidérer, Considérer* advances that a *lieu de vie*, no matter how deplorable it may appear, is just that: a space containing "les vies…vivantes et vécues" (ibid) with something to say about its inhabitants trajectories, achievements, bravery, hopes, and dreams, a "territoire d'idées" (48). Moreover, in respect to how one is compelled to live in Paris today, reading Macé's essay alongside Sorman's narrative for *L'Inhabitable* affords a pertinent observation on French society. Seemingly, it is no longer the alleged "marginalized" populations who are on the fringe, but instead those who continue to esteem these populations as Others and promulgate their marginalization who are "au bord de notre propre présent, de ses multiplicités et de ce qui y nous requiert" (24).

Synonymous with consideration, "faire cas (de quelque chose)" denotes an active curiosity from which one may grasp the many nuances that constitute the rich, though often complicated lives in the capital city. Such active curiosity is evident in the narrator of Baudelaire's poem, which provides an illustration of how, when faced with misfortune, one may move from "sidération" to "consideration." The reaction of the narrator's irritated companion to the trio outside, incongruous with the setting of her evening libation, epitomizes "sidération." She exclaims, "ces gens-là me sont insupportables, avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères ! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le maître du café de les éloigner d'ici ?" (Baudelaire 76)

The poem's narrator, on the other hand, pauses to contemplate the respective trajectories behind the three pairs of eyes, imagining the dialogue their gazes communicate before the brand-new edifice, its ornate fixtures, and blinding white walls. While the narrator admits a certain discomfort, he professes to be moved by the courageous man and his children, who "rend l'âme bonne et amollit le cœur" (Baudelaire 75). The narrator is moved to voice this encounter, with both his thoughtful contemplation and the speech it incites becoming acts of consideration. Macé writes:

> "Considérer en effet, c'est regarder attentivement, avoir des égards, faire attention, tenir compte, *ménager avant d'agir et pour agir* ; c'est le mot du 'prendre en estime,' du 'faire cas de,' mais aussi du jugement, du droit, de la pesée, du scrutin. C'est un mot de la perception et de la justice, de l'attention et du droit." (Macé 26, emphasis mine)

Much like Baudelaire's poem creates a place for the socially marginalized during mid-nineteenth-century class displacement, *L'Inhabitable* honors the stories of the insalubrious buildings' evicted tenants, and affords them a permanent residence by inscribing them in the enduring, and in this instance considerate literary text.

Sorman's Socio-Journalism of Consideration

If, as Robert Stockhammer suggests, maps are "operators of reading and understanding" (Stockhammer 27), their use in literature invites readers to question a text's unique engagement with these documents, and how this interaction can facilitate and even enhance reading, of a book or of space. Whether their manifestations are veiled like Sorman's movement-generated itinerary in *L'Inhabitable*, or tangible like the colorful images featured in colleague Philippe Vasset's *Un livre blanc* (2007), French literature's incessant focus on as iconic an example of charted space as Paris suggests that the map communicates messages that exceed the document

itself. In other words, what of these maps does topographical literature ask its audience to read, and how does it ask that we grasp this content? According to Stockhammer, "one of [the map's] essential virtues consists in making visible what without it would remain invisible or hidden…It makes visible the unknown that nestles in the real" (31). However, as Vasset illustrates in his quest to uncover the theoretically empty spaces punctuating his map of the capital, which initially appears to the author as "une boîte de chocolats vidée de ses meilleures pièces" (Vasset 10), the ideals maps feature often render these documents irreconcilable with reality (9). Although Vasset and Sorman would seemingly agree that it is only through experience in the field that one may catch a glimpse of invisibilized Paris, also a leitmotif in Vasset's book, the two authors undertake their projects with divergent methodologies.

While both authors encourage rereadings of marginalized Paris, how the reader comes to grasp space through Vasset's book is arguably from a position of "sidération." Like Macé, the author's attention turns to the men, women, and children who have created makeshift homes on the city's Quai d'Austerlitz. After his interviews with Arthur, Ruslan, Ibrahim and others, however, Vasset admits that he experiences "une fascination difficile à assumer pour ces existences portées jusqu'à l'extrême public" (Macé 25). Preferring "la confusion à la clarté" (ibid), the author promptly renounces the notion of a "documentaire engagé" to privilege the trials and errors of his research, and imagined, and often comical, narratives about the places he investigates. Drawing from both Stockhammer and Macé's arguments, I posit that unlike Vasset, Sorman's narrative champions a reading of space conducive to Macé's call to "faire cas des vies," and in so doing becomes emblematic of what I propose is a socio-journalism of consideration: Sorman's methodology in *L'Inhabitable* contemplates space and representations of space as "territories of ideas" (Macé 48), the study of which affords richer readings and

understandings of both the map, and our world. To summarize this chapter's arguments thus far, the book's project to rewire blueprint psychology does not seek to unmap or remap marginalized Paris, nor merely point to the characteristic invisibility of these spaces. Rather, *L'Inhabitable* concerns itself with complexifying how we allow marginalized spaces and their representations to affect and *inhabit* us, an operation that transforms our relationship to the marginal, and the notion of marginality itself.

Spatial Immersion

Sorman titles her text *L'Inhabitable* with good reason, and accordingly fills her narrative with portraits of insalubrity that bolster and afford concrete meaning to a substantive with which readers are surely familiar, but may never have "considered" in Macé's understanding of the verb. From the "suffocating atmosphere" (L'Inhabitable 56 [2016]) created in attempts to mitigate the omnipresent humidity in Monsieur Shunxi's apartment, to the Adélaïde family's recurrent hospital visits, their youngest son having recently contracted a lung infection "*après avoir mangé le mur*" (58 emphasis original [2016]), 73 rue Riquet presents all the signs of a building whose "état de dégradation peut avoir des effets dangereux sur la santé de ses occupants et/ou voisinage" (7 [2016]). In effect, human lives are foundational in the definition of insalubrity with which Sorman opens both editions of her narrative.[281] For, it is not the toxicity of a dwelling that merits the qualification of insalubrity but rather, a noxious space's potential to adversely affect residents and neighbors. Of greater import to Sorman than the building's urine-infested stairwell and illicit graffiti tags – "*casablanca oran en force, nik la bac, la bac trop bête*

[281] Both editions of the book open with the same definition of insalubrity, which reads as follows: "Insalubrité : un logement est déclaré insalubre à partir du moment où son état de dégradation peut avoir des effets dangereux sur la santé de ses occupants et/ou voisinage. L'insalubrité s'analyse en se référant notamment à une liste de critères tels que les murs fissures, humidité importante, pièces sans ouverture sur l'extérieur, terrain instable, absence de raccordement aux réseaux d'électricité ou d'eau potable, absence de système d'assainissement, odeurs fétides ou produits toxiques circulant dans l'atmosphère" (7 [2011, 2016]).

vous nous aurez jamais" (55 emphasis original [2016]) – are the injurious effects insalubrity has on the lives of its dwellers, which far transcend health matters.

Though Sorman's revelatory reporting may concretize Parisian insalubrity, it resists the reification of tenant identities according to the precarity that surrounds them. Rather than solely tell toxicity and tenant trajectories, the narrative shows and in turn (re)enacts empirical observation within readership, a preparatory process necessary to draw attention to underlying social factors surrounding housing-related precarity in France. Concomitant to *L'Inhabitable*'s journalistic field investigation is an inherently sociological concern for the Paris' housing-related inequalities, an approach that reflects on their development, structure, and functioning within the city's social structure (OED). Achieved through immersive writing techniques, Sorman's socio-journalism of consideration reconstitutes the uninhabitable through thoughtful reflection rather than mere observation so as to allow its inhabitants to affect us. The text's tableau vivant thus breathes life into insalubrious Paris by allowing its most valuable creators, the tenants themselves, to sketch their stories of habitat and home on literature's contemplative canvas.

Combining sociology and journalism in a project of consideration first requires that the text fix our gaze on the subject, what Macé conceptualizes in her definition of *considération* as "le regard (l'examen, par les yeux ou par la pensée)" (Macé 26). *L'Inhabitable* plunges its audience into the narrative through a two-fold process of immersion beginning with that of Sorman herself, which in the first edition manifests itself as authorial effacement. Privileging instead the delineation of spaces at hand, vignettes of the tenant's lives and their testimony, the authorial "je" appears a mere six times in the original text. Used predominantly to indicate her spatial trajectory through the buildings, only once does the "je" interrupt a tenant story to denote a near-boiling coffee pot that Sorman "n'ose pas…signaler" (L'Inhabitable 36 [2016]), the

author's discomfort proving further evidence of her desire to remain peripheral to the narrative. It is only in the second edition's "5 ans plus tard" segments that the authorial "je" emerges more frequently, albeit not in a manner that eclipses the investigation at hand. Rather, the "je" employed in the follow-up narratives underscores the author's puzzlement upon her return to the buildings, as she struggles to conjure the memory of the communities in which she was once immersed that have since disappeared, and to make sense of what has taken their place: "Je tente en vain de…recomposer une vague image de ses habitants, ceux dont j'aurais aimé retrouver la trace 5 ans plus tard ;…mais aujourd'hui je me tiens sur le seuil et les habitants ont disparu, les vies se sont dispersées" (42-3 [2016]).

Opening each address with a close reading of insalubrious space, *L'Inhabitable* in turn realizes reader immersion through what Marie-Laure Ryan describes in *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (2016) as the process of metonymic implication. At work in each address portrait is a carefully constructed *mise en scène* that gradually transports readers inside of the dilapidated buildings. Sorman begins by contextualizing the structures within their environs before recreating her sensory experience of insalubrity for her audience : pungent odors of trash, mildew, vomit and urine punctuate her portraits, as do the staggering sights denoting the wretched conditions in which the featured tenants reside. As Ryan has written, "the spatial objects explicitly named in the text invite the reader to imagine the larger spatial unit of which they are a part: for instance, the window…implies a room, which itself implies a house or apartment" (19).[282] Ostensibly, the previously analyzed condemned and obstructed windows that

[282] Ryan's analysis is founded in what she describes as an "interplay" between container and network metaphors for thinking space. In the container metaphor, a subject experiences space according to determined and imposed boundaries, enacting a sense of constriction that, according to Ryan, proves powerful in activating the imagination. The scholar describes the network conception of space as a "dynamic system of relations that allows movement and that is often created by the subject" (19).

both through narrative and images pervade the book's pages not only illustrate the tenants' social invisibility, but also serve to implicate the reader in the text. Similarly, the electric wires that "sortent des plinthes comme des pattes d'araignée" (L'Inhabitable 50 [2011]) and wander from one address to the next become webs that entangle the reader in the immersive experience.

And, if *L'Inhabitable* had a soundtrack, it would certainly be that emanating from the omnipresent television set, echoes from a Chinese soap opera at rue Ramponeau melding with LCI's Julliard/Ferry debate at rue Mathis, and "la télé allumée en continu" (48 [2016]) in Adel's first-floor apartment at rue Pajol: "Il paraît que le son fait fuir les cafards…" (ibid). This metonymic process the text sets in motion renders the reader an inhabitant of the insalubrious, if only cognitively, and but for the duration of the narrative. In this way, the text deploys immersive strategies to actualize the author's own fieldwork, rivet our attention on the tenant portraits to come, and make manifest the high stakes and detrimental effects of insalubrious living in Paris. Seemingly, immersion is a requisite operation of consideration, drawing reader awareness to insalubrity's attendant social factors in coupling "le regard" with what Macé describes as "égard, le scrupule, l'accueil sérieux de ce que l'on doit faire effort pour garder sous les yeux" (Macé 26).

In her article, "Another Way to Tell the News," Marie Vanoost argues for immersion's crucial role in the success with which information is relayed and in turn, internalized by readers. Working within the scope of what is interchangeably referred to as narrative and literary journalism,[283] Vanoost's study claims that the medium is particularly effective for creating

[283] For the purpose of this chapter, I will use narrative journalism. In her article, Vanoost defines narrative journalism as "a particular form of journalism that uses devices of fiction to tell true stories" (404). Purdue University's Online Writing Lap defines literary journalism similarly, describing it as "immersion journalism," and " the creative nonfiction form that comes closest to newspaper and magazine writing. It is fact-driven and requires research and, often, interviews." For more of their description on literary journalism, see their website page: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/teacher_and_tutor_resources/writing_instructors/creative_nonfiction_in_writing_courses/literary_journalism.html.

narrative identity, or a text's potential to "transform our muddled and bewildering experience of time into a comprehensible and significant whole" (407). Reading Paul Ricoeur with other narratology scholars, Vanoost grounds her argument in the philosopher's conception of three-fold mimesis. To briefly summarize Ricoeur's complex theory, prefiguration ($Mimesis_1$) denotes existing beliefs about self and world that an audience brings to their reading. Configuration ($Mimesis_2$) materializes through the communication of narrative, during which a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (405) takes place, which simply put is when an audience makes both temporal and intellectual connections to arrive at new conclusions about self and world. Finally, refiguration ($Mimesis_3$) corresponds to the appropriation of narrative by readers, or as Vanoost puts it "the inscription of narratives in human existence" (404), therefore contributing to one's prefigured state and continuing the circular process through which narrative identity is generated and, in turn, received. Vanoost underscores the importance of $Mimesis_2$, and notably narrative journalism's characteristic combination of immersion and information through which new attitudes are "configured." For Vanoost, this communicative medium has become crucial at a time when the turnaround time in the production and consumption of mainstream media narratives is so fast-paced that it has rendered impossible the paramount process of configuration, and consequently the possibility of a reconfiguration.

Not unlike *Sidérer, Considérer*'s concern for collective reception, and at times rejection of ubiquitous social inequalities in Paris, following Vanoost's argument it appears that the identity narrative journalism endeavors to establish is one of *considération*, "cette disposition où se conjuguent le regard…et l'égard" (Macé 26). And in turn, today's proliferation of, if not quite narrative journalism, then journalistic narratives, in French Letters suggests that *considering* the country's social realities is of equal import to the field of literature. Of ostensibly greater concern

in today's narratives than Ricoeur's time, however, are representations of space, a trend Joshua Armstrong attributes to a generalized malaise in light of our increasingly globalized world in his monograph *Maps and Territories*. From his corpus of eight contemporary French novels in which protagonists "renegotiate their relationship to space and place in order to maintain any sense of belonging within the troubled territories they call home" (7-9), Armstrong argues for literature's capacity to remap what he terms are "global positionings," or "[approaches] to apprehending the global" (8), and in so doing transcend the paradoxical limits globalization practices have imposed on France.[284]

The notions of positioning and position are of great import to Sorman's socio-journalism of consideration, yet with one key difference from that modeled by the protagonists in Armstrong's corpus. I suggest that in renegotiating problematic areas of Paris, *L'Inhabitable* does not seek to preserve or reclaim conventional positions of belonging in France, but rather invites readers to question how these positions are connected to what Armstrong notes are the disproportionate repercussions experienced by the socially, politically, and geographically marginalized in our globalized world (8). Moreover, that the protagonists of "traditional 'French' identities" (ibid) inherently possess the primacy to negotiate, or renegotiate space for their own benefit is problematic; in many ways similar to the blueprint psychology Sorman's narrative refutes, this implied dominance intimates that centralized positions of belonging necessarily contribute to the exclusion of Others. In fact, if the entirety of this dissertation's corpus encourages readers to complicate one's relationships to History, current events, and the

[284] Armstrong's corpus is comprised of novels from Michel Houellebecq, Chloé Delaume, Lydie Salvayre, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Virginie Despentes, Philippe Vasset, Jean Rolin and Marie Darrieussecq. His introduction posits our current relationship to space as paradoxical in that globalization's endeavor to free the social world from its attachments to place seems to have accomplished just the opposite (4-5): "What was to be a great expansion of the spatial imaginary of mankind instead contributes to the revelation of the true limits of the physical environment it is consigned to inhabit…in what feels like an increasingly crowded, controlled, and ecologically imperiled world" (5).

places we call home, it is in order to challenge what a "traditional" French identity might be in an increasingly diverse country, with its capital city the epitome of the country's innate ethnic and cultural heterogeneity.

What is seemingly at stake in *L'Inhabitable*, is not our physical location, or even how social and economic factors, with the added influence of globalization, have transformed our capacity to live and belong in this world.[285] Rather, Sorman asks what of this world we allow to relate to us, and how. Rather than encourage a repositioning so as to avoid or overcome the professed chaos of contemporary life, *L'Inhabitable* asks that we allow space and its concomitant disorder to dwell within us:

> "Faire entrer un lieu à l'intérieur de soi plutôt que s'y tenir, inverser le mouvement, être habitée plutôt qu'habiter, mais attention, pas habitée mystique-extatique, être concrètement habitée, y'a du monde à l'intérieur, il fait chaud, il fait froid, humide, ensoleillé, la maison rentrée de force à coups de boutoir, par la gueule grande ouverte comme une oie qu'on gave ; du béton coulé dans l'œsophage, sentir les angles du bâtiment irriter les poumons, le cheminée fumer ; inverser les espaces, les proportions, les contenants/contenus. L'homme qui avait mangé sa maison ; avalée." (Gros œuvre 99)

An approach formulated in *Gros œuvre* and enacted in *L'Inhabitable*, Sorman's socially-considerate journalism renders France's iconic city as we have not experienced it before: appearing as an inverted pop-up book, Sorman's Paris encourages readers to dive in, and allow the capital's most isolated recesses to inhabit them.

[285] Though not treated in-depth in this chapter, Sorman's other topographical narratives *Paris Gare du Nord*, and *Gros œuvre* in particular, ask similar questions of our relationship to the world around us.

Inhabiting

In a sense, spatial immersion is a means for Sorman to "déblayer le terrain." Used in the context of fieldwork, the French expression denotes the crucial, initial step in an investigation to "aplanir les difficultés avant d'aborder l'essentiel d'une question" (TLFi), which in *L'Inhabitable* is not the decrepit buildings, but the lives they contain. In effect, of greater import to the author's socio-journalism of consideration than enclosing readers in noxious space is how they engage with what they discover there. More than enrich narrative experience, Vanoost credits readers participation in character, and in this case tenant emotions with the capacity to "create long-lasting memories in readers and…these memories contribute to the way readers understand important societal issues in the long run" (Vanoost 419). Much like the text spatially implicates readers in the insalubrious, *L'Inhabitable*'s tenants inhabit readers through both empirical and metonymic techniques. While author-crafted vignettes tracing inhabitant trajectories and their own testimony work in concert to generate affective immersion, each serve distinct purposes in shaping how this immersion may, in turn, result in a potential transformation of how one is "inhabited" by the world around them, or in other words, their capacity to be affected, and affect in return.

If spatial immersion situates readers in a position to "faire cas des vies," then the tenant vignettes Sorman constructs from her fieldwork and interviews form the necessary foundation to textually create a relationship with the buildings' dwellers. It is here that we come to know their personal trajectories and the factors contributing to their marginalization within the city, through which a multitude of intersecting precarities emerge. From address to address, professional instability is a constant, despite the interviewees willingness to work. Monsieur Ladera's contract as a temporary employee at Orly Airport is renewed every three months, and at times, not at all,

Sorman noting that currently, "il touche les Assedic en attendant la reprise" (L'Inhabitable 37-8 [2016]). Similarly, Madame Adélaïde's sudden layoff and consequential loss of housing – "un studio, une sorte de logement de fonction attenant à un appartement bourgeois" (57 [2016]) – required that her family relocate to 73 rue Riquet's dilapidated and hazardous structure. In fact, for the ensemble of the tenants, it is coping with their living conditions that has become their principle activity. This is particularly the case for *squatteurs*, for whom finding a place to live, "c'est devenu un état, une fonction" (56 [2016]), and to whom the tenants worriedly refer.

The *squatteurs* included in Sorman's vignettes, who in one instance are a handicapped woman and her child (ibid), and in a second, a young *sans-papiers* couple, underscore important social realities tied to professional and economic instability, and therefore to insalubrious habitats. As Gediminas Lesutis notes in *The Politics of Precarity* (2022), "the otherness defined by gender/sexuality, nationality/citizenship (often interlinked with race/ethnicity), body-ability, and age fundamentally condition securities and instabilities of work" (23).[286] Indeed, though the *squatteurs* may live "en marge de cette collectivité" (L'Inhabitable 68 [2016]), in *L'Inhabitable* it becomes apparent that even the legitimate residents lead existences outside of what Judith Butler forwards in *Frames of War* (2010) are the "exclusionary norms by which fields of recognizability are constituted" (Butler 36). Characterized by woes associated with immigration, mental illness, reduced mobility, ageism, and the like, the vignettes demonstrate that it is not

[286] However, Lesutis moves beyond the notion of precarity as it was initially theorized by Pierre Bourdieu in relation to a predominantly Western labor force to merge capitalistic understandings of precarity with those relating to power relations, from which result social hierarchies contributing to dominance and marginalization. The scholar's rereading of Judith Butler's seminal conceptualization of *precariousness* and *precarity* is fundamental to the theoretical framework he develops to analyze space's violent potential. In Frames of War, Butler advances *precariousness* as a shared human condition of vulnerability in that we are inherently dependent on one another to live and be in the world. *Precarity*, on the other hand, refers to an added layer of vulnerability in populations relegated out outside of, or to the fringe of what she terms "exclusionary norms." With these definitions in hand, Lesutis writes that "precarity as a socially and politically mediated condition of everyday life is sustained through structural, affective, and corporeal exposures to the violence of spatial capitalist abstractions, as well as the dispositions of politics that these processes enable or deny" (29).

merely contending with their living arrangements, but also with an overarching geography of social precarities that has become the life's work of Sorman's interviewees.

The photographs from Jean-Claude Pattacini following Sorman's text in the first edition evocatively introduce the tenants into *L'Inhabitable*'s narrative. However, rather than render the tenants more "recognizable," or more relatable within France's interpretive frameworks regulating "who [conforms] to certain culturally specific notions about what the culturally recognizable human is" (Butler 42), the images appear to reinforce the residents' Otherness. Beyond the dim, cramped, crumbling, and porous condition of the buildings themselves, dated furniture, electronic equipment, and clothing suggest that the photographs were captured twenty years prior to the book's publication date. Moreover, in leafing through the images, one would not immediately presume they were taken in Paris at all, with a myriad of striking fabrics, culturally-diverse wall art, and demographically diverse populations rendering them impossible to place with geographical precision. Only a Provençal-style tablecloth, a smattering of infamous Tati bags, and the word "boucherie" (L'Inhabitable 64 [2011]) written on a plastic bag suggest that we are indeed in a francophone region, though not necessarily France, let alone *Paname* given that representations of the capital city are, as I have demonstrated, generally quite more glamorous.

Reinforcing the Otherly quality of the photographs are the tenants themselves, who appear with backs turned to the camera lens, blurred faces and at times, bodies. On one hand, concealing the faces of those pictured, along with what I would venture to guess are pseudonyms of those interviewed, is surely to protect tenant anonymity. Yet, we can also interpret this facial obfuscation as evidence of their effacement from France's field of social vision, and the blurred bodies in movement as indicative of the instability this marginalization engenders. And while

they have been underexposed to such an extreme that they are not evident at first glance, Pattacini's photographs also appear *within* Sorman's narrative in the first edition. Adjacent to *la belle page* commencing each address portrait, and used to background the interstitial texts are ghostlike, close-up images of the tenants cropped from Pattacini's originals. Effectively, rather than afford tenants the "recognizability" Butler argues is necessary to shape a "grievable life" capable of affecting us (Butler 41), the images seem to reinforce the idea of their exclusion and associated precarity.[287] Moreover, the precise focus and often vivid colors afforded to the rooms in which the inhabitants are photographed render the residents further indistinguishable, and reduce them to the precarity of their environments, phantom figures on the fringe of society. Effectively, if Sorman elected to republish her narrative without the photographs from the first edition, I propose that it was to circumvent the potential distance the images run the risk of creating between *L'Inhabitable*'s residents and readers.

Even without the added weight of the photographs, what Kathleen Stewart refers to in *Ordinary Affects* (2007) as the "shape-shifting forms of violence" (29) pervading quotidian life for many in France surface in the book's second edition. Often, it is testimony from the tenants themselves, typographically differentiated through the use of italics, that interrupts Sorman's observations to emphasize the high stakes of the inhabitants' precarious circumstances. Concerning his *sans-papiers* status in France, Wilfried M'Saliou is pessimistic, sharing that "*la CGT essaye de me régulariser mais ça aboutit pas*" (L'Inhabitable 36, emphasis original [2016]). Still, disillusion pervades the testimony of those for whom obtaining work papers is not

[287] Butler posits that a "grievable" life is one that is to be regarded "as worthy of protection, as belonging to subjects with rights that ought to be honored" (41), whereas an "ungrievable" life "is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (38). While Butler's essay speaks to the context of war, and specifically a Western hegemony distinguishing "grievable" from "ungrievable" lives on a global scale, when read alongside Macé's essay, Butler's arguments can inform our understandings on life and death of a social nature.

an issue, young Yacine adamantly stating that any housing option other than that at 46 rue Championnet, "*je prends sans le visiter et sans le voir*" (64, emphasis original [2016]). But for some, like Amine, it is not merely their insalubrious home, but the country itself that has become a supreme disappointment: "*moi quand je suis venue en France on m'a dit tu verras c'est le paradis là-bas, tu vas faire ta vie, tu vas sortir de la galère, tu vas faire de l'argent. La France, on ne parlait que de ça chez moi en Algérie, et moi je suis arrivé ici, je suis arrivé au 125, et sur les chantiers, et j'ai dit : c'est ça la France !?*" (11, emphasis original [2016]). Not unlike *L'Art de perdre*'s Zekkar family, who found themselves relegated to a series of remote housing options upon their emigration from Algeria, those confined within insalubrious conditions in Paris once dreamed of, and continue to aspire to "une vie entière, pas une survie…Voilà, c'est ça qu'ils ont eu jusqu'ici : une vie de miettes" (L'Art de perdre 289)

While it would seem that Sorman's narrative in *L'Inhabitable* seeks to distinguish those living in insalubrious Paris from the readers, I posit that the text's tableau vivant endeavors to accomplish quite the opposite. More than provide evidence of how France's exclusionary norms influence geographic (dis)placement in Paris, the affective immersion deployed through the vignettes and the chorus of voices woven together through testimony enhances receptive reconfiguration, to use Ricoeur's term; of prime importance to reconfiguration is affective immersion's capacity to "faire cas des vies." Or, to put it differently, the tableau illustrates that insalubrious lives are, indeed, "vies entières," and not only equally grievable, but valuable, and deserving of our utmost consideration. This, in turn, increases the possibility of reader transformation in respect to their prefigured ideas regarding insalubrity, but furthermore regarding the Parisian social macrocosm as a whole.

For how uncommon are situations such as these in Paris where the price per square meter averages 10,500.00 euros? Interviewee Soumia Chohra from "The Death of Working-Class Paris" lives in a self-professed, twenty square meter "rathole" in the city's eighteenth arrondissement, for which she and her partner pay 806 euros per month: "To deal with the [rat] problem, [they] have taken to sleeping with the windows closed, preferring the heat to the risk of nocturnal visitors. The two sleep on a mattress tucked away on a mezzanine accessible by ladder. Sometimes they also host her partner's 9-year-old daughter, who sleeps on a separate mattress on the floor, just next to the entrance" (Stangler 2). Much like *L'Inhabitable*'s tenants, Chohra adds she and her partner seem to work only to pay their rent, and cannot afford vacations or other outings in the city. Yet, whereas journalist Stangler jumps from Chohra's grim living conditions straight into concerning statistics on Paris' working-class diaspora, and an equally ominous outlook on the city's future, Sorman's socio-journalism of consideration recognizes how, despite difficulties, each resident partakes in and contributes to a society of equals as an "artiste quotidien" (Certeau 201).

Unlike the fixed images from Pattacini's photographs, Sorman's portraits of the residents and families are afforded movement, indicative of the gestures that from a habitation create a home, and from an existence, a life. Despite the cockroaches scurrying along the pipes, in Monsieur Ladera's apartment "ça sent la Ricoré chaude et cette odeur atténue la violence des lieux c'est miraculeux, ça et un rythme zouk en fond sonore" (L'Inhabitable 38 [2016]). And though Fatima's pigeon-infested apartment may not seem like an ideal backdrop for afternoon tea, "[elle] nous offre du thé à la menthe et des choux à la crème rose qu'il est inenvisageable de refuser, l'odeur de menthe sucrée rebondit sur celle de merde d'oiseaux" (42 [2016]). Similarly, when at the Sun family's apartment, Sorman is served guava juice and orange slices,

thoughtfully prepared for her visit judging from their display on a plastic film-covered stainless-steel tray (28 [2016]). The hospitality shown Sorman is indicative of a larger communal atmosphere the residents foster within these buildings, the newly rehoused Sidibé family even lamenting "*la bonne ambiance qu'on avait dans l'insalubre*" (75, [2016] emphasis original). Indeed, at 125 rue Faubourg-du-Temple, the 175 residents gather to play cards, celebrate birthdays, and even shop for groceries together: "ils se soutiennent, sont habitués. Être relogé c'est vivre séparé de cette fratrie instituée dans la crasse et l'humidité. Être relogé c'est boire son café tout seul" (12-13 [2016]). Though they may appear differently from that to which readers are accustomed, in the insalubrious, too, daily rituals endure, traditions are kept and "la famille enfle" (27 [2016]), Monsieur Sun confirming that his wife "*sera bientôt à nouveau enceinte* (ibid, emphasis original).

Considering the buildings' tenants as "quotidian artists" is not to say that Sorman means to normalize or worse, aestheticize Parisian insalubrity. Rather, *L'Inhabitable* pauses to consider how their gestures, the ensemble of which de Certeau esteems to be a city's veritable archive (Certeau 202) participate in the art of living, and essentially making Paris. Privileging and ascribing value to all manners of homemaking is of paramount importance in a society where Otherly practices are often criticized. When describing the lead-poisoning epidemic among children in one Goutte d'Or building, SIEMP nurse Annie is quick to correlate resident customs with an increased exposure to lead paint dust particles: "*le problème c'est que les enfants vivent par terre, mangent même par terre sur des nattes, comme ils avaient l'habitude de faire dans leur pays avant de venir en France…Et puis les mères n'arrêtent pas de balayer…J'essaye de les convertir à la serpillère mouillée, mais il y a rien à faire, elles veulent rien entendre !*" (L'Inhabitable 24, emphasis original [2016]). Reading Annie's critique of the African families'

lifestyles brings to mind Alice Zeniter's interview for the podcast *La Poudre*, during which she comments on immigrant assimilation in France, or a perceived lack thereof: "c'est pas de la malveillance ni de la bêtise, ni la négligence. C'est juste que leur vie d'avant, elle les a formés, elle les a forgés, elle leur a donné un certain nombre de plis qui sont l'évidence. Et la France n'est que la bizarrerie et la littérature peut permettre d'opérer ce pas de côté et du coup changer un peu le regard" (Épisode 33). In effect, *L'Art de perdre*'s call to adopt a plasticity of identities in writings of history is equally as pertinent in today's debates on French identity, and parallel discussions on what constitutes normative manners of practicing space in Paris, and in the *Hexagone* as a whole.

Rather than criticize or sensationalize the residents' trajectories, *L'Inhabitable* at once attends to the tenants' contributions to the quotidian art of living, and underscores the danger of assimilating divergent *manières de faire* with Otherness. For, producing areas of the city to be exclusive, or appropriate to specific populations and in turn establishing correct and incorrect manners of practicing Paris has consequences on the residents' sense of belonging. Take Monsieur Bilal, whose concern with rehousing is not limited to leaving his tight-knit community: "dans les beaux quartiers, *il se sentira pas à sa place*. Comme si le relogement était un épisode supplémentaire de la relégation sociale" (29 emphasis original [2011]). And in France's current climate, the notion of home is of paramount importance. As Armstrong argues, disoriented, homesick, and apprehensive protagonists in contemporary French novels reveal "a crisis of sense of place and belonging that has become a mainstream phenomenon whose effects…have become a persistent factor of metropolitan France everyday life" (Armstrong 8). Yet, of arguably more consequence to this crisis of identity than what Armstrong terms "today's complicated world system" (9) is a collective sense of division and unease regarding not only how French citizens

relate to the globe, but also where or even if marginalized identities feel at home in their own country. As Sorman illustrates, more than a specific place, a "home" is an ensemble of past, present, and potential experiences that become the building blocks of lives, communities, and society as a whole:

> "Chez moi est une réalité incrustée dans les infimes replies de la mémoire, d'un corps et ses gestes, ses habitudes. Chez moi s'imprime dans une vie, une accumulation de jours passés et sédimentés dans un lieu…Habiter, même un taudis, trace une histoire, une empreinte, occupe définitivement un esprit. Habiter est irrémédiable et l'on s'en souvient." (L'Inhabitable 53-54 [2016])

Seemingly at issue in Sorman's narrative is not solely the "chez moi" at 23 rue Pajol, 10 rue Mathis, or the other addresses figuring into the book's tableau. Rather, the "chez moi" in question is that of Paris, and how blueprint psychology and practices have rendered it "l'inhabitable" for a substantial number of marginalized citizens.

The book points to the necessary work that is repositioning oneself in today's debates on space and place, or as I argue earlier in rewiring the psychology determining how we allow the capital city to emerge, and therefore the production and practice of Paris. Of ostensibly greater importance to Sorman's narrative than our own position, however, is the inherently relational activity that is "belonging," and how it pertains to our reconfiguration. In other words, the positionalities of those with whom we share and practice geographic space inescapably affect us, and how we allow these positionalities to inhabit us and inspire our reactions, matters. As Stewart notes in *Ordinary Affects*:

> "There is a politics to being/feeling connected (or not) to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not), to affective contagion, and to all the

> forms of attunement and attachment. There's a politics to ways of watching and waiting for something to happen and to forms of agency…There's a politics to difference in itself – the difference of danger, the difference of habit and dull routine, the difference of everything that matters. (Stewart 16)

If, when referring to the politics of affectivity, Stewart means how and where we direct that which stirs up our cognitive and emotional activity (15), Sorman's socio-journalism of consideration suggests that we question how France's "politics to difference" influences affective response. Namely, *L'Inhabitable* asks that we pause to contemplate a perceived danger in the notion of difference, and how it inhibits Others from inhabiting, or affecting us.

Among the "differences of danger" affecting those living in France today is the paradoxical division arising from Otherblindness, or the Republican refusal to recognize racial, cultural, religious, and class-based dissimilarities, and thus to contemplate how these influence one's experience in the *Hexagone*. Indeed, refusing to recognize difference alludes that heterogeneity is a threat to our sense of belonging, and to the country's well-being as a whole. Yet as Macé so artfully articulates, acknowledging difference is key to consideration's capacity to affect us: "[éprouver la vie] semblable, c'est-à-dire aussi dissemblable. Et s'éprouver semblables-dissemblables. Contemporains, interdépendants, égaux, devant l'être" (Macé 28) is seemingly more of what France needs today. To acknowledge difference is also to broaden our ways of knowing, and living together (Stewart 15). In asking how literature may help to foster a communal sense of home in Paris, *L'Inhabitable* emerges as an imperative, and timely form of collective agency.

Rehabilitation

Not unlike the "murs aveuglants de blancheur" in Baudelaire's café (Baudelaire 74), stark white is not only the color scheme of choice at 31 rue Ramponeau, but at all of the renovated buildings featured in the text; from 125 rue du Faubourg-du-Temple's metro-tiled exterior (L'Inhabitable 13 [2016]), to the cream walls and white shutters at 10 rue Mathis (42 [2016]), to 72 rue Philippe-de-Girard's dazzling façade (51 [2016]), the notion of recreating an architectural blank slate reigns supreme in the SIEMP's building renovations. Seemingly, the renovated structures' blinding white walls are to symbolize new beginnings, "la vie qui s'ouvre devant soi comme une béance heureuse et insondable" (77 [2016]). However, in the context of France's professed blindness to race, and as I suggest generalized Otherblindness, this architectural obsession with the absence of color begs the question: could the renovations in the former Parisian faubourgs be an effort, conscious or not, to whitewash Paris, or in other words to further encourage its citizens to conform to the Republican mold for which its capital museum city would be the model?

We find a similar residential tribute to the color white in Sorman's *Gros œuvre*. The book's title chapter follows artist Jean-Pierre Raynaud's self-isolation following his divorce, when he tackles the project of covering every inch of his now empty home with square, white tiles. Once his *gros œuvre* is finally complete, "JPR" is left with "une maison sans confort, sans coussins, rideaux, matelas, ustensiles de cuisine, fauteuil club, tapis de bain, lampe de bureau, chaîne hi-fi. *Inhabitable, inhospitalière, attirante*" (Gros œuvre 61, emphasis mine). While as a work of art, the renovated home is intriguing, the architect's obsession with a unified aesthetic has rendered it a hostile environment: the uninhabitable is thus the utter absence of life, a home devoid of a story to tell. Perhaps, then, we can interpret Sorman's use of the adjective

"insondable" when referring to the new apartments as a "béance heureuse" a bit differently: while the rehousing process and alabaster walls present a coveted new dawn for the tenants, how does one engage with this stark space that, in its ostensible unity may for some read as inaccessible, even impenetrable?

Figure 3.13: Jean-Pierre Raynaud's "gros œuvre"

Here, I would like to draw what I think is a pertinent parallel with the principle of universalism in France today. While officially, Otherness does not exist in Republican ideals, as Mame-Fatou Niang points out, this engrained "denialism" (France's Racial Spring 3) manifests itself otherwise in quotidian life and practice, and has led to systemic forms of discrimination against Otherly populations. Speaking on race, specifically, in the midst of what she terms was France's "Racial Spring" of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, Niang writes:

> "This silence has become an integral part of France's media, art and academic scenes, shaping its language and writings on its national memory and history. Thus, the ever-so-verbose French language lacks terms to describe the legacy of France's imperialist past…If our beautiful language, which both underpins and reflects our national identity, has not even taken the trouble to come up with a word for *blackness*, this can only be

because the concept itself is not compatible with the republican mindset. Quod Erat Demonstrandum." (ibid, emphasis original)

While in theory universalism may suggest inclusivity, much like the unfathomable white walls in "Le Relogement," it appears that the country's Otherblind Republic remains out of reach for marginalized populations despite their physical presence, and more often than not French citizenship. For, how can one have a stake in a space that lacks the medium, or as Niang suggests even the language to tell one's unique story?

At issue in Republican universalism is its claim to blindness which, contrary to the equality it is meant to embody, denotes an innate lack of perception. Moreover, to approach something blindly is to do so in a heedless, reckless, or *inconsiderate* manner (OED). Thus, to be colorblind, or Otherblind is to render one unable to discern France's inherent diversity, and in turn remain unaffected by its rich tableau. More than a rewiring of blueprint psychology, then, *L'Inhabitable* is a call for an overhaul in how the country's population lives Paris together. Sorman and likely Niang, too, would agree with de Certeau when he writes that "habiter, c'est narrativiser. Fomenter ou restaurer cette narrativité, c'est donc aussi une tâche de réhabilitation. Il faut réveiller les histoires qui dorment dans les rues et qui gisent quelquefois dans un simple nom, pliées dans ce dé à coudre comme les soieries de la fée" (Certeau 203). While *L'Inhabitable* is undoubtedly a meditation on insalubrity and its consequences, it is above all a rehabilitative text, affording narrative to the ostracized, the unseen, and the unconsidered in the capital city. Indeed, the enduring nature of the book renders it an even "slower" (Vanoost 406) form of reporting than its narrative journalism counterparts, allowing for a more profound configuration to take place by which readers become not only more factually knowledgeable, but

also emotionally and even civically implicated (415) in seeing, and considering France's heterogenous population.

Exceeding what maps are able to communicate, *L'Inhabitable* not only illustrates, but becomes a piece of a larger Parisian patchwork. Presented in the form of a collage, with its narratives, statistics, images and documents, the multimodal first edition's colorful rendering of Paris appears to more concretely thicken the capital's mapscape. Yet, I would argue that the second edition's approach is just as suggestive of the recognition the city's vividly diverse mosaic urgently merits. Concomitant to rehabilitating universalism's ideals of neutrality is what Claire Lyu has shown in her article "Blank Space and Affect" to be a vital reconsideration of the "le blanc": in her reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, Lyu proposes "to read the blank space…*otherwise*: not merely as empty but also…as open" (133, emphasis original). Rather than negational, "le blanc" becomes "relational" (ibid), and in so doing, a theoretical space of possibility and affective exchange.[288] Indeed, much like Stewart's approach in *Ordinary Affects* to harnessing "a something both animated and inhabitable" (Stewart 1), "le blanc" featured on the covers and within the pages of *L'Inhabitable*'s second edition serves to "slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us" (4).

Rehabilitation, therefore, begins with a shift in how we conceive of space, whether in the text, the epilogue's freshly-painted walls, or even the social sphere that is universalism. As Lyu so deftly puts it, "affect is space articulating itself on its own terms. In its own *sens propre*" (Lyu

[288] Equally pertinent to Lyu's reinterpretation of "le blanc" is what : "To read le blanc otherwise means first and foremost to acknowledge that le blanc exceeds negativity: le blanc is not solely a space of forbidding annihilation, where the world and the writer are absent, but also a space of welcome where the work, the world, the writer, and the reader can come together in newly unexpected ways" (143).

143). Rather than opaque and finite, imagining these constructs as porous, dynamic and inherently open to France's vast spectrum gives way to the possibility of new narratives, and recognizing these constructs as such, our consideration. A "'biotope de béton, de pierre de taille et de zinc' au bord de l'effondrement, où tout bouge mais tient par miracle" (L'Inhabitable back cover [2016]), Sorman's Parisian patchwork becomes a model for this crucial shift in perspective. Stitched together with electric wires and the shared camaraderie of the residents and their relational communities, *L'Inhabitable* is a testament to the many complicated, but richly valuable experiences that constitute living and affecting in Paris, France, and the world today.

Conclusion

2006 was an unprecedented moment in the French literary sphere. That year's *rentrée littéraire*, or the country's autumnal peak in publishing that reveals the most anticipated texts of the season, saw its five most distinguished prizes awarded to authors who were not born in France. Nancy Huston's *Lignes de faille* won the *Prix Femina*, while Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic* was distinguished with the *Prix Renaudot*. *Contours du jour qui vient* from Léonora Miano earned the *Prix Goncourt des Lycéens*, and Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillants* was attributed both the coveted *Grand Prix de l'Académie française* and the *Prix Goncourt*. In response to what appeared to be an influx of foreign phenoms, in March 2007 *Prix Goncourt* laureate Jean Rouaud and celebrated author Michel Lebris published a tribune in *Le Monde* signed by Huston and Mabanckou, but also Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant, and J.M.G. Le Clézio among other prominent authors writing in French. Heralding a revolution in French Letters of Copernican magnitude, their essay, "Pour une littérature-monde en français" assuredly announces that "le centre, ce point depuis lequel était supposée rayonner une littérature franco-française n'est plus le centre" (2).

For Rouaud, Lebris, and the tribune's signatories, it is not by chance that the most renowned works of 2006 reflect a culturally-rich sampling of literary voices. Rather, the diversity present among that year's laureates illustrates the plural identities of authors currently writing in French and thus, the multifarious entity that is current literary production in France. Literature's talent to navigate identity-related intersections, not only within the text but also through the author figure has the capacity to enact a polyphonic conversation in a global, rather than national context (4). Much like the English language, which the tribune uses to illustrate literature's capacity to transcend national borders, French is now a global language that possesses a rather unique

potential in fostering a transnational literature.[289] The 2006 prize winners of American, Cameroonian, Canadian and Congolese origin represent but a slight sampling of where French is spoken today, due in great part to France's past colonial exploits. What was once the colonial project of linguistic dominance, or what Kaoutar Harchi describes to be "la valorisation historique du français comme langue légitime et supérieure" ("Paris comme condition" 52) has seemingly become an opportunity to enrich French literature. And yet, prior to the tribune, and often still today, literature emanating from formerly colonized areas of the world is categorized as "Francophone," which for the tribune's authors is an omnipresent reminder and indeed, a lasting bastion of colonialism. "Soyons clairs : l'émergence d'une littérature-monde en langue française consciemment affirmée, ouverte sur le monde, transnationale signe l'acte de décès de la francophonie" (Lebris 5).

Despite these claims and initiatives to render the field of literature more inclusive in recent decades, what remains of its hierarchical framework, and how does it determine what we read in French today?[290] And, as the tribune puts it, have new centers stripped France's national literature of its primacy through its relegation to a shared center in the country's literary landscape? (6) If, as I assert in my introduction, current French texts problematize a manifold, hydra-like France, this dissertation's inquiry into French literature's (re)writing of the margin has led to a number of challenging, but pertinent questions: who has the right to the timely endeavor that is (re)writing the margin? How are authors who are not of French nationality, but nevertheless publishing in France contributing to this process? Moreover, can French literature

[289] This is a pertinent comparison, for as Marc Ferro illustrates in *Histoire des colonisations* (1994), the English and French Empires were the world's leaders, and even avowed rivals in colonial projects (98-106). That the English and French languages are as widespread today correlates directly to the extent of their former colonial empires.
[290] For example, Gisèle Sapiro notes in her article "The Transnational Literary Field between (Inter)-nationalism and Cosmopolitanism" that "in 1993, the French government modified the conditions for supporting translation from French to other languages; it was no longer French authors but authors writing in French that could get support" (499).

rewrite a binary in which it is seemingly enmeshed? More than problematize existing binary-driven narratives and reintroduce the margin in interdisciplinary works of literature to reposition both the margin, and the marginalized, I posit that complication as an emergent form of a literary responsibility calls into question the field of literature itself. And this in France, and within the overarching "World Republic of Letters," which Pascale Casanova describes as "a world of rivalry, struggle, and inequality" (4). I will not attempt an in-depth analysis of the field of literature, for these complex questions merit a study in their own right, and with a corpus comprised of an increasingly diverse sampling of authors.[291] However, I would like to highlight a few fundamental elements related to the functioning of French Letters that will help elucidate why, as a field, it poses difficulties to a diversified and inclusive approach to (re)writing the margin.

Pierre Bourdieu's "Field Theory" has been most helpful in understanding the organization of French Letters, a space of "possible outcomes" that is nevertheless composed of an intricate system of hierarchies and thus to an extent, exclusionary.[292] I have mentioned France's upmarket literary production, or *pôle de production restreinte*, throughout this dissertation, and its opposition to the commercialized pole of production is where a first instance of exclusion occurs. While often more economically lucrative than its counterpart attuned to aesthetics, the field of literature symbolically ostracizes and discredits mass-market literature (Le Champ 7). Within upmarket literature there is yet another system of hierarchies, based on genre, modes of production, and the cornerstone of literary legitimacy: consecration (13). The attribution of

[291] I would like to add that these are questions that will play a significant role in my upcoming research project, a case study on what has been termed France's migrant literary genre conducted through literary analysis and quantitative and qualitative sociological research, which I anticipate will be a valuable complement to the analysis at hand in this dissertation. For more on this emergent literary genre, see Oana Sabo's *The Migrant Canon in Twenty-First-Century France* (2018).

[292] For more on Bourdieu's theorization of the field of literature, specifically, see his seminal article "Le champ littéraire" (1991) and Gisèle Sapiro's entry "La théorie des champs" in *Sociologie de la littérature*, pp. 24-6 (2014).

prizes is subjective, commensurate not with the inherent value of an author, but rather with the *production of belief* in the creative genius of the author and their work, a phenomenon Bourdieu terms *illusio* (22). As Gisèle Sapiro shows, the authors in contention for this mark of legitimacy is largely determined by their position within the field's system of imbricated hierarchies: "dominant authors" are veterans and generally already renowned, while "dominated authors" are those who are new to the literary scene and/or marginalized populations (Sociologie 24). More than a privileged space to observe gender-related inequalities (43), however, "la sélection sociale qu'opère le champ littéraire est encore plus stricte concernant les écrivains d'origine étrangère, surtout lorsqu'ils sont issus des anciennes colonies" (46).

What became apparent during the development of this project is that while, as I hope I have shown, Alice Zeniter, Nathalie Quintane, and Joy Sorman's considerate and inclusive inquiry into the margin challenges the notion of a presiding center in France, the three authors are vested constituents of France's *production restreinte*. Despite the added nuance that my corpus is comprised of women authors in France where, as of 2015 "men [had] a monopoly on good writing" (Horne 1), Zeniter, Quintane and Sorman are all of French nationality, and share a similar, and arguably dominant *habitus*, or what Pierre Bourdieu theorized as "les dispositions incorporées structurant l'action et la vision du monde des individus et des groupes" (Dictionnaire xvi).[293] All three women have been, or currently are educators, a requisite of which is a degree in higher education.[294] From their arrival on the literary scene, critics acclaimed their early contributions – notably Zeniter's *Jusqu'à dans nos bras* (2010), Sorman's *Boys, boys, boys*

[293] See Heather Horne's article in *The Atlantic* delineating gender inequity among laureates of France's *Prix Goncourt*, "France: Where Men have a Monopoly on Good Writing."
[294] Johan Heilbron explains that, while in Bourdieu's theorization of different forms of capital, economic assets are dominant, he argues that cultural capital, which can also be interpreted as scholastic capital, is a fundamental principle of power relations in modern society (Dictionnaire 107).

(2005) and Quintane's *Chaussure* (1997) – triggering a swift and steady accumulation of symbolic capital.[295] Zeniter has earned sixteen literary distinctions and Sorman eight, which includes the illustrious *Prix de Flore*. And while Quintane's oeuvre has not received consecration on the scale of her peers, what she lacks in literary prizes is compensated by regular reviews in the country's most popular forums in literary criticism, such as France Inter's *Le Masque et la Plume*, and an avid attention to her work in literary scholarship.

With prosopography comes a responsibility to address that the three authors of my corpus are, also, White.[296] In her study of the influence of racial categories within France's literary sphere, Clarissa Behar argues that "si comme la République française, la 'République des Lettres' se veut, de droit, aveugle de couleur, elle ne l'est pas de fait" (Behar 159). Corroborating Sapiro's findings, Mame-Fatou Niang advances in *Identités françaises* (2019) that minorities in France encounter increasingly more difficulty in accessing the country's field of cultural production.[297] However, this precision and my assessment of their preexisting cultural capital is not to say that Zeniter, Quintane, and Sorman have not been targets of prejudice.[298] Nor is

[295] In François Denord's entry for "capital symbolique" in *Le Dictionnaire international Bourdieu*, symbolic capital "renvoie aux profits que l'appartenance à une lignée ou à un groupe procure, en particulier le prestige et le renom" (114). He then specifies the dual meaning of "symbolic" in this context: it illustrates both that an individual's merit is determined by the perception others have of them, and facilitates the study of activities in which economic interests are not the sole incentive.

[296] For Bourdieu, biographical study is the final yet essential step in the analysis of a work or author's position in the literary sphere: "Essayer de comprendre une carrière ou une vie comme un série unique et à soi suffisante d'événements successifs sans autre lien que l'association à un 'sujet' dont la constance n'est peut-être que celle d'un nom propre socialement reconnu, est à peu près aussi absurde que de tenter de rendre raison d'une trajet dans le métro sans prendre en compte la structure su réseau, c'est-à-dire la matrice des relations objectives entre les différentes stations" (Bourdieu Le Champ 39).

[297] Niang writes that "du brouillon à la réalisation d'une pièce du théâtre, du financement à la distribution d'un film, les artiste issus des minorités sont confrontés à un véritable parcours du combattant pour mettre en scène leurs histoires et tout récit qui leur viendrait en tête" (251).

[298] Zeniter, in particular, has spoken at length about the discriminatory biases affecting those of Algerian origin in France, and of which she has been a victim. I am thinking specifically about her interview with Lauren Bastide for the podcast *La Poudre* (episode 33). For her part, Sorman is no stranger to misogyny, which is evident in a 2008 interview *Chez F.O.G.* where she intended to promote her recently co-edited volume, *14 femmes : Pour un féminisme pragmatique* (2007). Instead, Sorman finds that she must defend the book's "féminisme viril" to the all-male group as Fabrice Luchini laments "vous allez prendre le peu [de virilité] qui leur reste…il reste plus rien ma chérie" (Joy Sorman – 14 femmes).

underscoring their standing within the field of literature to suggest that arguably dominant authors cannot rewrite the margin. On the contrary, the authors' complicated literary responsibility demonstrates that if the field of Letters and France are to enact a polyphonic dialogue that includes the French-speaking world's rich diversity, *each* member of society has a role to play in this reconfiguration.

A part of this endeavor is to reflect on one's own position within a given society's complex series of hierarchies. Rather than allow privilege to inhibit activism, each of the works in question in this dissertation asks how rewriting may become a means to combat *with* the marginalized. This commences with a recognition of privilege, from Naïma whose mind turns to those "moins chanceux qu'elle" (L'Art de perdre 434), to Quintane who contests white knight syndrome (Un œil 363), to Sorman's "cruel and exhaustive" lists delineating life in insalubrity (L'Inhabitable 42 [2016]) that prompt reader awareness of their own advantages. Complication is thus a call not only to an awareness of social inequities and how they affect Others, but also an awareness of self and our role in either choosing to perpetuate divisionary attitudes and practices or, as Zeniter, Quintane, and Sorman do, to work against them.

Moreover, it is not only the author's accumulation of capital, but what Sapiro terms "gatekeepers" (Sociologie 42), or the field's cultural intermediaries who contribute to the success of an author, with a book's publisher among the most crucial. The works of my corpus are housed within several of France's most well-known publishing houses: *L'Art de perdre* is signed Flammarion, P.O.L published *Un œil en moins* and *Les Enfants vont bien* along with the majority of Quintane's oeuvre, and Sorman's second edition of *L'Inhabitable* appeared in Gallimard's *L'arbalète* collection. A closer look at publishing practices and, as I will next demonstrate circulation trends, reveals that it is less a question of *who* has the right to rewrite the margin, but

rather who and *where* have the authority and means to write and disseminate literature in French, on the margin, or any other subject for that matter.

In the upmarket literary sphere, the international exchange of cultural goods, too, functions according to a binary from which literature and other forms of artistic expression circulate from "central" locales to the geographically peripheral (Sapiro, Le Champ 84). In this model of circulation, if an author writing in French outside of France seeks visibility and, eventually, a legitimatization of their work, that author must figuratively and often physically circulate from the periphery to the literary center to acquire recognition.[299] Looking to the abovementioned 2006 laureates provides an excellent illustration of this model at work: publishing Littell's novel was Gallimard, an editing house of exceptional symbolic capital boasting 178 literary prizes since its creation in 1903; and Éditions du Seuil, with 58 awards and third in the French publishing chain of command now known as "Galligrasseuil" released Mabanckous' novel.[300] Though Plon and Actes Sud who, respectively, published Miano and Huston's texts are not as abundant in symbolic capital, Plon has 14 prizes to its name and, established in 1852, longevity. For its part, Actes Sud is a rapidly growing publishing house, in existence only since 1978 and with five *Prix Goncourt* and one Nobel Prize to its name since 2004.

While the 2007 tribune lauds these authors for breaking down an outdated and restrictive Francophone frontier, the correlation among their publishing house's symbolic capital and the authors' recognition suggests that the center facilitates the identification and diffusion of the

[299] This seeming requirement of physical displacement is apparent in the 2006 prize winners: a common theme emerges among three of the authors, in that Mabanckou, Miano, and Huston all moved to France as young adults to pursue their studies, trajectories that all include universities in Paris, or its neighboring Nanterre. As a child and teenager, Littell shared his time between the United States and France, and *Les Bienveillants* earned him French citizenship in 2007.

[300] A survey of the year's literary prizes in a 2018 article from *Le Monde* conjectures on whether the three leading editing houses in literary consecration, Gallimard, Grasset, and le Seuil, are "indomitable": "'Galligrasseuil' a encore frappé. Comme à l'accoutumée, le trio des trois 'grands' éditeurs…a trusté près de la moitié des grands prix littéraires de la saison 2018."

literary peripheral. What is also visible in these authors' respective trajectories is what Harchi has called "Paris comme condition."[301] With the exception of Actes Sud, the headquarters of all the publishing houses mentioned here are located in Paris, and the Arles-based Actes Sud nevertheless today has a satellite office and its own bookstore in the capital. If in our age of globalization sociologists of literature discern a transnational literary field, as Sapiro's analysis of the divergent players in this domain has shown, "the growing cosmopolitanism of the literary field conceals a high degree of centralization and a concentration of the power of consecration in central cities and in the hands of the most prestigious publishers and agents" (The Transnational field 498). And, there is one city that takes precedence over others: more than the heart of France's cultural production, Casanova esteems Paris to be the "Prime Meridian" in the World Republic of Letters, "la capitale de la littérature, c'est à dire de l'univers littéraire dans son ensemble" (Paris, méridien 5).

Harchi's case study of Algerian literature written in French and specifically that of Kateb Yacine depicts the Algerian author's determination to reach Paris in order to kickstart his career in literature in 1948 ("Paris comme condition" 54). After publishing his first novel in 1956 (*Nedjma*, le Seuil) and progressively building his reputation, however, Yacine begins to feel confined within the field's compulsory aesthetic and geographic norms (55). Harchi's description of Yacine's assimilation to the capital's realm of literature is not unlike that of Naïma in *L'Art de perdre* who, despite having studied Art History experiences impostor syndrome in her career at a contemporary art gallery in Paris: "Elle, elle a passé des années à chercher à s'approprier la culture dominante (qu'elle a longtemps appelée 'la culture,' tout simplement" (372). While Naïma's exposure to radical political movements in college leave her with reveries of infiltrating

[301] See Harchi's article: "Paris comme condition : une approche spatialisée des modalités de valorisation des œuvres littéraires."

this “host culture” only to sabotage their comfortable preeminence, “la culture dominante s’est avérée toujours plus vaste et elle a fini par perdre son intention de la subvertir” (ibid). The novel’s segment dedicated to Naïma ends as it began, the protagonist’s back against the gallery wall contemplating her fruitless, yet addictive affair with entitled gallery owner Christophe.

Yet, it seems Alice Zeniter accomplishes what her protagonist cannot. Despite Naïma’s father’s insistence, “aucune de ses filles n’est allée à Polytechnique, ni à l’École normale supérieure, finalement” (ibid). Zeniter, however, *did* pursue her studies at France’s esteemed *ENS*, a training that, like Yacine, inspired and equipped the author to participate in “les conduites artistiques subversives qui [cherche] à faire de cette attractivité [parisienne] l’objet même de leur critique, et cela dans le but de revaloriser les marges, soient ces positions affaiblies susceptibles des devenir les lieux inédits de déploiement de ressources littéraires en construction” (“Paris comme condition” 56). Beyond her research in the field of sociology, Harchi, too, contributes to France’s literary initiative to “exploser de l’intérieur” (L’Art de perdre 372) the country’s frameworks of dominance. Her recent autobiography, *Comme nous existons* (2021) traces the sociologist’s journey through defining moments during her adolescent years during which she is both witness to and victim of countless acts of discrimination that give way to an ardent, yet productive anger (108). The text culminates with Harchi’s apprehensive hope in regard to the endeavor that lies ahead as she receives the “Mention Bien” that seals her admission into a doctoral program in Paris: “Grande était la peur, et plus grande fut la joie” (134).

Though authors born outside of the *Hexagone* like Yacine have long written in French “pour dire aux Français que je ne suis pas français” (“Paris comme condition” 55), France’s complicated literature seemingly reaches beyond linguistic subversion. Zeniter, Quintane, Sorman and Harchi’s identification of inequalities not only critiques the center/margin binary in

France, but rather transcends it to explore and reveal the richness of *Other centers* of interest *through* literature, and *to* the field of literature, complicating the very sphere itself. And the stakes of this endeavor are high: asserting the critical thinking skills our interactions with the text foster, and notably as a locus to question social order, in her essay "Why doesn't the radical left read literature?" Quintane argues that, without literature, we "can hardly see how things would be if they were different. We hardly see *that things could be different*" (122, emphasis original). If authors like Quintane and scholars like Christy Wampole have recently published essays on the pertinence of literature, it is because the book itself is arguably being pushed to the margin in our increasingly digital age.[302] Electronic books and "Click and collect" have already innovated *how* we read and obtain our books, and complicated literature aspires to innovate *what* it is that we read today, and *by whom*.

A look to recent trends in publishing suggest that literary activism is making its mark: since 2009, the *Prix Goncourt* has attributed its award to four women. While this number may not appear impressive at first, for the first 106 years of the prize's creation, a mere eight women won the award, or less than one percent. Four female laureates since 2009 thus represents a thirty percent increase in the past fourteen years. And while in 2018 "Galligrasseuil" took home half of the year's literary prizes, *Le Monde*'s analysis of that year's consecration trends notes that "des maisons plus modestes leur ont raflé les deux récompenses les plus prestigieuses" (Breteau 1). Yet another promising development was the Prix Goncourt's consecration of *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes* (2021), written by Senegalese author Mohamend Mbougar Sarr, the first Black African man to win the esteemed prize. Of note, too, is Sarr's independent publishing

[302] See Wampole's collection of essays, *The Other Serious: Essays for the New American Generation* (2015).

house, Philippe Rey, who co-edited the author's novel with Dakar's Éditions Jimsaan.[303] Moreover, all works originally written in French appear in Philippe Rey's catalogue under the rubric "littérature française." While these transformations are surely the beginning of a long, and likely complex process, like Naïma, like the authors of my corpus and those who join them in complicating and rendering increasingly rich today's "littérature-monde en français," France's literary sphere is "en mouvement, elle va encore" (L'Art de perdre 506).

[303] By way of comparison, Philippe Rey's catalogue consists of 450 titles while Gallimard's Folio pocket collection alone counts over 9,000 titles.

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