

La Goutte d'ôr: Localizing a *banlieues* Aesthetic

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The surrealist project for liberating Paris from the imposition of quasi-colonialist urban superstructure in the early 20th century resonates in valuable ways, yielding possibilities for a new and vital understanding of 21st century *banlieues* art. In her Marxist analysis of Benjamin and Breton's Paris, Margaret Cohen reiterates the Surrealist fascination with the *shape* of Paris and the journeys taken through it by those artists and writers. She argues that Breton's wandering characters are to be seen as "haunting selves." Indeed, in his novel *Nadja*, Breton's "haunting self" is to be taken as a "fissured and fundamentally constructed identity" (65). Breton's reconfiguration of how identities are constructed through an encounter with urban spaces is indicative of the prescience of surrealist identity politics. The journeys taken through Paris by the enigmatic but disenfranchised worker, *Nadja*, are an appeal for balanced narratives about the oppressor and oppressed. This desire for unrepressed accounts becomes increasingly more important as a consequence rather than primary aim of the surrealist project and must be taken up today as emergent narratives of *banlieues* inhabitants are reaching new and innovative heights.

Surrealist critique of urban reform in Paris precedes and is then contemporaneous with the violent roots of contemporary urban planning in the *banlieues*, namely, the ghettoizing of North African workers, which was one of the triggers for uprisings linked to the

Franco-Algerian war in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Paris. The Manifesto 121, one of the central early critiques of France's policies towards the Algerian war for Independence, was authored by surrealist groups and then circulated more widely, becoming integrally linked with larger intellectual protest against the war (Rosemont 346).

André Breton's *Nadja* instructed in the early 20th century that the map of Paris unfolds like the skirts of a sultry mistress, hiding both sordid truths and exotic beauty beneath them. The misery of the Algerian immigrant workers was one of the truths lurking in those outskirts around the time of the seminal parisianist novels, an emergent literary genre in 1959, which has been analyzed in depth in Benetta Jules-Rosette's sociological study, *Black Paris: the African Writer's Landscape*. In her recent book, *La rançon du colonialisme: Les surréalistes face aux mythes de la France coloniale (1919– 1962)*, Sophie Leclercq traces the anti-colonialist stance of the surrealists and the role it played in their representations of Parisian landscapes. Taken together, the work of Jules-Rosette and LeClercq provides sociological and ethnographic frameworks for analyzing the literary and cinematic resonance between pre-parisianist surrealist expression, parisianist narratives of the Franco-Algerian war period and contemporary *banlieues* creative production.

Journeys taken in *Nadja*, a text which can be posited as a precursor to the seminal parisianist texts, touch upon some of the traumas of the northern edges of the *arrondissements* and highlight surrealist fascination with primitive art as ultimately an anticipatory critique of the disenfranchised worker and their identity politics. In the beginning of the second part of *Nadja*, Breton implies that revolution against increasing disenfranchisement required preparation. As he gazes at the indifferent faces of people hurrying from their offices on the Grands Boulevards just inside the border marked by the Porte St. Denis, Breton announces that these particular workers did not appear ready for revolution (71–72). Their voices were silenced by the burdens of the working class system.

One fundamental surrealist principle, to be revealed in *Nadja* was

to anthropomorphize the city in order to humanize and critique the pain it was undergoing as new and indifferent superstructures were imposed upon it and its populations. Current *banlieues* artists often take up the self-fulfilling prophecy of the surrealist aesthetic, for example when Abd Al Malik compares Paris to an old woman who plays the role of *femme fatale* (Château Rouge, Centre Ville 2010). Breton equally feminizes the shape of Paris as he speculates on what she, Paris, will become (182). In film theory, the *femme fatale* is the central camera code for signifying an obstacle to narrative progression (Mulvey; Silverman). In evoking this generic figure, Abd Al Malik marks his work as being concerned with equally disturbing obstacles to narrative progression in the identity politics of *banlieues* dwellers.

Parisianism in its Inception

In 1959, parisianism, a generic category which bears witness to the obstacles facing Franco-Algerian and Franco-African struggles to assimilate is anticipated through Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris*, and also, as I have argued in a forthcoming article, through Richard Wright's unfinished *Long Dream* trilogy (Jules-Rosette 8; Craven). Both the trilogy and Dadié's novel were published at the height of Franco-Algerian tensions. Though neither author engages directly with these tensions, their mutual dependence on one of parisianism's generic centers, the environmental gaze, nonetheless suggests that the urban space *itself* defines the identity politics of these novels, and therefore the sub-text of the Algerian War cannot be discounted as it was contemporaneous with the inception of the genre. The testimonial nature of the environmental gaze allowed writers shaping the genre to reveal their own fissured senses of identity in the face of the Parisian urban landscape. One of the specificities of the genre most crucial for my purposes is its substitution of protest literature with nuanced silences that force the reader to dwell upon the material conditions of those landscapes. In parisianist texts, the physical locations depicted must reveal themselves and their struggles through the silence of the environmental gaze, rather than mount a frontal assault on the

causes of those struggles. Demographics become fore-grounded in this way.

Thus just as Breton announces the *Porte St. Denis* as the historic marker of the exit from city proper into the *faubourgs* or as gateway to the suburban areas of Paris which both conceal and reveal violence for those who have been alienated or who have never belonged, the parisianist text combines the immigrant's desire to belong with the awareness of the impossibility of realizing that desire, given the conditions the narrative describes. Though other articles in this present volume rightfully locate a *banlieues* aesthetic just beyond the current marker which separates Paris from its suburbs—the *périphérique*—I would contend that the principles of social exclusion practiced with the construction of the *périphérique* were already inherited from the colonialist and anti-colonialist debates of the surrealist writers and their adversaries. The anticipation of the *périphérique*, which now dominates as the marker separating Paris proper from its impoverished suburbs, was always already a figment of the French colonial imagination.

Locus of Neo-Parisianism

Pointing out liaisons between the themes, concerns and styles of seminal parisianist writers of the late 1950s with more contemporary artists, one can reconfigure La goutte d'ôr as a symbolic locus for new articulations of the parisianist environmental gaze. Just as the surrealist search for value and meaning in its creative production was reliant upon journeys of discovery through an evolving urban landscape, so too the *banlieues* and northern margins of Paris play a crucial demographic role in *banlieues* art. Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot have suggested in their study *Paris: Quinze promenades sociologiques* that Emile Zola contributed to the neighborhood's longstanding *emblematic* role with respect to the Parisian worker's historical identity by using ethnographic methods *avant la lettre* in *L'Assomoir* (193).

The shared aesthetic base of many *banlieues* artists echoes the cultural diversity of La goutte d'ôr and calls attention to the indispensable use of physical location as an important common

trait in contemporary *banlieues* art. Coupled with the traumatic remnants of the Franco-Algerian war, the shattered streets of La goutte d'ôr bear witness to over a half-century of immigrant struggle which must be taken as the anchor for a contemporary *banlieues* studies. The immigrant workers' struggles and the Franco-Algerian war served as the fertile ground from which the parisianist genre of writing has sprung up, and therefore parisianism or more suitably, neo-parisianism, can also be taken as a cornerstone of *banlieues* studies.

Hervé Breuil, owner of the *Olympic Café* and the *Lavoir Moderne Parisien*, has suggested on the first global channel of La goutte d'ôr, *Rueleon TV*, that the secrets and the success of this culturally diverse world can be gleaned on the streets near the Square Léon, the lifeline of La goutte d'ôr. Its population's search for affirmative identity is one of the primary concerns of the activities taking place in and around the Square Léon on a daily basis (www.rueleon.net; Pinçon 213). Breuil's establishments are also two of the most crucial showcase locations for exhibiting and giving a communal life to creative production in the *banlieues*.

The Echomusée is another local institution dedicated to uncovering the exotic beauties of La goutte d'ôr and to the *banlieues*, a practice that requires re-affirmation of worker and immigrant identities. One of the projects directly related to these concerns is the *Cargo 21* project where there is a call for new cartographies of a neighborhood according to the sentiments of artistic impressions, inhabitants and visitors (www.echomusée.com). It is precisely in these places that the protagonists of parisianism have re-emerged to offer renewed testimonies of the lingering pains which can be witnessed in the workers' *cités*. Finally, Marsa Editions, a local press run by Aissa Khelladi, is dedicated to the publication of works by second or third generation Franco-Algerian writers. Her "storefront" publishing house offers regular workshops and readings to effectuate the work of mourning over France's collective colonial past, which she claims has yet to be fully realized (Khelladi).

Valorizing the art of the *banlieues* requires that repressed

histories of these immigrant worker neighborhoods become un-sedimented rather than transformed, a critical practice only made possible through the triangular aesthetic base of neo-parisianism, demographics and reconsideration of the traumatic effects of Franco-Algerian tensions. The use of the environmental gaze as employed by artists Abd Al Malik and Rachid Bouchareb and analysis of it in their works therefore serves as an initial case study in a call for *banlieues* studies rooted in neo-parisianism. These artists have been raised in the *banlieues*. The work they have done mimics a location which in and of itself is here taken as the emblem of a unique culture and therefore the base of a *banlieues* studies. Unlike others, however, these artists have achieved a certain level of recognition outside the local terrain, which makes them crucial subjects of study, in that they are part of the emergent public face of the *banlieues*.

The benefits of an aesthetic field of study dedicated to the *banlieues* are debatable, but it is nonetheless clear that some of the retrenchment that dismantled the surrealist project at the advent of World War II is perhaps avoided in the contemporary *banlieues*. As Abd Al Malik's title, "la guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu" suggests, the artistic production of the *banlieues* might eventually be used to temper the depictions of violence which have plagued the outer regions of Paris and have led in some media cases to willful misrepresentation of the energies contained within, as indicated by Jocelyne Césari in her study on common misconceptions about the causes of the 2005 riots (5).

Hacène Belmessous also outlines the menace of super-structural organization overtaking the *banlieues* in his recent book *Operation Banlieues: Comment l'état prépare la guerre urbaines dans les cités françaises*. Belmessous analyses the current efforts of the French government to facilitate urban violence as a way of infiltrating and transforming the *banlieues*. The play of identity politics which has led to positive creative outlets for second or third generation children of immigrants in Paris has equally led to a crisis in French national identity. Such a crisis necessarily creates confrontational scenarios, which must be countered through deeper understanding of the *aesthetic* aspects of *banlieues* energies.

The aesthetic reactions of artists such as Abd Al Malik and Rachid Bouchareb are rooted in such contemporary concerns but nonetheless echo central tenets of tensions from earlier generations. While the voice of authors such as Richard Wright or Bernard Dadié are muted by the larger than life Malcolm X, iconic versions of Barack Obama, or the directly inherited violence of Franco-Algerian conflicts, understanding the resonance between multiple forms of disenfranchisement which have taken place on the Parisian landscape or in the *banlieues* seems crucial. In particular, the Algerian massacre has re-emerged in the past few years as a subject of scrutiny in such works as Rachid Bouchareb's *Hors-la-loi*. Less prominently displayed texts, the plays *Un Soir à Paris* by Madjid Ben Chikh (1999) and *C'était un 17 Octobre . . .* by Marie-Christine Prati-Belmokhtar (2009) attest to the fact that the massacre of 17 October 1961 continues to fuel the poetic imagination of immigrant and second generation immigrant artists, but the film *Hors-la-loi* calls for attention in that it is produced in a blockbuster style. The film was released to a larger, more commercial audience than the theatrical works, which are published by Marsa Editions. As public reception of the film attests, the massacre of Algerian-French citizens in October 1961 in the streets of Paris is still a public embarrassment for the French government and thus Bouchareb's cinematic recreation of the event from the perspective of Franco-Algerian protagonists constituted a minor scandal when the film was shown at Cannes (*Cahiers du cinéma* #660 88).

Bouchareb creates a three-way protagonist structure, shared by three brothers who adopt different attitudes towards their immigration into France. Bouchareb re-enacts an alienating and aggressive environmental gaze. In *Hors-la-loi*, the first brother abandons political principles in order to belong to French capitalistic society. The second brother takes up his belonging in France as a burden he must assume, given that his participation in the war for France left blood on his hands. Until he is able to join the third brother in the Algerian Revolution and the constitution of the National Liberation Front (*Front de libération nationale*), he mistakes

his blood guilt for the assumption of French national identity. In effect, he killed *in order to* become French. The third brother insists that the Algerians have been disenfranchised and must continue to struggle against their oppressors. Their oppressors are equally their hosts and the Algerian immigrants' willingness to participate in the work force that will rebuild France after WWII creates the essential dichotomy of longing and belonging characteristic of the environmental gaze.

The film ends with each of these brothers bearing silent witness to the 17 October 1961 massacre. The cinematography of the last shots, shots which depict the events of the massacre, is one of extraordinary silence, where a lack of closure in the events of the film suggests that the sequence is less the ending to a film than it is an extra-diegetic call to acknowledge fully one of the most excruciating episodes in France's colonial past. The death of the third brother is painfully and silently depicted in this final sequence as well. As Benjamin Stora and Renaud de Rochebrune suggest, the film could and should be placed within the context of any number of films treating the memory of the French and the Algerians on their communal past (89). They argue that the film is not a political film, but rather, a depiction of heroic violence from the perspective of the Franco-Algerian gaze.

Stora and de Rochebrune equally contend that it is ill-advised for Bouchareb to glorify violence which has negative resonance in today's *banlieues* (90). In so doing, they fail to recognize crucial aesthetic dimensions of Bouchareb's cinematography. Nonetheless, the use of the environmental gaze in this film insists on an act of mourning and recreates a much-needed narrative of longing and belonging rooted in the 17 October massacres which should not remain repressed. Prior to the 1990s, there were only two *eye-witness* accounts of the 1961 October massacre embedded in literary treatments: *The Stone Face* in 1963 by African American journalist W.G. Smith and Didier Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire* in 1984 (Stovall 191). Other novels and films, such as *Elise ou la vraie vie* by Claire Etcherelli and its film adaptation by Michel Drach, make use of the massacre as a backdrop, though in

this case and in the case of other literary treatments the amount of eye-witness testimony varies. Eye-witness account or account based on testimonials after the fact, the goal of these creative works is to gaze upon a violent past in ways that allow for constructive moves from formerly repressed roots of contemporary unrest to new and healing perspectives.

In the final analysis, it is the political impotency embodied by the parisianist or neo-parisianist protagonists that gives poignancy to the genre and distinguishes it from confrontational protest literature. If there is any birth mother to the parisianist genre, it is precisely the tense environment of the immigrant worker and the reactions to it on the part of African, Franco-African and African American writers, who longed to embrace the credo of “liberté, égalité, fraternité” but for whom the blatant racial and social imbalance of their existences in France helped to foment fervent reactions to the Franco-Algerian war. While protest and demonstration was called for, writing direct protest literature coming from “guests” of the French state on the subject of Franco-Algerian tensions was an unthinkable practice (Stovall 98).

The parisianist genre shapes itself out of the collective desire of immigrant artists to bear witness to social injustices even as they realized their impotency to give political voice to such critiques. As a result, intense focus on spatial determinants in the parisianist aesthetic distinguishes it from pure protest literature, though the nuance of the genre can often go unrecognized in a writer’s *legacy*. Writers such as Richard Wright, Bernard Dadié, William Gardner Smith, Didier Daeninckx and Abd Al Malik have all in some ways been labeled as authors of protest literature, though the fine line between novels of protest and novels which can be seen as belonging to the parisianist genre is one which must be articulated in order to avoid oversimplification.

In his novel *The Stone Face*, William Gardner Smith evokes the October 17, 1961, Algerian massacres in Paris, and focuses on a literary representation of the Algerian worker in the racially tortured northern areas of Paris. For the face of the oppressors depicted in the massacre in *The Stone Face*, the protagonist Simeon

claims, “They were all the same face. Wherever this face was found, it was his enemy; and whoever feared or suffered from, or fought against this face was his brother (1964, 176).” The uncompromised likening of Algerian immigrant to American Negro disfigures the complexity of identity politics in Paris during the Algerian war (Smith 57; Stovall 194), but a narrative of disrupted identities and virtual longing, as well as silence in the face of exclusionary practices is echoed in Simeon’s gaze upon his enemy’s symbolic face. W.G. Smith and his protagonist Simeon were both painfully aware that they could never participate in a protest against the struggles of Algerian compatriots.

By contrast, *Hors-la-Loi* brings the violence of the *banlieues* to the big screen and does so by rooting it in a specific past trauma, the Franco-Algerian war—a war about which Bouchareb feels entitled to speak. In addition, Abd Al Malik’s “novel” *La guerre des banlieues n’aura pas lieu* (2010), establishes links to seminal parisianist authors, despite generational and cultural disparities in setting. Abd Al Malik found new structural solutions in creating a novel that skirts direct confrontation. He calls for a new kind of identity politics based on the affirmation of balance between one’s claim to French citizenship and one’s claim to exilic cultural roots—a balance Abd Al Malik asserts is made possible through literacy. His novel follows the dictates of the parisianist genre though he has less need to lapse into the silence of longing or alienation that characterized the work of Dadié, Wright and W.G. Smith.

Nonetheless, as in the case of Dadié and Richard Wright, the literature, musical lyrics and cinema of the *banlieues* are born out of a deliberating scrutiny of physical spaces—spaces that both imprison and create an expectancy of journey towards a less fissured self-identity. On 16 December 2004, for example, Abd Al Malik organized a concert *sauvage* on the Place de la Sorbonne, for example, and reconstructed a replica of a *banlieues* location directly onto the Place. Place de la Sorbonne is historically one of the most venerated symbolic centers of free discourse in Paris. Abd Al Malik transformed the physical appearance of the place by

performing against the backdrop of a huge glass sheet situated just in front of the doors to the Sorbonne. This was done in the months leading up to the 2005 riots and student protests, a moment of profound unrest in Paris, which can be witnessed in localized films of the events.

Abd Al Malik sang his lyrics, as one of his colleagues created an elaborate graffiti typical of those seen in the *banlieues*. In the process of being painted, the graffiti began to block the audience's view of the front door of the Sorbonne, emphasizing the eminent visibility of the Sorbonne and the absolute invisibility of the *banlieues* in the minds and lives of French nationals. Abd Al Malik thus delivered the message that if the intellectual elite of Paris did not want to come out to the *banlieues*, then the *banlieues* would just have to come into the center of Paris. The abjectness of the environmental gaze of *banlieues* inhabitants was symbolically recreated.

Abd Al Malik's subsequent musical projects equally stress spatial dimensions, in particular, in his work with a collective of artists on a musical album entitled *Beni Snassen*. Each of the artists in the collective inhabits the *banlieues* and all but one was born in the *banlieues*. Furthermore, the name of their musical collective originates from a physical location. The population of Beni Snassen, a region in Algeria, is characterized by a collective diversity as are La goutte d'ôr and other northern Paris areas. Beni Snassen is also the name given to one of the French tanks used during World War II that was commandeered by Algerian soldiers fighting in the French army (www.chars-francais.net). Chronicling the involvement of Algerian soldiers in the French army is another locus of the popular imagination used by Rachid Bouchareb in his more broadly accepted film *Les Indigènes*.

Privileging physical location is at the base of Beni Snassen's identity as a collective group and is echoed continuously in their lyrics, particularly in one of the lead songs, *Spleen et Idéal*: "The streets have become the grandest theater of the absurd . . . but I have transcended the *banlieues* with my pen . . . the books in my library are the only *bling bling* I know—my translation. (On Aime,

On Aide 2006). This type of lyric reinforces the links between literacy and the environmental gaze onto *banlieues* locations, which informs so much of Abd Al Malik's life and work.

Abd Al Malik's most recent album *Château Rouge* moves directly into a sub-area of La Goutte d'ôr, continually stressing demographic space. Château Rouge's place in the lives of Abd Al Malik's parisianist protagonists is ever present, such as in the song *Centre Ville*: "un lieu est l'allegorie de l'être" a lyric which insists that place is an allegory of a being—one must visualize Paris and its *banlieues* in anthropomorphic shapes. Another lyric, written in English by Abd Al Malik, suggests that many *banlieues* youth are: "Born in Paris, raised like a virus, Born in Paris, raised like a crime" (We Are Still Kings 2010). Abd Al Malik even calls upon parallels to the Afro-American experience of physical exclusion when he speaks of his neighborhood as one where people live in similar ways to the way Malcolm Little lived before he became Malcolm X. The demographic dimension of the identity politics under scrutiny is thereby reinforced. By liberating himself from the oppression of American racism, Malcolm comes to be called by a new and powerful name and lives differently in the spaces he inhabits. In each of these lyrical instances, the silence of the environmental gaze is evoked by first calling attention to the physical location with ethnographic precision and secondly, to the beings it has produced. The spaces of social exclusion are aesthetically framed in this manner (Château Rouge 2010).

The Neo-Parisianist Novel:

La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu

Despite early failures, Abd Al Malik converts to a life of reading that he claims was his salvation. Abd Al Malik revalorizes the traditional spaces of free discourse and juxtaposes the *cités* as overlays and as potential new spaces for free discourse as in the case of the Sorbonne concert discussed earlier. Throughout *La Guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu*, the reader follows the evolution of the central character, a young boy named Peggy, as he moves from a life in the *banlieues* which entraps him towards a life in

the *banlieues* which he controls. The reader is witness to the thin balance between the alienating silence to which Peggy is subjected as well as to a nuanced account of longing and belonging which terminates in his acquisition of an empowering education. In the closing chapter, Peggy has become many things, notably a father who must explain to his son, the only Black Muslim in his school, that he should not listen when his friends claim that he is not French just because he is black and when they insist that he is *per force* an Arab simply because he is Muslim. In effect, the father's lesson to the son is that his longing to belong to his surrounding environment will always be thwarted by that environment's willful revision of his identity or imposition of a super-structural definition of his place within the environment as a means of excluding him.

The lesson is equally explained to the son's teacher when she tries to suggest that the young black boy is having trouble learning to read, but that this is not cause for great concern since he will probably have no need for reading in whatever future he pursues afterwards—being a black Arab, as she sees it. As Abd Al Malik expresses it through the words of his character, “there was one phrase which really *bugger dans ma tête* [got to me]” (2010, 153), namely, the teacher's assertion that his son would do the kinds of jobs or activities where he wouldn't be required to read when he was older. Two forms of irresponsible prejudice typical of national imagination about the Parisian *banlieues* are here evoked—that race, nationality and ethnicity are used confusedly to marginalize many French citizens who have descended from immigrant parents, and that literacy is unimportant for those citizens because they will never be able to assimilate in a productive way into mainstream French culture.

The echo of Malcolm X, who narrates a similar humiliation in his own autobiography, continually resurfaces explicitly and implicitly in the pages of Abd Al Malik's texts. Abd Al Malik ends his novel with an insistence that one's life must be shared with others (75), an echoing of Todorov's call for alternative ways of evoking collective memory. In *Mémoire du Mal, Tentation du Bien: Enquête sur le Siècle* Tzvetan Todorov denounces repressive collective histories,

whose superstructures are intended to efface individual memory, particularly the individual memories of the disenfranchised. Along with the suggestion that *what* one remembers is a function of one's identity and sense of empowerment, Todorov stresses the need for balance between *la manie analogique* and *l'obsession literaliste*—between the tendency to simplify past events through over-determined analogies and the dubious insistence that there can be an objective viewpoint which, in claiming to be literal, often obscures important details, particularly with respect to colonial histories (10). Breton's "haunting selves" re-emerge in Todorov's appeal for unrepressed reviews of 20th century events.

Abd Al Malik's first prose work, *Qu'Allah Benisse La France*, is completely autobiographical, but its environmental testimony on his troubled past is transformed in *La Guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu*, which aligns itself more precisely with parisianist tendencies. Abd Al Malik constructs a fictionalized narrator who is both a direct derivation from his experiences and also a *literary* construction. Peggy embodies the environmental gaze of the parisianist genre and is intended as a re-visitation of Abd Al Malik's own doubled life of longing and belonging.

Dadié's and Wright's anticipatory parisianism is echoed in the epigraph to *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu*. Abd Al Malik gives to literature a voice of its own. Literature frees the human individual from indoctrinating forces and forms of social control that both Dadié and Wright witnessed as particularly debilitating for the Negro of their generation and social backgrounds. As with Bouchareb and others, the power of aesthetic distance gained through literary, lyrical or cinematic construction, complements the power of the environmental gaze in bearing witness to the racial and social constraints which bar *banlieues* populations from proper belonging.

The crucial work of mourning the birth of the *banlieues* has begun to take place and the efficacy of a field of *banlieues* studies would be precisely in documenting and facilitating this phenomenon. By anchoring the aesthetic in the parisianist genre, one can address the issues raised by Todorov in his call for a balanced

inquiry into the forces that have shaped the lives of the many disenfranchised beings of the 20th century. Physical location as a center to the genre does not always imply that the spaces evoked are literal. Indirectness at times dictates a move from literal to figurative spaces of entrapment or exclusion. In both *Un Nègre à Paris* and *The Long Dream*, the physical space of the airplane cabin replaced the segregated worlds of the respective protagonists of these two novels. The novels were both written as anticipations of the authors' trips to Paris. During conversation with an Italian American in the plane, Fishbelly withdraws into silence because "he is not yet ready to admit what he had lived" (Wright, *Long Dream* 380). Exhilaration at potential entry into a new cultural experience coupled with the anxieties of longing to know in advance whether or not he will belong to that world push his narrative into the silence characteristic of the environmental gaze.

Like Fishbelly, Dadié's protagonist Bertin begins with an exultation upon entering the airplane that will take him to Paris only to slide into silence as he becomes aware that no one wants to sit next to him or to speak to him. He thus witnesses the gap between his longing and his belonging. The culminating depiction of Wright's environmental gaze is articulated in his unpublished manuscript, *Island of Hallucination*, the sequel to *The Long Dream* which is set in Paris. The reader witnesses Fishbelly's narrative of longing and belonging as he journeys through the city and slowly comes to realize that no matter how long he might reside in Paris he would never BE French. Both characters are prologues, but prescient ones, to the full fledged and authentic voice of parisianist alienation articulated by Abd Al Malik and Rachid Bouchareb's protagonists. Those protagonists in turn echo the lives of many local inhabitants of La goutte'ôr and the *banlieues* beyond, for whom silence in the face of harsh social environments is a way of life.

Structure of the Neo-Parisianism Narrative

Abd Al Malik's novel is divided into a narration of a typical character's life in the *banlieues*, a life of drugs, of confusion and violence sparked by moments of false freedom. Abd Al Malik

creates an aesthetic distance for a stereotypical depiction of a *banlieues* dweller by first reciting his narration as if it were spoken by the character who is caught in that role and then interrupting that narrator through the guise of several different voices—the voices of characters who are increasingly enlightened and who embody the environmental gaze of parisianism. In so doing, Abd Al Malik recreates the ironic distance of both Dadié and Wright in *Un Nègre à Paris*, *The Long Dream*, and *Island of Hallucination*.

Abd Al Malik's novel ultimately does propose a political perspective, but it is not a confrontational one. The violence in the suburbs of Paris can be avoided—the war will NOT and SHOULD NOT happen. The *argument* for how one can avoid the violence of the suburbs is constructed through the threading together of different aesthetically determined authentic voices of the Franco-African immigrant, which is to say that it is an argument through artistic crafting as opposed to protest. Abd Al Malik calls not for violence against the ethnic and color divides of Paris (and by extension, France), but rather against the abuse of those human beings who are unable to create identities for themselves because they are unable to escape the consequences of those divides. He compares the French suburbs to a huge nuclear power plant which could be used to provide light and electricity to the entire country but which have in fact been recklessly abandoned and can therefore only give way to atomic weaponry (35).

As Benetta Jules-Rosette suggests in *Black Paris: the African Writer's Landscape*, parisianism recounts a narrative in which “the cultural exile becomes an immigrant” (10) and reflects “the identity discourse of a new generation” (185) as opposed to mounting a literature of protest. The narrative structure of parisianism pushes the writer toward witnessing the world by assuming an ethnographic and journalistic gaze on their social environments” (186). These artists, who wanted to belong to a landscape they would encounter as foreigners, therefore planted the seeds of the parisianist genre. What has been traced here is just how concretely contemporary artists in the *banlieues* adopt aesthetic dimensions of the parisianist genre despite the fact that they were born or at least

raised in Paris and therefore are not encountering the landscape as foreigners *per se*. Parisian artists coming from the *banlieues* struggle to assert a belonging which eludes them because of the alienation of their social environments in Paris. In Abd Al Malik's novels, in his song lyrics and in the lyrics of his collective group Beni Snassen, as well as in Rachid Bouchareb's latest film about the Algerian massacres in 1961, the use of creative techniques which mimic narratives of longing and belonging dominate. These works are rooted in the belief that lived experience must be transformed through aesthetic distance. Nonetheless, awareness of these artists' shared conditions must come through recognizing their dependence on the tri-partite gaze structure which characterizes parisianism, and the silence of the environmental gaze which characterizes their works, and includes moments of virtual longing and loss (157–158).

The aesthetic forms which best serve Abd Al Malik in positioning himself, born as they are out of his exhilarating experience of learning to read, create continuity between the seminal parisianist works and his own concerns, which are similarly echoed in the works of Rachid Bouchareb. Both artists call for new ways of reading and viewing their works. They seek new audiences which can include both inhabitants of their own urban landscapes and those seeking to learn more about the creative energies hidden within. Each of these artists has experienced a becoming particular, but they nonetheless share common threads in that they accept the shape of the city as it reveals and conceals many aspects of individual becoming, a crucial aesthetic base for surrealist urban studies as well. These contemporary artists also evidence through their work that the environmental gaze must be articulated precisely through whatever creative means are at the disposal of the artist or citizen and that it must be at the center of an aesthetic of *banlieues* studies. The surrealist critique of institutional forces which threatened to destroy the creative powers of the individual unconscious has been brought full circle and has found its home in a study of these works, emblemized by the physical spaces of La goutte d'ôr.

Indeed, La goutte d'ôr has itself experienced a "becoming particular" and should be embraced as a gateway towards a productive journey into the Parisian *banlieues*. A concrete example of this would be the exhibit at the Echomusée where artist Philippe Férin has undertaken a series of portrait drawings of citizens of La goutte d'ôr who were born elsewhere, in Africa and other nations, but who are now old enough to suspect that they will pass the remainder of their days in La goutte d'ôr (Djabali 11). This tribute to senior citizens of La goutte d'ôr, who have no doubt found themselves gazing environmentally throughout their lives at the physical locations which will become their resting place, is an unprecedented proof of the power of art to transform worlds which could, if left unattended, erupt into violence. In La goutte d'ôr there is "le vin qui se met tout le monde d'accord (the wine which brings us all together)" and which might allow us some day to say "We are ALL Parisians"—a clarion call for *banlieues* studies.

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