Fragment, Reassemble, Repeat: Productive Border-Perforations in Works by Leïla Sebbar, Farah Khelil, and Martina Melilli

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ABSTRACT
This paper investigates the formal means by which three practitioners, French writer Leïla Sebbar, Tunisian artist Farah Khelil, and Italian filmmaker Martina Melilli create cross-Mediterranean Deleuzoguattarian "holey spaces" in their work, that challenge, in particular, the memory borders between North and South. Exploring the use of virtual and actual holes, points, and collages in Sebbar's alphabet book *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (Voyage in Algerias around my room; 2008), in Khelil's perspective-bending *Point de vue, point d'écoute* (Viewpoint, Listening-Point 2013), and multi-material, implicitly navigational *Point d'étape* (Waypoint; 2016-), as well as in Melilli's medial border transgressions in her film *My Home, in Libya* (2018), I posit that the disruptive spaces generated by these works reshape the fabric of their Mediterranean pasts and presents. The Deleuzoguattarian notion of "holey space" with which I engage recognizes the multifaceted and multiplied nature of these spaces, neither completely "striated" (controlled by power structures), nor completely "smooth" (free of any state intervention past or present). The perforation of border spaces of the present mines colonial pasts, bringing to light, interrogating, and potentially transforming their contemporary residue.

KEY WORDS
Holey Space, Assemblage, Rhizome, Mediterranean, (Post)colonialism, Memory, Migration

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores creative border crossings as productive perforations in the work of three cultural practitioners, French author Leïla Sebbar (*Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* [Voyage in Algerias around my room], 2008), Tunisian artist Farah Khelil (*Point de vue, point d'écoute* [Viewpoint, Listening-Point], 2013 and *Point d'étape* [Waypoint], 2016-)[1] and Italian filmmaker Martina Melilli (*My Home, in Libya*, 2018). All three engage critically with the colonial and contemporary contexts of the Mediterranean area in which they and their works are situated, and all adopt elements of the collage format in these engagements, piecing together pasts, mixing up presents. It is this shared collage element that suggests a comparative exploration, the interplay of text(s) and images in borderland spaces proving particularly fruitful for exploring their assembled works and enabling affective responses, in particular, those generated by Sebbar's alphabet letters, Khelil's holes and "points", and Melilli's mobile-centered border transgressions.

In mapping examples of these collages and other related features of Sebbar's, Khelil's and Melilli's texts, I attempt to highlight the spaces that the three practitioners (re)create through their works, spaces that link both sides of the Mediterranean in a fragmentary, continually de- and re-assembled way, and that are "holey" in the sense of French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, in other words neither "striated" (marked up by power structures), nor "smooth" (completely free of state interventions). What emerges from these assemblages, I contend, is borderland spaces that explore colonial pasts and acknowledge their continued traces by perforating, and thereby fundamentally interrogating, contemporary borders. The past connections and contemporary power formations that Sebbar's, Khelil's, and Melilli's formal techniques uncover bore into the culture and borderlands of (collective) memory, and simultaneously and consequentially serve as an intensive reminder of contemporary remains and responsibilities (Zhurzhenko 2011). The creative materials they use to traverse spatio-temporal borders and dig up shared pasts, consisting of single letters, cutouts on colonial or tourist postcards, text messages piercing the screen, holes in painting whiteouts, collections of photos, videos shot on mobiles, and so on, all serve to shake up space, time and the fragmented (sometimes fractious) nature of interstate relationships in a postcolonial world.

HOLEY SPACES: PERFORATED CROSSINGS

That the Mediterranean is implicit as metaphorical and physical divider in the work of all three practitioners seems not insignificant. The sea, on the one hand that apparently ultimate smooth space, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is also, on the other, the space that, because of navigation, was "the first" to be striated, in having these navigational lines and crossings at least notionally marked onto it, precisely the idea of the "waypoints", or navigational directions, with which Khelil works (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.529; Khelil 2014, pp.121-122). Thinking through the Deleuzian permutations of engagements with sea (borders) is helpful here, because, in a Deleuzian sense, a smooth space would mark the "absence of a territory", while a striated space is all about pinning down, reterritorializing, and indeed, as Hamza Safouane puts it in his discussion of why migrants shirk this kind of a space, "capturing" (2017, p.1929, p.1935). Negotiation of holey space is thus always already a negotiation of "the *mixture* of smooth and striated space that characterizes any power formation" (Hantel 2012). The striation of the sea, in recent times and in the contexts of these works – in the Mediterranean, one need only think of the EU's External Borders Fund's financial support of Operation Mare Nostrum and not

[1] Both Sebbar's and Khelil's projects are ongoing and their various iterations can be explored at the Swarthmore College website (Sebbar – see: http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/virtuel/index.html) and on Khelil's website (see: http://farahkhelil.free.fr/).

uncontroversial subsequent instigation of Operation Triton[2] – is reminiscent of the relatively recent post-colonization sea border in/on a space that, in the cases of Italy and France, used to be a space of crossings *inside* a country,[3] or at the least, *inside* an Empire.

Hélène Frichot talks of the Deleuzian sea as an "unruly smooth space[] that [has] fallen under surveillance and control", while Safouane, exploring the experience of crossing into Europe, acknowledges the tensions and complexities of this nexus when mapped onto the contemporary migration context in the Mediterranean area when he writes that "many archetypal smooth spaces like the sea are becoming increasingly captured by nation states' migration management apparatuses" (Frichot 2007, p.172; Safouane 2017, p.1935). At the same time, however, Safouane highlights that "'Fortress Europe' is ridden with holes, gaps and cracks", making it, as cultural theorist and filmmaker Brigitta Kuster also identifies, a space that reveals itself to the migrant as neither striated nor smooth, and that could even offer possibilities for a penetration of state boundaries, and for flight, "a holey space dug into heavy police and state control" (Safouane 2017, p.1935; Kuster 2018, p.63). The implication is that even striated space can be both overcome and reappropriated, also in the literal sense – and indeed, as Nizar Messari also discusses in this volume, "[m]igration is [itself…] a vector of space occupation and appropriation" (Safouane 2017, p.1936). The possibilities for reappropriating these spaces and thereby re-assembling past and present could be seen as the impetus for Sebbar's, Khelil's and Melilli's artistic negotiation of these cracks, for, in the works I will discuss, "cracks" reveal both convergences (productive connections and lines of flight to nomadic space) and stoppages, or state blockages, in the contemporary interconnections between France and Italy on one side of the Mediterranean, and Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya on the other. Frichot deems holey space "metamorphological", a concept that has broadened from the idea of a change in form to suggest "transformation in general" (Wilk 1999, p.71), and it is this transformative state that renders holey space elastic and able to "register the demand for a creative practice of hollowing out regions of escape" (Frichot 2007, p.175). While the "escape" in this sense and in these creative works may be from determined meanings and power relations rather than from watchtowers and searchlights as such, the transformative flexibility of these works nonetheless poses a challenge to, and evocative escape from, the striated, territorialized spaces (or cultural systems) of modern Mediterranean nation states.

RISING FROM THE SUBSOIL: MAPPING LANDSCAPES OF NON-PLACE

Holey space is most closely associated with the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the rhizome – the non-hierarchical multiplicity that does not merely get bigger but is fundamentally transformed by each addition or new sprouting – and it shares the rhizome's unpredictable behavior and its ability to shake up power and meaning. For Max Hantel, writing on Édouard Glissant's engagement with Deleuzian concepts as a challenge to the notion of the nation state, "the rhizome is most productively thought as 'holey space,' or the landscape created by an itinerant artisan who follows the movement of matter-flow to create concrete assemblages suffused with incorporeal affects; […] figured as holey space, the rhizome grows unpredictably in the 'non-place' between content and expression" (Hantel 2012). Hantel's concept of the non-place of the rhizome overcomes the dualism of the content-form binary, proposing instead a productive, re-generative, continuous substance whose "gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes etc.", its self-generated "redirections" of "matter-flows" in other words, function "to frustrate the state apparatus" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.458; Hantel 2012). In the cases to hand, I contend that these "frustrating" acts take the form of a redirection of flows of "accepted" meaning – one need only look at what Sebbar, for example, does with the state-imposed French alphabet, how Khelil's

[2] Indeed, Daniela Ortiz's *ABC of Racist Europe* (2017), which will be discussed below, includes Frontex as its entry for the letter "F". See:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_14_566.

[3] From its colonization until 1962, Algeria formed three départements of France.

"points" force her viewer to reexamine their perspective and perceptions, and how Melilli enmeshes documentary footage, personal re-collections and mobile photographic interventions in a narrative of post-colonization and migration.

I would further contend that the suspended, evocative structure of the rhizomatic, assemblage-like collage is shared by all three practitioners. In turn, these collages transform and reshape, challenging the borders that seek to confine them, and frustrating the notion of uniform states (in all senses of the word). Writing about the convergences between migration, art and the postcolonial in the Mediterranean, Celeste Ianniciello reminds us that

> art is able to create zones of ontological slippage, spatio-temporal interlacing, contact zones between collective and personal memory, critical and improper, self and other. Interrogating our position, our habitual procedures of recognition and definition, art transposes us into a critical space, beyond the visible, under the "peel" of domesticated time, in a region not delimited by frontiers, closeness, division, but signed by traces, folds, movements, unpredictable currents, migrations of bodies and senses. (2018, pp.2-3)

Here, art's memory work is seen to profit from its side-stepping of the concrete and of a fixing to a single spatio-temporal "territory." Its slipperiness opens it to shifting spaces and times, blurred interfaces between private and public spheres, and has the potential to take us on a "critical" and unpredictable journey of migrational perception.

In exploring how holey space reverberates with the potential for resistance of uniform states, it is helpful to return to Édouard Glissant, whose contrast of the root and the rhizome poses a challenge to *post*colonial "nations" – especially those of the Global South – to enact their possibilities of doing things differently. For Glissant, the inherent problem is that "the history of the West is a history of fixing movement in terms of the static model of the nation-state", and that this history has been perpetuated even in decolonized nations, which largely continued "to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of the single, unique root" (Glissant 1997, p.14; Glissant in Hantel 2012). Hantel further explains how Glissant works to transform this "national root" into a rhizome-equivalent, and the idea of the resistance to "fixing movement" is one that is worthy of pursuit here, for when states change and borders shift, the after-effects of colonization, independence and the memory-connections between countries/states are forgotten, or remembered differently, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko reminds us in her work on memory, its symbolic reconstruction, and its erasure in the "unif[cation of] cultural landscapes" and the creation of new "communities of memory" in the aftermath of conflict and the redrawing of borders (2011, p.63, p.66). Melilli's contrast between the memories of the people and the state-sponsored narrative in *My Home, in Libya*, is particularly evocative here, as we will see, precisely in its creation of space for individual memories to move through and transpierce the official narrative(s) of state-building and the aftermath of Empire(s).

Holey spaces of movement and perforation fragment the border, releasing it from the fixed structures of this side-the other side and before-after ("diesseits-jenseits und vorher-nachher") writes Kuster, who sees any act of crossing as perforation (2018, pp.14-15). In the way Kuster, writing in German, uses "holey space", its perforatory sense comes across even more clearly than it does in the original Deleuzoguattarian French ("espace troué"). Becoming "der durchlöcherte Raum" ("the space pierced through with holes" or "the transpierced space"), these perforations are seen to produce "a montage-fabric of affect that cannot be made to stand still" ("ein nicht stillzustellendes Montage-Gefüge der Affektik"; Kuster, 2018, p.15). The use of the geological term "fabric", the pattern of the rock – both what constitutes it and how this constitution is arranged in space and geometry – does not seem incidental here, referencing actual topography and residue at one and the same time, and for Kuster, "the transpierced space of migration" ("der

durchlöcherte Raum der Migration") is always already lumpy and bumpy, a metaphor of its uneven politics (2018, p.218).

Precisely this notion of transpiercing, combined with the call to follow this fabric of matter in movement in order to supersede spatial striations is key to Deleuze and Guattari's own introduction of holey space in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> Transpierce the mountains instead of scaling them, excavate the land instead of striating it, bore holes in space instead of keeping it smooth, turn the earth into swiss [*sic*] cheese. An image from the film *Strike* [by Eisenstein] presents a holey space where a disturbing group of people are rising, each emerging from his or her hole as if from a field mined in all directions. The sign of Cain is the corporeal and affective sign of the subsoil, passing through both the striated land of sedentary space and the nomadic ground *(sol)* of smooth space without stopping at either one, the vagabond sign of itinerancy, the double theft and double betrayal of the metallurgist […]. Holey space itself communicates with smooth space and striated space. In effect, the machinic phylum or the metallic line passes through all of the assemblages: nothing is more deterritorialized than matter-movement. […] Here, we would say that the phylum simultaneously has two different modes of liaison: it is always *connected* to nomad space, whereas it *conjugates* with sedentary space. On the side of the nomadic assemblages and war machines, it is a kind of rhizome, with its gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc. On the other side, the sedentary assemblages and State apparatuses effect a capture of the phylum, put the traits of expression into a form or a code, make the holes resonate together, plug the lines of flight, subordinate the technological operation to the work model, impose upon the connections a whole regime of arborescent conjunctions. (2004, pp.456-458)

In their call to "transpierce the mountains", "bore holes in space", and indeed, by implication to rise from the "subsoil", Deleuze and Guattari both infuse the notion of holey space with disruptive movement, and that of the "State apparatus", that seeks to plug it, with fixed meaning. This idea of the "machinic phylum" that is followed precisely to bore these holes in space, and that the state seeks to hold down, requires some further explication. For the philosopher Manuel DeLanda (1997) the machinic phylum "conceptualiz[es] innovation." DeLanda explains how, in Deleuzian theory more broadly, the blacksmith, and, later, the metallurgist, are understood to "treat[] metals as active materials, pregnant with morphogenetic capabilities" – their task being to coax and "guide" form from these materials in their different ways, for the smith "through a series of processes (heating, annealing, quenching, hammering)", for the metallurgist "utiliz[ing] the indentations and accidents of the rock", until what is ultimately produced is "a form in which the materials themselves had a say" (DeLanda 1997; Faure in Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.456). Yet it is the metals themselves that are the "catalyst", "interven[ing] in reality, trigger[ing] effects, caus[ing] encounters that would not have taken place without [them]", while they themselves are "not consumed or permanently changed in these interactions, so that [they] can go on triggering effects elsewhere" (DeLanda 1997). Thus, it is the burgeoning form of the metal, in this in-between non-place of the space transpierced with holes, that "act[s] on an initial set of merely coexisting, heterogeneous elements, and cause[s] them to come together and consolidate into a novel entity" (DeLanda 1997).[4] This notion of a self-generating fabric of matter followed through lines of metal

[4] Explaining the "phylum" of the "machinic phylum", DeLanda (1997) points to its biological definition as a category "above class", drawing the conclusion that "we are also related to non-living creatures […] through common 'body-plans' involving similar self-organizing and combinatorial processes" – suggesting we are also part of, or inherently enmeshed with, the lines of metal in the rock that we are

is particularly evocative for the collage work done by Sebbar, Khelil and Melilli, as we will see, especially in the way Sebbar's work and its interweaving of text and image pushes the reader to follow the "metal" letters of her alphabet book, the way Khelil's perforations and waypoints direct the gaze, and the way Melilli's texts, images and videos flood and pierce her projected mobile screen.

Hantel (2012) takes the doubled problematic of holey space and its propensity to both connect *and* conjugate further: "connections imply an intensification of different deterritorializing flows that reciprocally accelerate; conjugation, on the other hand, 'indicates their relative stoppage' because the flows are brought under the control of a single code." Holey space both actively resists and is inherently susceptible to Glissant's "national root" that surrounds it, because, as Maria Mayr explains, it must work with what it has: "in the midst of dominant structures", it "subverts not by imposing something completely new and foreign upon the received space, but by transforming that which is given, by following the metal flow" (2010, p.32).[5] That which is given, here, is two forms of bordered national spaces – that of European memory culture and that of the contemporary postcolonial nation state itself as threatened by (clandestine) migration.

The self-perception of modern nation states as threatened by migration is evocatively addressed by Kuster, who asks us "What more is holey [transpierced] space than that of the transnational connections and routes of migration which do not dissolve or attack the state-entity, but rather churn through it? Hole by hole, migration has bored corridors and tunnels under the seas that are supposed to separate continents" (2018, p.216).[6] And yet, "churning through" in resistance relates in my mind not just to migration, but also to one of the propellants of that migration: Robert J.C. Young's concept of dynamic postcolonial remains, "the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies" (2012, p.21). While these remains "move" less obviously and less "actually", so to speak, there is a Deleuzian intensity inherent in the residue that causes the past to churn through it and into the present. What emerges from these transpiercings is, then, "the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present, the insistent persistence of the afterimages of historical memory that drive the desire to transform the present", where the present is itself "ceaselessly transformed" by the socio-political "configurations" these remains have themselves generated in it (Young 2012, p.21). Like metallurgists, who Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p.457) suggest "kept up the mines, boring holes in European space from every direction", I contend that Sebbar's, Khelil's and Melilli's collage-assemblages mine into memory culture *and* into the configurations of the present. Both minings imply that generating new holey spaces is a "subterranean and hidden" act of resistance (Frichot 2007, p.170), "a subversion from below, [… and] a space of political intervention and interaction" (Blankenship 2002, p.8). The collages mine the "field" of the mid-Mediterranean region "from all directions" as their elements "rise" into contemporary France and Italy as nations of the Global North(ern Mediterranean).

Following Hantel, Kuster, Frichot, Blankenship, and Deleuze and Guattari themselves, holey space is thus always already transgression, boring holes into country spaces to allow for

following. Phylum, here, arguably functions as a synonym for rhizomatic assemblage, with "machinic" implying the ways in which this assemblage works (both on itself and in and on the world around it).

[5] In her PhD thesis, Mayr makes a further distinction between the possibilities afforded by holey space and those afforded by the more well-known spatial notion of the Deleuzian line of flight, linked to smooth space: "For Deleuze and Guattari, the line of flight […] is: *a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour,* that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points [...] and that is as alive as a continuous variation [....]. By virtue of its definition, a line of flight can never arrive, does not allow for a settling. Holey space, on the other hand, is a place of – at least temporary – refuge" (2010, pp.29-30).

[6] "Was ist der durchlöcherte Raum anderes als derjenige der transnationalen Verbindungen und Routen der Migration, welche die Staatlichkeit nicht auflösen oder angreifen, sondern durchwühlen? Loch für Loch hat die Migration Gänge und Stollen unter den Meeren, welche Kontinente trennen sollten, durchgebohrt."

cross-border movement, "routes" and "connections", where precisely the fragmentalization of the collage mechanisms making these holes allows the collage itself to be a statically intense "kind of rhizome, with its gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc." (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.458). In this sense, the very "holes" themselves are the intensive memory affects that break down borders and allow for "unpredictable growth" (c.f. Hantel 2012). These collages-as-holey-space are tied to the state actors who formed the territories they tunnel in the first place – striated space being always "conjugated" into meaning with the "arborescent conjunctions" of state borders and historical "codes" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.458) – but their intensiveness makes for "deterritorializing flows" that churn up and churn through the sea border in question in all cases.

BORING THROUGH IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Holey space is fertile for creative engagements and "material journeys", journeys that are "as intensive as they are extensive, but […] are always invented and, as such, constitute vital acts of creation" (Frichot 2007, p.176). Frichot speaks here of actual refugee journeys across space, but the subversions and sproutings of Sebbar's, Khelil's and Melilli's collages, I argue, produce just such an apparently contradictory entanglement of movement capture and meaning evasion in their productive convergences, providing for an intensive journey of multiple virtual crossings and transgressions on the spot.

Arguably the most important mode of fragmentation, both operating on (and in) and simultaneously producing borderlands, is the deterritorialization of "national" memory – also that of the present. As Zhurzhenko explains, borderlands and their "geopolitics of memory" are important for memory recovery, as well as for memory renegotiation and contestation (2011, p.65). The question Sebbar, Khelil and Melilli grapple with in their work is that of what we do with common memories shared between spaces that are now striated into different states (and have the painful past of colonialism). Explaining how collective memory is "related to territory", and how the claiming of territory in turn emanates from "sites of memory […] concretized as locations", Zhurzhenko warns against a "state-led politics of memory" (2011, pp.71-72). The fragmented, assembled, and reassembled form of the collage frustrates any notion of sites and always already destabilizes the concrete, making of it a "zone[] of ontological slippage" (Ianniciello 2018, p.3).

SEBBAR: A DISORDERLY ALPHABET OF ECHOES

Leïla Sebbar's *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre: Abécédaire* (Voyage in Algerias around my room: An Alphabet Book, 2008) is the third text in her apparently personalized "Algerias" trilogy. It is preceded by a "travel notebook" and a journal, with all three linked by their cover appearance, the use of the first-person possessive in each title, as well as the pluralized "Algerias", and their own inherent "plurality" of form, as text-image-fusions of short sections clustered around a theme, a date, or a letter, and compiling collected, often material, memories, both Sebbar's own and those of family, friends and acquaintances, as well as material vestiges of the Franco-Algerian past, in short, the convergences between Algeria and France that (apparently) refract Sebbar's subject position, as the child of an Algerian father and a French mother, herself born in Algeria when it was still a part of France (see also Gueydan-Turek, 2014 and Wilson, 2018). For Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, the texts are plural at every level, the page itself functioning as a visual and textual palimpsest where "different strata" form combinations, acting on each other: "new elements are added and subtracted in the combinatory of signs that defines the narrators and these signs are reorganized at each new encounter"[7] (2014, pp.107-109). Yet, I would posit that Sebbar's

[7] "De nouveaux éléments sont ajoutés et soustraits à la combinatoire de signes qui définissent les narrateurs, et ces signes sont réorganisés à chaque nouvelle rencontre" – she later refers to this structure

"Algerian" alphabet book goes further than her previous two texts, as arguably by far the most experimental of the trilogy. In some ways, we can see this from the cover of the alphabet book itself, the background reproducing each of the words chosen to represent the alphabet (an apparent striation of form somewhat undone by the multiplicity of words for some letters and the disappearance of the representation of others, as I will explain below), while an image of Sebbar's bookshelf in her room in her Paris apartment, with its jumbled mix of referents and media is superimposed over the elements of her "alphabet", sitting prominently in the center of the cover, surrounded by the text's title.

The choice of an alphabet book as the vehicle for Sebbar's third installment of her (re)assembled, collected memories of Franco-Algerian pasts begs further investigation. In the context in which it is presented (the "Voyage in Algerias") the alphabet book is also an inherently colonial form, always already implicated in the "state apparatus", where the learning of the French language within an imported, colonial French education system was fundamental to the controversial *misson civilisatrice* (see for example Spolsky 2018).

Children's literature researcher Clare Bradford outlines how alphabet books have long functioned as entries into "cultural systems", implicated as they are in constructions of fixed cultural identity and of racial and colonial hierarchy (2011, p.275).[8] For Bradford, the alphabet book is tied up with language and identity from the beginning, and this reveals itself especially in terms of Nodelman's discussion of it as a "puzzle" that children solve by matching up text and image, where the combination resultantly generates specific associations with words, and children are drawn to follow these associations in turn, entering into the "shared" cultural meanings that these text/image fusions ultimately project: what Sonia Wilson calls their "understand[ing of] both word and image together as representations of an object in the world" (Bradford 2011, p.275; Wilson 2018, p.89). Bradford further emphasizes the importance of problematizing Nodelman's "us" thus formed, especially in terms of the way this "us" of shared cultural meaning elides the role of the alphabet book in supporting "cultural and ideological" systems that have already "normalise[d]" notions of an us and a them, namely of "who is included and who is excluded from the audiences they imply" (Bradford 2011, p.275).

However, just as leaders of freedom movements emerged from the French education system across France's colonies, so too does Bradford subsequently demonstrate how contemporary indigenous and postcolonial authors are resisting children's entries into these colonial and ideological systems in producing their own "reclaimings" of the genre as they fundamentally reshape the books themselves, and by extension the identity positions the books produce, "exploiting the possibilities of a form deeply implicated in the production and reproduction of the values of dominant cultures, […] engaged in building repertoires of knowledge, values and affect" (2011, p.275). The resistance central to the projects of the contemporary authors Bradford discusses also lies, she notes, in "demonstrating that the meanings of words derive from the ways in which they are used" (2011, p.277), and it is here that I contend that the notion of holey space becomes particularly evocative. Sebbar begins with a series of letters, to which she matches words significant for the intertwining, cross-border nexus of Franco-Algerian relations. Yet, each of her letter/word combinations functions as an intense point that is made to go on a journey of its own, akin to Deleuze and Guattari's metal catalysts that produce unpredictable paths, "lines", that criss-cross the Mediterranean in dynamic and apparently random ways, thereby fundamentally shaking up and changing the meanings of the words to which they relate, and by extension, the identities and relationships that those words may once have implied.

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as a chronotopia with topographic potential, in the mixing up of time and space on the page (Gueydan-Turek 2014, p.109). I have elsewhere described this same characteristic of Sebbar's first two *Algéries* texts as Deleuzian plateau-assemblages (Roy 2010).

[8] Sonia Wilson also references the alphabet book's role in colonialism, arguing that identity formation and the developing understanding of identifying cultural elements and selves are an inherent part of learning to read (2018, p.92).

For a condensed form that demonstrates the reshaping of alphabet books as resistance to fixed meaning emerging from the subsoil of an apparently striated space, we can turn first, briefly, to the Peruvian-Spanish artist Daniela Ortiz's *The ABC of Racist Europe* (2017).[9] Ortiz's ABC book (also exhibited in multiple European locations as a wall collage)[10] consists of letters whose illustrations – their image content – as she explains, are each compiled of a collage of racist images from actual historical European ABC books, sometimes also superimposing historical and contemporary images of resistance, as seen in the example of the letter F below (SAVVY Contemporary 2018; Burke 2018). For Harry Burke (2018), Ortiz's collages "challenge the ways in which oppressive thinking is endemic in even the earliest introductions to language and epistemology" and begin to map a "dystrophic psychogeography" which paves the way for the reshaping of "the process of subjectification itself." In her *ABC of Racist Europe*, Ortiz takes on a number of overt border contexts and institutions, succeeding in flipping the subject to underline the power relationships under which the border operates.

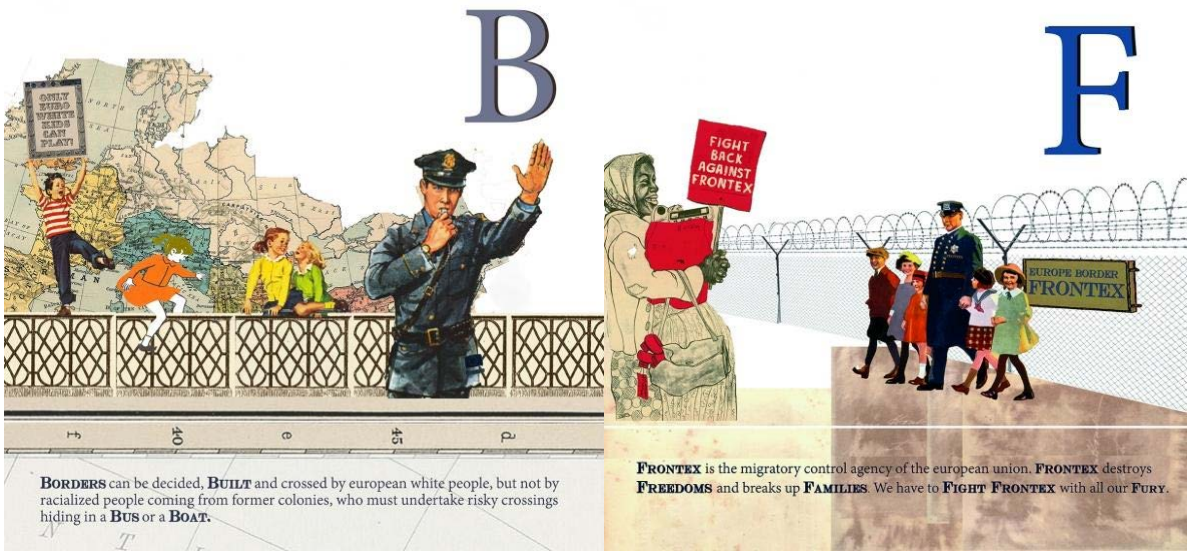

Figure 1: "B" and "F" from *The ABC of Racist Europe* by Daniela Ortiz are licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Significantly for the present context, not only does Ortiz set her sights on "Border" and "Frontex", but her "M" stands for "Mediterranean", with the accompanying text: "The same MEDITERRANEAN is the sea where the white european [*sic*] MIDDLE CLASS enjoys their holidays, the same sea where more than 50,000 MIGRANT people have died or disappeared" (Ortiz 2017). In this sense, Ortiz's project uses the letters of the alphabet and the systemic cultural form of the ABC, mining the images of the past to overlay their remains with a resistance, a creative political intervention of the present. The static journey Ortiz's letters and the innovative permutations of their associated words take us on essentially rewrites, and thereby disruptively cracks the edges of Europe.

In the same way, as Wilson also identifies, Sebbar's implementation of the *abécédaire* quite clearly goes beyond "imposing order" on her compiled "mass of textual fragments, images and objects": it is demonstrably evocative of the alphabet's role not only in the development of literacy, but also in the entry into a system, "framing" the way we see and read (Wilson 2018, p.89). For

[9] Ortiz's alphabet book is available online at: https://archive.org/details/TheAbcOfRacistEurope/page/n3/mode/2up.
[10] I viewed it, for example, at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin in October 2018.

Wilson, "to enter Sebbar's 'room' is to learn the alphabet anew", as we find ourselves in the position of the new reader, again "hav[ing] a code to crack" (Wilson 2018, p.89). I concur with Wilson that Sebbar's alphabet resists the order normally inherent in the form, and by implication, the linguistic and identitarian control seen in the theory explored above. Quoting Coats, Wilson implies the progression of the alphabet book from A to Z: "'When you get to Z, you should close the book.' Yet Sebbar's alphabet leaks letters" (Wilson 2018, p.92). It is not just that Sebbar's alphabet proliferates some letters[11] and omits others – it also "leaks" in other ways, indeed the letters actually bleed into each other like unruly ink via their image components, where some "visual" elements of the previous letter or the letter to follow are to be found in the page space of the next or the previous letter (e.g. pp.74-75 where "Conquête" (Conquest) actually begins in "Colon" (Colonial, noun) via one of its images, or pp.12-13, where there is an image for "Abécédaire" (Alphabet Book) in "Abeille" (Bee; Sebbar 2008).

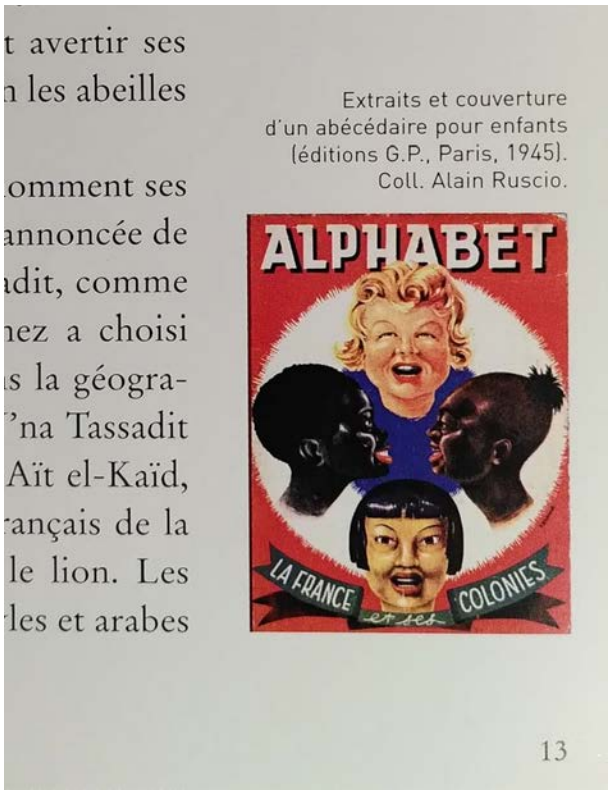

Figure 2: Alphabet book cover image within the entry "Abeille" (*Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre*)
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Both Sebbar's prolog and her approach to her first entry demonstrate that she knows what is at stake in her adoption and shake-up of the form of the alphabet book: she speaks of "searching, then searching again, with neither a method nor a system, carried by the whim and the random chance of the immobile voyage" ("Chercher, rechercher sans méthode ni système, portée par le caprice et le hasard du voyage immobile") and of weaving "an affective link with Algeria" ("un lien affectif avec l'Algérie"; Sebbar, 2008, p.10). This "routes not roots", rhizomatic impetus that is reminiscent of Glissant's call to morph the national root into a rhizome, an inherently non-static flow, and of Mayr, quoted above, for whom following this (metal) flow inherently transforms the "given", is continued in the choice of illustrative entries: "the companions, female and male, of

[11] Interestingly, Christiane Chaulet-Achour and Brigitte Riéra's *Abécédaire insolite des francophonies* (A Strange Alphabet Book of Francospheres, 2012) resists form and "leaks" in similar ways, with multiple entries for some letters.

my Algerian routes. All those who live in my French room colonized by my Algerias and an imaginary Orient, in the affective disorder of the arbitrary alphabetical order I impose […] It is not the scholarly and rational collection that moves me, but the variations on the motif, to infinity"[12] (Sebbar 2008, p.11). The motifs, variated and pushed to infinity, proliferated, are themselves very often already imbued with a sense of travel, however that sense may be inflected: bees, (shared) animals – especially birds – and trees, the banlieue (suburbs, often translated as migrant housing spaces), cinema, colonials, the author Rimbaud, stamps, dreams, voices, voyages, and the names of a host of Algerian cities, towns and villages, experienced by a variety of travelers, letter writers, and artists, whose writings and art are now situated in France. Similarly, the modes of storytelling Sebbar references in her prolog seem significant here, especially those of tattooing, weaving, and mural painting, all modes that challenge the boundaries of individual entities, and bleed or collect stories. The multiple reference to "affect" (a term also used by Bradford above in describing the indigenous and postcolonial rewriting of the alphabet book), and especially to "affective *dis*order", in the volume's prolog suggests the impact Sebbar's infinite series pile-up of voyaging motifs could have on the reader:

> I fabricate, in this prosaic and lettered game of echoes, baroque associations, strange correspondences (color, gaze, sound, smell, gestures) a great living body from the Orient (Algeria, metaphor of the Orient) to the Occident (France, metaphor of the Occident), an unheard of tribe, enigmatic, mythological, a choral song to accompany my father.[13] (Sebbar 2008, p.11)

A number of the word choices in this prolog extract seem significant in light of the text's overarching, mobile system: "baroque", in the Deleuzian sense, suggests a unified form that folds in on itself rather than having an inside or an outside (Deleuze 1992), while "insolite" (which I have translated here as "strange", for me, implying outside the given order), is the same word as that used by Chaulet-Achour and Riéra (2012) in the title of their postcolonial alphabet book. The term "chant choral" also has Deleuzian inflections (as a returning refrain, echoes that transform the present), while "tribu", or tribe, is estranged via the dual meaning of "inédit" as both "unheard of" and "unpublished", depriving the concept of a static territory: in neither sense can this tribe be "known" or pinned down. All of this suggests we are confronted here with an active and continuing reshaping of memory that points towards new and possible configurations and a folding of memory into the present, and not the simple nostalgia that Sebbar's mention of her father might trick us into "seeing" at first glance.

Gueydan-Turek certainly sees Sebbar's *abécédaire* as breaking down national borders, but for her, while this is a result of the "movement" inherent in the book despite its static nature, it effects an overly "positive rewriting" of Franco-Algerian history which elides different identitarian categories and privileges a utopian "imaginary geography", an archiving, and personal and cultural rift-patching, that redraws a "mythic" Mediterranean community (2014, pp.110-111). Of the trilogy, it is especially the *abécédaire* that shapes this "mythic" community, argues Gueydan-Turek, in its marking as "a great 'living body' or living body OF WORK" ("un 'grand corps vivant' ou corpUs vivant") that joins together East and West, and in its refusal to "commentate" or "guide", which problematically enables an "escape" from any idea of hierarchy between the elements that

[12] "[L]es compagnes et compagnons de mes routes algériennes. Tous ceux-là qui habitant ma chambre de France colonisée par mes Algéries et un Orient imaginaire, dans le désordre affectif de l'ordre alphabétique arbitraire que j'impose […] Ce n'est pas la collection savant et rationnelle qui me touche mais les variations du motif, à l'infini."

[13] "[J]e fabrique, par le jeu prosaïque et lettré des échos, associations baroques, correspondances insolites (couleur, regard, son, odeur, gestes), un grand corps vivant de l'Orient (Algérie métaphore de l'Orient) à l'Occident (France métaphore de l'Occident), une tribu inédite, énigmatique, mythologique, un chant choral qui accompagne mon père."

Sebbar has collected together on the page, whether these emanate from her own story or those of others (2014, p.111, p.113). Gueydan-Turek takes issue with the way Sebbar produces transcultural memory and breaks down borders of "history, identity and geography": for her, the seamless transfer between Sebbar's material choices, such as sexualized colonial postcards, functions as a problematic equalizer, as these Orientalist images (and thus power constructions) that Sebbar is apparently trying to critique are simultaneously accompanied by a descent into "nostalgia" that Gueydan-Turek reads from the autobiographical text collected in the same entries, such that she ultimately accuses Sebbar of having "archive fever" (2014, p.114, pp.116-119).

I do not dispute the problematic nature of the materials Gueydan-Turek discusses, nor the risk she sees Sebbar as running, and yet, what she seems to miss here is that there *is* a mode of commentary and subversion in Sebbar's *abécédaire*, and that this in fact comes in the *form* of the text. The striation into a colonial alphabet book, the teaching implement of the French state, is punctuated by bleeding letter-components that escape their categories, and by the confusion generated in the matching up of text and image, or in the multiple words associated with a single letter, frustrating any specificity of word associations, any ultimate equivalence of word and object.

Figure 3: "Abécédaire" entry from *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre*

Sebbar's "A" is for "Alphabet Book" ("Abécédaire"): "I love alphabet books. Letter and image […] Teacher-mother, I embroidered red, green and gold alphabet books while my sons read aloud from their schoolbooks"[14] (2008, p.12). The image collected under the same entry is of a colonial *abécédaire*, a direct reference to the colonial system, and, much like my own from Ortiz above, its letter choices do not seem insignificant. While "D" and "L" stand for the flag of the Empire and the loyalty of the colonial troops protecting its borders and "liberating it" in the Second World War, "A" and "V" show cross-border pollination in other ways, where the products of the colony make a fundamental contribution to the metropole, both practical ("alfa", derived from the Arabic in "Algeria" is a plant whose fiber provides paper, while also a homophone for the first letter of the Greek alphabet), and in the realm of taste (Sebbar 2008, p.13).

Briefly exploring the components of two of Sebbar's *abécédaire*'s longer entries takes us on similar material journeys. "Colon" ("Colonial", noun) begins with her own reflections about Hennaya, and lists a series of writers who were "colonials" and opposed the colonial system, while also noting that "Algerian-Algerian" writers were not able to express themselves openly (Sebbar 2008, pp.62-63). However, it also includes an initially random painting of Corsica by Sebbar's son (Sebbar 2008, pp.64-65), not linked until several pages later to the long extract of reminiscences of a "colon", Roger Azzopardi, "exiled" to Corsica, whose wheat-farming background explains pp.68-71's farming images and diagrams from the Berliet company of Vénissieux, near Lyon (this cereal production company, we are told in the caption, was also operative in Algeria). The "Cocotier" ("Coconut Tree") entry from the colonial *abécédaire* graces page 72 ("The **C**oconut Tree from our **C**olonies gives us **C**opra out of which we make oil"),[15] and an engraving from an early twentieth-century book entitled *Algérie*, which depicts "le vaillant zouave" ("the valiant Zouave"; Sebbar 2008, p.74), clearly precedes its section, "Conquête" ("Conquest"), which begins on the following page. The "C" entry "Colon" (one of twelve "C" entries) is thus always already implicated by and infiltrated by the notion of conquest that enabled the colonial presence, and by the colonial system implied by the alphabet book where the coconut tree provides a key colonial resource. All of these notions are further drawn together by the letter "C" into an affect-producing "montage-fabric" of cause, effect, and socio-political residue.

The "Voyage" entry (one of two "Vs", and the second-to-last entry) is loosely (and significantly) structured around the travels of a group of teachers under colonial patronage and on an Algerian "study" and "discovery" trip in 1902, for the purposes of the "regeneration" of the colonies via education. Lines emerging from the fabric of this entry's structure include what the teachers wrote about, their obligatory tourist moments, and the places they visited. This first thread critically interweaves the teachers' reflections with those of famous travel writers like Maupassant, Fromentin and Daudet, for example on the notion of irreducible difference between Arab and European, on the (lack of) depiction of Algerian women before the time of the female travelers and colonizers, barring Fromentin's "Haoua", who welcomed the narrator-traveler to her home and whose "tribe" had allied with the French, and by implication on Jewish women, whose spaces and images are depicted in two paintings within this entry, now part of the Bibliothèque Nationale's collection (Sebbar 2008, pp.191-193, p.195). The teachers' obligatory tourist stops are connected with an image of racially-stereotyped colonial figurines in a photograph also on that page (Sebbar 2008, p.191), that echoes the colonial *abécédaire*, traveling "tourist" objects, and with the teachers' own collection of "scenes and types"-style photographs and descriptions, for example in their valorization (and that of other travelers) of the Kabyle people, and in the racist descriptions of black servants in the narratives of Fromentin, Maupassant and the teachers that have their echoes in traces of colonial advertising in the Paris of 2008 (Sebbar 2008, p.194, pp.196-197, pp.199-200). The text takes us on a journey around colonial schools with the traveling teachers, a story of state

[14] "J'aime les abécédaires. Lettre et image […] Mère institutrice, j'ai brodé des abécédaires rouge, vert et or, cependant que mes fils lisaient à voix haute les livres de l'école."
[15] "Le **C**ocotier de nos **C**olonies donne le **C**oprah dont on fait de l'huile."

institutions, and of Algerian teachers as "auxiliaries" of colonization and "civilization", collecting images, impressions, and products that the teachers saw and/or consumed on their voyage, such as perfumes and oranges (Blida) and the colonial bust of Pélissier who asphyxiated whole tribes in caves (Sebbar 2008, pp.197-198). Simultaneously, this journeying is interwoven with a string of photos of "Madame B." returning to visit her former Algerian home, twenty years after independence, a painting of the desert by Sebbar's son, and an engraving depicting an odalisque and her servant from a book on "French Africa" (Sebbar 2008, pp. 197-202). The entry exudes the conclusion that these teachers were fully implicated in the colonial project, but ends on a note about the left-wing teachers of the 1950s and 1960s who supported Algerian independence (Sebbar 2008, p.203). Indeed, while the teachers' voyage gives an obvious "state" direction and striation to the entry, "Voyage" is shot through with moments of resistance that the text encourages us to follow beyond, outside the parameters of the teachers' narrative: for example, the Kabyle reference includes a mention of their resistance to colonial rule and the deportation of the Mokrani, as well as the imprisonment and burial (without tombstones) of other "insurgents" on the Île Sainte-Marguerite, and there are many textual traces of colonial resistance in the locations of the schools (e.g. Sebbar 2008, p.196). The holey space of this "Voyage" throws up some evocative "lumps and bumps" of memory.

As we have seen in the examples from Sebbar's *abécédaire*, if the alphabet references are always already mixed up we cannot extract a coherent narrative from each entry, and cannot generate the specific associations we are "meant to." As Bradford notes and Ortiz demonstrates above, meanings are derived from the way the words are used, and in this alphabet book, the order of the colonial language is always already shaken up, the supposed monolithic schooling instrument shoots off in all directions, and each letter-entry becomes a holey space, a mixture of the striated and the smooth, an intense "here and there" at once. The materials of the montage-fabric of Sebbar's text have their own say, and allow for a critique of colonial residue to rise from apparently nostalgic subsoil and transpierce the Mediterranean.

KHELIL: PUNCTUM AND POINT OF VIEW

The work of Tunisian artist Farah Khelil, who has exhibited extensively on both sides of the Mediterranean, stands out in particular for her striking, multiplied use of holes and points that "bore through" her materials both literally and figuratively, and her thought about direction and perception that complements this: indeed, when asked to sum up her work in a single idea she has chosen to describe it as a "waypoint" (Scarborough 2018). Khelil's points and holes are employed to challenge perspective, and in her PhD thesis she explains how her exhibitions themselves function as a sort of collage, using the example of *Point de vue, point d'écoute* (Viewpoint, Listening-Point) and the modular construction of the space of the gallery ("une construction modulaire de l'espace de la galerie"), which enables her to put different elements in relation with each other, together, so they come to "fit" in different ways, as in a pictorial system (2014, p.147). Khelil writes that in her gallery spaces, her emphasis is on connecting disparate elements ("des éléments disparates") and making of them a "virtual" or a "real" collection, in the Deleuzian sense, where the real, or actual, is what is present in the gallery and the virtual is the connections that are made beyond the gallery space, and the sensations the space and its connections produce (2014, p.152). In designating her galleries virtual or real gathering "places – or non-place[s]" ("des lieux – ou non-lieu[x]"; 2014, p.152), Khelil seems to suggest that her modular interventions hold the potential of creating a holey space out of the gallery itself.[16]

[16] I saw Khelil's work, including extracts from *Point de vue, point d'écoute* (Viewpoint, Listening-Point), in this format at her solo exhibition *Transduction* at the Mamia Bretesche Gallery (Paris) and at the group exhibition *Safra* at NEF de la Halle Roublot, (Fontenay-sous-Bois) in March 2016. The title for the exhibition *Safra* was chosen as it denotes a voyage in Arabic – a deliberate singular, because everyone has their own voyage (Souad Mani in fsbFontaneyenscenes 2016).

In her own PhD thesis, Khelil reflects on the etymology of the word "punctum", quoting Barthes: "*punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (2014, p.240).[17] She also extends Barthes' definition to encompass a tiny portion of time (and of space), different modes of perspective, and a punctuation mark that we can assume calls the viewed into question, an intense point, in the Deleuzian sense, pierced into our perspective and taking it on a line of flight, out of her work(s) of art (Khelil 2014, p.240).

Like punctum, "point of view" is one of Khelil's central concerns, and one of the keywords of her thesis (2014, p.400). For her, it references the idea of the mediated gaze, and the notion that whether this is optical, political or personal, it is never objective, and indeed rests on opinions and judgments: "Point of view is also the expression of an opinion on a subject, a position-taking, a posture, a choice or a vision that's given. It's also what we are given to see, what is in our field of vision", for what is visible to us cannot be "detached", writes Khelil, from our subject position in the world, "[the notion of a point of view] is in some way the direction we navigate in, the point on a line of the horizon" (2014, p.17, pp.121-122).[18] And yet, referencing Deleuze, Khelil also reminds us that lines and points are never static and point of view is "by definition dynamic" ("par définition dynamique"), and enables a work to act as a guide, like the metallurgist, guiding form from our perspective that pushes it beyond our subject position (2014, p.122, p.371).

Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I & II)

Khelil's works *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I & II)* were exhibited together in her solo exhibition Punctum at the Galerie Mille-Feuilles in Tunis in 2013. *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I)* is formed of a series of twenty canvases, painted over in white, the whited-out images consisting of boldly-colored touristic depictions of Tunisia painted by local artisans (Khelil 2018). The white paint "effaces" typical stereotypes of Tunisia, re-producing, as Cécile Bourne-Farrell puts it, "the perspective-settings known by all" ("les mises en perspectives connues de tous"), precisely by escaping representation of them (Bourne-Farrell in Punctum 2013), and then by marking circles of vision that demonstrate how our perception is shaped, all the while preventing us from seeing "the full picture."

The "whiting-out" effectuated in *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I)* echoes the idea of smooth space, a space and a perception at once that cannot be territorialized, as discussed above. It also echoes similar moments in the work of Franco-Algerian artist, Zineb Sedira, for example, or Moroccan writer Abdelkébir Khatibi, both of whom use white-outs to destabilize their work, and to prompt revisitings and reshapings of what lies behind (Roy 2009, p.276, p.278). Khelil herself writes

> The solid color of the white paint, often perceived by the viewer as a paper collage, simultaneously veils and reveals the original scene so as to better sound it out […,] letting the elusive edges escape. This white hiding-place sets itself up as a visualization mechanism. Like a blind spot in the scene's display, it resists and thwarts perspective. Meaning is only ever produced at the edges. (2018)[19]

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[17] Khelil quotes from Barthes' original French, I adopt here the 1981 Howard translation (Barthes 1981, p.27).

[18] "Le point de vue est aussi l'expression d'une opinion sur un sujet, une prise de position, une posture, un choix ou une vision donnée. C'est aussi, ce qui nous est donné à voir, ce qui est dans notre champ de vision. [… La notion de point de vue] est en quelque sorte la direction vers laquelle on navigue, le point sur une ligne d'horizon."

[19] "L'aplat de peinture blanche, souvent perçu par le spectateur comme un collage de papier, voile et dévoile à la fois le paysage source comme pour mieux l'ausculter […,] laissant échapper les limites de l'insaisissable. Ce cache blanc se place comme un dispositif de visualisation. Comme un site aveugle, met en vue le paysage, il y résiste et déjoue la perspective. Le sens n'a jamais lieu qu'à la limite."

Khelil seems to suggest here that it is only by "sounding out", and thus following the holes in the screen (the metal in the rock, the meaning at the edges), letting them envelop us like a soundscape, that we can come to understand how our perspective is striated by stereotype, and how we might begin to break down the borders of perception to revisit these tourist-marked spaces and see them for what they might become, or how they could be different, rather than for what we expect them to be.

Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés II), also exhibited at Punctum, is formed from a series (or, as Bourne-Farrell would say, "archive"; Punctum 2013) of postcards of the past and present, bought by the artist in both Tunisia and in Paris, but generally (on their downturned fronts) depicting the Maghreb. However, Khelil displays not the front of these postcards, but their backs, leaving visible the messages written on them, "intimate correspondences, as well as stamps of the era" ("des correspondances intimes ainsi que des timbres d'époques"; Bourne-Farrell in Punctum 2013). The postcards, "points of view and of correspondence" ("points de vue et de correspondances"; Hedi Khelil in Punctum 2013), traveling touristic elements, are further marked where the artist cuts out their main shapes (in the examples in Figure 5 below, camels, a traditional building, a vessel). These shapes become empty holes, that again signal the escape from (stereotypical) representation. In Khelil's own artist's statement on her work, she writes:

> By arranging the cards in a display case to show these fragments of writing, I mask the often stereotypical photographic content, cutting out the outlines of figures that allow [this content] to reduce a city to its clichés [also "camera shots" in French, KR], denying the knowledge of a place through the superficial visiting of its tourist attractions. (Khelil 2018)[20]

Knowledge is power is representation, and Khelil's comments here only reinforce Young's ideas about the power relations and residue of the past that have "remained" in the socio-political configurations of the present – here, who can travel as a tourist and collect and form perceptions that mark "other" spaces (Young 2012, p.21).

Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I & II), in their employment of and subversion of tourist objects (postcards, souvenirs) rest on the notion of (cross-Mediterranean) tourism, "one of the most prominent forms of border-crossing", that is, according to Border Studies theorists Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen, all too often discounted (2012, 98). The tourist, always already an "imposter", is undercut for their "partial and absent-minded observation of the real" ("l'observation partielle et distraite du reel"), and the artist seeks to highlight this very imposture with "subtraction", "collection" and "indexing" ("des gestes de soustraction, de recouvrement et d'indexation"; Verhaeghe 2018, 49). According to Antoine Lefebvre, perforation *creates* these viewpoints and listening-points for Khelil because it pierces "the real" ("le reel"), exposing the way we see (and societies see) the world around us, and thereby enabling Khelil to highlight what has been invisible, the virtual that exists in her gallery installations (Lefebvre in Punctum 2013). Khelil's (re)shaping of "the perceptible in absence" ("le sensible dans l'absence") is effected through the "overturning", "redistribution" and "multiplication" of codes "to create new significations" ("pour créer de nouvelles significations"; Lefebvre 2013). The collector of postcards and tourist images, the artist, recomposes and reinstalls these in exhibitions, fundamentally changing their "sense", both by putting them into contact with each other and by perforating them. With her white-outs and face-down, perforated postcards, Khelil hinders representation, building a landscape that is difficult for the tourist to see[21] and mined through and through, more than an "interpretation of

[20] "Inciser les contours des silhouettes lui permet de réduire une ville à ses clichés, réfutant la connaissance d'un lieu par la visite superficielle de ses attractions touristiques."

[21] Diener and Hagen argue that "draconian" border crossings contribute to the "perceived distance" and excitement of the tourist experience (2012, pp.98-99).

Figure 4: *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I)*. Acrylic on canvas. Paintwork over paintings by artisans. Reproduced with the kind permission of Farah Khelil and ProLitteris

Figure 5: *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés II)*. Postcards of Tunisia from 1980-1990, manually incised. Reproduced with the kind permission of Farah Khelil and ProLitteris

the contemporary history of her country" (Bourne-Farrell in Punctum 2013), that highlights past configurations projected into the present, it takes the Tunisia of the present beyond representation.

Point d'étape

Khelil's more recent *Point d'étape* (Waypoint) series functions as something of a "best of" of her material compositions, collages and techniques. The example I employ here, *Point d'étape* #1 (2016), was featured in the *Voice of the Border* exhibition at the Selma Feriani Gallery in Sidi Bou Saïd, Tunis. This exhibition sought to express the "general feeling of estrangement" felt by Roberto Bolaño's character Oscar Amalfitano in the novel *2666*, itself set in a city of "fragments" from whose radio station the exhibition's title is taken (Cheffi 2016).

Figure 6: *Point d'étape* #1 (2016), books, documents, glass, marble, framed Fine Art photographic print 40 x 50 cm, base 100 x 70 cm. Featured in the *Voice of the Border* exhibition at the Selma Feriani Gallery. Reproduced with the kind permission of Farah Khelil and ProLitteris

"I like all media equal, and that's what I'm trying to do with the series called *Point d'étape*", says Khelil in her interview with James Scarborough (2018), later explaining that this combination of material in her *Point d'étape* installation renders the materials evocative in the relations they make and the sensations they provoke (Verhaeghe 2018, p.48). *Point d'étape* gives Khelil the ability to connect heterogeneous elements and make them "coexist", to put together "things that exist equally and separately in the world, without any value or hierarchy" (Verhaeghe 2018, p.47; Scarborough 2018). That "point d'étape" signifies "**way**point", the terminology used by navigators, seems particularly significant in view of the mixed media presented here, especially

when Khelil describes it further as a direction of thought and a "mental map" ("carte mentale"; Verhaeghe, 2018, p.47). "Waypoint" suggests a striation of the sea, but what we find in *Point d'étape* is a series of cross-Mediterranean jumbled objects – a book by Camus, another by Diderot, Khelil's own hands, images of Tunisia, perishable materials, and "points" conveyed by marbles sitting on the texts. Khelil's "navigation" is always already confused, broken down, by the way she puts together these heterogeneous elements from different points on the map and lets them work on each other, grow unpredictably in *de*territorializing flows within the space of her collage installation.

Farah Khelil's *Point de vue, point d'écoute (Clichés I & II)* and *Point d'étape*, read together, change our direction, encourage us to realign our Mediterranean waypoint(s) as we direct ourselves toward the horizon, Khelil's holes and points drawing our gaze and encouraging us to transform our perspective by collectively encountering the perception-bending materials she has collated.

MELILLI: A SCREEN PIERCED THROUGH WITH HOLES

Martina Melilli's documentary film *My Home, in Libya* (2018) weaves together the memories of her grandparents, who were born there when it was an Italian colony, and left in 1970, after Gaddafi came to power, with the Libya of the present as mediated to the filmmaker via the messages, images, and videos sent to her by the Libyan student Mahmoud, whom she engages to trace the remains and residue of her grandparents' Libyan pasts.[22] The communication with Mahmoud is rendered in the film by a chat animation, which reveals itself as filmically simulated via its old-school smileys and heart emoji-graphics. This very new film is all about borders, with many of its features motivated by one of the border's most practical nation-state-striations: while Martina's general mobility (her frequent travels to Brussels and Paris) is contrasted with Mahmoud's statement "I never go out from libya [*sic*]", the two must communicate via their mobiles because neither can get a visa to cross the Mediterranean and into their respective spaces (Melilli 2018). In light of the theme of this volume, there are many topical aspects to this film, but my present focus on holey spaces draws me to explore two of its formal aspects in particular: the collage that is in preparation throughout the film, and the "punctuation" of the screen with text messages, images, and video, that provide almost all the material for this collage, and that are themselves a result of the medial border-crossing enabled by mobile communication.

My Home, in Libya begins with a dictated "note", the subtitles appearing over a collage background of photos of Martina[23] herself, surrounding a central image of a wire-netting fence with the sea in the background, her "identity", her "selfness", immediately entered into collage with the border:

> Voice note I was born in Padova Italy in 1987 punto [period][24]
> New line
> My father was born in Tripoli comma Libya comma in 1961 punto My grandfather comma was born there too comma in 1936 punto
> New line
> Space During the years of Fascism Libya was an Italian colony punto
> New line
> Over the years I asked about this story many times punto They never talked about it punto Until now puntini puntini [dot dot dot]. (Melilli 2018)

[22] I am grateful to Martina Melilli for generously providing me access to her film during my research and writing process. I first saw the film, followed by her Q&A, at the Locarno Film Festival in August 2018.
[23] I will refer to the film's narrator and protagonist as "Martina", and to the filmmaker herself as "Melilli."
[24] The voiceover is in Italian. The film's subtitles translate the Italian "punto" with the British English "full stop", however I prefer to use the Italian term here to keep the punctuating, "pointed" tone of the original, and the fullness of its meaning (for example, spot, point, place, dot, stitch).

Punctuated by the idea of the holes in her family's story, the repeated "punto" of the voiceover chases and perforates "Italy" and "Libya", boring into the colonial past, its apparent finality hinting at a striated present of a here and a there. The final dictated and suspenseful "puntini", conversely, immediately lead into a close-up of Martina's hands sifting through photos she is cutting out for her collage, always already enmeshing the two features, the possible reading of "puntini" as "little stitches" suggesting that the collage will assemble the striated space of the sea between Italy and Libya anew. Punti and ellipses continue to mark Martina's reflections in the notes she superimposes over images of her childhood and includes in her collage, and, as here, they often create doubt, holes, gaps in knowledge, and even in any certainty about the present: "HOME WAS A PLACE, PHYSICAL, SIMPLE, CLEAR. NOW… I DON'T KNOW." (Melilli 2018). The persistent holes of memory transform and destabilize Martina's Italian present, the puntini enmesh her in her own collage.

Martina and Mahmoud's exchanges punctuate the screen: about the story behind Martina's project, the colonial past, the Gaddafi takeover, and, simultaneously, as the exchanges of two twenty-somethings, about their own lives, relationships (first dates, first kisses), studies, food, and daily life, including vicarious, cross-border mediated experiences of routine, like traveling on the metro. Mahmoud's contemporary experience of a post-revolutionary state leads his messages to idealize the Tripoli of the past, while Martina actually sounds a more critical note, demonstrating awareness of the impact of colonialism on Libyans themselves, and also felt by her grandparents as part of the "return" and reluctant reception of 35,000 Italians in 1970: stuck between two nation states, they flee the police at one end, only to receive a police reception at the other ("we were foreigners", says Martina's grandmother, "they wanted to check if we were civilised enough to live in town"; Melilli 2018). Later, Martina and Mahmoud's exchanges provide a window on the Tripoli of the present that is not reflected in the European media or in Libya's own state-sponsored memory of the present, with live narration of the "sounds of war" (Melilli 2018), the imposition of a US-French no-fly zone, and photos of bombed buildings and a man dead on the street (which appears in the nascent collage before Mahmoud "sends" it in the film, destabilizing notions of filmic time). Here, the mobile's transmission of these images, an almost literal flight out of "state blockage", produces "holey space dug into heavy police and state control" (Safouane 2017, p.1935).

From the moment that Martina first makes contact with Mahmoud, to his last message to her (see Figure 9 below), their text messages are synonymous with holes in the screen leading from Libya to Italy and vice versa. A series of three pulsating punti frequently provide a refrain as the text messages are preparing to arrive, the chat animation mimicking the mobile screen. These punti often make us wait, and they always enhance the notion that the messages are piercing space, boring through the borders the two text-writers cannot themselves cross. The text messages often appear against a black background, an indistinct background, or the sea (with the sound of the movement of the ship against the waves, its horns, etc.).

Images and videos similarly punctuate the screen, tunneling through time and space, as moving images, Kuster's montage-fabric of affect that cannot be made to stand still (2018, p.15). The sequences depicting Martina's grandparents watching Mahmoud driving around Tripoli, re-visiting the places they used to live and work through his windscreen, with the even further enhanced framing of the computer screen (see Figure 7), are particularly evocative of this spatial penetration: in at least one video, they, and we, can also hear the sounds of the city, such as the music on the radio and the call to prayer, making for a multimedial experience, a soundscape, like those of Khelil's Listening-Points, that they, and we, cannot control, and that can make our perspective take flight.

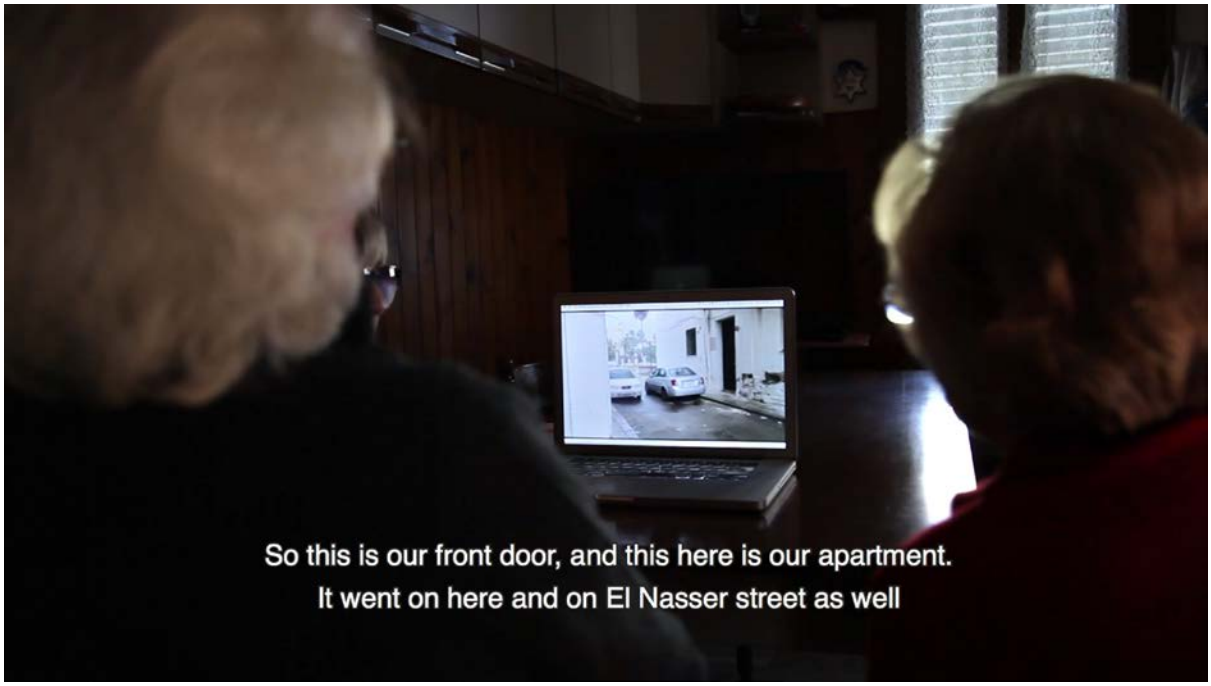

Figure 7: Still from *My Home, in Libya*. Reproduced with the kind permission of Martina Melilli

In these journeys into Tripoli via Mahmoud's phone and windscreen, Mahmoud himself is searching out the points Martina's grandfather has marked on a map, until he redraws this map with his own interpretation of these points after determining that some sites are impassable in the contemporary Libyan situation (one is a militia base, for example). The map has changed – and indeed it seems no coincidence that everyone is carrying maps, making, and re-making them, as they guide this journey into the past and present, and points in the map become deterritorializing lines of the collage-assemblage. Also making their way into the collage (reminiscent of Sebbar's *abécédaire*, and similarly mobile in meaning) are photos of the cross-border plants, animals and objects that appear in the film's frame as Martina's grandparents narrate their memories of Tripoli and of their reluctant journey "back", their supposed "repatriation" by the Italian state: cacti, the African parrot (returning repeatedly as refrain), the few souvenirs, in the truest sense of the word, that they managed to bring with them, a brass coffee set, stuffed toy camels, sand, etc. As in Khelil's *point d'étape*, these heterogenous elements are caused to come together and "consolidate into a novel entity" (DeLanda 1997).

Martina's words "I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PUT PIECES TOGETHER FOR ALL MY LIFE, AND IT TURNED OUT BEING MY WORK." (Melilli 2018) – and again, this projected handwritten statement ends with a punto that intensifies this expression of her fragmented identity – are superimposed over a shot of her sitting on the floor of her warehouse art space cutting out pieces for the partly-formed collage on the wall behind her. The generation of this collage is a constant process in the film, indeed, the film is punctuated with the putting together of the collage, an unpredictably growing entity, that, because of the filmic medium, moves, is superimposed and has other scenes superimposed on it. In this vein, in addition to the collage components mentioned above, a major (moving) element of this collage is the sea, as it moves from behind the frame of the camera or video to a momentarily static state within the projected collage, before returning to the camera's live focus. There is much framing of the sea from the windows of boats – first, in the grainy home-video footage of the grandparents' journey "back", voiced over, and thus marked up with the sea's striation by the state(s): their memories of leaving the house, giving up the keys, the watching police, and spliced with official footage of the reception at the quay in Naples, with its flag waving. Subsequently, the framing, or "forming" is produced on Martina's voyage to Sicily to attempt to overcome precisely this striation of the sea, and get as physically close to Mahmoud as

possible – the sea of her images looks smooth, as if it might join the two spaces, yet, as we have seen above, it is always already spliced with the sea of her grandparents' policed boat.

The sea of Melilli's film is thus a holey space "par excellence." It enables Mahmoud's narrative to "rise from the subsoil" and challenge the Italian radio's negative depiction of cross-Mediterranean migration (that we hear as background audio over visuals of the grandparents' house in the film), as that of men leaving women and children behind. The visuals, multiple distressing images of dead children on the beach, that Mahmoud subsequently sends, and that shoot onto the black screen, repeatedly punctuate it, accompanied by a sound simulating the arrival of a mobile message, produce Blankenship's holey space as a space of "political interaction and intervention", a space further pierced with Mahmoud's texted words "Dead in sea they going to Italy" and "we found them" (Blankenship 2002, p.8; Melilli 2018). Yet the sea also enforces state boundaries by implication. While Martina and Mahmoud can send images of and from both sides of the sea (she from Sicily, he from Tripoli), and while, as the film draws to a close, their shared videos and films show them moving closer to this apparently-shared sea, the final view of the sea from the point where Martina is told she would almost have been able to see Mahmoud ultimately fades to a shot of the completed collage superimposed with the residual traces of that previous shot of the sea and the note "BUT IT'S ALL SEA." (Melilli 2018).

These final words from Martina and their accompanying "punto" do not seem innocent. The collage bores holes in space and shares past and present in a multitude of ways (the protagonists' exchanges, the mix of public and private materials, the objects it collects) but it is always already marked by the protagonists' inability to cross this particular sea border in any legal, state-approved way. Both this penultimate layered shot of the collage and the sea, and the film's actual final shot of a text message from Mahmoud that is never delivered, and remains as three pulsating punti on the screen while the background music begins to punctuate the silence, leave us, the film, and all that is shared on the sea, in a masterful state of disruptive suspense that leaks the politics of past and present. The holey space of Melilli's sea is ambiguously both striated and susceptible to boring through.

Figure 8: Still from *My Home, in Libya*. Reproduced with the kind permission of Martina Melilli

Figure 9: Still from *My Home, in Libya*. Reproduced with the kind permission of Martina Melilli

CONCLUSION: CONTACT ZONES AND MEMORY FOLDS

To briefly conclude this unpredictably growing piece on holey space in the works of Sebbar, Khelil and Melilli, it perhaps suffices to say that, as we have seen, the dynamics set in motion by these three practitioners serve us up creative cross-Mediterranean spaces that are "bored through" in every direction with holes, and, resultantly, lumpy and bumpy with the residue of the socio-political configurations of European memory culture of the past and of its resurgent implications in the present. Sebbar's, Khelil's and Melilli's collages, whatever form they may take, function as "concrete assemblages infused with incorporeal affects" (Hantel 2012), and they share flows of subversion and resistance in the dynamics of their gaps and detours, that are all in some way critiquing (post)colonial residues, while also sidestepping their simple representation. The affective *dis*order of Sebbar's alphabet book, the new "forms" of perception that Khelil's holes force us to follow, Melilli's layered sea, all of these bring Young's (2012) "ongoing life of residues" from the subsoil to the surface, while refusing to be "captured" by them, in other words to conform to them, beyond highlighting, and thereby implicitly subversively reshaping their presence. The self-generating fabric matter of image and text that these practitioners draw on takes us on material journeys through productive cracks in North-South Mediterranean borders mined in every direction.

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