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**Travelling toponymy. The contribution of place names to the textual representation of place and memory in Abdellah Taïa's *Une mélancolie Arabe***

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*Narratives of exile and migration pose important questions related to the role of language in the representation of space, both that of home and away as well as sites of transit. This article argues that the textualisation of space is a central strategy for representing these spaces as place, i.e. as the site and product of lived experience, and that toponyms, place names are an important linguistic tool in this respect. The article draws on critical place name studies in order to examine the political and emotional aspects of place names in narratives of exile and migration. To do so, it examines the role of place names in Abdellah Taïa's novel *Une mélancolie Arabe*, a text where place names play an important role, as the protagonist navigates between his native Morocco, his adopted city Paris, and Cairo, capital of the Arab world; and where the names of the cities come to function as symbolic representations of home and freedom. The use of place names thus becomes a means of recreating places that may be geographically distant, but emotionally close. Moreover, the close relations the text establishes between place names on the one hand, and emotions and affect on the other, give reason to reconsider the textual and mnemonic functions of place names.*

**Introduction**

Narratives of exile and migration, i.e. situations that pose challenges to the representation of place and memory, raise important questions as to how people use language to make sense of their situation, to uphold

bonds with home, and construe places of arrival and transit, and how memory is constructed in this process. An important strategy is the *textualisation* of space, i.e. the use of linguistic tools to represent the spaces through which one passes in a more meaningful, comprehensible and hospitable manner.

In this article, I argue that the use of place names, *toponyms*, is an important linguistic tool for the textualisation of space. To examine this argument, I will provide analyses of the use of place names in Abdellah Taïa's novel *Une mélancholie arabe* (2008), a text which represents mobility between the West and the Arab world, in the contexts of migration and professional travel. In the novel, place and memory are closely intertwined, and are also crucial dimensions in the general narrative discourse of the novel. The analyses will consider how place names contribute to the representation, mapping and appropriation of the spaces and places in which the protagonist visits and lives.

Place names have for a long time been studied in linguistics, yet the acknowledgment of their emotional and political impact is quite recent. The study of place names has mainly been related to reflections in various disciplines on their role in processes of de-colonisation (e.g. Rose-Redwood et al (2010) or name restoration initiatives where indigenous toponyms are reintroduced Kostanski (2016)). Moreover, the role of place names has been under-explored in the context of narratives of migration and exile (but see Dominguès et al 2017 for a recent analysis of the representation of place in migrant narratives). Thus this article proposes to add to this literature by examining the role of place names in the textual representation of exile and migration in Taïa's novel.

In order to investigate these issues, the main research questions that will be addressed are as follows: 1) how do place names contribute to the textual representation and the textualisation of space in the novel? 2) how does the textualisation of space contribute to the construction of memory?

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the relations between place and narratives of migration and exile, and sets out the theoretical basis for the article. Next, the notion of toponymy and its relevance to the representation of place and memory is discussed in section 3, while section 4 presents the analyses of place names in Abdellah Taïa's novel *Une mélancholie arabe*. Finally, section 5 presents the final remarks of the article.

## **Place in narratives of migration and exile**

### *Spatial factors in narratives of migration and exile*

Narratives of exile and migration raise important questions as to how semiotic resources are used to make sense of the spatio-temporal dimensions of these phenomena. Narratives of exile and migration may

differ vastly in the nature of the journeys undertaken (see e.g. Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013 for a critique of the conflation of various modes of mobility). Nevertheless, the experience of exile, and its related memory work and identity construction share characteristics (Nuselovici 2013) that are related to the spatial movements between home and place of arrival. Moreover, contexts of migration and exile may demonstrate a wide variety of language use, related both to the influence of multilingualism and to how language is used to make sense of the situation. Therefore, the specific aesthetic and linguistic modes of narratives of exile and migration necessitate both theoretical reflection and empirical analyses to analyse the use of language and aesthetic expressions in migratory settings (Phipps & Kay 2014, p. 276).

The spatial dimensions of exile and migration are crucial, as situations of exile imply the transition between home and away, possibly via places of transit, as well as associated feelings of belonging and estrangement (Ahmed 1999). Moreover, migratory contexts may create the need for mnemonic devices related to place. Mnemonic devices can be explained as tools that may help to represent memories of both home, places of transit and of arrival, both on the individual level, but also on the collective level, in the sense of creating a cultural memory related to exile and migration (Erll 2011). While different situations and experiences of exile should not be conflated in an over-simplifying manner, it is still useful to acknowledge that situations of mobility and migration may be characterised by specific emotions related to the situation and that stem from the interactions of people with their context (Svašek 2010, pp. 867-868). Thus memories, shaped through emotional interaction with the surroundings including place, play a crucial role in the textual representation of migration and exile:

[...] emotional encounters are not only shaped by direct interaction, but also by memories and imagination [...]. The 'others' in emotional encounters are not only other human beings; animals, landscapes, material objects, images or events also affect people emotionally. (Svašek 2010, pp. 867-868)

In migratory contexts, material objects and sensory impressions may come to represent home, or absent people (ibid.), and in this article, I argue that the representation of place, along with the representation of sensory experience that characterises place, may have a representative or mnemonic function.

The spatial dimension of narratives of migration and exile becomes particularly acute when it comes to representations of *home*. Ahmed (1999, p. 341) emphasises the spatial dimension when she notes that home may be theorised as '[...] *the lived experience of locality*' (emphasis in the original), and that home as place is closely linked to sensory experience:

[...] the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-

home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them; being-at-home suggest that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*. (Ahmed 1999, p. 341).

The experience of being-at-home may be recalled and recreated through various semiotic resources, and place names are important and understudied tools for this process, as they come to embody a range of connotations or associations that render the home as being present, even in exile. This becomes especially important due to the profoundly uncomfortable and precarious nature that exile sometimes has (Ahmed 1999, p. 342). The exilic movement between home and place of arrival implies a discontinuity both spatially and temporally, that leaves the subject in a vulnerable and precarious position, in which memory becomes a crucial issue, as stated by Ahmed:

The experience of leaving home in migration is hence always about the failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit, a failure which is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body which feels out of place, which feels uncomfortable in this place. The process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar. (1999, p 343)

The question of spatial location, and of its textual representation and associated memories thus becomes crucial in the analysis of narratives of migration and exile. More specifically, the question is how space is processed into place, and made meaningful through reference to personal experience, emotions and attachments. The need for linguistic tools to represent place thus becomes urgent. A crucial strategy in this respect is the *textualisation* of space, something which creates place, and makes it possible to inscribe memory, emotions and belonging into place. Among the semiotic resources that may be used to construct and represent place in the memories of home and exile, place names may be considered particularly important mnemonic devices, as they make it possible to represent places such as home, the place of arrival and places of transit. In the following, we will consider how toponyms, i.e. place names, may be considered as essential tools for the textualisation of space. However, let us first examine more closely the notion of place, considered as lived and experienced space.

### *Place*

In the following, the notion of *place* plays a crucial role for the analysis, and it is therefore necessary to consider it more closely. We will investigate what the difference is between space and place, and how space may be represented as the subject of personal experience and reflection, in order to create memories of past experience in its spatial configuration. In order to investigate this, we need to examine the notion of place, defined by Pearce in the following manner:

By place, I mean “lived space”, that which is created by identity and intimate connection, as well as the creator of identity and intimate

connection [...] Place as space shaped by experience, including all that experience implies [...]. (2008, p. 17)

In this perspective, place only becomes a tangible reality through the engagement with spatially situated emotions and lived experience: '[...] we see place most clearly when we interpret it in context, through the tension between presence and absence of experience, between involvement in and detachment from the landscape' (Pearce 2008, p. 21). While engagement with place through personal experience may seem like an intuitive notion, the question is how to stabilise it in memory. A range of semiotic resources may be drawn upon to create and represent memories associated with place. One of the linguistic tools we may use to associate memory with a specific place is the use of toponyms, since they provide points of reference for lived events, emotions and relationships. The place names in their turn become moorings for the individual and his/her memory and life story.

### **Toponyms and the textualisation of space**

#### *A definition of toponyms*

Toponyms, or place names, are linguistic features that refer to a place, be it a city, street, country or other geographical and spatial locations. As such, they have received a relatively limited interest in linguistic literature and theory, although place name studies have a long tradition in linguistics, and have traditionally been oriented towards etymology, i.e. the historical background and origins of toponyms. Standard accounts such as Lyons (1977) consider names, including place names, to have reference, but not sense. However, they may have a 'descriptive backing' connected to characteristics of the referent (Lyons 1977, p. 219), something which provides the basis for non-referential uses of a name. Lyons also notes that names may acquire a specific association in a given cultural context. In recent decades, however, place names have received a renewed interest in language studies, often in the perspective of discourse analysis or cognitive linguistics (e.g. Cruse 1996, Gjesdal 2013, Halverson & Engene 2010, Paveau 2008, Siblot 2006), and studies focusing on the various uses of place names, particularly in political discourse. At the same time, place names have received a renewed interest in the field of human geography, where the role of place names in contested issues, often in postcolonial contexts, have demonstrated the imbrication of place names and naming issues with power relations and emotions (e.g. Rose-Redwood et al 2010). This has resulted in the development of a *critical toponymy*. Approaches based in critical toponymy often take their point of departure in moments when place names become a site for struggle and political contestation, and by doing so, they make visible several interesting and overlooked aspects of place names that may be useful for the analysis of narratives of the experience of exile and migration. Based on work within critical toponymy (e.g. Rose-Redwood et al 2010), three perspectives appear to be particularly

interesting for the analysis of narratives of exile and migration, i.e. the political, emotional and performative perspectives on place names.

First, approaches based within critical toponymy emphasise the political aspect of place names, as they are manifested in for instance struggles over street naming in post-colonial contexts. However, such approaches could also be visible in the way place names are used to commodify certain geographical spaces, either for the purpose of promoting tourism (Kostanski 2016), or through the renaming of public spaces such as schools, streets or arenas. While this aspect is perhaps less obvious in the context of narratives of exile and migration, I argue that place names may acquire political significance in contexts where racialisation and power inequalities become visible, as is the case for 'Paris' and 'Marrakesh' in the analyses provided in section 4.

Second, approaches based on critical toponymy demonstrate the *emotional* aspects of place names and place name giving. As Rose-Redwood et al state:

Place names are also important in creating and maintaining emotional attachments to places, even in the face of physical alienation from these very same places [...] Associated intertextually with larger cultural narratives and stories, toponymic inscriptions serve as a 'means of situating people in places' [...]. (2010, p. 458)

In this perspective, place names may be considered part of the semiotic resources used to create and maintain bonds and attachments in situations of exile and migration, by way of associating place with cultural and personal narratives. The association of place with narratives assigns a mnemonic function to place names, as they serve to strengthen and retain memories of home, or to support hopes and longings for the place of arrival.

Finally, place names and name giving clearly have a performative aspect (Lyons 1977, p. 218), not only in the sense that the act of name-giving is in and by itself performative, but also, in the sense that each use of the place name can be considered performative, in bringing forth a memory, and thereby constructing a conceptualisation or representation of the space it refers to. As Rose-Redwood et al point out:

[...] the act of naming is itself a performative practice that calls forth the 'place' to which it refers by attempting to stabilize the unwieldy contradictions of sociospatial processes into the seemingly more 'manageable' order of textual inscription. (2010, p. 454)

Similarly, recent studies of naming practices (Kostanski 2016) demonstrate the close relations between place names, identity, community, memory, and emotions, and notably the role of place names in structuring *space* into *place*. Place is seen as space structured or configured in a manner that renders it meaningful and imbued with affects and emotions, thus providing the basis for

belonging and emotional attachment to place. This literature also suggests close ties between memory and place names, where place names are seen to symbolically represent important events in the past, not only on an individual level, but on a collective or cultural level as well:

[...] events and actions are remembered by place-names, in a way similar to buildings and inscriptions on walls. In this way, in their memorialization of actions and events, communities utilize toponyms as mnemonic devices for their collective identity. (Kostanski 2016, p. 421)

In this perspective, the use of toponyms can be considered a practice of creating places that are meaningful, and naming can be considered a key practice in the individual, subjective appropriation of space. The question is how these approaches can be meaningfully integrated into the analysis of the textual representation of space and place in narratives of exile and migration. To account for this, I propose to see the use of toponyms as a means of *textualising* space, i.e. as a means of rendering space in a textual and thus more discursively available form. The process of stabilising unstable spatial processes through linguistic and textual intervention appears particularly useful for the textual representation of exile and migration. To consider these issues in more empirical detail, I will now turn to an analysis of Abdellah Taïa's novel *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008).

### **Analyses: place names and memory in *Une Mélancolie Arabe***

#### *Abdellah Taïa : Une mélancolie Arabe*

Abdellah Taïa (1973) is a prolific writer born in Morocco who now lives and publishes in Paris. Taïa writes in French, and his work is often considered to be auto-fictional (Navarro Solera 2017), exploring topics related to exile, gender, and sexuality, notably with reference to the status of homosexuality in the Arab world (Smith 2012, Christensen 2016, Muzart 2016, Heyndels & Bakira 2017). As noted by Dahmany & El Bouazzaoui (2016, p. 53), Taïa's writing largely centres on issues of intimacy and performances of the self. Moreover, his work is characterised by representations of gender and sexuality that attempt to assign a legitimacy to gay sexuality which is currently denied by the laws of the community. These issues are also closely linked to the representation of exile, as well as a critique of the values of both the West and the Arab world.

*Une mélancolie arabe*, published in 2008, tells the story of a young man, Abdellah, who lives in Paris and works in the film industry, after having left his native Morocco. In addition to the journey from his childhood Morocco to settle in Paris, the novel describes his professional travels to Marrakesh and Cairo. It also tells the story of Abdellah's carving out of an Arab gay identity, while in exile, through the description of his relationships with two men, i.e. Javier, a French photographer of Spanish origin, and Slimane, an Algerian welder. Thus,

the novel can be seen to represent the development of a transnational, cosmopolitan subjectivity that experiences migration and exile primarily through the lens of work and his identity as an artist. His romantic relationships, and love and sexuality as overarching themes of the novel, play a considerable role in the mapping out of space in the novel, as we will see in the analyses. In the novel, mobility is thus both professional and emotional, and characterised by both professional obligations and aspirations, as well as by love and desire. Finally, the novel represents the conflict between a European and an Arab identity, and describes the conflict that may result from the encounter of identities and cultures. As such, the novel may be seen as an attempt to make sense of the exilic situation, and as a project of creating a memory that integrates the experiences of various geographical locations, as well as the values and experiences that are associated with them.

Toponyms, or place names, play an important role in the novel, and they contribute to the representation of the narrator's trajectory across the cities where he lives, works and travels, as well as the movement between his birthplace and the metropolises of Europe and the Arab world. In doing so, they also build a map of the narrator's desires and identity, be it related to the dream of working in the film industry, or in the relationships with his lovers.

The following analysis will focus on the textual strategies that contribute to the construction of place names as moorings or placeholders in the overall textual representation of memories of exile, migration and mobility. I hypothesise that it is the context that allows for the realisation of the place name's emotional and mnemonic potential, i.e. that it is through the integration into textual patterns, figures or strategies that the place name receives its specific meaning in the textual universe.

The analysis will be divided into two parts, where the first part focuses on what I have termed *travelling toponyms*, i.e. names of cities that represent the Arab world and the West, and that come to stand for the places Abdellah has passed through, either in migration or in the context of his professional travels. These places also come to hold key significance in the negotiation of the values of the West and of the Arab world, and are sites where the racialisation and precariousness of the mobile, cosmopolitan subject become visible. This is the case for the cities of Paris, Marrakesh and Cairo.

The second part of the analysis will focus on place names in Paris, with attention to how the linear sequencing of the text shapes their interpretation, as well as of how they contribute to the representation of the emotional ties and attachments between Abdellah and the two men with whom he has had relationships; Javier and Slimane. These relationships become another textual matrix for the interpretation of place names, and the analyses will focus on what I have termed *cartographies of love*, i.e. text passages that represent Abdellah's experience both of exile and of love. These passages inscribe the



emotions of love, conflict and rejection into the cityscape, and place names give pattern and structure to these experiences, and to the memory of them.

*Travelling toponyms: Paris, Marrakesh and Cairo*

As previously stated, the novel focuses on Abdellah's experiences of mobility and migration, his journeys from his home town to Paris for work and personal development, but also on professional travels to Marrakesh and Cairo. In addition, it describes his brief relationship with Javier, a French man of Spanish origin, who lives in Paris, and works as a photographer on the film set in Marrakesh. On their return to Paris, Abdellah wishes to pursue the relationship, but he is rejected by Javier.

*Travelling toponyms I: Marrakesh*

In the novel, Marrakesh is represented as an intermediate space, not quite home, yet not quite foreign, straddling the Arab world and the West, because of the large influx of tourists to the city. Thus, it is a space where new encounters become possible, including gay encounters that might have had to be kept more secret elsewhere in the country. The presence of Western tourists thus creates a zone of moral permissiveness, broadening Abdellah's possibilities. The city acts as a context, a witness of the relationship between Abdellah and Javier. As the following passage indicates, Marrakesh is represented as a living entity, almost humanised through its capacity to judge and as a witness of the unfolding love story:

La nuit pour se donner à lui, et lui à moi, la première fois, et Marrakech la rouge présente par sa chaleur, bientôt juge de notre histoire, témoin pour l'instant du lien que j'inventais entre nous [...]. (Taïa 2008, p. 40)

That night, for the first time, I was his and he was mine, when Marrakech, the red city, was there with us in all its heat, and soon would pass judgment upon our story, a temporary witness to our relationship [...]. (Taïa 2012, p. 44)

However, as an important site for the Moroccan tourism industry, the city also makes explicit the unequal power relations between the two lovers, as Abdellah is bound to the country's moral codes in a different way than Javier, for whom the city is a place for fun and adventure. Thus, the city itself reflects the distance that exists between them in terms of their background.

Marrakech, c'était un peu les vacances pour lui.

Marrakech n'était pas ma ville, mais c'était mon pays. (Taïa 2008, p. 43)

Marrakech was like a vacation for him.

Well, Marrakech wasn't my hometown, but it was my country. (Taïa 2012, p. 48)

The place name comes to represent the unequal relationship between Javier, the Western tourist and Abdellah, the gay Moroccan. Thus it contributes to a relational conceptualisation of the place, of the city as being saturated by Moroccan values, yet simultaneously a playground for the Western tourist, who is either naïve or lacking in knowledge about the reality of the place. For Abdellah, however, it is a place of relative liberty, in the sense that it allows him to live out his romantic and sexual desires, as well as his professional aspirations through the film project that he is there to work on. Still, it is a place where he is also constantly racialised and reminded of his position as a non-Westerner, precisely through his interaction with the city and Javier, the Western tourist. All these relations come to be embodied and framed by the place name.

*Travelling Toponyms II: Cairo*

The representation of Cairo, as the heart of the Arab world, is much more complex than that of Marrakesh, and in many ways makes up the heart of the novel, as it represents an attempt by Abdellah to come to terms with an Arab identity, as well as being the scene of a deep and existential crisis for Abdellah where he comes to question his religious faith. The city is represented as vast, and almost grotesque, as 'gigantic and crazy' (2012, p. 66), and as a chaotic city of gigantic proportions:

Il y avait enfin le Caire, ville du chaos qui m'allait comme un gant.

Le Caire. Al-Qahira. Un hammam de 20 millions d'habitants. Un monstre humain. Une fleur bleue, jolie, poussiéreuse. Un désert inspirant, étouffant. (Taïa 2008, p. 79)

And there was Cairo. Al-Qahira. A Turkish bathhouse with 20 million bathers. A human monster. A blue flower, beautiful and covered with dust. An inspiring, stifling desert. (Taïa 2012, p. 90)

Again, the city is compared to other entities, human and non-human, a hammam, a human monster, a flower and a desert, thus attributing a set of associations to the city and the place name. Through these textual strategies, the vast and confusing space of Cairo is textualised. Even though it is not rendered less confusing, at least this confusion is inscribed in textual form in order to make the experience more accessible to Abdellah himself, and thus enabling him to render it accessible in memory, somewhat more coherent and comprehensible. In addition, the passage illustrates the role that multilingualism has in many narratives of exile and migration, in which it comes to play a key role as a semiotic resource for the representation of the subject at the intersection of locations and cultures. In this perspective, place names may also come to have different connotations as the protagonist moves between languages, and the movement from the French to the Arabic illustrates the movement between the West and the Arab world.

*Cartographies of love: toponyms in Paris*

In the previous section, I argued that place names are a means of textualising space, in order to represent the emotional, political, historical and cultural associations of a place. This textualisation of space may enable the integration of heterogeneous associations and impressions into a coherent whole, to make sense of a fragmented position. The cases used to illustrate this argument in the previous section were related to cities, and thus related to a specific location, as well as to the attribution of specific characteristics and properties to the cities, in analogy with objects or human organisms. In this section, we will examine the case of *cartographies*, i.e. text passages in which several place names are linked together to create a mapping of emotion onto space, and where emotions come to have a duration and be inscribed into memory. The cartographies we will consider are related to Abdellah's relationships with two men, Javier and Slimane, an Algerian migrant (see section 4.3.2), both residing in Paris.

*Cartographies of love I: Metro line 2*

In the first example, the juxtaposition of place names is used to represent Abdellah's relationship to Javier. The relationship starts as a brief affair in Marrakesh. On his return from Marrakesh, Abdellah goes to visit Javier at his flat, in order to declare his love for him, and to find out whether the feelings are mutual. Javier, however, sees Abdellah as nothing more than a holiday romance, and is not interested in pursuing the relationship. After this meeting, Abdellah returns from Javier's in a state of heartbroken disappointment. Rather than taking the metro, he chooses to walk back to his own flat on foot, following the metro line no. 2 across Paris, because he does not want to be seen by others in this state of pain and dejection, to 'not make a spectacle of himself':

J'habitais Belleville. Pour rentrer chez moi, j'aurais pu prendre le métro à la station Place de Clichy, ligne 2, direction Nation. Je ne l'ai pas fait. Je ne voulais pas qu'on me regarde, qu'on devine mon malheur. Qu'on voie que je venais à peine d'être une nouvelle fois rejeté. Que je m'étais trompé. Je ne voulais pas me donner en spectacle. J'avais envie d'errer, de respirer la nuit seul, de traverser cette ville où, depuis que j'avais quitté le Maroc poursuivant des rêves cinématographiques, je me redécouvrais heureux et triste, debout et à terre.

C'était direct. Pas de changement. Blanche. Pigalle. Anvers. Barbès-Rochechouart. La Chapelle. Stalingrad. Jaurès. Colonel-Fabien. Belleville. Neuf stations à pied. Une traversée de Paris. Un chemin de croix pour parler enfin à Javier. [...]

Les quartiers de Paris par lesquels je suis passé cette nuit de froid et de pluie, heureusement, ne m'ont pas laissé tomber. Ils m'ont écouté.

Paris était enfin solidaire. (Taïa 2008, p. 45-46)

I was living in Belleville. To get home, I could catch the subway at Clichy Square, take Line 2 in the direction of Nation. That's not what I did. I didn't want anybody looking at me, figuring out how unhappy I was. Seeing me right after someone had just dumped me, once again. Seeing how wrong I was about things. I didn't want to make a spectacle of myself. I just wanted to walk around, breathe in the night alone, walk across the city, the place I came to be when I left Morocco to pursue my dreams of breaking into the movies, the home where I found myself happy and sad again and again, found myself still standing with both feet on the ground.

It was a direct route. No sidetracks. Blanche. Pigalle. Anvers. Barbès-Rochechouart. La Chapelle. Stalingrad. Jaurès. Colonel-Fabien. Belleville. Nine metro stations on foot. A walk across Paris. My very own Stations of the cross, which I followed so I could finally speak with Javier. [...]

The sections of Paris, the ones I passed through on that cold and wet night, did not, fortunately, give up on me. They heard me.

Paris, at last, was with me all the way. (Taïa 2012, pp. 51-52)

Abdellah's route follows metro line no. 2, which crosses northern Paris from the west to the east of the city. After the loss of his lover, the walk across Paris is like crossing an ocean ('traversée'), the path is dotted by the metro stations, and is perceived as a 'chemin de croix', referring to the Stations of the Cross. However, in the end, Paris proves itself a welcoming and soothing city for the exilic, grieving protagonist. Thus, the trajectory traced by the metro line, being walked on foot, finally traces the outlines of a hospitable city, where the wounds of rejected love may be healed. In this manner, the place names, while public in their very nature, become integrated into a private, intimate geography or cartography of the city. The very personal experience of grief and rejection is integrated into the public space of the city, providing relief and hospitality.

#### *Cartographies of love II: the streets of the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement*

A second cartography of love appears in the final part of the novel, which describes the relationship between Abdellah and Slimane, an older, Algerian man, with whom Abdellah has had an intense relationship some years earlier. Their relationship is characterised by recurrent conflicts, which are played out in the streets and neighbourhoods of Paris.

The following excerpt exemplifies the cartography and place names used in the novel as textual tools to represent the romantic relationship, and thus the textual inscription of emotions into the space of the city, i.e. the textualisation of space. The passage describes a scene where Slimane leaves their apartment in great anger, after a fight, shortly followed by Abdellah, who pursues him to put an end to their quarrel. The verb tense *imparfait* indicating that this pattern of conflict is habitual for the couple:

Tu m'as quitté je ne sais combien de fois. [...] Tu m'abandonnais. Tu partais. Dix minutes après, je courais après toi dans les rues du 18<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. Rue de Clignancourt. Boulevard de Barbès. Rue Doudeauville. Rue... Et le petit pont. Et le petit banc. Tu étais là. Tu m'attendais là. Assis sur le petit banc. Je te rejoignais. Et on regardait ensemble les trains de la gare du Nord passer. Dans le silence. [...] Le sourire revenait à tes lèvres. Tu retrouvais la raison. Calmes, on se levait, on allait acheter à chaque fois du melon, ton fruit préféré, et on revenait à la rue de Clignancourt célébrer l'amour apaisé. Momentanément loin de la folie. (Taïa 2008, p. 120)

I don't know how many times you've broken up with me [...] You would abandon me. Leave. And ten minutes later, I'd come running after you, racing down all the streets in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Down Clignancourt Street. Barbès Boulevard. Doudeauville Street. Down to the little bridge. Down to the little bench. That's where you'd be waiting. Sitting there on the little bench. I'd catch up with you. We'd sit together, watch the trains go by from the Gare du Nord station. Sit in silence. [...] Once again, you'd start to smile. You'd come back to your senses. And then, very calmly, we'd get up and, same as always, head off to buy some melon, your favorite fruit. Then we'd come back to Clignancourt Street and celebrate our appeased love. Miles away from madness, at least for the moment. (Taïa 2012, pp. 133-134)

As illustrated in this passage, the conflict and reunion of the two lovers are played out against the backdrop of the city. The city space is patterned by street names in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris e.g. Rue de Clignancourt, Boulevard de Barbès, Rue Doudeauville, and the listing of street names refers to a recognisable, objective configuration and structuration of the city space. In a movement of textualisation of space, the text moves from an objective structuration to an intimate configuration of space, shared only by the two lovers. This happens through a discursive movement, from the designation of places by place names, to a designation of places by definite descriptions whose references are available only in and through the shared memory of the lovers. While the references of the street names are objective and accessible to anyone, the references of the definite descriptions ('le petit pont', 'le petit banc') are accessible only to the two lovers, through reference to their shared history, memories and emotions. This is due to the semantic difference between official place names, and definite descriptions that are dependent on contextual knowledge for their interpretation, in this case a contextual knowledge that is only available to Abdellah and Slimane. The discursive movement from official place names to definite descriptions thus enables a textualisation of space that renders the cityscape intimate.

Thus, the space is structured in different ways, first by the official street names, and then gradually by the material objects that inhabit the spaces and that are specific to the shared experience and past of Abdellah and Slimane: the little bridge, the little bench. Hence, the passage indicates how space is structured by factors that are sometimes public, sometimes private or sometimes even intimate. The

linguistic move from toponyms to definite descriptions is the concrete tool that facilitates the integration of public space and intimate, personal experience, and the inscription of private, intimate emotions and relationships onto the public space of the city. This way, the linguistic devices enable the textualisation of space, allowing the textual subject to inscribe his experience into the fabric of the city. As such, it becomes a meaningful experience and memory, since this inscription, in turn, makes it easier to recall the emotions and the relationship. In sum, the place names function both as mnemonic devices and as tools for inscribing personal, individual and intimate experience onto the public space of the city.

### Final remarks

Contexts of exile and migration raise important questions for the textual representation about how language can be used to inscribe experiences and emotions in exile onto the public space of the city. Place names are important and under-researched tools for the textual representations of such phenomena, and they are important mnemonic devices in the context of exile, migration and mobility. In this article I have investigated the case of Abdellah Taïas' novel *Une mélancholie arabe*, where toponyms are important devices for the representation of emotions, as well as of a cosmopolitan subject that moves between Europe and the Arab world, not only in the geographical sense, but emotionally and professionally.

In this article, I have tried to answer two research questions: First, how do place names contribute to the textual representation and the textualisation of space in the novel? Second, how does the textualisation of space contribute to the construction of memory?

The article has addressed the first research question through the notion of textualisation of space, considered as a linguistic tool to represent space as place, i.e. as the product of personal experience. This may involve experiences of cultural estrangement and affiliation, but it may also concern the private or intimate experience of place, as it is played out in emotions and relationships of intimacy, rejection, conflict and grief. The textualisation of space is a strategy where semiotic resources are deployed to reconfigure space into place, i.e. as the result of lived experience. I have tried to show how place names play an important role in this phenomenon, and that toponyms function as linguistic tools for the representation of place and the bonds and attachments that are associated with it. I have exemplified this by two cases.

First, in the case of travelling toponyms, i.e. place names for cities, that come to be attached to cultural significance because they correspond to and embody the movement between the West and the Arab world, but that also demonstrate the complexity of the Arab world. In addition to their contribution to the textualisation of space, travelling toponyms also illustrate the conflict the protagonist experiences in his negotiation of different cultures.

Second, the use of place names in the textual representation of place has been examined through examples of what I have termed 'cartographies of love'. This includes instances where place names are used as linguistic tools for the inscription of emotions and relations into the cityscape, and where the sense and meaning of place names are associated with, and derive their meanings from, the relationships and emotions of the protagonist.

These examples let us approach the second research question, i.e. how the textualisation of space contributes to the construction of memory, and more specifically in situations of migration and exile. The textual strategies we have considered in Taïa's novel indicate that place names may be used as a tool for processing cultural affiliation and estrangement, relationships, loss and conflict, and thereby to create a memory of these events and the emotions associated with them, as considered in their spatial configuration. Thus, this indicates the role of place names as mnemonic tools. Through their contribution to the textualisation of space, place names function as mnemonic tools that allow the individual to hold on to the memory of not only places, but also the emotions and relationships that are associated with them. This way, they contribute to a materialisation of space, that may otherwise seem fragmented and transitory.

The analyses of *Une mélancholie arabe* also indicate how the contribution of place names to the textual representation of space as place may take on different configurations, depending on the contexts into which they enter. Space may be structured punctually (as is the case for the cities of Marrakesh and Cairo), where it is relationally constructed as sites endowed with specific meaning, or it may be configured as networks or cartographies (the Parisian metro line no. 2, the streets of the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement), that in different ways represent the space of emotion, mobility and exile. The analyses also show how space and place are intimately connected with emotions, in this case related to romantic relationships and their failures, and the conflict, disappointment, happiness and intimacy that come to be associated with them.

Finally, the analyses indicate the role of place names as mnemonic devices, as they enable access to the past as embodied experience, taking place in a specific location, and attaching it to the present moment through the associations connected with the place names. Thus, place can be rendered accessible to memory through place names, something which makes it possible to relive the experience of a specific place just by mentioning the name, by tracing your route and trajectory through a city by listing up a group of metro stops.

In conclusion, as the analyses presented in this article suggest, approaches in contemporary place name studies may be useful for the analysis of narratives of migration and exile as they provide insights into how place names may express perspectives that are political, emotional as well as performative. This may explain their contribution

to the textualisation of space, and how place names may function as mnemonic tools for the recollection of places and the emotions that come to be associated with them. However, in order to be useful for the analysis of the textual representation of migration and exile we need to understand better how place names interact with other elements in the text to create networks of meaning, rather than just being isolated elements, as indicated by the analyses.

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