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Exiled Tongues of Two Migrant Women

by

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## ABSTRACT

Writing as a land to inhabit and/or a place of estrangement represents an essential territory for the exiled woman: a means of finding with/in words the necessary sources for her life to be regenerated.

For Nourbese Philip and Nadine Ltaif, two migrant women, writing seems to offer a land of exile where they first learn how to disidentify and detach themselves from a country or an island before connecting their selves and origins with a new (Canadian) surrounding. By working carefully on words with which they grew up, and which they have (re) adopted and adapted, they evoke their geographical and psychological exile through their "snake-like tongues": their organ of speech split between (at least) two languages. Throughout their literary creation they displace grammar and semantics, cast language(s) into "errantry," thus confusing words and providing other meanings. Out of their (forked) tongues they imagine a land that reflects their own schizophrenic condition and movements from dream to reality, life to death and vice versa, and depict a world turned upside down in order to observe what remains behind language(s). Looking through the glass of their experience, Nourbese Philip and Nadine Ltaif attempt to dis(re)cover their selves and voices.

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To my grandparents  
and  
parents

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L'Écrire c'est un peu inventorier en soi, explorer les béances d'une autre géométrie, relier le connu aux inconnues dont on recueille les marques comme autant de légendes avortées.

CHAMOISEAU, *Écrire en pays dominé*.

## INTRODUCTION

How to speak about exile without questioning identity and alterity--the Same and the Other--within language(s)? How to think about exile without isolating the words that describe it?

Identity--an "I" entity--built upon a sense of belonging to linguistic, cultural, social and national structures, becomes problematic in exile. Because displacement prompts an encounter of the Same with the Other, identity starts breaking apart. Confronted with an Other, the traditional values of the Same are differently and critically perceived, and therefore fail to be authenticated. If the Same turns into a fragmented "I" as soon as the Other is encountered, the concept of stable identity seems to be threatened. In fact, identity may well represent an illusion that the Other brings to light "unconsciously." Freud's statement underlines the deceptive belief in such a concept since for him "l'identité est une défroque dont l'inconscient se vêt afin de mieux leurrer le Moi" (qtd. in Harel, L'étranger 14). Exile thus proceeds in unveiling the imposture of an I's identity by promoting a becoming Other--"un devenir autre"--which characterizes the experience of the (hidden) Other in the Same.

In undermining a deceptive idea of the Same, exile provokes the recognition of a plural identity in relation to the structural foundations of a country; for thinking about a people's customs inevitably leads to scrutinizing a history of cultural exchanges between ethnic groups. In that manner, identity cannot be singular but remains constantly subjected to external influences which also affect linguistic systems. Exile therefore gives birth to and increases a state of uncertainty, already latent in the historical being, when discovering oneself as Other. Estrangement begins with self-examination and questioning language, including its social function

(cf. Kristeva, Le langage 25); in other words in a condition of exile the being may feel the need to (re)consider the position of his/her speaking "I" within the socio-linguistic pattern and its historical background. In relation to the above remarks, it appears that exile stimulates reflections on language, culture and history, these three elements strongly determining the role of the wondering "I." However, the "I" that will be challenged in the proposed analysis concerns the female speaking, and more specifically, writing "I."

The study of exile through women's voices brings to light the development of their alienation within language--and especially in its phallo(go)centric organisation--and their subsequent "muteness"--sometimes even mutilation--in cultural practices and historical currents. Since language mirrors a patriarchal framework, speaking and writing involve the woman in a mimetic activity (or passivity), as Luce Irigaray points out in Parler n'est jamais neutre (282), thus "borrowing" the masculine Other's tongue in order to verbalize herself. In this manner, language would essentially and inevitably cast the woman into exile. Taking into account the aforementioned observation, one may wonder whether the linguistic manifestation of the woman's exile could serve her desire to emancipate herself. In other words could exile enable the female subject to achieve a tongue that would be more appropriate to her voice?

If exile provides an exit from imposed silence, writing may offer a privileged space for the woman to "try her tongue." Writing arouses a feeling of estrangement as the writer has to struggle with words, to unlearn and relearn compositions of language that seemed familiar to her. Exiled by and in the words, the female writer witnesses a "meeting" between two "aliens," her self and tongue, in her literary activity. Based on the preceding questions, exile and language will be examined in the writings of two migrant women: Nourbese Philip<sup>1</sup> and Nadine Ltaif. The comparison between these two female authors will point to their linguistic research within a new

geographical environment as well as their meditations on cultural and historical heritage(s).

When dealing with their work, Philip's obsession with her father tongue and Ltaif's symbolic "detachment" from her (primary) mother tongue need to be related to their personal stories and histories. From their specific linguistic and psychological investigation and battle, it emerges that a father tongue imposes an absence of language for Philip, and that a mother tongue may impede access to her own voice for Ltaif.

Considering the position of the two writers towards "their" respective language(s), the object of our analysis can be formulated as follows: how to be mothered in a "father tongue"? And how to recompose oneself in the passage from one mother tongue to another? What these interrogations underline is a possibility for negotiation of their selves with their other tongue and for an eventual rebirth in their textual bodies. Both Philip's and Ltaif's writings serve as ideal means to explore exile as a stimulus for their tongues to untie themselves. Whether spelt "ex-Il" to indicate a movement out of a patriarchal order or ex-"isle" to illustrate a liberation from the confinement of a place, exile corroborates the idea of an "excoriation"—for changing tongue may well imply changing skin—that guarantees a new growth of the two authors' speech.

By associating exile with emancipation, a rebellious attitude towards written language needs to be looked into and will orient our reading of Philip's and Ltaif's texts, that is: writing as a reaction against domination. The conception of a literary work in terms of reaction is a danger that Philip emphasizes in her essay "Journal Entries Against Reaction": "my chief concern has been to create a place where I can write from a position of statement—first statement—and not reaction, because reaction implies that I am being determined by what I oppose" (*Frontiers* 64). In "Écrire le rythme avant les mots," Ltaif echoes a similar interest when, preoccupied with the question of "'comment' Écrire aujourd'hui" to which she asserts that it can be accomplished "En

se défaisant, luttant, militant, contre l'assoupissement idéologique, le 'ronron' qui endort, du 'confort et de l'indifférence.' En s'engageant sans merci dans une lutte sans merci" (62).

Regarding the two women's opinions about writing and the voice/ path (voix/voie) adopted by them, exile will be interpreted as a re-acting, instead of a reaction, that supposes an "un-acting," that is to say: an attempt to free themselves from the linguistic, cultural and historical pressure that acts upon them. In order to accentuate the particularities of Philip's and Ltaif's voice(s) and path(s) off/in exile, a brief comment on their relationship with language and writing will be helpful.

For Philip, an Afro-Caribbean woman, exile pertains to and evolves in the English language. This tongue, inherited from colonial history, literally eradicated many African languages. Consequently, the author has to live and write in a language substantially other to her. Becoming aware of the remote wound of her people(s), Philip looks thoroughly and critically into the semantic and structural organisation of English to uncover colonial and racist linguistic signs. In a remarkably sharp analysis, she focuses her attention upon the Black woman's relation to her "only language [which] is her mother tongue, [and her] father tongue" (She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks 19). The author's statement invites us to differentiate between a mother and father tongue by outlining the historical and emotional connotations related to them. When referring to a mother tongue, Philip points out the privileged maternal link between mother and child that secures the transmission of language. The symbolic process of uterine work explains the substantial value attributed to a mother tongue, which nourishes the child with words. However, as for the English-speaking Afro-Caribbean woman, that (pseudo) mother tongue encapsulates patriarchal and colonial features. Also considered a father tongue, English invokes for Philip the memory of the African diaspora.

From a socio-linguistic point of view, a father tongue involves a phallo(go)centric system;<sup>2</sup> however if such an association is true of a father tongue, it is not necessarily the same type of process which determines a mother tongue. In other words, to speak about a maternal language does not necessarily infer a matriarchal society. Thus, each time Philip comments upon the consequences of a lost African mother tongue, she brings into relief the essential "rupture" between the Black woman and her maternal land and language instead of lamenting an eventually destroyed matriarchal "order."

The nutritional power and historical violence that qualify a mother and father tongue respectively in Philip's writing are intertwined in Ltaif's poems. Born in Cairo (Egypt) and raised in Lebanon, Ltaif has always lived in a multilingual atmosphere, with Arabic and French as her "mother tongues." As she was forced to leave the Lebanese land because of the civil war, her position to Arabic and French tongues is complex and incites us to review the emotional and symbolic interests attached to a maternal language. In opposition to many feminine (and especially feminist) writings, Ltaif does not strive to retrieve a mother tongue, but searches instead to break free from it. Since it brings her directly in touch with women's condition in the Middle East and the civil war, her Arabic tongue ties her to the Egyptian and Lebanese lands. Confronted by violence, her exile is inscribed in a double flight from Lebanon and from an Arabic language--this linguistic reflection of a political and social violence:

*Voici mon exil.  
Celui qui ne fuit pas seulement la guerre.  
Celui qui prend racine aux racines du déracinement  
profond qui se trouve à l'origine du sens de la vie  
en dedans de nous.  
Qui pose la question de l'origine.  
Qui ne trouve pas de réponse. (Entre les fleuves 28)*

Writing about her exile in French, Ltaif describes her rupture from her Arabic mother land and

tongue and adopts a path (voie) and voice (voix) of uprooting. In that respect, Ltaif's conception of her primary maternal language can be compared to that of Joël Des Rosiers: "La mère étant le porte-parole de l'**infans**, celui qui ne parle pas, la langue maternelle est abusive parce que la mère en quelque sorte "parle" son enfant. La distance par rapport à la langue maternelle devient salutaire" (*Théories caraïbes* 191).

Fleeing an agonizing land and tongue, she searches for her own mode of expression within the French language. Nonetheless, if detachment from a mother tongue becomes vital, it turns out to be even more urgent to work within the structure of language itself to avoid the patriarchal trap, since "c'est du côté du père que va s'établir la question du travail de la langue, de la soumission à la grammaire, à la syntaxe, à la loi" (Des Rosiers 191). The patriarchal law written in the structures of what remains a mother tongue for Ltaif belongs to the restrictive unicity that justifies identity: "Aujourd'hui je choisis de tout abandonner, jusqu'à l'héritage de mon père Unique" (*Entre les fleuves* 45). As a consequence, the mother tongue represents the hysterical voice (from the womb) that Ltaif needs to (re)appropriate and the paternal authority she attempts to overturn. With French as her other maternal language, and Montreal--her "terre d'exil"--she uses a tongue which, in that new geographical landscape, might become orphaned and closer to herself.

My study of exile and language(s) in Philip's writing is based on *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*. In the first collection of poems, I focus my attention on "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones," "Disourse on the Logic of Language" and I also refer to "Universal Grammar," "The Question of Language is the Answer to Power," "Testimony Stoops

to Mother Tongue" and, last but not least, "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks."<sup>3</sup> These poems offer examples of aesthetic and logical (in fact cartesian) principles that order syntaxes and build up argumentations against the Black woman, who is thus "othered" by language. More generally, these poems illustrate the construction and circulation of prejudices through which the oppressed voice begins to emerge. The second book, Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, forms a poetical fiction: (a long) distorted poem(s) fragment(s) a narration on and of silence. The protagonist, a Black female traveller, goes (back) to the Dark continent looking for Livingstone—one of the explorers and discoverers of Africa. Although the title indicates a homeric quest, the absence of defined spatial ("Somewhere, Africa") and temporal landmarks introduce us into silent languages, where the search for the White Anglo-Saxon Other turns into a self-examination of the Black/African woman.

Ltaif's Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, Entre les fleuves and Élégies du Levant constitute a trilogy in which a feminine narrative voice relates her exile(s) from Egypt to Lebanon and from Lebanon to Montreal. Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar coalesces a highly lyrical tone with narrative sequences to transcribe unbearable pain into words and music. Entre les fleuves expresses the breaking from Lebanon, the personified motherland "Elle," and the narrator's rebirth in Montreal: "C'est une colline magique comme un baume sur mes blessures" (25). The space in-between of Entre les fleuves symbolises the wound and womb where the "I" becomes schizophrenic and scriptural, a transcription off/in madness. In the poems of Élégies du Levant, Ltaif proposes a rereading of her previous texts and sheds some light upon her struggle against the oppressive cultural rules of her Arabic culture and Western philosophy. The few extracts quoted from this book will provide additional materials to reread the recurrent themes of war, death, exile and rebirth.

Both Philip and Ltaif portray a (coming to) awareness of exile by attuning their voice(s) to their own migratory movements. The evolution of these two women's languages of exile will be studied in three chapters. The first chapter entitled "Letters of exile" emerges from an implicit double question: when and where does exile begin? The word "letters" is chosen to demonstrate how the graphic sign and its inscription on a territory and/or body precipitate a flight—a forced or deliberate departure from a motherland. The term "letters" also hints at a patriarchal order and at implanting a new alphabet and rules, which presuppose the learning of "another" language. Finally, "letters" can suggest the beginning of an epistolary relationship that will give voice to two different experiences of exile. In other words, one of the possible readings that a comparative work offers here is to establish an indirect dialogue between Philip and Ltaif—an exchange of letters and words to speak about their alienations and response to violence: violence of the word that banishes, maims or kills. By juxtaposing their experience or reminiscence of brutality—the consequences of the slave trade in Africa and the Lebanese war—we will pay heed to alienation in the passage from an external to an internal exile. By this juxtaposition, I hope to establish a correspondence between Philip's and Ltaif's self-estrangement in language. If alien/nation suggests a progressive emotional "detachment" from a geographical space, alienation conveys the peculiar relationship between woman and her m/other tongue: her linguistic confinement.

In order to liberate their bodies from a strangling language, Philip and Ltaif insist upon a linguistic rejection—a literal and literary expulsion of words—depicted in biological terms. This verbal evacuation, as a primordial stage before (re)appropriating a tongue, will be explored in the second chapter "Writing In-Between and Between Writing". This chapter is divided into two parts: "On the Frontier: Eruption of the Body" and "A Space to Write." In the first part, particular emphasis will be placed on hunger and repulsion in Ltaif's texts and on a painful

(dis)articulation of the English language in Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language." We will see how the female body becomes an in-between writing, a body that writes itself and cries (*s'écrit/s'écrit*) at the same time. The second part, "A Space to Write," brings up a parallel between a geographical and metaphysical exile. As a result of this double inscription of wandering, melancholic voice(s) emanate from Ltaif's and Philip's work. In Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar and Entre les fleuves, Ltaif explores the emancipating power of writing in a melancholic state--prompted by a foreign environment. Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of language" projects the Black female "I" split between a (lost) maternal tongue and a colonial language on the paginal space.

Writing and illustrating their exile, the two poets sketch their own recreation and rebirth. The last chapter, "The Metamorphosis of the Phoenix," presents exile as a constant spiritual and linguistic alchemy in writing. For their emancipation to be achieved, Philip and Ltaif return to the sources of their respective cultures and reconsider oral tradition and mythology. From orality to writing a first metamorphosis operates in the two women's poems and initiates their own perpetual transformation. Working with/ through semantics and syntax, Philip and Ltaif try to alter the tongue(s) and reach other women: they change and exchange, creating an "esthétique de la turbulence" (cf. Glissant, Poétique 169) and announcing a multiple dialogue of transculturation.

In order to carry out an analytical reading of the two poets' writings, the proposed study will rely on linguistic and psychoanalytical concepts. These materials will help us observe carefully how physical and psychological exile expresses itself in Philip's and Ltaif's poems. Throughout my comparative work, I will mainly refer to French feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose reflections on women and language are informed by psychoanalysis and semantics. What a semiotic approach suggests here (and I am not offering

an exhaustive list) is a description and interpretation of the syntactic order, semantic choice including the poetical and prosaical devices that Philip and Ltaif are using. By adopting the aforementioned methodology, I intend to demonstrate how their previous traumatic experiences affect their language(s) and how their presence in a land of exile, namely Canada, may empower their literary creation. Throughout our exploration of these two migrant women's work, we will come to realise the influences and confluences of many cultural currents that give rise to their voices.

How to speak of exile if not with exiled tongues?

## CHAPTER I

### LETTERS OF EXILE

#### **I. Alienation**

##### **I.1. The Roots of Exile**

The theme of exile will focus on a question of politics and gender. The political aspect of exile—in legal terms—will be developed through an etymological exploration of the word itself. The selected definitions of exile will bring into focus some of its specific connotations with which it will be possible to discuss Philip's and Ltaif's writings. Although these definitions will not be referred to directly, they will nonetheless serve to expand different perspectives on the topic of wandering and to inquire into its gendered version and vision. As I shall soon demonstrate, the statements we find in a dictionary take for granted a patriarchal thinking, which offers only one side of the issue exile raises. This is not only to say that we are confronted with a biased semantic and thematic interpretation but also a conceptualization of exile; however its connotations establish the need for a feminist revision. From this observation, we will then examine the relationship between women and exile, and more specifically between an African or Arabian woman and exile. In terms of a feminine (re-) contextualization of exile, it will be useful to analyse the link between alienation and psychological/ physical wandering in Philip's Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence and Ltaif's Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar and Entre les fleuves. Furthermore, in order to understand how alienation and exile correlate, we will take into account the "history" and "linguistic origins" of Philip's and Ltaif's female narrators.

Etymologically, exile is based on "ex-out of + sal-to go (root of *salire*- to leap)" and

means "an enforced removal from one's native land according to an edict or sentence; penal expatriation or banishment; the state or condition of being penally banished; enforced residence in some foreign land" (OED). In this denotation, we notice an order, a decision of authority by which excessive power compels a person, or a people, to leave their country. As well, by the use of words such as "sentence" and "penal expatriation," exile becomes a punishment for breaking the Law (the Law of the Father), a condemnation and an expulsion from the "patria"--the native land. Significantly, the semantic field of exile refers to a "phallo(go)centric system" that leaves no space for the woman. In a section of the previous definition, we read: "**expatriation, prolonged absence from one's native land**, endured by compulsion of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for any purpose." The bold sequence of words describes the condition of woman within/out her native land. To speak about a "native land" already represents an ex-patriation for the woman, since that word relates to "patria" and therefore has no direct roots with "woman"--from a generic point of view. This raises the questions: is there a native land for the woman? Where does she come from? These questions will become a leitmotiv throughout this study of Philip's and Ltaif's writings regarding the notions of origin(s) and exile. However, these interrogations incite us now to scan the term "native land." Because it remains grafted upon "patria," it suggests a patriarchy and an exclusion of women. Shari Benstock describes the situation as such: "For women, the definition of patriarchy already assumes the reality of expatriate in **patria**; for women, this expatriation is internalized, experienced as an exclusion imposed from the outside and lived from the inside" (Benstock 23). The outside represents the area where power and authority encompass and impose upon women.

### *Women: an inscribed absence*

From Benstock's explanation, we perceive that the link between the patriarchal system and the process of alienation lived by women corresponds to an expatriation within the "native land." Thus expatriation—as defined in the OED—can be double for women: conditioned by the Law, they feel expatriated within themselves and might be forced to leave "their" country and to endure "a prolonged absence." As an extension to the word "exile," we will retain the following components which are intimately associated with women: banishment, expatriation and absence. Absence, as we saw above, means the "fact of not being present," "of being away" or "of lacking," and mirrors the condition of women within a patriarchal society. Literarily and etymologically, women do not belong to patria and therefore signify absence. This last remark calls our attention to the roots of "women," since: "it all starts with **mann**, the Anglo-Saxon word for "human being," to which was prefixed "**wif-**" for "female" . . . That gives us **wifmann**, which gradually became **wimman** and eventually **woman**" (Morris 608). Henceforth, "woman" does not seem to have an identity (even an existence) of her own, since linguistically speaking she is only recognized through her "linkage" to "man." Within language, woman represents an absence; she is banished by the word that names her. We can already presume that such an aspect of exile will help us understand Philip's and Ltaif's conceptions of and relations to language.

In French, the equivalent of the word woman, "femme," relies on the imagery of fecundity (and breastfeeding), thus putting the emphasis on the maternal. The idea of fecundity allows us to draw a parallel between woman/femme and land, and brings us to the last and more extended definition of exile: "waste and devastation of property; ruin, utter impoverishment." In the particular context of "putting in exile," the statement can suggest first "to ravage (a country)," secondly "to ruin (a person)." Because the word exile can be applied to both land and human

being, it bridges the gap between the devastation (and violence) committed against a country and against a (female) body. The connection between land and woman appears in Philip's and Ltaif's poems through a feminization of the country and/or feminine metaphors. In adopting such methods, the two poets reveal how the Law of the Father and the language of authority introduce a violence that becomes a violation and dispossession of the woman/land.

In the light of the above definitions, I will take a careful look at Philip's and Ltaif's descriptions of the process of alienation: first, through the colonialist allusions in Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, then, through internalized images of the Lebanese civil war in Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar.

## **I.2. Words: Seeds of Destruction**

"In the beginning was. . ." exile, for Philip implies an ancient suffering that originates with the black people being uprooted from their original countries and with their subsequent cultural loss--"the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans" (Frontiers 22). In order to understand that pain deeply anchored in her Black Caribbean woman's body, Philip undertakes an investigation of the English language. As an embodiment of this foreign tongue, she chooses "Dr. David Livingstone," a Scottish missionary and explorer. Retracing the routes followed by the "national hero of England" (Newson-Smith 40), Philip examines the introduction and expansion of the English language in the "Dark Continent." In so doing, the author incites us to wonder about "what's in a name" such as Dr. David Livingstone. The man, the missionary, wanted "to abolish the slave-trade and . . . open up the continent to commerce and Christianity" (Newson-Smith 42); yet, as Philip suggests, this "holy" purpose needs to be questioned.

In Africa, Livingstone dedicates his life to bringing the natives "to the one God, the true

God, the only God" (Looking for Livingstone 24) and therefore to converting them to His Word and His Law. Humility, obedience and submission constitute some of the principles associated with the Word of God. Therefore, Christianity involves a subtle and devious way to keep the natives under control. Because christianization has always been the counterpart of "civilization," as Aimé Césaire demonstrates in his Discourse on Colonialism (11), it operates in the name of the Father to justify the destruction of "the customs and mores of continental Africans" (Philip, Frontiers 13-14)—perceived as pagan and therefore as savage. What the passage from the equation "paganism=savagery" to "Christianity = civilization" requires is a modification of **names** and an insertion of "new" words. In order to carry out such an alteration, the missionary assumes both roles as explorer and discoverer: "Wasn't that what Livingstone had done? And Prince Henry the Navigator. And Columbus. And Cartier. And all those other explorers. Discover and possess—one and the same thing. And destroy" (Looking for Livingstone 15). In enumerating "great explorers' names," Philip emphasizes the common purpose of these "historical" men, which consists in taking possession of a "new" territory. Between discovery and possession, the articulation is (re)naming by means of the English language: "Dr. David Livingstone . . . was shown the falls of Mosioatunya—the smoke that thunders—by the indigenous African, discovered it and renamed it. Victoria Falls" (7).

When baptizing the African territory with English names, the missionary/explorer succeeds in dispossessing the native of his/her land. The method of dispossession becomes visible in the very structure of the sentence in which the indigenous African's voice is silenced by the passive form. Thus eradicated as a subject, s/he loses authority over the name and the African language—now supplanted by English. As well, the transformation of the word "Mosioatunya" into "Victoria Falls" obliterates an African cultural and emotional identification

with the surrounding landscape-- "Mosioatunya--the smoke that thunders." Hyphenated in the text, the descriptive meaning that characterizes the African word unveils the deep emotional tie that links the native to his/her land. In (re)naming the place Victoria Falls, the explorer asserts the imperial appropriation of the territory and defines it according to an English perspective. By means of an English word, he can thus guarantee his power and protection: "The power of naming, the force of what dominates the dangerous assurance of the name (there is danger in being named) become the privilege of the person who can name and makes what he names be understood" (Blanchot 115). Since "Mosioatunya" does not mean anything in a British context, except for the evocation of a foreign and exotic land, it needs to be transmuted into English. In this way, "Victoria Falls," as an extension of the British empire, turns the place into a "foreign" land for the native, or perhaps more precisely turns the native into an alien to his/her nation. In fact, we could conclude, in the light of Maurice Blanchot's words, that if naming is a way of avoiding "the danger of being named," then re/naming protects one from entering the other's (the indigenous African) representation of the world. Consequently, re/naming involves an un/naming that initiates a perverse attempt to "unmake" an African civilization" (Scarry 28-29).

Unmaking with words and using the Word in the English tongue to conceal a colonizing intention (cf. Césaire 10) form an external power that acts dramatically upon the African heritage:

In the beginning was  
the ravage  
    in  
word inside time  
    inside  
History (Looking for Livingstone 31)

His/story--the missionary/ explorer's as well as man's story in general--written with words of violence, belongs to a language of destruction, a narrative of bloodshed which provides the ink of History. It is that linguistic inscription of a "new" (colonial, conflictive) code upon a country or

a city that alienates a people. When living a civil war, for instance, alienation increases with, through and because of a language that partakes and linguistically reproduces the "physically" undergone violence.

### **L3.Murderous Words**

In Ltaif's Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, the idea of exile emerges from the war in Lebanon and under the outpouring of murderous words: "Qu'Allah vous protège du Fils d'Adam,/ s'écrie ma nourrice/ de cet homme de guerre" (11). In describing her exile—"voilà comment est mon exil"—the poet/narrator puts the emphasis on the manipulation of Man's language, which relies on and promotes violence. He speaks a tongue of war to confirm the spreading of his authority and guarantees his appropriation of speech, when words are materialized in bombs (cf. Derrida, L'écriture 190). Defined as "hostile **contention** by means of armed force, carried on between nations, states or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state" (OED), war also implies a conflictual exchange of words, a "discord" and even a "cacophony" that intends to "neutralize" the other's "parole." Therefore, bombs become an extension of words that inscribe a text of dispossession and dismembering of the Lebanese land. These bombs devastate both the city and the female narrator's memory:

Aujourd'hui  
J'ai vu  
comment meurt une ville (9)

elle [sa mémoire] était mutilée, ou détruite par les bombes, ou bien encore en ruine (14)

With the juxtaposition of the above lines, we can notice that the verbs and nouns: "mourir," "mutiler," "détruire" and "être en ruine" corroborate the common experience of annihilation suffered by the narrator and the city. Furthermore, functioning as a subject of the verb "mourir"

in the quoted sentence, the dying city serves as a synecdoche for the Lebanese's agony. The figure of speech brings into relief war and its ravage on a spatial and memorial territory. Indeed, the synecdoche creates an omission (cf. Scarry 64)—that of dying people—and seems to be symptomatic of a mutilated memory. As well, the omission helps to keep away or shadow the obsessive image of Lebanese sufferings. Paradoxically, it magnifies the witnessed horror (in the dimension of the city) and dismisses the physical reality which contains the "bodies in pain." What characterizes the omission occurring within the synecdoche is an internalization of a language of violence in Ltaif's writing. That internalization starts with a visual grasping of the external devastations: "j'ai vu . . . ce que j'ai vu dans mes yeux" (9). Visions of horror have imprinted her memory so strongly that now "ces yeux-là ne se referment plus" (11). The narrator is thus inhabited, haunted by images of destruction. These painful images could be compared to "an apocalyptic vision" (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 180-181) that compels the narrator to transpose reality--agonizing people--into a non-human-shaped schema ("la ville" evoking here architectural features) by the use of a synecdoche and to leave a blank in the mind. However, the city, which mirrors a social construction and body, may personify the Lebanese population as well; and in that way we are still confronted with a language of violence injected into the narrator's words. Indeed, the city suggests a presence of walls behind which bombs "warrant" the erasure of humans and their languages. It becomes evocative of "walled tongues," of an imposed silence by an exploding and imploding language of power. Bombs, as I mentioned before, introduce a radical vocabulary of annihilation coming from the inside and from the outside. Nonetheless, that language perniciously works its destructive purpose from the inside: "les voitures piégées de Beyrouth, in Beirut" (37). Thus managing an internal explosion of the structure (city), the bombing operates--symbolically--a similar effect on the narrator's tongue.

The passages we have selected from Philip's and Ltaif's work reveal here a similar treatment of a dispossession process. Renaming as a disguised method of appropriating the African continent corresponds to a plotted bombing mission to injure Beirut. In both cases, the result is an implicit and explicit violence directed towards the Lebanese/the African countries and tongues. Words, in a colonial and/or conflictual context, trigger such violence by substituting for a native language or by asserting the supremacy of one tongue over another. They become murderous words. Significantly, Philip and Ltaif see in these words the consequences of a "genocide" perpetuated by "codified languages," which aim at forcing a structure onto the other:

J'ai entendu les mêmes lois, les mêmes  
codes récités en d'autres langues . . .  
les mêmes, les mêmes formes gouvernent la terre,  
les mêmes, les mêmes guerres, vols, châtiments se répètent.  
Et on tue et on tue  
et on rase,  
on crucifie et on suspend. (*Les Métamorphoses* 22)

Political rules recited in different languages proceed by obliterating, devastating and "silencing" a whole people. Silencing ensues from a literal and/or figurative "removal of the tongue," (Philip, "Discourse" 58) or from an unbearable vision of the surrounding landscape that squeezes the voice. All the savage articulations belong to "La Langue de l'Homme," spreading out principles of authority and domination. Hence colonialism and war speak a similar language of denial, share a tongue "that is the principal organ of oppression and exploitation," ("Discourse" 59) and succeed in depriving the other of his/her "identity/ies."

### ***The Logic of the Same and Disfiguration***

Concerning the similarity between oppressive rules—whether in a colonial or conflictual atmosphere—I will point out two coinciding concepts: the Logic of the Same and disfiguration.

The latter results from the former and is related to the idea of "face" (visage). A brief presentation of a Derridian reading of Emmanuel Levinas will join together language and violence. In L'écriture et la différence, Jacques Derrida asserts that: "Le visage est, en effet, l'unité inaugurante d'un regard nu et d'un droit à la parole" (211). This right to speak, therefore, depends on the other's recognition of the potential speaker's being. Quoting Levinas, Derrida writes: "La rencontre du visage n'est pas seulement un fait anthropologique. Elle est, absolument parlant, un rapport avec ce qui est. Peut-être l'homme seul est substance et c'est pour cela qu'il est visage" (210). The face, in that respect, can initiate a visual and oral exchange as it represents the "place" where parole emerges, and partakes in the being form/ation. That substantial correspondence between face and speech will help us understand the mechanism of violence in dis/figuration. As well, for the purpose of my analysis, I will associate "surface" and "face" to put side by side a territorial and "anthropological" encounter (cf. Derrida, L'écriture 210) from a linguistic point of view. In that way, we will observe how disfiguration--the unmaking of face--inscribes violence on a territory, a body and language in Philip's and Ltaif's writings. Disfiguration originates from an intrusive power and language that (re)writes (renaming and bombing) its own law on the surface of the native's landscape. In that sense, disfiguration constitutes one of the most brutal expressions of the Logic of the Same. These two concepts will become particularly explicit in studying the religious "motive" in Philip's and Ltaif's poems.

Rewriting alienates the other by wiping out his/her own landmarks: "If I could discover this as yet unnamed thing, it would be mine, I believed," (Looking for Livingstone 15) and provokes an irremediable loss and disconnection within the "mother" tongue: "Je ne sais ce que jardin veut dire, ni rose ni saveur ni parfum" (Les Métamorphoses 63). As well, the inscription on the (sur)face of the country looks like scars--or like an open wound--corresponding to the

trace of erasure ("rature") left by authoritarian language. Thus, we witness in Philip's and Ltaif's poems, the disfigurement occurring on the (sur)face. Subsequent to the disfigurement of a surrounding landscape (or surface): "La ville de Beyrouth/ est un champ de ruines" (Élégies du Levant 34), the native's "face" is being marked by an oppressive language. Because, according to Derrida, the face is also "parole" (cf. L'écriture 219), disfiguration impedes access to speech, and enables the oppressor to dis/regard the previous inscription; in other words the native's story and language.

Il [le vent] me ballotte et me défigure de peur  
de voir ma trace sur le sable  
cet ennemi de tous. (Les Métamorphoses 49)

In a state of deformity, the other becomes the "savage," the "barbarian" who has to be civilized (in the case of the indigenous African) and/or neutralized. In order to clarify this point, disfiguration needs to be associated with unmaking and re/Creation, where "re/Creation" is understood as an abuse of religion: the religious motive being an end that justifies the means. In this theological context, disfiguration implies the writing of a Christian text and rules on African cultures in Looking for Livingstone, and a misreading of Koranic principles in Ltaif's trilogy; for "Rien n'est plus fabriqué/ que la guerre d'un frère/ contre son frère" (Élégies du Levant 34).

Recurrent biblical and Koranic references permeate Philip's and Ltaif's poems and emphasize an intertwining between re/Creation and violence. With sentences such as "in the beginning was"<sup>4</sup> and "ma frayeur des fils d'Adam," (Les Métamorphoses 33) the two poets indicate articulations of violence committed in the "Name of God." Philip's use of the predicate (mentioned above) appears in five sequences of her poems to show a rupture and a chaotic intrusion of the Word and words. In fact, a violence is already contained in the predicate (cf. Derrida, L'écriture 218) and sustains Livingstone's promise to destroy "African society and

religions. . . [in order to] bring European commerce more easily to the Africans, and Christianity" (69). The missionary's desire to "bring Christianity" to the indigenous people produces a deep alteration in the nature of the latter. In endeavouring to introduce the Word to the native, the missionary also seeks to mold him/her in God's image. Yet the presence, in Philip's text, of the Word (God) and word (Man) hints at a colonial interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, the Word serves as a pre/text to "submit" the indigenous African to the White European man's image and crush him/her to the "Logic of the Same" (Moi, Sexual/Textual 134). Thus disfigured, the native is inevitably deprived of speech and of his/her African tongue:

forgive me this dumbness  
*but thou art the same Lord, whose property*  
 this lack of tongue forgive  
*is always to have mercy* ("She Tries" 94)

As a result of being dispossessed, the indigenous African experiences a geographical, physical and psychological dismemberment that characterizes his/her exile.

In Ltaif's poems, "le fils d'Adam" symbolises the perpetrator of homicide that constitutes the rule. By means of repetitions, Ltaif insists on a circle of violence in process: "Qui répand le sang de l'homme, son sang par l'homme sera répandu" (qtd. in Kristeva, Pouvoirs 130). Here the concept of retaliation signals the death of dialogue; once the words call for revenge, no more verbal exchange seems to be possible except for the incessant return of the same murderous words: "Musulmans et Chrétiens s'entre-égorgent" (Les Métamorphoses 61). A reciprocal will to exterminate the other's speech determines the deaf/death exchange. In fact, the verb "s'entre-égorgent" translates the mad effort to stop each other's flow of words by literally cutting the throat, to hinder the slightest utterance and finally impose an oppressive and maiming silence on the other. Consequently, responsible for and anchored in a cycle of violence, Man's language echoes a destructive dumbness and remains univocal (the voice of revenge) and therefore

exclusive. That tongue expands the alienating Logic of the Same, forces the other to fit into the same image and speak from the same voice, and even begets monstrosity: "Je n'ai plus de morale, je n'ai plus de tête, et plus de philosophie et plus de sagesse. Je vous parle de ce lieu que trop de hachures trop d'éther paralyse et endort" (*Les Métamorphoses* 64). Thus, with a Logic of the Same, Man plays God's role, unmakes the original Creation, to recreate a world erected on a phallo(go)centric system (cf. Irigaray, *Le Temps* ) and teaches a language of pain:

Man can only be created once, but once created, he can be endlessly modified; wounding re-enacts the creation because it re-enacts the power of alteration that has its first profound occurrence in creation. (Scarry 183)

After focusing our attention on the passage from an external to an internal alienation, we realise now how in sustaining the Logic of the Same, violence conjugates negation and denial of the other. However, throughout this analysis, we have put aside the question of gender regarding the loss of a "land" and its consequences on individuals. Therefore, it seems important, at the present stage to look at the interrelationship between country and woman under the control of a destructive (and denying) language.

## **II. Female Body and Feminization of the Country**

### **II.1. Metaphor**

In Philip's and Ltai's poems, various metaphorical elements appear to link land to woman (or woman to land) and highlight the negating effects of a tongue of power on a geographical space and a female body. In *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, a name and an expression such as "Africa" and the "Dark Continent" may well encapsulate deeper significance than a simple equivalence in meaning. "Africa" is the general word to designate the geographical area and location of the continent; whereas the "Dark Continent" metaphorically refers to Africa

especially at a time when little was known about it. Thus, this expression connotes a lack of knowledge, a mystery that has not yet been solved. When considered separately, the terms "dark" and "continent" deliver a network of signifiers that might be read as feminine "characteristics." Among the connotations applied to the adjective "dark," we find "something mysterious" and/or "concealed," which at some point relate to a psychoanalytic vocabulary. This allusion to psychoanalysis brings me to introduce Freud's use of the words "mysterious" and "concealed" with respect to woman. Indeed, according to his interpretation of woman's sexuality, the female subject remains unknown and her "difference . . . [is] perceived as an absence or negation of the male norm." Freud's lacunal investigations in the feminine field incite him to speak about the "dark continent of femininity." By this expression, he qualifies woman as a "mysterious" (non-) being, places her beyond man's understanding and hints at her "hidden" sex (cf. Irigaray, *Ce sexe* 46-7). For all these reasons, the female body is supposed to contain a secrecy and represent an obscured continent for her masculine counterpart. Henceforth, we guess at a feminine connotation of the expression the "Dark Continent" that outlines a link between Africa and the Black woman.

In the beginning of her poetical fiction, Philip stresses Livingstone's sentence: "I will open a way to the interior or perish" (7) to indicate the intrusion of a foreign and colonial language. With the verb "open" suggesting an outside/inside movement and mirroring an extension of power, the poet inserts a strong sexual connotation. Through Livingstone's words, we can read the unswerving determination to penetrate the continent and break through its mystery, as well as a desire for "abducting" the Black woman. Thus, in provoking an ambiguous content in the explorer's sentence, Philip shows us the preliminary stage of a "linguistic rape" (*She Tries* 23). Moreover, in the dream sequence of her fiction, a lecherous image projected onto the Continent

provides a debased (even an abject) representation of the African female body: ". . . A CONTINENT AWAITS US\_\_EAGERLY\_\_LIKE A... LIKE A WHORE!" (Looking for Livingstone 25)

Verbally abused and denied fundamental value (and virtue), the Black woman/ continent is subjected to the constant assault of words. The will to "open the way to the interior" conveys the colonialist's "insurmountable arrogance" to violate (and tear up the hymen of) the African territory and female body with his language. Subsequent to his linguistic power and aggressiveness, his exploration of space turns into an infiltration of seminal words, and thus operates an invasion and corruption. In addition, a semantic field of armaments and contamination permeates Philip's text where discourse and intercourse constitute the instruments of colonial control:

mounted armies of words to colonise the many and various silences of the peoples round about, spreading and **infecting** with word where before there was silence. (12, emphasis added)

The effects of a colonial language on an African woman/land are portrayed as symptoms of a contagious disease injuring a different human tissue and staining the indigenous body with "the pollute/ the profane in word" (39). As a result, the body becomes **impure**—im/proprie. On the verge of losing her own self, the Black woman's "infection" is symptomatic of her inner alienation. This state of alienation may be considered from Julia Kristeva's study of the notions of "saleté" and "souillure:"

L'excrément et ses équivalents (poussiture, **infection**, maladie, cadavre, etc.) représentent le danger venu de l'extérieur, de l'identité: le moi menacé par du non-moi, la société menacée par son dehors, la vie par la mort. (Pouvoirs 86)

The threat from the outside is symbolised, in Philip's text, by the intrusion of "aggressive" words related to a foreign language that turns the Black woman's body into a stranger to herself.

*Abjection: to be Sidon and the Other's pain*

Being unable to inhabit her body any longer or to live in her own corpse, as Ltaif's sentence seems to suggest in Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, corresponds to the condition of women "in a state of siege."<sup>5</sup>

A peine suis-je née  
que je n'existe déjà plus  
car la guerre empêche la vie de naître  
empêche les fleurs de mûrir  
empêche le soleil  
et rompt le rythme des choses (10)

War, which includes an invasion of words, obstructs the cycle of life and starts a severe infection that also contaminates land and woman, Lebanon and the female narrator. A dis/ease (or dis/ is, that would suggest an impossibility of being), such as war, displaces the being and condemns her to the eradication of her self: to be born and not exist. In fact, Ltaif's lines uncover the linguistic absence / non-existence of the woman. It is precisely in the form of (textual and historical) erasure that a connection between city (Sidon)<sup>6</sup> and the female narrator can be delineated: "ma douleur à moi remonte/ à l'Antiquité du temps/ au passé de l'Âge et de l'instant/ car je suis Sidon" (Les Métamorphoses 10). In identifying herself with an ancient and vanished city, the narrator reveals her "belonging" to death: "je commence par la mort,"<sup>7</sup> she declares in the introduction to her narrative. To be Sidon signifies for the narrator a correspondence between the city and herself in the unsaid wound. Injured throughout history, Sidon remains the trace and print of a destroyed Phoenician civilization, a name connected to a remote past and blotted out of the present map. Constantly wiped out, the woman/narrator shares with the city the impossibility "to be" governed under the dominant language. Thus, what the metaphorical structure brings about are double negatives: a non-being assimilated to a "no-more-being" (Cohen, "Théorie" 101).<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, "carved" in the name of "Sidon" a history of submission, violence and pain can be deciphered. Pain seems to "be" a space where the city and the narrator can meet and melt into each other, a semaphorical language that allows them to signify and communicate their endured experiences beyond time. Thus on behalf of suffering, the common scar, even the umbilical cord between woman and land, the narrator also claims: "le peuple d'Egypte c'était moi" (12).

In Ltaif's words, such an eagerness to mix her narrative "I" with a city and a people may also betray a desperate attempt to fill in the emptiness that occupies her body: "J'étais du vent. Ariel. Du vent. Du vent. Du vent. Rien du tout. Absolument tout" (Entre 9). An emptiness is provoked by war: "car la guerre n'épargne/ ni ma passion/ ni ma mémoire/ celle des milliers d'années" (Les Métamorphoses 10) and sets up the narrator's inner destruction, a dis/embodiment and disconnection with her self. Three times denied, in the repetition of the word "vent," she becomes an uprooted speech stammering and stumbling upon a language of violence and horror. A "witnessed" horror produced by war, war inflicting pain on a land and lived by the woman in the depth of her soul and body, composes the intricate steps in the escalating devastation that is respectively managed on a territory and a female body. Therefore in Ltaif's work, the metaphor, which correlates the narrator to an ancient city, strengthens the "mirror effect" between land and female body. In other words, everything that occurs in Sidon/Lebanon/Egypt reflects on the narrator's body; any ravages tearing apart one of these lands also empty and mutilate the woman.

The linkage between an external space—encompassing a people—and the narrator is made possible through the gaze:

Je me souviens lors d'un séjour au  
Caire, j'avais pu remarquer que la douleur  
ne quittait pas certains traits du visage et  
qu'elle s'y manifestait en permanence. (Les Métamorphoses 21)

To notice the pain inscribed on the other's face (and the city's surface) involves, for the narrator, reading and learning the signs of violence, gradually incorporated in her own self. She does not only become aware of the other's suffering, she integrates in her body that other pain and language (cf. Derrida, *L'écriture* 146).

J'étais restée dans cette ville assez long-  
temps pour savoir parler sa langue et discou-  
rir avec elle de choses et d'autres . . . (21)

Thus, a visual exchange conveys a language of pain, and a meeting of eyes between women expresses the absence of their "I/s," their non-being and also their suffocation. As well, from the narrator's perspective, the "fact" of being Sidon--that erased city--provides her with an invisible space to represent the condition of women: "L'histoire des femmes à travers le monde est mon Histoire à moi" (*Entre* 48). To be Sidon means to turn one's eyes on History in order to dis/cover women's dis/ease, their emptiness and their death. Yet, when sight, confronted with the inscription of violence, brings too many disturbing images of the surrounding suffering inside the female body, it prevents her from relating to life and casts her into an inner exile:

. . . Et voilà, et vous me voyez je ne mange plus. Sidon cesse de manger, comme une paysanne égyptienne qui **voit trop**, un bout de cervelle lui manque."(*Les Métamorphoses* 24, emphasis added)

These excessive and overwhelming images penetrate the narrator's mind and "refuse" to fall into oblivion. They invade her inner space with scattered representations of war:

Ah comme je souhaite l'oubli et vivre.  
Mais je ne vis qu'au rythme de la guerre,  
qu'à celui de la mort (61)

The intrusive image, engendered by a tongue of power, projects itself onto and into the woman's body, raping so to speak her "spiritual" property. Her eyes, being "impressed" and "obsessed" by apocalyptic visions of war (Cf. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 178-179), fail to distinguish the borderline

between the outside and the inside. Since her memory has absorbed signs of war, she becomes monstrous and abject:

Ma mémoire est aussi lourde qu'une  
grappe de raisin, une fleur de grenade, une  
guerre à mille têtes (50)

Being deeply affected (and infected) by external violence, her words translate the experienced distortion ("grenade" refers to both the fruit and the weapon, reproducing in that way the horrid combination between a blooming of life and death) and manifest an alienated language, unable to erase from its words the traces of war. In Philip's text, the monstrosity of the words, "sexually transmitted" (because of the linguistic rape) develops and evolves within the body of the Black woman. By the medium of metaphors that embrace and unite the woman's body to the land, Ltaif and Philip portray the devastation initiated by Man's language on the woman's inner space. Visually and/or sexually assaulted by words of domination, the (Black/Arab) woman is subjected to the collapsing landmarks and the loss of her tongue.

Having considered the metaphorical knot between the (Black/Arab) woman's body and her territory, through their respective erasure under a dominant language, I shall now concentrate on the textual prints of the woman's obliteration and silencing within a patriarchal tongue. In order to observe the process of silencing endured by the female (non-) subject, I will rely on two principal articulations: sexual mutilation in Philip's text and "devouring" images in Ltaif's poems.

## **II.2. From Knit Lips to Open Mouth**

### ***Incorporating a Father Tongue***

The sexual manifestation of the Black woman's oppression, as we realised earlier, characterizes the colonialist's method to keep the Black female under his control as well as to

confirm his authority:

Just as Western people conquer nature in an effort to conquer their own self-division, so they [South African colonialists] cannot desist from enslaving other human beings who necessarily confront them as that Other, alien and forever threatening (Huggan 20).

In alienating the Black woman, the colonialist endeavours to avoid the danger that she, the "dark continent," might spread out. Since the main threat resides in the depth of her being, her mystery needs to be torn up and defiled once and for all. Thus, images of pain inflicted on the subjected Black female emanate from Philip's poems and reveal the destructive power of the word. The lines I will now study, in *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* offer various sites for debate about oppression:

it bound the foot  
sealed the vagina  
excised the clitoris  
set fire to the bride  
the temple dance was  
no more (13)

Sharp and accurate sentences, introduced by active verbs, mirror the Black woman's double seclusion—in patriarchal and grammatical structures. By adopting a particularly abrupt tone of voice, the poet testifies to the maiming and corrosive effect of an imposed foreign language, and describes the physical violence committed on the Black woman's body. The first line evokes the slave-woman's condition, since the verb "bound" indicates that physical (and emotional) movements are impeded. Moreover in a postposition to the verb "bound," the "foot," as a synecdoche for the African woman's body, reinforces the idea of a state of dependence. Considered from a poetical point of view, the foot also suggests a restriction within language. As an element of prosody and part of a poetic structure, it may distort her feminine sensitivity for the sake of the textual rhythm instead of transcribing a body language. The "foot," like a textual war, "rompt le rythme des choses" (*Les Métamorphoses* 9). What the image transmits here is the

stifling and suffocation of the Black woman, bound to a land/langue that seems to snatch away her vital "breath."

Philip pictures a violation of the Black woman's body in the second line. In fact, a verb such as "seal" hints at the inscription of a confidential text, that of the Father, which authenticates the "colonialist"'s ownership over her body. As well, if we extend our reading to the "concept" of **linguistic rape**, such as described by Philip, we can associate the "vagina" with the "middle passage" leading to the Black woman's own disintegration and denial. In the third line, the poet pertinently twists a Western interpretation of ancestral African traditions by symbolically transposing the cultural practice of excision into an Occidental mode of oppression. African social organizations that "generally" justify the ritual of excision are exposed by Françoise Lionnet:

... there are symbolic relationships between the human body and the social body, ... rituals can be interpreted in terms that link purity with order, impurity with disorder, the latter being a sign of danger and power. Excision, like circumcision, thus "purifies" the body, renders it fit to belong to its assigned place within the social order, which it no longer threatens by its impure, abject nature—that is, its undifferentiated, dangerous sexuality. (*Postcolonial* 138-139)

In the light of Lionnet's comment, two fundamental aspects in relation to social rules should be scrutinized: purification and fear of the other's sexuality. Conveyed in the verb "purify" is the sacrificial ordeal. Only after the passage through this ritual stage can a person be "integrated" into society; however a loss comes along with the purifying process, which in Philip's words appears as an aggression against the Black woman's body. Further, if this ordeal guarantees a respect for boundaries between the two sexes and prevents the confusion of the Same and the Other, it may well contribute to emphasize her exclusion. A physical, yet invisible and painful mark will distinguish her from the Western other. Her stamp of "otherness" will be inscribed within her body by the loss of her African tongue. "Excised" by the Western world, she

undergoes the White Father's "savagery" which deprives her of her "labial" organ. When recontextualizing excision in Occidental societies, Philip implicitly reverses the equation "Christianity=civilization and Paganism=savagery" into Western civilization=savagery. Likewise, in introducing an image of clitoridectomy, Philip's poem relates to the "speechless" Woman in a patriarchal society (cf. Emberley, 146). Finally, the mutilated woman's body will be erased from society and denied (even devoured) by fire, the "holocaust": the ultimate sacrifice that "maintains" the purity of (Western) society. Also included in the principle of purification is a division of space that separates the pure and the impure. Therefore, cursed and impure<sup>9</sup> the (Black) woman does not belong to the visible (and sacred) "paternal" place; "dumb-tongued" and bodyless, she remains confined in a nowhere and sentenced to an inner and outer exile.

*An aggressive mother land/ accusing masculine eyes*

If, in Philip's writing, her relation to exile revolves around the traumatic experience of the lost "mother tongue," for Ltaif, the obsessive pain emerges from a plurality of languages, impressed by a voice of authority, which outline a tendency to "s'éprouver absent dans son corps, ne plus voir, ne plus savoir où l'on est, quel lieu on habite" (Harel, "La parole " 386):

En toutes les langues Elle me chassait. En  
allemand, en italien, en anglais, en arabe et en  
français.

Et en toutes les autres langues que je ne  
comprenais pas. Aux intonations de Sa voix je  
savais qu'elle me chassait. (Entre 17)

Forced to run away and sensitive to the assertive undertone of the different languages spoken in Lebanon, the narrator feels disoriented and endures the sudden awareness of her exile. Although the verb "chasser" hints at the narrator's expulsion from "her" country, it also translates the idea

of hunting and killing in order to absorb. Either expatriated or in/corporated, the act of "chasing" (away) brings forth the problematic relation to the (woman) other. In a context of war—that multiplicity of tongues—we are tempted to compare hunting to a predatory activity in the specific perspective of annihilating the (woman) other. War festers on and fosters destruction, and therefore could be associated with a big bloodthirsty mouth. In addition, war suggests, as we already mentioned, a refusal and fear of the other which manifests itself in an attempt to destroy alterity.

However, war is not the only means of "devastation" and "consumption" of that other; man's look on the (Arab) woman triggers—to some extent—a similar obliteration (cf. Beauvoir 260):

C'est pour fuir la haine de ces regards [mâles] que j'ai quitté mon pays. Ne plus jamais devoir défier le mépris dans leurs yeux, car il faut avoir senti l'humiliation. Savoir que nous représentions la souillure. (Entre 44)

Rejected by the contempt in man's eyes, the (Arab) woman will be swallowed, integrated in a "native" patriarchal structure that aims at stifling her. Marriage constitutes one of the rituals of purification that allows the woman "to be part" of society, or more precisely, that compels her to be assimilated (cf. Beauvoir 305-6). In marrying the woman, the (Arab) man removes the stain (the other) and keeps the "impure" (the woman) out of sight:

Je veux vous parler de l'ensablement des femmes au Caire. Comment on les enterre et on les marie dans des maisons qui ressemblent à des ruines, où elles nettoient ces maisons couvertes de poussière. (Les Métamorphoses 25)

Here, the devouring process is depicted as a gradual burial of women in the sand—the phallogocentric system. Through her evocation of the Arab women's condition in the Arab world, the female narrator insists on a restriction, even an imprisonment of life itself. In order to recover life, she has no alternative than to escape from the Arab man's devouring eyes, and therefore to

leave the country. That country, always depicted in feminine terms, seems to propagate violence. In other words, the "mother" land ("mère dévoreuse" Entre 10) bears in her matrix the violence committed against the woman, becomes "Herself" a chaotic place, which both drives away and swallows the female narrator (cf. Beauvoir 247): "Elle me portait dans son corps, tellement Elle avait une maîtrise absolue de moi. Moi je n'existais pas. Elle me mangeait" (Entre 41).

### *Guilty oblivion and devastating memories*

No existence for the female narrator can be possible in the Lebanese womb as the monstrous "mother" land connected with Chaos keeps engendering and providing food to man's madness. To flee and not be eaten represents the desperate goal of the woman. Yet out of the country, in exile, the female narrator comes across another form of devouring, which takes the invisible form of oblivion, of a historical amnesia. With time, dramatic events such as war and violence upon women are gradually fading away, consumed by Kronos:

"Le sable envahit il est vrai, mais personne ne lutte contre ce désert dévoreur de mémoires. Alors on néglige et on s'assoupit sur des siècles de misère et de populations d'affamées." (Les Métamorphoses 25)

In her struggle to preserve the memory of secular silence and destruction imposed on women, she discovers the horror of "hunger" subsequent to devouring. Indeed, if devouring corresponds to the effect of an overwhelming and insatiable power, "hunger" describes the (woman) other's lack, deprivation and emptiness: "Je voulais faire le portrait de ma fée. Tant que je ne l'avais pas fait je restais en manque. Affamée" (Entre 9). A hunger for life and especially for a place of recognition tears up the female narrator's body; in exile, she carries with her, "moi la terre déracinée," her vital need for love and re/composition of her self.

From sexual and verbal mutilation to devouring, we become aware of two symbolic

articulations of dispossession that the Black/Arab woman undergoes. In Philip's poems, alienation appears as a "closure" (subsequent to penetration) of the Black female body which guarantees the propagation of foreign words and transforms her body into an abject object. As for Ltaif, enclosure characterizes the Arab woman's alienation. In the many tongues which surround "H/her"<sup>10</sup> space, inflections of voice translate a rhythm of violence and war circling the woman's body. That rhythm animates the patriarchal structure which resembles a devouring mouth, crashing and swallowing the (un)desired element. Infiltrations of words and devouring both attempt to silence the woman and drive her into exile; they sever, absorb and confine her body. By describing alienation in terms of physical suffering and suffocation, Philip and Ltaif insist upon an organic representation of linguistic exile. In doing so, they reveal their (narrators') inner estrangement and dispossession as their tongues are forced to articulate the other's "abusing" language. Familiar words, which inhabit their bodies, become foreign to the female narrators inasmuch as they transmit the reality of remote or actual dehumanizing violence. Because of this strange language that infects or devours the Black/Arab woman's corporeal envelope, she lives in pain, experiences her self-decomposition and is left with her benumbed tongue. Alienation thus suggests a gradual scattering of the whole physical and psychological space that results in the (partial) loss of organic and semantic senses: the Black/Arab woman is no longer able to see, hear, touch and taste the "words" and "wounds," her sore tongue having deadened, or so it seems, the slightest sensitive responses. For, in exile, the Black/Arab woman has nothing else but her (own) body. She needs to reconnect her self with her physical environment, to retrieve her own rhythm, her own voice or to (re)shape a tongue in her "i-mage." (Philip, *She Tries* 12). A language to discover and to inhabit, in a situation of exile, will be explored and developed in the second chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### WRITING IN-BETWEEN AND BETWEEN WRITING

#### **I. On the Frontier: Eruption of the Body**

Speaking a language in which she is spoken, compelled or choosing to leave her "native land," doubly "affiliated" with exile because of the history of her people<sup>11</sup>, the woman discovers two different loci of exile: language and geographical space. The "language of the master, [English or Arabic<sup>12</sup>] [which] will necessarily colour her perceptions of reality and deform her vision" (Lionnet, Autobiographical 180), will prevent her from recognizing herself as "a subject of enunciation" (Irigaray, Le langage 351): her "I" is predetermined, (dis-) qualified and positioned according to the patriarchal organization of language itself (cf. Irigaray, Le corps-à-corps 13). As a testimony to a phallo(go)centric thought, language denies and negates the woman, subordinates her to the male voice so that she recites her alienation each time she utters a word. One could argue that she has acquired the linguistic tools to enclose herself in "masculine codes of Logic," (cf. Jardine 99) preventing her from "speaking" with her own voice (Jardine 114) and excluding herself as a subject of enunciation. We need to ask ourselves what happens when [she is] excluded from the fullness and wholeness of language" (Philip, She Tries 21). Does she withdraw into madness? Does she escape from a "father" tongue by adopting a new language? Does she (or even does she have to) and can she flee from her land/langue to be the orchestrator and not the orchestrated (or the castrated one) in order to play her own fugue? (cf. Kristeva, Étrangers 9-11). From these questions emerges a "disturbing" feeling of estrangement

in the woman that creates a split between her "self" and language—never hers, "always the other's" (Derrida, The Ear 144)—and opens an in-between space where **her** exile begins. As René Major points out: "Pour que l'exil s'accomplisse, il faut que le sujet soit étranger à lui-même ou qu'il le devienne" (Harel, Le voleur 11, emphasis added). Perhaps we could interpret the process of becoming estranged to her "self" as a possible means of disalienating herself, since through her estrangement she might come to realise her own difference? In understanding her difference—as an Arab/Black/woman—she can leap out of her "state of exile" and enter her "own" exile. In other words, she needs to turn her exclusion in exile into an exile of freedom by asserting her national, cultural and linguistic particularities.

The problematic of exile and/in language as a mode of disalienation will be discussed in the first part of this chapter. I propose here to examine how the female body, after being stamped by the patriarchal seal, strives to free itself from the limits and boundaries which are erected by language. Then, in the second part of this study, the theme of boundaries in relation to language will lead us to observe (the written and writing) exile in a geographical (and autobiographical) space.

### **L1.On the Threshold of Consciousness: the Split Body**

The female body—as we noticed in the first chapter—is "tattooed" by the patriarchal (and colonial) text: "Ces tortures de glace, ces tatouages sur nos corps, ces traces de hiéroglyphes ou de herse" (Les Métamorphoses 63) and therefore remains under the control of the Law. When learning a language, such as English or Arabic (and French), the woman assimilates "alphabet writing [which] is historically linked to the civil and religious codification of patriarchal power" (Jardine 99). Her whole body is involved in a dispossession of herself as she has to "swallow"

and "eat" the writing so that the Law is inscribed in her flesh (cf. Kristeva, Le langage 103). In fact, the patriarchal regime craves the "grammar" of Law in the female body, thus exerting pressure and violence upon the woman. Whether described as a linguistic rape or as a devouring mouth of authority--that develops an eating-eaten relationship between the dominant and the dominated--the inscription of a (new) language and of its alphabet in "her" body produces a devastation with: "the word/ that claims/ and maims/ and claims/ again" ("Testimony" 82). To the physical violence that language represents, the female body responds and reacts biologically and physiologically.

Henceforth, I intend to analyse the recurrent references to hunger in Ltaif's poems, as an emerging opposition of the female body to the "foster/murderous" Mother land and tongue. In relation to the theme of hunger, I will focus on the concept and consequences of a maternal language for the poet/narrator. Then, through Philip's poetry, I will study sequences of disruption within the Black female's body. My concern will essentially deal with the signs and consequences of this disruption on the Black woman's voice and words.

### ***Hunger and repulsion***

Hunger and eating hint at an internal dialogue, which is supposed to maintain (the balance of) life. However, external conditions, such as war, may interrupt and upset the vital exchange.

This is precisely what we witness in Ltaif's Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar:

Hier j'ai mangé.  
 Tout le dossier sur la torture  
 toute la lutte africaine contre l'apartheid  
 toute l'histoire des disparitions  
 tout le Caire,  
 et ce matin j'ai encore faim.

Je ne sais pas, c'est comme si j'étais

morte : je me nourris très mal ces temps-ci,  
comme si je faisais une grève de la faim (19)

The verb "manger" seems to annihilate the distinction between the outside and the inside, **as if** by "eating" the traumatizing events of day-to-day life, the narrator could feed on that violence without being affected by it. What "manger" suggests here, is a consumption of the outside by means of reading and watching activities ("le dossier sur la torture"). Language enables her to learn about external realities, such as tyrannical policies, and to internalize that knowledge; it therefore serves to link outer and inner or personal worlds. However, when violence becomes a common fact, communicated by language, the margin between external reality and inner reaction tends to blur. In that way, the received information (through watching and reading documents) might lead to indifference. In Ltaif's words that indifference can be compared to "digestion:" the swallowing and (dis)integration of brutal practices. Nevertheless, that language fails to satisfy the narrator's needs ("et ce matin j'ai encore faim") since it mainly conveys death, pain-afflicted stories and erasure—"toute l'histoire des disparitions"—that political oppression cultivates. Emptiness is felt when "manger" can no longer dissolve reality, make it internal and uniform, nor shut out the narrator's consciousness. Thence language—in her female body—opens up and constantly widens the "hollow" space inside herself. She is inhabited by a lack, a "want-to-be," a constant craving for food/language, which accentuates her death-like state and which may well develop a bulimic behaviour: "Je ne sais pas, c'est comme si j'étais morte."<sup>13</sup> As well, if language does not feed her body, we can suppose that it neither fits her organism nor answers her physiological and psychological "wants." Hunger becomes a silent contest, the expression of a biological reaction against a language showing signs of anthropophagy.<sup>14</sup>

In Ltaif's poems, hunger translates a gestative and not yet formulated anger in the female body, which has always been taught to repress its emotions. On that account, hunger is evocative

of the "béance ambiguë," (Lionnet, Autobiographical 233) this hole which elicits an awakening, a coming to consciousness and outlines the split that is about to surface between the woman and language. By not providing her body with the necessary food/ language, she physically protests against "pathogenic" and destructive words, and starts a self-imposed starvation: "J'avais faim. Je refusais de manger," (Les Métamorphoses 123) or at least attempts to disrupt her feeding habits: "Je me nourris très mal ces temps-ci." In so doing, her body becomes the text upon which she "impresses" her revulsion against the external reality that language contains—the inhumane political procedures that are (were) ruling in some countries such as South Africa, Egypt, etc. Not to eat properly is symptomatic of her revulsion and corresponds to an emerging "semiotic" language of revolt (cf. Kristeva, Revolution 24): not yet able to communicate her anger in her "own words," her body serves as a signifier in order to **in-form** her disagreement. By refusing to eat, the narrator, as we saw above, directs her rebellion against language and more precisely against Arabic, her "mother tongue." Indeed, eating, hunger and above all feeding are related to the fostering attributes of the "mother," the one who gives birth and transmits "Her" history to the narrator: "Elle m'avait appris à lire, mais je ne savais plus lire que la cruelle passion des tendresses retenues, je savais lire et mes yeux ne se refermaient plus, depuis que je lisais son histoire" (Entre 13). The subject pronoun "Elle" does not refer (only) to her biological mother, but embodies the Mother land/language with a capitalized "E" so as to stress the power that land/language possesses and exerts upon her.

To speak about a mother tongue instead of a father tongue, and moreover to consider that mother tongue as a burden—"un fardeau"—from which she needs to liberate herself, sheds light upon the love-hate relationship she "nourishes" for her land and her Arabic language. The mother tongue, according to Ltaif, is the one that surrounded her before her birth, the one she

could hear from her mother's womb: "Celle que j'ai entendue bébé. Celle que j'ai parlée dans le ventre de ma mère"(Ltaif, "Écrire entre les langues"). Although Arabic turns out to be one of the colonial languages<sup>15</sup>--alongside German, Italian, English and French (Entre 17)--and an imposed language on the Lebanese people (cf. Bertrand 50), it is when immersed in the amniotic fluid that the writer/narrator first became familiar with it. That language circulates around and inside the mother's body, thence creating a connection between the internal, maternal space and the external world. To be born implies to leave the maternal womb and to come into the land--Cairo/Lebanon: the passage from one "cavity" to another (d'une antre à l'autre) happens with the cutting of the umbilical cord. All the same, language remains the common "bridge" between mother and land. To a certain extent, language, as a linkage between the prenatal and postnatal worlds, substitutes for the umbilical cord. In that sense, tongue and land can both be prefixed with the word "mother" and encapsulated in the subject pronoun "Elle." Nonetheless, the other maternal space (Cairo/Lebanon), far from offering the "whole" that as an unborn child she could receive in her mother's womb--"le tout qu'il recevait dans le ventre de sa mère: la vie, la maison, celle où il habite et celle de son corps, la nourriture, l'air, la chaleur, le mouvement, etc" (Irigaray, Le corps-à-corps 23)--deprives the narrator of her vital resources and prevents her "evolution." That break in her development--"Il m'était impossible de rire. D'exister" (Entre 45)--results from the "fratricide" war in Lebanon, which tears apart a people and spreads death. The womb transformed into a tomb does not provide food, except perhaps for a poisoned ersatz made of milk and blood; and its noxious atmosphere stops the narrator's "growing:"

Lorsque l'image de la nourrice a dominé entièrement votre vie. À ne plus vouloir me nourrir du tout. Et vouloir me laisser mourir de faim. Lorsqu'une histoire dévore le creux de votre histoire qui dévore une autre histoire qui dévore une autre histoire... jusqu'à vous perdre. ( 51)

Feeding (on) and/or dying, to be fed (up) with violence and refusing food characterizes the narrator's complex struggle for "weaning" herself from the Mother land/langue. Because the Arabic language bears "these commas of flesh" that punctuate life in war (Cooke 64), the narrator wants to separate herself from torturing and tortured words, words so similar to "Des maisons, des habitations / criblées de balles" (*Élégies du Levant* 19), and to cut the second umbilical cord: "Je sais, le plus dur à vivre est la rupture symbolique" (*Entre* 50). By breaking the links between herself and the Mother land/langue, she is looking for a way out of the never-ending (and satiated) story of "[la] mère dévoreuse." The hunger the narrator feels deep in her body--"la béance ambiguë"--tokens a chasm, a disconnection between her and the Mother land/langue that impedes the slightest exchange: "Il ne pouvait y avoir de dialogue. Ni même de partage. L'écart était trop grand entre elle et moi" (11). Hunger is her body crying out what Arabic words fail to convey--a message of peace--and a sign of estrangement with/in her mother tongue.

Alien/ated and exiled in "Arabic," in the matrix of this language, the narrator has to cut off her dependence on Her self and Her history. To leave in order to live translates the necessary and vital movement of her exile, an exile which allows an escape from the "Chaos matriciel." The linguistic and geographical departure figures here the painful gesture of "rupture" in an attempt to embrace life--in French and in Montreal. To leave and sever herself from a Mother land and langue, to bring with her the "M" (aime)--the split letter of m/other--in order to live, love and be loved in the other land and langue, articulates her desire for emancipation: for an exit into existence. As a means of affranchising (and even affrenchising) herself from the Arabic tongue, she chooses (to write in) French, her second and "foreign" language. In the other tongue and in a new matrix, "ventre de Montréal," she is about to be in touch with herself.

If the other tongue helps Ltaif recover from the wounds left by her past—as I will try to prove later on in this chapter—for Philip, the foreign language that is English remains a source of pain and doubt, a place of dichotomy whenever she, the Black Caribbean woman, speaks in the "White Anglo-Saxon" tongue. How could English embody her mother tongue when words are infused with a tradition of oppression upon and exclusion of women and people of colour? When words point at, look down upon and discriminate, how could a language mother a woman, and especially a Black woman? (*She Tries* 21-22). Through her close study of the English language, of its etymology and grammar, Philip pinpoints the chasm between the Black woman and her "father tongue," revealing in that way the negative image that comes back to her from the connotative framework of the English tongue. With a distorted reflection of her negroid features, the Black woman starts experiencing a split within language and herself. In order to examine the issue of "schizein" or chasm in Philip's writing, I will refer to "Mediations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheekbones" and to "Discourse on the Logic of Language." I will consider, in the first poem, how Philip reformulates and recontextualizes a self-interrogation vis-à-vis the English language. The second poem—and especially its central part—will set up the ground for a questioning of the notions of mother and father tongue.

### ***The Knot of Being***

In "Meditations," we can notice the transposition of an existential quest (who am I?) into a linguistic question of identity and belonging: in whose language/am I? In regard to the Black female "subject," the notion of being opens up a complex reflection on her ethnic background and on the social context in which she lives. In other words, the question of her being and/or calling her being into question requires an interpretation of her African heritage in a Western (English

speaking) society. Meditations on being do not only engage a dialectical process in order to discern solutions to the initial interrogation "who am I?", according to Western philosophical thinking (Philip, *Frontiers* 66), they also depend on a language which enables the utterance of self-questioning and validates (or not) the enunciation. For the statement "I am" to be recognized, "I" needs a language first to assert herself as a subject of enunciation, and then to fit her "being" into a linguistic construction. If "there is no way in which human society could exist without speech," as Chinua Achebe affirms (qtd. in Anyidoho 46), on an individual, genderized and "racialized" level, there is no way in which a Black woman could "be" without a language. Moreover, alongside the ontological and linguistic issue, with which the Black female subject is confronted, Philip spotlights a "dependence" (in fact as we will see further, an interdependence) between being and language, and in particular between **her** being and **someone else's** language. In this way, Philip exposes a fundamental chasm, a place of disjunction, where the Black woman "is entitled" to speak with/in the other's language (Godard ).

The use of the subject pronoun "I" opens wide a split: "Je est un autre," as Rimbaud put it (Harel, "La parole" 397). In fact, this sentence sounds particularly relevant to the position of an Afro-Caribbean woman, born and raised in an English speaking island (cf. *Frontiers* 9-10). Her "I" is not only **other**, it is **othered** in and by English--the other's language. Because the word that "kinks hair/ flattens noses/ thickens lips/ designs prognathous jaws/ shrinks the brain" strongly permeates the language, the Black woman stands in **contradiction** with that tongue. The slightest act of speaking (and writing) sets off a disconnection as the language she speaks (and writes) turns against her self. In addition to a thorough analysis of connotations, Philip "extends her detection of the discourses of racism to an examination of subjectivity and the production of aesthetic values" (Godard 168). For instance, by ending the poem "Meditations"

on the adjective "beautiful," Philip links her wondering about a discriminating mode of thinking, in an (ex) colonial language, to the Black woman's physical appearance: "In whose language/ Am I/ If not in yours/ Beautiful". The adjective, which closes the poem on an open indirect question, invites us to take carefully into account the creation of aesthetic criteria as a source of influence and prejudices. Not only do these criteria "help" to pre-determine and (dis-)qualify the Black woman, but they also promote and maintain restrictive stereotypes in order "to unleash the promise/ in ugly/ the absent in image" (Philip, "Testimony " 78-82).

The disjunction experienced by the Black female "subject" in English, is accentuated under the effect of a double speech: the one she intends to voice and the other one that voices her. For example, when uttering a sequence of words, in relation to her (non-) identity, such as "In whose language/ Am I/ Am I not," she positions herself in a binary structure that already denies and excludes her according to a historical and socio-linguistic tradition of gender and racial divisions. In fact, as the poem implies, she **can** not be or, to put it differently, she exists only in the negative and through negation.

"Meditations" is a fragmented poem. It "moves through negation of negation of negation, proceeding by lapse and bounds," (Godard 169) thus showing the Black woman's unstable position of enunciation. The beginning of the poem announces that instability when a voice, the Black female subject's, stammers a hypothesis and indicates at the same time the difficulty of verbalizing and of finding a balance between her utterance and the words: "If not/ If not/ If/ Not/ If not in yours/ In whose/ In whose language/ Am I" (52). The speaking subject hesitates to formulate "her" deformed thought, because she is impeded by the "not," the knot in her throat which tries to keep her silent and breaks the sentence, the knot of reminiscence—a "foreign anguish"—that strangles her words. Her voice is hung upon the other's language: "Am I

not I am yours" (53), a gallows which—when the poem is read aloud—makes the Black woman swing between the question of being and of not being:

In whose language

Am I  
 Am I not  
 Am I I am yours  
 Am I not I am yours  
 Am I I am (53)

The movement of the poet's meditations, with alternative (pseudo) questions, unveils her own unsteady reality between a father tongue and a non-existent mother tongue, and the absence of balance in the impossibility of speaking in her own name. In "Meditations," Philip puts the emphasis on the schizophrenic condition of the Black woman who is discovering her seclusion in and exclusion from Western aestheticism. As well, by exposing the "schizein"—the psychological experience of a split being—the Black female subject must contend with, Philip discloses a coming to consciousness: that of the Black woman struggling against her uneasiness with/in the English tongue.

### *A Logos of Anguish*

In the poem entitled "Discourse on the Logic of Language," we can observe a progression in the understanding of the "obsession" that is English for the Black woman writer. In this excerpt, Philip adopts a deductive mental process to unveil the fundamental differences between a mother and a father tongue. If "le langage est à la fois la seule façon d'être de la pensée, sa réalité et son accomplissement" (Kristeva, *Le langage* 12), can a father tongue translate her thoughts, albeit always inaccurately, without undermining them? How effective can they be in the Black woman's reality? These questions somehow echo the problem at stake in "Discourse," in other words, the absence of a mother tongue and its consequences on the Black

female speaking subject.

The poem, as the title suggests, is built upon a Logic of language, which entails an ability for reasoning, combining ideas and constructing an argument or a demonstration: "English/ is my mother tongue./ A mother tongue is not/ not a foreign lan lan lang/ language/ l/anguish/ anguish/ --a foreign anguish" (56). In her discourse, Philip relies on the principle of Logos to order the words and proceed by including (is) and excluding (is not). In this manner, she manages to prove the validity of her deductions. However, when her thoughts come across the word "foreign," the short sentences are interrupted, stumble over, and even choke at this linguistic sign--or harbinger of the past. Moreover, the **deformation** of "language" into "anguish" underlines "the pain of speaking when one's tongue has been amputated and one is left with a stump" (Godard 162). Deformed because foreign, her (non-) language sounds more and more disjunctive and regressive the moment she ponders over "her mother tongue:" "What is my mother/ tongue/ my mammy tongue/ my mummy tongue/ my momsy tongue/ my modder tongue/ my ma tongue?" (56). Here, her language turns into a kind of "aphasia," shows symptoms of a "regression that reverses the order of acquisition and ends up at the mere proffering of '[ma]', the word that in some way would be at once the first to be acquired and the last in the regression" (Derrida, *The Ear* 133, modification added). Nevertheless, for the Africo-Caribbean woman, the term "ma" already contains the germ of foreign anguish in English, as it was forced into her mother's mother's mother's mouth. According to Philip, a father tongue is grounded in a logic of oppression, the one that justifies gender or racial hierarchy according to "scientific researches:"

Dr. Broca believed the size of the brain determined intelligence; he devoted much of his time to "proving" that white males of the Caucasian race had larger brains than, and were therefore superior to, women, Blacks and other peoples of colour. (57)

By naming English a father tongue, Philip points at the confinement in Logic (and the Logic of

confinement), at her ban and banishment, and exposes that colonial history "which accounts for [her] being here today" (*Frontiers* 56) and for her speaking English as her first language. On the other hand, "her" mother tongue is **not**, it embodies absence, oblivion, loss and therefore it cannot (should not) be defined. Attempting a definition (or "deafinition"<sup>16</sup>) or suggesting an answer to the question "what is my mother tongue" may entail the risk—for the poet—of being trapped (one more time) in a Logic of Discourse. From the perspective of an Afro-Caribbean wo/man, to speak **about** a "lost" maternal language conjures up the past, brings up the remote and unknown experience of "being snatched away from [her/his] original matrix" (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 160) and from original languages. The maternal language remains the inaccessible tongue (Glissant 160), the reason and the quest for a "be/longing" (cf. *Frontiers* 24-25).

Regarding the mother tongue as an expression of and in exile, an essential distinction needs to be drawn between Ltaif's and Philip's works. Ltaif's poems unveil the poet/narrator's efforts to disentangle herself from the Arabic language. By changing her tongue and putting herself in a double exile—both linguistic and geographical—she is trying to recover from the witnessed horror. Thus, exile, that (partial) dis/connection from her maternal tongue and "original" land, corresponds to salvation and shelter. However, for the Afro-Caribbean woman, exile is always already inscribed in the Father tongue: "We sucking the milk of exile at we mammy bobbies we cutting we teeth on exile—exile in the very air we breathing" (Philip, *Frontiers* 10).

For both, Ltaif and Philip, the experience of exile in language (and in their respective places) promotes the split within their selves and simultaneously an awakening to their own reality. Their bodies speak first of and in exile through the image of *hunger* in Ltaif's poems and

the stammering voice in Philip's writing. While becoming aware of their inner chasm--and of the call of their bodies--Ltaif and Philip also turn into strangers to themselves. No longer estranged by the other (other's language), they enter a new stage, a time of self-destructuring ("destructuration du moi")<sup>17</sup>, in order to escape from an irreversible enclosure--that withdrawal into silence and self-annihilation. Throughout the transition toward self-destructuring, Ltaif and Philip transform their exiled position into "positions" of exile. They aim at freeing themselves from the passive and static position ascribed to them. Their coming to awareness allows a passage from the sentence (condemnation) "I am exiled" to the phrase (ex-expression) "I exile myself" (Major 11). Furthermore, with/in their bodies they can abandon their selves to the movement and the unknown: movement as opposed to the circumscribed and restricted place they are supposed to occupy, and the unknown being the adventure of language itself.

## **L2.Coming to Writing**

It is precisely with (through) their written bodies--those bearers of the patriarchal code--that they deliver their corporeal text in/to exile, in an attempt to unwrite and describe themselves with their (own) words and wounds. For Ltaif and Philip, their coming to writing requires an identification and recognition of the wound(s) in their selves: their writing becoming, in this condition, a writing between the flesh, deep into the open injury. Yet "To write," as Blanchot asserts "is to be absolutely distrustful of writing, while entrusting oneself to it," perhaps especially when the writer is a woman (qtd. in Lionnet, Post/colonial 127). Distrust becomes the rule in Ltaif's and Philip's works, as they cautiously put the(ir) words "in process/ on trial" to speak about and from their bodies. The object of their distrust (words) and their approach to a written language will be discussed in the following section. The proposed study will examine how their

coming to writing in/as (an other) exile may represent a means of dis/belonging ("départenance") from the mother tongue in Ltaif's poems and of "purification" in Philip's poetry and fiction.

***A French exit and Arabic stanza: writing an eruption***

In exile and writing in French, Ltaif is working on a possible reconciliation with life. In the passage from an Arabic tongue to the French language, in that crossing of tongues, she literally and symbolically has to "unlearn" an Arabic alphabet in order to totally involve herself in the French one. Unlearning intimates an undressing, a strip-tease, to free herself of the overwhelming images of violence curled around each letter of the Arabic alphabet: "La danseuse arabe se déshabille en moi, le jour où je dirai mon amour sans aucune gêne" (*Entre* 47). Unlearning as an undressing allows her whole body to come in touch with that other language, both familiar and foreign at the same time, to say what is/was unspeakable and unspoken in her mother tongue. By choosing to write in French, Ltaif strives to transpose the visions of pain--stored up in her memory--into "strange" words: "J'écris car je reste inconsolée/ dans le refus de la destruction" (*Élégies du Levant* 24). Writing in order to bring out the inner wound outlines an act of mourning, "deuil salutaire" (Lequin, "L'épreuve" 146), and of life, that necessary step to transcend death and keep on living: "Car il faut bien continuer de vivre" (*Entre* 39).

Such a transcendence can be carried out by transgressing the mother tongue and by embracing another language. That movement retraces her (re-)learning of existence, and even of "exit-stance." For Ltaif constantly re-enacts the search for a way out, a flight with and through foreign words, in a gesture of liberation from her monstrous mother land/langue: "Cet être que je combats. En moi. Hors de moi. En moi à nouveau" (*Entre* 42). When she writes in French, Ltaif succeeds in (or is on the verge of) signifying and verbalizing the symbolic rupture with

Arabic (and Lebanon); a changing of (symbolic) words, structure and grammar unmakes her from the maternal (and linguistic) pattern: "La vie prend un nouveau tournant. Ne repart plus sur les bases anciennes. Plus aucune dépendance. Plus rien ne compte à présent, que ce que je ferai de ma vie" (39). With/in the other language, she engages her life in a new direction, in a new "voice," from which her "I" may be in possession of her self. Thence, writing in French, for Ltaif, not only represents a means of putting the symbolic rupture into words, of conceiving and making it visible through her texts; it also enables her to write her/self down. On this point, we can perceive a strong tension between her self and feeling for the Lebanese land. Shifting from love to hate, she communicates her desire to attempt a "symbolic matricide" in her writing, since it constitutes "an act of self-emancipation and allows [the poet/narrator] to reach autonomy" (Lionnet, *Autobiographical* 201).<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the "scriptural" matricide seems to take place in the poet/narrator's body, since writing reiterates the "emptying process" and moves toward unlearning the maternal words. The few interferences and interruptions, which sometimes hold back the poems and narratives, are manifestations of the body—eruption and eructation: "Musulmans et Chrétiens s'entre-égorgent (ne quittez pas, restez-là, je vais vomir)" (*Les Métamorphoses* 61), "Il (the camel) babillait et vomissait"<sup>19</sup> (20).

These moments of rejection and repulsion denote the inner struggle, or perhaps more accurately, the wrestling, in a kind of "corps-à-corps," with the mother land/langue so as to reject a language of violence. Vomiting enacts the poet/narrator's refusal to articulate Arabic words; it "purges," disinfects her and contributes to her "dis/affection" from the maternal country and tongue. Such a biological a-version for (from) her maternal language translates her desire for splitting up with her bondage-like kinship, thus negating a certain inheritance. By vomiting her "mother tongue" into another language, the poet/narrator estranges the maternal words from

herself and inserts with/in her writing what Julia Kristeva calls "the stranger's madness," that "défi à la prégnance parentale" which echoes the motto "Ni père ni mère, ni Dieu ni maître" (*Étrangers* 4). In fact, just as her body rebels against an oppressive language by rejecting its contents, the poet/narrator voices her rebellion in French and vindicates her independence: "*On ne saura pas me dicter une conduite. Je suis libre et rebelle. Je ne saurai être Sage. Dans ce lieu choisi pour renaitre de personne*" (*Entre* 35). Without a father, the epitome of the Law, and without a mother, the "commuter" of Order, she does not feel indebted to anyone nor compelled to follow the principles edicted by the Law: no threat nor thread may hinder her movement in/to a new language. Not being wise any longer ("Sage" with a capitalized "S") suggests her **going astray** from moral, religious, social but also linguistic and grammatical rules and structures. According to an Arabic proverb, wisdom resides in the Arabic language (cf. Kristeva, *Le langage* 129), therefore the breach between her and her mother tongue guarantees her freedom and keeps her safe from the "straight jacket" of Wisdom.

### ***"Départenance" between exile and belonging***

Furthermore, Ltaif's craving for being (re-) born out of "nobody" finds in writing a possible place for a self-(re-)creation and an access to life without condition. Writing for the sake of her (re-)birth confirms the restless quest for an absolute dis/belonging or "phantasm of départenance" (Rosello 17). The concept of "départenance," as opposed to "belonging," conveys "a gesture of departure, a deliberate renunciation of partnership, **an always defeated attempt not to belong**" (Rosello 17, emphasis added). However, a nuance should be brought to Mireille Rosello's statement. It seems to me that the difficult and painful dis/connection between the poet and her mother land/langue--through writing--does not so much infer "an always defeated gesture

not to belong," but involves instead a **repeated attempt**<sup>20</sup>: a constant re/writing about and around "Elle." *Départenance*, in the sense of departure, can also be related to the emancipatory and emptying gesture (undressing and vomiting) we mentioned earlier. "Départenir," if such a verb existed, would describe the action of leaving everything attached to her and attaching her self to a prescribed "role,"<sup>21</sup> of ex-piring her self and dying there in the mother land/langue as an ultimate renunciation of herself, but would also intimate a will to hold (on) (*tenir*). Nonetheless, "holding (on)" would not imply a grip, yet instead a "stubborn" desire for living after the ravage or tempest, for standing back in the other land/langue, and for being reborn: "Il a fallu que je me noie une première fois, pour que je ressorte suffocante de l'eau, à demi morte déjà toute petite. Frissonnante et **dégoûtée**" (*Entre* 41, emphasis added).

"*Départenance*," in the context of Ltaif's poetry, encompasses the narrator's feeling of repulsion and attraction for the mother land/langue, and signifies a rebirth in a state of deep "repugnance" (*dégoûtée*): "Elle, trois cents ans plus âgée que moi. Moi, quelques milliers d'années manquant, qui nous séparent et qui nous lient à bras repoussants, pour nous maintenir éloignées" (26). This repugnance corresponds to an underlying e-motion that comes up in the text and translates the narrator's confusion. Writing her confusion in a refusal of fusion with the maternal land and tongue, this "eructation" of words, is also a way of vomiting her/self in order not to belong. However, deep inside herself, the e-motion, or the rhythm of Ltaif's poems, remains close to an inspiration coming from far away: a Phoenician inspiration. That rhythm carried in her body enables her to depart from Lebanon and the Arabic language, and to bring with her a breath of life extracted from the past of the Arabic world.

Maybe, the rhythm as a whisper from an unknown past can help the woman to re-compose her self and retrieve her voice; perhaps, it could reconcile her with a language that hurts;

and, as far as an Afro-Caribbean woman is concerned, it could create a place of belonging in an (ex-)colonial language and of reconnection with her own body.

***Mother tongue: an intestinal struggle***

Body, bondage and language, or rather a tongueless body bound to the English language is the site of Philip's questioning. There, the writer is sounding the English tongue from within her body, investigating a foreign text in her corporeal space and exploring the contradictions (between her and "the other's tongue") to counter-act and act upon them. Her body, as the locus of contradictions, needs to be rewritten by unwriting and expelling the estranging words of her estrangement. All through her poems, Philip undertakes a re-membering of her body's memory, which seems to have preserved an African trace:

When the African woman came to the New World she brought with her nothing but her body and all the memory and history which her body could contain. The text of history and memory was inscribed upon and within the body which would become the repository of all the tools necessary for spiritual and cultural survival. (Philip, "Managing the Unmanageable" 298)

Therefore, reading and listening to the body requires a readjustment of the "eye/I" and "ear" to the silence of an African echo, and a transposition of that soundless parole into (and upon) the English tongue: an acquired taste. As for Philip, the coming to writing is portrayed in terms of turmoil within the Black woman's body and of rejection--which differs somewhat from Ltaif's. The work (and to some extent labour) that operates in and through the body, in reaction to language, will be analysed in the "Cleenis" section of Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence and in a selection of poems extracted from She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks.

In Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, the Black female traveller

experiences silence(s) among a variety of "African" communities--and in particular among women--who challenge her with riddles and ordeals. The communities, who are called after anagrams of silence(s): SINCEEL, ECNELIS, LENSECI, SCENILE, CESLIENS, CLEENIS and NEECLIS, give the traveller the opportunity to come across her "many words and silences" and to start a journey into language. Her passage into "the land of Cleenis" illustrates a step towards self-(re) appropriation with/in an (ex-)colonial language. There, the traveller undergoes a symbolic "cleansing" which is performed in "the sweat-lodge:" a hut for "sweating words." Before entering the sweat-lodge, the traveller has to choose three words to ponder, and for that purpose, she picks out: "Plunge," "thrust," and "cut." When she is finally shut in the hut, the three words stir up an intestinal disturbance:

How they fled--rushing from all orifices and openings, words evacuating, escaping--fleeing me--a diarrhoea, ceaseless and unbidden--their harsh, jagged edges ripping and tearing their way through my soft, secret folds--I hadn't conceived them so how could I birth them? but still they came, a torrent of words rushing and pouring through me. I retched--vomiting words, words, and still more words, a noxious pus ran from my ears and nostrils, and through my pores I sweated words . . . (43)

This body, oozing and pouring out words from all its orifices, calls up the image of illness and contamination. "Diarrhoea" and "vomiting" are symptoms of a biological disorder after absorbing a "strange," "impure" element, which upsets the proper functioning of the organism. The English language, as a pathogenic agent, sets up an inner decomposition of the body, which cannot/will not digest the foreign words: the process of decaying would thus result from an impossible, incompatible mixture [mélange] between the Black woman's body and English words (cf. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 174).

Mixture [mélange] signifies here a contamination inside her whole body and expanding beyond it. The infectious fluidity that overflows the borderlines of her body, wears away and even utterly annihilates the distinction between inside and outside, life and death. The words that

have infiltrated her body—the matrix where life originates— introduce death and simultaneously initiate the collapsing of borders. Having no control over the outpouring of words, the traveller becomes the **object** of action: "How they fled . . . words evacuating, escaping—fleeing me," and the **abject**, since her body **becomes**: "l'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte" (Kristeva, Pouvoirs 10). Her position as object/abject, under the effect of an imposed language, prevents her from "birthing" the words—as birthing suggests an action, a creation or a work of art. As well, biological reactions such as diarrhoea and vomiting are stimulated by the words, not yet by the woman. These unassimilated words constitute a food which is an other for her "I" (cf. Kristeva, Pouvoirs 10-11). Consequently, when sweating and throwing out words, the traveller does not expulse, spit off nor throw out her self (cf. Pouvoirs 11) in order to engender her "I." During her experience in the sweat-lodge her "I" remains an unknown and the passive element "I" has (always) been with/in the English language. Given the correlation between linguistic and social structures, this "I" illustrates the Black woman's already designated place in the Western world.

What the sweat-lodge symbolises here, is a re-verses scene of the linguistic rape and alienation of the Black female's body, and an aching passage towards dis/alienation: "their [the words'] harsh, jagged edges ripping and tearing their way through my soft, secret folds." While going through the decomposition of her body, the traveller discovers the "impossibility of her being" and therefore "l'abjection de soi" (Kristeva Pouvoirs 12). This "abjection de soi" arises with the awareness of an initial loss [perte inaugurale] and lack: that of the African language. All the same, at this stage of decaying and of her symbolic death (abjection), she is on the threshold of her self-recovery in order to excavate her silence. By the end of the ordeal, only three words still occupy her body: "That was all I had—birth, death, and **in between** silence" (43, emphasis added). Of these remaining words, silence truly belongs to her: "My words were not really mine-

-bought, sold, owned and stolen as they were by others. But silence!—such devalued coinage to some—no one cared about it and it was mine" (43). Silence, as an underground language, a language unheard by the other, transports the African inspiration, the breath and whisper of the "lost" mother land/langue that push out the foreign words ["as if hunted, and maybe they were-- by Silence" (43), that blow between them--between life and death--and embrace them in a rhythm-- "ce rythme qui vient d'ailleurs." Henceforth, regarding the above reading of the sweat-lodge and the woman's coming to writing, we may ask ourselves: isn't that experience in the sweat-lodge, the experience of writing itself? "Doesn't the writer begin writing at the moment words escape him [or her], when 'familiar' words become 'once again' unknown? Doesn't he [or she] write in order to translate silence--without breaking it--into writing?" (Derrida, The Ear 145).<sup>22</sup>

## **II.A Space to Write**

### **II.1.Melancholy**

The experience of writing, portrayed as an outpouring of estranged and estranging words, corresponds to the exile of and in language that Philip and Ltaif are dis-covering. In their poems, the first gesture of writing is represented by a body language, which articulates silence and rhythm in reaction to repression--to the woman's condition in the Arabic world and the Black woman's position in an ex-colonial language. Writing by means of the body, through repulsion and rejection of the m/other tongue, hints at a psychological exile that prompts a physical displacement, a departure or flight from the is/land: Tobago/ Egypt and Lebanon. The geographical exile also represents and reproduces a corporeal expression inscribing an in/visible story on a new territory.

On the blank space of the page, Philip and Ltaif succeed in conflating images of their respective double exiles and in retrieving their voice(s) and self/(ves) in the very chasm or "schizein" emphasized by their wanderings. It is precisely on these two main inscriptions of exile—upon the mind and the land—that I will comment in Ltaif's Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar and Entre les fleuves. I will look at the schizophrenic effect of wandering and introduce the idea of melancholy<sup>23</sup> as a means of self-writing and salvation. My purpose is to study the birthing of a feminine "parole" among autobiographical elements between two places—Montreal and Lebanon—two languages and two time periods—past and present. In Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language," I will examine how the disposition of the poem on the page represents a spatial and symbolic exile, by making visible the Black woman's split between two continents and languages, and by stressing the emergence of her melancholic voice.

### *Hearing exile: a fear of collapse*

In Montreal, Ltaif's narrator, introduced to a different country and immersed in the accent and musicality of the Québécois language, feels shaken by this oral sign of exile, what Simon Harel designates as "un exil langagier" ("La parole" 385). Although the French language belongs to her culture and may be perceived as one of her foster mother tongues in Lebanon, in Montreal she is constantly surrounded by the Québécois tonality. Her linguistic experience in this new city can be compared to that of Roland Barthes after his first contact with the Japanese tongue:

"La langue inconnue, dont je saisis pourtant la respiration, l'aération émotive en un mot la pure signifiante, forme autour de moi, au fur et à mesure que je me déplace, un léger vertige, m'entraîne dans son vide artificiel, qui ne s'accomplit que pour moi: **je vis dans l'interstice, débarassé de tout sens plein.** (L'empire 18, emphasis added)

In Ltaif's situation, the uncommon linguistic inflection keeps on reminding her of exile and emphasizes the strangeness of the city (in which she has to re-learn life). "Sounding differences,"

just like the unborn baby in the matrix of Montreal, the narrator exists in the interstice, this in-between (*entre*) and den-like place (*antre*) of the city. Because of the tonality which penetrates through the auricle of her ear and forces her to listen to the accents of exile, the narrator feels dizzy and frightened of being dismembered and of falling in an unfathomable emptiness (cf. Harel, "La parole" 383): "J'apprehende ce lieu où se posent mes pieds," (*Les Métamorphoses* 45) "Pourquoi mes pieds tremblent-ils? Pourquoi suis-je tellement effrayée d'être en exil?" (*Entre* 8). In hearing the Québécois language, the narrator undergoes crises of vertigo—defined as an impression of being swallowed by the depths of the unknown—which are amplified by physical exile and the trans/lation of her body into the Montreal context: "Montréal me happe soudain dans son affreux gouffre" (*Les Métamorphoses* 50).

A change of place and language occurs in the space in-between, this unsettling ground that threatens, or so it seems, to give way at any time. Hence, the narrator's fear of standing on the land of exile; a fear which Donald Winnicott associates with "la crainte d'une hémorragie identitaire qui se traduirait par une forte angoisse de disparition" (qtd. in Harel, "L'exil" 27). Moments of vertigo result from the trepidation of losing the cultural and linguistic components of her identity, and of vanishing among the unfamiliar national landscape. In the light of Winnicott's psychoanalytic studies about what he calls "la peur de l'effondrement," we can read the narrator's hesitation to put her feet on Québécois soil as a dread of self-decomposition. Indeed, feet—this part of the body in touch with the soil (and the roots of territory) and therefore, symbolically, of identity<sup>24</sup>—are supposed to guarantee balance and stability for the self. Nonetheless, with her feet on **foreign** ground, she runs the risk of losing her self, should her Oriental roots not survive in the Occidental land.

This fear of collapsing is also strongly connected with the silent influence that the urban

and linguistic environment exerts upon the narrator's body; in other words, her corporeal and sensitive envelope gradually receives the rhythm of that other land/ language:

Montréal me vient sous les pas, et cet Hiver, et cette terre que je ne connais pas, et ces arbres et ces parcs que je ne connais pas et je m'asseois sous un arbre au parc La Fontaine, et j'écoute ce que dit l'arbre du parc La Fontaine, et j'écoute les eaux du lac artificiel. (Les Métamorphoses 45)

Ears and feet epitomize the sensitive organs that receive the reality of exile and communicate another significance of being and conception of life to her body: here, she is about to become—if she is not already—someone else.

Ears, the gates open to the external sounds of the world, suggest the possibility of hearing (almost) simultaneously Eastern and Western words, wherever her feet will carry her. Through these two orifices, different languages impress her mind and initiate a zone of disturbance, a cacophonic or Babel-like area, where her exile resounds. When hearing familiar and unfamiliar phonemes, her sensory memory is challenged and starts projecting snapshots of her past on her mental screen. Thence, the slightest sound calls back "recepts" of Lebanon in her mind. This particular corporeal and mental agitation can be linked to the experience of a sonorous exile that Barthes describes as "a seismic disturbance" (L'empire 12). Like an underground current, images of the past rise to the forefront of her mind and overthrow the present, when a sound or a word conjures up scenes of horror: "J'entends une bouche obscure en moi./ Une de mes mémoires revient et insiste./ Un hiéroglyphe égyptien ou bien encore/ des bombardements" (Les Métamorphoses 49).

In Ltaif's poems, references to sound, sight and feet express the impact of the external and foreign surroundings on the narrator's body, and highlight the role of the sensitive organs, which transmit the past's insistence. Because feet are the first part of the body to be immediately in touch with the new city, they can be compared to a sensitive organ. As well, with such an

emphasis put on senses in her "poetical" world, Ltaif elaborates writing as the embodiment of an organic substance: "Lorsqu'on écrit, on est en relation directe avec la matière vivante qu'est l'écriture," the poet states in "Écrire le rythme avant les mots" (65). Writing thus serves to translate the stimuli and feelings, as received by the organs, and resembles a seismograph recording the conflictual meetings between (at least) two linguistic strata and their emotive power: between her Arabic rhythm and French words. As a seismograph and an "electrocardiogram," her writing traces and reproduces the beat and movement of her two hearts, and exposes the split, the apex of pain at the top of which her (narrator's) existence is about to collapse: "Et regarde Montréal./ Et je vois double: l'Est et l'Ouest./ Je prends ma tête entre mes mains/ Je crois voir Beyrouth./ Des lambeaux entre les deux./ Et l'horreur et l'exil,/ une guerre entre mes deux coeurs" (*Les Métamorphoses* 48). In drawing a simile between Ltaif's writing and an electrocardiogram, we can give prominence to the "two hearts" mentioned above, which symbolise her unconditional and yet paradoxical love for both Montreal and Lebanon. From this image of a double vital organ--propelling the breath and current throughout the lines of her poems--we are introduced into a writing determined by successive separations. Two hearts and a double vision communicate an experience of exile with/in a writing that evolves according to the female narrator's heartbeats and heartbreaks. Therefore, in order to write about exile, Ltaif inserts many sequences and symbols of splitting that sometimes echo each other through a homophonic play.

### *Di/vision: movements of the eyes/I*

To speak about homophony allows us to focus one more time on the importance of hearing--a sense which opens up a division of meanings. For instance, if we give ear to the

sentence "Je vois double," the verb "vois" produces a polysemy (cf. Verduyn, "Je voi(e)s double(s)" 98-105), since we can perceive within it the words "voix," (voice) and "voie" (path). With the first homophone "voix", we guess at a double narrative, or schizophrenic voice; the second homophone "voie(s) double(s)" indicates the various readings and interpretations that Ltaif's poems present. However, I will concentrate mainly on a correlation between "vois" and "voix," two words referring to senses (sight and hearing) which end up creating a plurality of signifying routes (voies). The play on sounds with "je vois(/x) double(s)" suggests a double sight and a double subject: the narrator and the autobiographical voice. Thereupon, the narrator, as the writer's double, becomes a mouthpiece for Ltaif's rebellion and anger: "Car je ne peux pas oublier qu'écrire pour moi a débuté par une première révolte. Celle de la guerre, elle se poursuit dans une lutte contre la condition des femmes, et surtout des femmes dans le monde arabe" ("Écrire le rythme" 66). Therefore, in the very "schizein" of the "I," Ltaif succeeds in verbalizing the experiences of suffocation and death, and in speaking against a political violence. In a lyrical dance of doubles, the split between writer/ narrator offers an opening, the liberation of a woman's voice which wanders in the meandering of a French-Québécois language and tries to assert itself. A wandering begins between two languages (French/Québécois and Arab), a linguistic space in which the poet attempts to free herself from the weight of memories: "Ma mémoire est aussi lourde qu'une/ grappe de raisin, une fleur de grenade, une guerre à mille têtes" (Les Métamorphoses 50).

### *To live a Mother Tongue: crying Isis*

When writing in a zone of double linguistic influence, Ltaif keeps her self separated from the narrative "I" which, on one hand, enables her to empty her body of the murderous words, and

on the other hand, helps her to transcend the unspeakable--after another struggle with/in the French/Québécois language. Because in that other tongue the transposed sounds and signs of the Lebanese war do not accurately evoke the same reality, Ltaif needs to infuse a grating tonality into the Québécois musicality in order to depict her feelings, grief and cry, and to explore the pain with a new "parole." In order to share an emotional language, that of her "Orient intérieur"--by writing in another tongue and speaking through another's mouth (the narrative "I")--and defeat a secluding silence and deafness, the poet plays on double meanings. Once the "cold war," to borrow Kristeva's expression, with a new language is settled, and the phase of "Ne rien dire, rien n'est à dire, rien n'est dicible" (*Étrangers* 29) is surpassed, the poet can handle the other tongue to open her heart(s) and ponder over her existence and woman's condition.

From the spatial and linguistic in-between, both void and fluid, Ltaif intensifies and amplifies the strength and value of her speech, with words rebounding from one border to another and echoing her suffering. Writing in between helps to fill in the holes and wounds by turning language into an outpouring, in fact into a logorrhea where words become tears overflowing the text. The passage about "Isis," in *Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar*, brings into relief a significant example of what constitutes a "liquid" tongue through which the double linguistic components (French and Arabic) meet:

Les Larmes d'Isis n'étaient rien  
que la crue du Nil.  
Les Lamentations n'étaient rien  
que la crue du Nil.  
L'écriture n'est rien que la crue du Nil

J'y ai cru, et j'y ai cru tant  
que j'écrivais la crue du Nil, comme  
je vous l'écris un peu maintenant.  
Comme ces cris qui ne vous retiennent plus.  
Comme vous qui partez et vous qui ne revenez plus.  
Comme lorsque je ne suis plus là et que je suis

en exil . . . (52)

By alluding to a female mythological character, such as the ancient goddess Isis, Ltaif draws on her Egyptian culture to utter the pain of and in exile, and to expand the theme of wandering. As well, Isis, the goddess "in search of her dismembered brother (/husband), Osiris" (cf. Lionnet, Autobiographical 117) personifies an extreme sorrow and unspeakable suffering, which is brought to the fore by the reference to the Nile. In this excerpt, the river constitutes a metaphor of the pain growing and welling up in a crescendo emphasized by repetitions and "echo-rhymes": "J'y ai cru/ La crue du Nil." A sonorous suffering is tearing and rending the poem with the recurrent guttural sounds: "écriture," "cru," "la crue," "écris," "comme ces cris." The throaty utterance attunes the semantic signs to the poet's grief. Henceforth, the floods of the Nile intimate both the rising of tears and the flow of writing, from which a cry, a scream grates on the ear. Like the Nile, writing carries the narrator away from word to word as it follows the vibration echoing in the "parole vide" (Barthes, L'empire 106). Void does not involve an absence of meaning, but on the contrary draws forth a mirror-image which, according to an Oriental saying: "ne saisit rien mais ne repousse rien," since "Il [le miroir] reçoit, mais ne conserve pas: le miroir ne capte que d'autres miroirs, et cette réflexion infinie est le vide même (qui, on le sait est la forme)" (106). By a juxtaposition between echo-effect and mirror-image, I am alluding to the omnipresence of the sensitive organs—ear and eye—that influence Ltaif's writing and provide double, even multiple senses to her words: "Les mots dépassent leur sens premier," the poet asserts "Les mots disent plus" ("Écrire le rythme" 63). As an example, if we pay attention to the word "l'écriture" when reading the poem aloud, we can find "l'écrit tue," (writing kills) and "les cris tuent" (cries kill) with the last syllable fading away: a writing and crying in order to condemn silence and deafness to death.

### *Transcribing and trance-crying*

Thence, Ltaif's writing represents a means of transcribing her pain into Québécois sounds and signs, as well as a means of converting her Arabic culture into an Occidental tradition. In the following sequence, transcription takes up a double function: "Et je m'égare et j'essaie d'autres chants./ Je vous sens toujours là,/ même si je ne vous vois pas.// Alors je transcris/ l'enseignement qui coule de vous," (52) first to preserve an Arabic rhythm and memory, in the other tongue, then to voice a lamentation ("cri") into a trance-like state ("transe"). In transcribing, and "trance-crying," her inner split and the separation of her two hearts between Montreal and Beirut, Ltaif's writing is endlessly animated by two linguistic rivers, as the title of her second book indicates: Entre les fleuves. "Entre les fleuves," alludes to the Saint-Laurent and the Nile, and confirms the water imagery, which already strongly permeates Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar. Throughout those two books, we are led into a writing, or zone of confrontation, where Oriental rhythm and Western words stimulate a contra-diction and sense of disorientation.

Before progressing in this analysis, it is important to keep in mind the series of divisions-- spatial, linguistic and verbal (the narrative and autobiographical "I")--including the focus on sensitive organs (ears, eyes and "feet") that impress and affect the poet's memory and conception of "identity" in exile. The scattering effect, subsequent to exile, is rendered by the flow of the poet's writing that transports various cultural components of her being. These very components are responsible for the restless linguistic currents, or rivers, which transgress her writing. All the same, writing as a transcription of her cultural heritages allows a to and fro movement between Montreal, Egypt and Lebanon and stresses the confusion and disorientation of and in words. It is indeed in the confluence of the rivers that the semantic signs (French words) are impregnated

with plural meanings so that they might become extra-vagrant and trigger a confusion of senses.

***Melaina Kole: a name of exile***

Similar to rivers flowing into the sea, the work on language and words lead (back) to the sea (mer)/ mother (mère) (cf. Verduyn, "Nouvelles" 44), to this fertile in-between and den-like space where the poet's tongue(s) draw(s) on its (/their) significance and potentialities. Thus, writing between the Saint-Laurent and the Nile induces a writing from within the sea and the mother's womb, a space of creation and separation as "Une loi existe, et c'est la loi de la séparation originelle des cellules. Des cellules se séparent pour donner vie. Pour se multiplier" (*Entre* 50). This division of cells reminds us of the baby's development in the matrix, of the conception of a child, which is often compared to the emergence of a literary work; hence the connection between division and creation. Nonetheless, this law of separation, in the in-between (the maternal space of the sea and womb), implies both a movement toward the mother/sea and an effort to split from her/it, therefore producing a conflictual and potentially lethal climate in Ltaif's writing. That deadly atmosphere is underlined by the poet's desire to break from the mother/sea, that source of life, which subsumes another confrontation with death (cf. Verduyn, "Je voi(e)s double(s)" 45). Consequently, when writing (about) exile and the separation from the mother, Ltaif describes a meeting and struggle against death through her double, a narrative voice named Melaina Kole in *Entre les fleuves*:

Je m'appelle Melaina Kole. C'est le nom de mon double caché. Vous auriez pu me nommer Hécate. C'est un nom que je ne me suis pas choisi. Vous auriez pu me nommer Kora. Mais mon vrai nom est Melaina Kole. C'est ma vraie raison de vivre ici. (26)

This voice rising between the rivers corresponds to a passage, a transition from one country to another, from one culture to another, and delivers a speech tinged with melancholy. When

claiming that her (narrator's) real name is Melaina Kole (black bile), Ltaif corroborates the melancholic (under)tone we notice in the section on Isis. As her inspiration comes from the in-between space (maternal space), from a place where her Western and Eastern cultures both converge and diverge, her words are imprinted with and immersed in the black bile, in the ink of the narrator's black eyes: "*Et mes yeux noirs si noirs, les vois-tu mon amour, je les coule, je les coule dans ces eaux au goût de sang qui déversent et débordent, hors de leurs rives hors de leurs rives...*" (Les Métamorphoses 53). The in-between space constituting a place off for melancholy confers a privileged area for creation since "La création littéraire est cette aventure du corps et des signes qui porte témoignage de l'affect de la tristesse, comme marque de la séparation et comme amorce de la dimension du symbole" (Kristeva, Soleil 32-33). Thereupon, from this space, a melancholic voice rises to speak about (her) death, about the past (East) and the present (West), and to exorcize at the same time the lethal attachment to a mother/land. In fact, if in Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, a melancholic mood strongly permeates the poems, first by opening on a question of lamentation: "comment retrouver le rythme, un rythme autre/ que celui d'une lamentation,"(10) then by referring to Gérard de Nerval, a famous "melancholic" writer (cf. Kristeva, Soleil 151-182): "J'ai lu/ l'Histoire de la Reine de Gérard de Nerval" (36). In Entre les fleuves, the poet succeeds in shaping her pain into a melancholic form (Melaina Kole). By pointing to her suffering under the name of Melaina Kole, Ltaif does not only "[met] en musique sa douleur," (Bertrand 30) she also psalmodies a symbolic separation from her pain and double: "*Adieu, Melaina Kole./ Garde avec toi le secret/ de mon Orient intérieur*" (Entre 30). In so doing, her French/Québécois tongue, following an Arabic rhythm, orients toward a polyphony and polysemy that accentuate the melancholic voice. In the literary space, between Montreal and Lebanon, writing (about) melancholy represents a means (voice/voix) of salvation for Ltaif. With

words she has access to a haunting past and "installe la Chose ou l'objet perdus en soi, s'identifiant d'une part aux aspects bénéfiques et d'autre part aux aspects maléfiques de la perte" (Kristeva, Soleil 177). By identifying her self with loss and pain (Lebanon and women's condition) and inscribing them on a textual body, she is able to inject an image of death into her writing—as she externalizes the mortifying past—from which she can detach her self. Henceforth, in Ltaif's poems, the biological and biographical law of separations, which is initiated by her double heart and double vision, opens on a plurality of signs and sounds, exhibits her scattered self between Montreal and Lebanon, and lets sound a melancholic voice of exile announcing a turning point in her life.

## **II.2. Body Language/age**

In Philip's poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language," we are confronted with a different treatment of separation—as felt in a linguistic and spatial exile—which invites us to examine a melancholic mode of writing in relation to the split of the poem on the page.

Philip uncovers her grief for a lost mother tongue by inscribing it in splits and vacant spaces. Separated into three parts on the left page, the poem signifies a writing located between two worlds (the absent Africa and the West) and two time periods (past and present), from which the oblivion of African languages originates. The theme of division is presented in the two sections entitled "Edict I" and "Edict II," which compose "an (invented) archival document from colonialist history" (Carr 74), and stipulate the separation of African slaves. Thus, the poem underscores the practice of what was regarded in the past as a legal division of Black human beings into "many ethno-linguistic groups" to prevent "rebellion and revolution" (56). Initially, this procedure was supposed to keep the African slaves both passive and dumb, and triggered an

inner death, which turns out to be "a crypt in [their] bod[ies] for the dead object," in other words for the dismembering of African tongues (cf. Derrida, *The Ear* 58). The two "Edicts" evoke the age of slavery and Western trade in the African continent. This remote memory provokes the author's mourning. In opposition to these sections, on the left side of the page and vertically inscribed, we discover a feminine language, a literal mother('s) tongue as the text calls attention to an intimate relationship between a mother and her newborn daughter. The mother's tongue "moves" upon the baby in order to "TONGUE[] IT CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY" (56); through this gesture of purification we can read a will to erase traces of any Western languages on the daughter's corporeal envelope. Infused with sensuality and sensitivity, the text shows us an attempt to dis/embody the (Father's) law from the child's carnal surface, and demonstrates the resistance of a tongue directly in touch with the daughter's skin. The communion between mother and child outlines the emergence of a feminine language by "the eruption of the body into the text," since "the body insist[s] on being present throughout" the poetical section (Philip, "Managing the Unmanageable" 298). For that particular reason, the use of space in Philip's writing pinpoints the importance and persistence of a body language. In order to read the mother/daughter's sequence, we have to turn the book horizontally, the poem thus proving an actual experience of body language (cf. Philip, "writing a memory" 227). Such a spatial arrangement allows the Black woman's silence to manifest itself through the body; there is no cry, no guttural sound here to express the pain, but an expansion of a corporeal presence acting against the linguistic and physical oppression, promoted by the two edicts.

However, the vertical position of the mother/daughter's sequence hinders immediate access to the written words, and hints at a feminine language which interrupts the "normal"

organisation of sentences. We can observe a radical split on the page between two linguistic instances or idiolects: on the "Right"-hand side, a (colonialist) law of divisions which imposes silence, and on the left-hand side a feminine and corporeal speech which acts against an estranging "white colonial tradition" (Philip, *Frontiers* 26). In this context, Philip's essay "Who's listening" is helpful for a better understanding of the symbolic significance that the textual and spatial divisions bring into relief. She identifies two fundamental archetypes which have deeply influenced her writing: "John-from-Sussex. . . the **substance** of any colonial education," who stands over her right shoulder (*Frontiers* 26, emphasis added) and "Abiswa. . . representative of a certain collective race memory of the African," who stands over her left shoulder (27). Of these two archetypes, she specifies that "Bridging the split that [they] represent is a difficult process: each represents what the other is not--each is, so to speak, the other's Other. A dialogue between the two is essential."

### *A semiotic and symbolic discourse*

In "Discourse," Philip does not so much sketch a dialogue as work out two monologues, and two borderlines (here the Edicts and the mother/daughter sequence have to be distinguished) that delineate an in-between space for the central voice/path. Regarding Philip's description of the two main cultural and historical factors which have an impact on her work--as in the two archetypes mentioned above--we can study the mother/daughter sequence as being inspired by Abiswa's mores, and the "Edicts" as texts issued by the colonial tradition of "John-from-Sussex." Thus, these two separate monologues are evocative of two specific languages and two continents. By designating these linguistic instances as specific, I am thinking about the effects of semiotic and symbolic currents which drive through the texts.

In order to elucidate the terms semiotic and symbolic, as well as the perspective in which they can be applied to Philip's poem, I will rely on Kristeva's Revolution in Poetic Language. In her book, Kristeva underscores the fact that "the subject is always **both semiotic and symbolic**," that "no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is [therefore] necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (24). The poem—the mother/daughter part and the edicts—as a signifying system is thus worked through these "two modalities of the signifying process" (Kristeva 24). Nonetheless, the semiotic and symbolic intensity involved in the two opposed poetical sections varies dramatically. In the edicts, we can take notice of an authoritative decision, of a textual inscription of the law which results in the destruction of African languages. Law, being "the term reserved for the symbolic," conveys "the act of judgement" so as to guarantee the safeguarding of society" (Kristeva 240).

The most radical way of maintaining security in a colonial context requires, according to the edicts, a physical maiming of rebellious African slaves, that is to say the "removal of the tongue." A symbolic function of the legal section manifests itself through the image or evocation of a literal cutting of the tongue. As a consequence of this organic mutilation, we come to realise the physical reality and consequence of a lost African language. The symbolic underlines the representation of a linguistic split responsible for that loss, first by offering a reason for mixing individuals of various "ethno-linguistic groups" (Edict I), then by justifying the use of physical violence (Edict II). If the symbolic, as Kristeva declares, "is any joining, any bringing together that is a contract, one that either follows hostilities or presupposes them--and, finally, any exchange, including an exchange of hostility" (Revolution 49), we do indeed witness a tension between English and an "African silence," that is between the symbolic and the semiotic investment in Philip's poem. What is meant here is that the symbolic, as the foundation of Law--

which orders the removal of the tongue—exposes the "mutilated sensitive organ" of the author herself, since it is with and through a linguistic "prosthesis" (her English language) that she can speak and write about the dis/membering of African languages (cf. Kristeva, *Étranger* 28).

The symbolic conveys the power of edicts to control a Black woman's body and memory: the beginning of amnesia and "white-washing," of muteness and silence. If the legal section of the poem indicates the "absence" of African tongues, the mother/daughter sequence brings into focus the sensitivity of a tongue, which allows physical contact as a mode of communication, and reveals how the "absent" tongue "inscribes its own resistance" (Godard 172). When going through the left lateral part, which may be designated as a "maternal poem," we can listen to "a body [that] speaks when silence is" (172). No words are exchanged; instead there is a touch "tongue to tongue" between mother and daughter, until the mother starts "BLOWING WORDS--HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE--INTO HER DAUGHTER'S" (58). Words thus become much more than semantic signs; they seem to provide a vital substance to the daughter's body and an influx of a(n African) matrilineal language. To a certain extent, we could assert that the particularity of (these) this women's tongue(s) reside(s) in the organic characteristics of their words, which diffuse an inner linguistic current within the daughter's corporeal envelope. When reading the maternal verses, we are transported into a lingual universe or body which exists beyond words themselves (in fact we are dealing with carnal words) and which incorporates a strong semiotic modality. Consequently, the maternal/poetical section succeeds in "signif[ying] the unsignifying: it assumes [relève] within a signifying practice this functioning (the semiotic), which ignores meaning and operates before meaning or despite it" (Moi, *The Kristeva* 116). In Philip's "Discourse," the unsignifying implies the impossibility for the Black woman's tongue to

make sense within a foreign language on one hand, and intimates on the other hand, the power of that very tongue to manifest itself through the senses.

After examining the opposite and lateral poetical sections, we can deduce that the maternal poem, with its highly semiotic intensity, and the legal section, with its deep symbolic input, both strongly affect the middle text. Regarding this last point, we should come back to Philip's reflection in "Who's Listening?" when she insists upon developing a dialogue between her two main influences, that is "Abiswa" and "John-from-Sussex"--between the two archetypes we have associated with the maternal poem and the edicts respectively. Thence, the middle text turns out to be the place where the two opposite and opposed monologues, bearing spatial and temporal traces, come into interaction and give birth to a central disjunctive voice. Among the "stanzas" which compose the in-between poem, we can perceive the moments when the semiotic modality overwhelms the symbolic and triggers disjunctions within the textual body. Let's compare two verses from the central poem:

English is  
my father tongue.  
A father tongue is  
a foreign language  
**therefore** English is  
a foreign language  
not a mother tongue (56, emphasis added)

By the conjunction "therefore," the poet indicates a logical (a cartesian) articulation that relies on the symbolic order and underlies the colonial meaning of a father tongue. However, as soon as the poet reaches the conclusion that she is bereft of a mother tongue, her thoughts show signs of disconnection and end up revolving around two missing and essential elements: mother and tongue:

tongue mother  
tongue me

mothertongue me  
 mother me  
 touch me  
 with the tongue of your  
 lan lan lang  
 language (58)

Through a playful combination of primary terms—the words which testify to the formation of the subject and to coming into language during the child's development—we become aware of a semiotic drive which pierces through the text and transgresses the logical order. Significantly, the maternal poem and central voice echo each other by revealing the physical and sensitive property of the tongue, suggesting an interdependency between mother and daughter.

*A maternal frontier: an in-between alternative*

The central voice/path, in which two (border) monologues counter each other under the effect of conflictual semiotic and symbolic exchanges, constitutes a dis-course nourished by a death drive (edicts) and a life drive (maternal verses). Although the central voice lays stress upon a melancholic fluctuation by lamenting the absent mother tongue, it also demonstrates, through the dismantled aspect of the poem, the emergence of feminine (and) literary agencies, which impose themselves upon a repressive discourse of logic and a logic of disourse. Out of this lamentation, the Black woman's voice aims at destabilising the linguistic foundations of an (ex)colonial language, first by speaking from a central position, then by asserting her own parole.

In her writing, Philip attempts to step out of a marginalized position by means of the structural and spatial splits she operates on the page. For instance, in putting the edicts on the right hand side of the page, the author manages to undermine and literally displace the power of a colonial argumentation, not so much to supplant it as to create a counter-discourse.

Refusing to be relegated to the margin, because of the derogatory connotations attached to this word, Philip considers instead its synonym "frontier" as a term for her counter-discourse and subversive method of writing. Furthermore, the difference of meaning she attributes to "margin" and "frontier" needs to be considered and related to Ltaif's notion of "in-between". In "Who's Listening," Philip explains that marginality "suggests a relationship with the dominant culture in which the marginal is considered as inferior, and implies that the marginal wishes to lose its quality of marginality and be eventually absorbed by the more dominant culture" (*Frontiers* 41). Thus, according to Philip, marginality implies criteria that are predetermined by a dominant society in order to delimit "norms" and "margin," and intimates the marginal's unfulfilled desire for suiting the cultural and social conventions. In other words, marginality necessarily involves a sentence to exclusion and silence. On the other hand, "frontier" offers a more positively connoted signification, since it hints at "emergent energies and experiences which stubbornly resist" the dominant culture" (41).

The poet's interpretations of the terms "margin" and "frontier" shed some light upon her conception of writing, and especially upon her preoccupation with words and space in "Discourse." In this poem, Philip contests the concept of marginality by intro/ducing her **own voice(s)** on the page, and claims simultaneously a textual frontier position, that is to say the central voice/path serves as a frontier for the two border texts (the maternal poem and the edicts). In so doing, the author reveals a verbal and spatial resistance against a dominant language and preserves her fundamental particularities as an Afro-Caribbean woman. In this respect, Philip's writing on the frontier can be connected to Ltaif's in-between since, for both of them, the decentralized space enables them to speak about their selves with an authentic voice, without losing the cultural and "linguistic" components of their beings. These components are maintained within

the in-between or the frontier--these places where various influences converge and meet or oppose each other. Henceforth, the parallel that may be drawn between the frontier and the in-between allows us to understand how Ltaif and Philip strive to save or retrieve their cultural and linguistic plurality by provoking confusion (Ltaif) or producing a disjunction (Philip) in their writings. As a result, when assimilating the middle text of "Discourse" with the meaning that "frontier" conveys for the author, we emphasize the interaction of two linguistic influences--the silent maternal tongue and the silencing (ex-) colonial language--which break to the voice and give evidence of an underground power. The last part of the "frontier" poem provides a good example of that disturbing and destabilising "powerful" utterance:

language  
l/anguish  
anguish  
**english**  
is a foreign anguish (58, emphasis added)

The de/capitalized "e" of "english" heralds or rather confirms the Black woman's "prise de parole," and her struggle with/in language in order to overcome her foreign anguish. In the presence of a de/capitalized "e," we are attending to a symbolic decapitation of the "Kinglish," which inaugurates a new combination of "black" terms and an entry into a new land of words through three texts, paths and voices. In "Discourse," the Afro-Caribbean woman's voice(s) celebrate(s) the beginning of a linguistic/lingual revival against a Western logic, and wanders into a wonder/lanque (a tongue which needs to be questioned) to finally exclaim: "Banish the word/ Off its head\_ / The word is dead/ The word is risen/ Long live the word!" ("The Question" 75).

Philip's poem illustrates her efforts to exhaust logic--which remains close to Irigaray's phallogocentrism--in using another perspective which subverts the general order. Sub/version

characterizes a writing that infiltrates oppressive and repressive structures by means of a body language, which provides words with polyphony and polysemy. On that matter, it can be asserted that Ltaif's and Philip's writing constitutes a power of resistance and a mode of overthrowing the rigid bases of a language of authority. The outflow of words reveals the recurrent water imagery which signifies the rejection and search for a mother/lan(d)guage in Ltaif's poetry, and announces an emerging silence in Philip's writing.

We have examined the progressive reconciliation between a woman's body and language, and more specifically between her organic tongue and a written form by outlining their physiological manifestation. In fact, the Black/Arab woman's physical awakening, prompted by her experience in another geographical place, begins with an internal confrontation between estranging words and corporeal silence that signals the process of disalienation. In other words, coming back to life, the Black/Arab woman's body does not only re/cognize itself, it also assumes strange (linguistic and literary) forms which can be achieved after symbolic "purgation." What is meant here is that the studied sequences about physiological reactions such as vomiting and/or sweating words illustrate the gradual acceptance or rather re/conversion of a foreign language, in Philip's writing, and an effort to trans/verse from an Arabic to a French tongue, in Ltaif's poems. Since "vomiting" and "sweating," as biological and corporeal ex/pressions, already sketch a language, they constitute the preliminary stages for an entry into the world of writing.

Instead of using her body as a space for writing, the Black/Arab woman starts inscribing it upon the page from an unknown territory and un/known language. The new geographical environment and/or exploration of the page nourish, even open up, other possibilities of the language(s) she is trying to "adopt." In her place of exile, the Black/Arab woman inquires into the linguistic wonderland, gives her self up to strangeness by writing with words she has learnt to

unlearn, and finally "excoriates" her self through the melancholic voice of her previous skin. This change of skin characterizes the passage from one language to another in order to reactivate the organic tongue.

After reading these two women's writing-in-exile, we need to make a distinction between "tongue" and "language." With the word "tongue" Ltaif and Philip do not only refer to the articulation of speech, but they also place emphasis on the sensitivity and sensuality of this organ of taste and speech. On the other hand, language conveys the different techniques adopted by the two poets to write down their bodies.

Tasting the words to make them soft on their tongues and to describe the experience of their physical and linguistic exile, is what essentially motivates their "itinérance," (cf. Des Rosiers 211-12) and impels them to return to the sources of history and language through mythology and etymology. It is precisely these introspective and retrospective aspects in Ltaif's and Philip's poetry that I shall study in my last chapter. By focusing on the mythological elements the two female poets respectively introduce in their work, I will examine the excavation of oral tradition and its emergence in the written form as a linguistic and cultural "métissage," and the phenomenon of transculturation.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE PHOENIX

In this chapter, I propose to examine two fundamental aspects of Philip's and Ltaif's writing: the use of oral tradition and mythological references. My purpose consists of studying both authors' specific intentions for introducing the above-mentioned devices in their poetical work as well as their subsequent effects. In the context of an analysis of orality and mythology, I will show the relationship between the theme of story-telling and writing with the concept of re-birth, or more precisely with metamorphosis. In relation to this ultimate element, I shall then demonstrate how endlessly transformed and parasitic voices of exile may constitute a means of transculturation, thus allowing a *métissage*—of styles and genres—in Philip's and Ltaif's writing. In an exile condition, transculturation suggests a freedom of cultural and linguistic transactions when the nomadic tongue "borrows" or "steals" from country to country and language to language, exchanging in this way with the other through dialogues. However, before dealing with the first part of the study, a brief comment upon the importance of oral tradition—as a maternal link that allows to acquire one's voice and/or to be "mothered" in the other tongue—needs to be made.

#### **I. Of story and magic**

##### **I.1. Oral Tradition: a Corporeal Library**

When referring to orality or oral tradition, we bear in mind an obvious and principal

attribute: the voice and its instrument, the tongue, which leads to a play on sounds by means of "retour (répétition ou redondance), assonance, variations de la tonalité" (Glissant, Poétique 231). In other words, orality relies on an interrelation between tongue and voice in order to transmit a message or/and a story. By bringing out such a commonplace, I am trying to emphasize the role of the sensitive organ, the movement of the tongue often reinforced by the body itself. Because telling a story requires "jou[er] à la fois de la voix et du corps" (Maximin 220), the body becomes an expansion of the voice and a language of gestures. Therefore, orality always implies a performance, that corporeal participation which bestows vitality on words, on a living tongue and language. As well, to speak about an oral **tradition** suggests a transmission of stories from mouth to ear through time, with the body as the primary memory:

The story is older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift, and circulate. So that it may become larger than its proper measure, always larger than its own in-significance. (Trinh 137)

In fact, regarding Trinh T. Minh-ha's quotation, we realise on one hand, that tongue and body perpetuate and alter stories without damaging them—but on the contrary constantly empowering their meanings—and, on the other hand, that the oral heritage remains an essential—but not exclusive—maternal property. In this context, we have to question the transposition of an oral tradition into (a feminine) writing, and to observe its consequence(s) on the written word. These interrogations will lead us to examine Philip's female communities in Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, and to concentrate on two characters: Mama Ohnce and Arwhal.

In naming the various tribes after anagrams of the word "silence(s)" and in highlighting "communions" of women, Philip may, as Madeleine Gagnon does, "[view] silence as the fundamental psychological space of 'motherhood' throughout patriarchy" (Gould 135). With respect to this statement, there might be a disturbing contradiction in trying to identify key

structures of orality among the many tribal "silences." However, first we have to remember that silence, for Philip, does not convey an absence of articulate speech, nor an antagonism to words:

Everything has its own sound, speech, or language, even if it is only the language of silence . . . and if you were willing to learn the sound of what **appeared** to be silence, you understood then that the word was but another sound--of silence. (Looking for Livingstone 35)

Silence(s) stand(s) for a language that allows a communication of the body with nature--in a symbiotic relationship--and a network with the surroundings. In that sense, we can pretend that the (female) body receives impressions, is even written by the place and its oral tradition, and symbolises for that reason "a whole library" which, we should add, "burns down" as soon as the teller or "griotte dies" (cf. Trinh 130). Hence, the importance of passing on stories or what silences contain in order to preserve and extend at the same time a transtemporal knowledge. In addition, the image of "a chain of transmission" (Trinh 130), among women, resembles a vital flow, a kind of umbilical cord or matrilineal continuum that guarantees memory and life.

Telling saves the past and incorporates it in a present time by re/membering stories. Nonetheless, for the Afro-Caribbean woman, the context in which telling or orality takes place presents an uncommon relationship with ancient history, since the link of imparting has been interrupted in the Middle Passage--that "transplantation" from Africa to the West Indies. Therefore, if in the African continent oral tradition maintains the legacy of past civilizations, in the West Indies, orality constitutes the **remnant** of an African cultural heritage. Needless to say, in relation to the colonial vestige strongly anchored in the Caribbean islands, the story-teller's or the "artist's" role is to "restore" remote traces or silences and to help recover from a compelled mutism. As Colette Maximin explains, in Caribbean islands such as Guyana and Trinidad, "l'artiste a vocation à **panser** la blessure" (54).

Before we examine the stylistic indicators and symbols of story-telling in Looking for

Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, a digression on Maximin's description of the artist is necessary to delineate the virtues of orality. Healing the wound by means of words presupposes that the story-talker turns herself into a physician and is empowered to soften, if not to cure, a (psychological) pain--a partially lost memory. Healing also requires the ability to **think** about the appropriate terms (mots) to erase or calm down the wound (maux). Thus, healing and thinking (about the pain), two verbs which in French--"panser" and "penser"--share a common etymological root, represent the story-teller's principal attributes. She consequently succeeds in (re)conciliating words with mind and body, through magical formulae or incantation. Story-telling encompasses two "artistic" strategies--read curing and magic--which, on one hand enable the Afro-Caribbean woman to shut out the traumatizing past, similar to a missing cell in her memory, and on the other hand, initiates a performance, that is an action upon reality.

***Dia/meter: an Original Mother's story***

Analysing Philip's Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, and focusing on the "CESLIENS" section, we discover a charismatic female figure, Mama Ohnce, who turns out to be the "oldest woman" of the tribe. That hint allows us to recognize the traditional couple "oldness and wisdom," which grants the woman her powers and emphasizes them. "Oldness" can also be identified in the very name of "Mama Ohnce" ("pronounced wonce," the narrator specifies), as the two components of her identity signify respectively: the maternal nature (Mama) and the introductory indicator of story-telling (Ohnce/once). Out of the juxtaposition of these complementary elements, we can deduce that Mama Ohnce embodies the original Mother, the Once-upon-a-time-there-was-an-African-Mother, and to a certain extent Gaea, "the Mother Earth . . . called 'Oldest of Divinities'" (Walker, The Woman's Encyclopedia 332). As a venerable

member of the CESLIENS, Mama Ohnce invites the young traveller to take up a challenge and to go through a vivifying ordeal for her language and womanhood, while she, the oldest woman, displays her magic practices. What we can perceive in Mama Ohnce's world of illusions is the recurrent circular feature, which underlines the feminine property. As an example, in the following sequence, we are presented a magic performance that brings together geometrical forms and the maternal attribute:

Mama Ohnce . . . drew a circle in the earth with a stick . . . Mama Ohnce took a piece of string, put one end under a rock at one point along the circumference, stretched it across to the other side of the circle, and held it in place with another rock. . . the diameter, of course. She then went to the centre of the circle, cut the string in two and offered me one. I reached out, held it and screamed, dropping the shiny green snake. . . Mama Ohnce reached down and picked up the snake—it became once again an ordinary piece of string . . . When my fingers closed around it for the second time, I held a wet, slimy birth cord, at the end of which a placenta—dark rich red—dropped blood on the already red earth. (37)

The above scene reveals a ritual that begins with drawing a circle. In the light of Barbara G. Walker's rereading of myths in The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects, we become aware that the circular inscription outlines "one of the primary feminine signs" and invokes a sacred dimension within the CESLIENS community of women. Indeed, the circle "was associated with the idea of a protected or consecrated space, the center of the motherland, a ceremonial space where all participants were equal" (4). It also figures and promotes the traveller's (psychological) return to the source—Africa—and finally illustrates a womb where she can (re-)compose herself.

The diameter, which "means literally 'Goddess Mother' and may refer to the ancient creation myths in which the body of the mother herself . . . was divided into upper and lower halves,"(5) confirms our interpretation of Mama Ohnce's role and power as the Original Mother. Circle and diameter define the space where Mama Ohnce's magical activity can take place and be

exerted upon the traveller. Subsequent to the performance is the transformation of the wood stick first into a snake, then into an umbilical cord attached to its placenta. Sometimes considered "the life-force which determines birth and rebirth" and "connected with the Wheel of Life" (Cirlot 287), the reptile remains correlated to the maternal organ, that is the placenta. If the snake incarnates the concept of regeneration, the placenta, which in ancient Egyptian mythology represents "the infant's spiritual twin" (Walker, The Woman's Dictionary 322), corroborates the process of perpetuation, since the spiritual twin guarantees the continuity of the self in the other.

After decoding feminine symbolic characteristics in Mama Ohnce's magic, we need relate them to oral tradition and to the question of language. To do so, we have to keep in mind that what differentiates the CESLIENS tribe from the others is its "language of silence." Considerable attention shall be paid to acts that assume a symbolic value, or to put it differently, that concretize words.

### ***Transformations of the stick: a "prise de parole"***

We find an explicit representation of the language of silence in the old woman's performance. Here, the whole magical display, which precedes her acting, mirrors the setting and creation of a peculiar atmosphere (often announced by a musical leitmotiv "palm skin against drum skin") for the story to be told. Thus exciting the audience's curiosity and stirring up the traveller's anxiety: "I was afraid, not knowing what to expect" (36), Mama Ohnce proves her vocation of story-teller. The magical effects she produces testify to the word/gesture power of illusion within reality, so that we might ask ourselves: "Où commence le réel? Où s'arrête la fiction?" (Maximin 242). These tricky "words," like the wood stick, are metamorphosed when going from the story-teller's mouth to the listener's ear and transport the latter into another world.

Captivated by Mama Ohnce's language of silence, the traveller has to participate in the theatrical and magical universe of story-telling, or mimed story. In accordance with the oral tradition, the audience, and more precisely the traveller herself, is prompted to respond to the story-teller's indirect question, the scene providing an example of what Maximin describes as an "alternance solo/ répons, répétition refrain," (246) that characterizes the dialogue between teller and listener. At that moment of the traveller's ordeal, we witness the beginning of a dialogue between Mama Ohnce and the traveller, when the former offers the stick to the latter. The exchange, which is completed as soon as the young wanderer accepts the "sacred object," supposes a communication beyond words, and a step towards communion. It is worth stressing that, in some women's groups, the passing around of the stick concedes the right of speech: "Only the person holding this object [is] allowed to speak" (Walker, Women's Rituals 32). Nonetheless, in the CESLIENS tribe, when the first metamorphosis of the stick occurs, the traveller drops the object changed into a snake, as if terrified by the power of language (since the snake is symbolic of the tongue). She refuses the gift of speech. During the second attempt, she succeeds in overcoming her fear while holding the cord and its placenta. When mastering her repulsion, the young woman seems to prepare herself for her rebirth.

Throughout the tests submitted to her attention under Mama Ohnce's guidance, the traveller--and listener of silence--experiences the old woman's artifices as though she had been charmed by a fairy-tale. Besides, her involvement in Mama Ohnce's ritual/tale accelerates her own transformation: the two successive shapes--the snake and maternal organ--that the stick adopts, bespeak her spiritual development and enlightenment. In other words, pointing to the traveller's own mutation phases, these external signs result from Mama Ohnce's intervention and the passing on of her knowledge.

*Imagination: the magic of a speaking I*

The purpose of story-telling inside a women's community resides in "transmitt[ing] from generation to generation . . . not only the stories, but the very power of transmission" (Trinh 134). The meeting with the CESLIENS thus enables the traveller to (re-)live and revive an oral (African) tradition and to get in touch with an original and essential source of inspiration. Above all, among the CESLIENS women, the traveller gradually acquires a method for achieving a better understanding and interpretation of Mama Ohnce's mysterious acts and inscriptions. Each challenge aims at increasing her self-awareness and connection with language, and for that particular reason enables her re-birthing. The ultimate trial to which she is subjected is still directly linked to the maternal circular image. Her goal consists in finding a way out of the circle drawn by Mama Ohnce:

I hadn't realized it until then, but I was inside the circle, and each time I tried to step out of it, some unknown force hurled me back to the centre . . . Knowledge of Pi was of no use to me; none of my earlier knowledge was of any use to me--all I had was the language of the CESLIENS--the language of silence. (37-38)

The feeling of being at a loss is quite similar to the listener's experience. When fascinated by a story, the magic of words/gestures shakes her previous beliefs and sense of reality; and the problem our traveller is confronted with, does indeed defy her rational thoughts. She can no longer rely on sensible explanations in order to solve the "enigma" and leave the circle; as a matter of fact, the circle represents a delivered story, requiring a non-passive listener. To clarify this point, two primary features and functions of story-telling need to be repeated. First, the world that a story or tale projects upon the mind overturns the usual conception of reality, and therefore stimulates imagination. Endeavouring to make the story fit into a rationalized structure may undermine its spiritual value. Now, is this to say that story-telling, as part of an African

(/Caribbean) oral tradition, does not at all depend on reason? To think in such a way implies that a crucial element has been disregarded, namely the language in which the story is told. As Philip states in *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks*: "To speak another language is to enter another consciousness," (15) a reflection that can be juxtaposed with the American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf's remark when he "argued . . . that differences in behavior and thought, including differences in concepts of space and time and matter, are a function of differences in language" (qtd. in Chamberlin 70). Other values and logics impose themselves within the multiplicity of languages. The CESLIENS, speaking the language of silence, possess their own "philosophical" vision and appreciation of the world, and of the Black woman's role, in particular. Perhaps the traveller's failure to step out of the circle results from her culturally-based Western interpretation which "cannot" translate African (in/fluenced-) signs. She has to think in the language of silence to seize, or at least try to, the meaning(s) of Mama Ohnce's story and to free herself from the universal law of attraction,<sup>25</sup> constantly bringing her back to the centre and preventing her from sharing other perspectives. Significantly, it seems to be her impulse that helps her to find a solution:

Where the thought came from I don't know—it wasn't even a thought—an impulse, perhaps—unbidden—without my willing it—but I began to trace a circle in the earth—around me—with my finger-tip—around and around—scoring the earth deeper and deeper. Now I was safe. Within my own circle—contained by theirs. (38)

That impulse, like a body parole, dictates to her the conduct she needs to follow. By inscribing a smaller circle, the traveller unconsciously explores her African origins and brings out some particles of her remote heritage. The traveller's circle, inside the CESLIENS' circle, corresponds to the embrace of her Western culture by an African legacy.

The second fundamental characteristic of story-telling concerns the active participation of the listener, and from this perspective, we can assume that the traveller's drawing illustrates a

perfect example of involvement, as required by an African oral tradition. Because the survival of orality is contingent upon the circulation and expansion of stories, the story-teller calls for the audience's response, to guarantee the vital force and breath of the communicated message: what we named earlier "the power of transmission." Being part of the performance, the audience is expected "To listen carefully [so as] to preserve. But to preserve is to burn, for understanding means creating" (Trinh 121). Drawing a circle inside the CESLIENS' circle is a creative act and a reaction to Mama Ohnce's spiritual teaching and questioning. It also manifests the traveller's own imaginative power and reveals that, even though she has not fully assimilated the old woman's lesson, it should soon benefit her.

### ***Arwhal: a prenatal experience***

The young woman's passage among the NEECLIS presents another experimental and linguistic value, which discloses other aspects and consequences of orality, namely: the resurgence of the (African) past in (a Western) language. In this tribe, we are introduced to Arwhal, who distinguishes herself as "the best needlewoman and weaver of the NEECLIS" (48). The emphasis put on manual activities will be the object of analysis later on in this chapter. Nevertheless, for the time being, it would be helpful to look once again over the onomastic significance of "Arwhal" and its relation to orality and re-birth.

When reading the name Arwhal, we might find a certain resemblance with the word "whale." Besides the similarity of their spelling, it is the symbolic peculiarities associated with the mammal that shed some light upon Arwhal's role in the traveller's existence. According to "ancient scriptures, the whale appears as a symbol of the world, the body and the grave," and is often compared to a "womb" (Walker, The Woman's Dictionary 392). As a result, we can

stipulate that the connotations, underlying the term "whale," all have in common the idea of surrounding and bearing, whether it be bearing people, life or death, and therefore they spotlight the womb-like image of the mammal. The whale/womb operates a transition from life to death (and perhaps the other way round, as the concept of rebirth intimates) that determines Arwhal's function. Like Mama Ohnce, whose name refers to the Original Mother, Arwhal's identity signifies maternal characteristics, which clearly appear in the decomposition of her name into Ar-whal(e). The prefix "ar" indicates what comes "before," or the fact "of belonging to" (OED); hence the combination of "ar" and "whal(e)" (the womb) is evocative of a time before the womb, or perhaps of a prenatal life. In accordance with the maternal connotation of her name, Arwhal contributes to the traveller's rebirth and self-re(-dis)covery, her influence thus altering the young woman's attitude towards life and language. Arwhal's vocation as a story-talker serves two purposes: first to nourish the traveller's confidence in her, then to reinforce her own motherly power over the young "novice." By telling stories, she does not only hope to have an impact on the traveller's mind, she also intends to modify her conception of (and in a certain way prejudices about) story-telling. We find an example of the traveller's disparaging opinion of oral tradition in the following sentence: "Throughout my sojourn with the NEECLIS, Arwhal's stories had entertained and delighted me" (49). We could suspect here an allusion to the discrepancy between an oral and a written mode of expression, inherited from a Western mode of thinking: the former being reduced to a mere entertainment, the latter being considered as a more "serious" exercise of thoughts (cf. Maximin 257). Nonetheless, the young woman's stay among the NEECLIS, and especially her friendship with Arwhal, drives her to experience the unfathomable resources of the oral tradition. In fact, as we shall see, the presence of a "coded" message within Arwhal's story soon makes her realise the substantial investment of orality, in other words the

linguistic and existential empowerment that orality can produce. Let's turn now to Arwhal's embedded narrative in order to examine the key elements of her story.

## **L2Weaving: a Restructuring of Multiple Languages**

The NEECLIS woman portrays the metamorphosis of six young brothers into "six white roosters" after disobeying their sister's recommendation not to eat the "red berries." To "help her brothers become human again," the sister "had to make six shirts for her brothers . . . and in the six years it took her to make the shirts, she was to be silent and not to utter a word" (50). In this story, patience and manual skill (weaving) are two combined qualities that induce an act of (re-)creation. These very qualities, which the traveller has to demonstrate in order to assert herself as a creative woman, need to be construed in the context of the Caribbean "artist" or "artisan." Both patience and weaving imply the long and laborious task that the Caribbean artist sometimes undertakes to excavate and transcend a colonial past, and to insert it into her "insular" reality. Similarly, the traveller's forced withdrawal period initiates an introspection, at the end of which she is supposed to come out with her own linguistic work:

When they finally came to get me--when SHE [Arwhal] finally arrived, I had woven a tapestry, and had pieced together a multicoloured quilt--of Silence--my many silences--held together by the most invisible of stitches--the invisible but necessary word. (55)

Weaving a "multicoloured quilt" involves an intertwining of her Western and African cultural heritages, a putting together of her words and silences to attest her position as an Afro-Caribbean woman, and to communicate "herstory." This linguistic patchwork results from the influence of Arwhal's parable upon the traveller. As an embodiment of the "womb," Arwhal triggers and partakes in the development of the traveller's own language by suggesting that having a language of one's own means to engage oneself into a creative enterprise and finally to become a

crafts(wo)man of words. By weaving words and silences together, the traveller projects the image of a writing tinted with orality, and shows how "l'obligation de contourner la loi du silence fait d[e la littérature orale] une littérature qui ne se continue pas avec naturalité . . . mais qui jaillit par fragments arrachés" (Glissant, *Poétique* 83). The association of disparate "colours" reflects a fragmented structure that authenticates, according to Glissant, a Caribbean "oral" writing. Thus, the traveller's tapestry relates, "di[t] en ne disant pas" (83), the past of an African woman's body, of her people and their imposed settlement in the West Indian islands, hence illustrating the story of a "Caribbean demotic." It seems relevant at this point to compare the aforementioned scene of the NEECLIS tribe to Philip's poem "She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks."

Appearing at the end of the poem, the name Philomela evokes another story of weaving, which Philip recontextualizes in African colonial history. Philomela, the Greek mythological character who was raped and had her tongue cut out by her brother-in-law, Tereus, symbolises the African woman slave's condition and her imposed silence (cf. Grimal 366). Beyond the image of violence, the reference to Philomela unveils the surfacing of a silent language. By weaving the scenes of her tragedy, Philomela "tells" her story through a tapestry. In that way, the woven fabric translates what her mutilated tongue can no longer communicate, and transgresses the law of Silence. The traveller's multicoloured quilt serves an analogous purpose: it conveys the "babbling" of a "dis/re/membered" tongue and the scars of a foreign language. However, the tapestry should not be seen as a mere testimony of a deep and ancient wound; more than that, it discloses an irrepressible desire to "speak" whether it be through the body or any artificial fabric. In both the NEECLIS sequence and "She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks," the activity of weaving consecrates a language of pain in the breaking of silence--or, to put it differently, in the introduction of orality in the text. Since weaving, like writing, calls for a

manual skill and vivid imagination, the created work—the tapestry—can be compared to an open book. Silence(s) and orality, in Philip's poetical fiction, operate the same disruptive and deluding function within a written or woven pattern. For, to weave words with silences presumes a misleading or at least a/mazing voice among the intertwined and meaningful threads.

### ***Detour and subterfuge***

Saying without saying determines the main trait of a weaving activity or writing (about) orality. This artistic method, also called "*la pratique du détour*," has been inherited from the period of slavery and mirrors a technique of "*marronnage*," (Glissant, *Poétique* 83). In other words, the expression refers to the Black slave's "*ruse*" to abscond from his/her condition. I will, however, choose to interpret Glissant's concept of "*détour*" not in the sense of an escape attempt, but rather as a cunning literary device. The multicoloured quilt, for example, displays a certain art of craftiness, which, metaphorically speaking, uses a language of authority to transmit a(n underground) message. All the same, the various colours pertain to the Black woman's idiolect (her silences) and "*dialect*," and translate the multiplicity of Caribbean "*languages*." By joining them together, the traveller does not only "*revalue*" an insular speech, she infuses as well a new (dis)harmony or musicality into the linguistic fabric:

And how I loved the silence of purple--those purple silences--almost as much as I loved the absolute in the silence of black, or the distilled silence of white; the burnt sienna of silence--red, green, blue--colour greeting shape--pentagram, hexagon, octagon, circle--squares of silence . . . (55)

Musicality arises from an oral African in/spiration and relies upon a mixing of different styles and structures. In the above quotation, the miscellaneous geographical designs outline "*visually*" the "*abundant narrative forms*" (cf. Maximin 213), including "*les effets de polyrythmie . . . Changement brutal de rythme, accélération ou ralentissement de la cadence*" (Maximin 224). In

this manner, oral literature, both interrupting and overturning a rhythmic arrangement, is represented in the patchwork composition of the traveller's quilt. The traveller thus achieves a piece of art—or artifices—and now possesses all the necessary tools to fortify her Caribbean "writer" position, or at least her writing skill.

Based on the above descriptions of the traveller's encounter with the CESLIENS and the NEECLIS tribes, we can argue that both Mama Ohnce and Arwhal personify African vestiges, and more specifically the young woman's revived and "ancestral" memories. In each community, she is submitted to rites of passage that enable her to dig out her cultural and essential African fragments. Thus, led back to the deepest recesses of her mind, she is bringing out what has been repressed: "To weave anything I first had to make the separation, and before I could do that, I needed to find my own Silence" (54). It seems, therefore, that the meetings with communities of women—and silences—result from the traveller's own imagination. They are the projected images of the Afro-Caribbean woman's (writer's) unconscious, in her efforts to combine an oral tradition with writing. The title in that respect—Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence—signals the protagonist's spiritual struggle all the way through her ramblings. The word "odyssey," referring to Homer's epic poem, implies a series of challenges, even tribulations which activate soul-searching and self-transformation. By alluding to the legendary and mythological hero, Ulysses, Philip works upon the experience of exile and the art of deceiving (cf. Mactoux 225) to underscore the powers of silences/ orality in the text. However, in her poetical fiction, the traveller, a woman, bears resemblance to Penelope, that other important figure of Ulysses's adventures. In comparing these two women, we become aware that Penelope's virtues and abilities, namely faithfulness and craftiness, also define the traveller's being and "coming" to creation. Faithfulness, in Philip's fiction, implies respecting an absent African tongue and

believing in its return. By not waiting for this language to come back, the traveller is mentally looking for the moment of its loss and the fall into oblivion.

Throughout her journeys, the traveller is gathering information and sensations about her "mother tongue," thus starting a weaving activity. Because the whole fiction—especially the CESLIENS and NEECLIS parts—revolves around the idea of crafts(wo)manship, we can identify an influence and reappropriation of Penelope's method of subterfuge. This woman, who subtly weaves and unweaves her canvas, is sometimes associated with philosophy and wisdom. Fabric and thought are close to each other since "de même que l'on obtient l'étoffe en combinant la trame avec la chaîne, on crée aussi le discours en composant des mots" (Mactoux 169). When unweaving, Penelope is engrossed in a real work of intelligence, and aims at deceiving her suitors. Unmaking overnight what she has accomplished during the day, Penelope symbolises the dis/course of the unconscious, which disrupts and restructures an order of thinking. Similarly, the traveller's manual labour exposes a psychological process under an unconscious impulse that unfolds a corporeal memory—the remembrance of a lost mother tongue or "mémoire de la peau" (cf. Des Rosiers 208). For, the traveller's progression drives her back to the original maternal womb (Mama Ohnce, Arwhal) to express the linguistic rupture (through an heterogeneous "tapestry") and, ultimately, practice "the exercise of the imagination as a weaving and unweaving of the self" (Chamberlin 189). In *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, we witness the Afro-Caribbean woman's rebirthing, as she discovers in her silences an African orality, and finds a means of using—instead of being consumed by—her "ancestral" anger. Her odyssey transports her from outrage (a feature denoting Ulysses's temper: "celui qui s'irrite"<sup>26</sup>) to a creative position, in accordance with Penelope's wisdom:

I clung to my anger for a long time—it was very hard to let go of it—but when I began to give up to the Silence around me, my fingers, as if of their own accord began to weave.

(54)

And as I worked, my anger left. (55)

Weaving and unweaving, with a melanchol(er)ic inspiration, involves a never-ending metamorphosis through a literary production—a transformation that denies the limitation of time. All the same, unweaving indicates literally an "unthreading" of time, which on one hand upsets a Western notion of temporal division, and on the other hand, preserves the remote African voice's "immortality":

THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE MONTH OF NEW MOON (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE FIRST AND LAST MONTH) IN THE EIGHTEEN BILLIONTH YEAR OF OUR WORD, WHICH IS THE SAME AS THE END OF TIME. (60)

Time plays indeed a destabilising role in the story-telling by sustaining manoeuvres of the oral/writing scheme; it contributes to holding, accelerating or deferring events so as to break the linear narrative development.

### *Telling a transtemporal story*

In both Philip's and Ltaif's writing, we can observe a struggle against time-- which partly originates from a "desire . . . to multiply perspective and comparisons, and to capture in life, within [themselves] that composition, that architecture of the world" (Hermann 126). It is by means of this feminine temporal re/vision that I will now investigate Ltaif's borrowing from oral and mythological themes and stylistic devices. By adopting these techniques, she introduces a remedy against the past in her writing. In Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, Ltaif works through two different tales: Les contes de la mère l'Oie and Les Mille et Une Nuits (cf. Lequin, "Quelques mouvements" 139). However for the purpose of my study, I will mainly concentrate on the last story and on its central narrator: Sheherazade.

By introducing Sheherazade's voice, Ltaif inscribes her writing in an Arabian culture as well as an ancestral, "un/real" period of time, in order to speak about the war in Lebanon and denounce the condition of women. Telling becomes a means of survival: the narrator "parle et . . . raconte, comme une femme arabe à une autre femme arabe, comme une oie à une paonne hospitalière raconte et raconte les malheurs et les malheurs, et ma frayeur des fils d'Adam"(33). When speaking and sharing a story of violence, the narrator does not only endeavour to exorcize the pain, she also tells "la parole qui sauve l'existence" (Bencheikh 51). Narrating in order to avoid death summarizes Sheherazade's strategy to manipulate authority and dismantle the King's murderous policy. Briefly, I shall recall here that in The Thousand and One Nights, King Shāhriyār, infuriated by his wife's unfaithfulness, has her beheaded, and vows to marry a virgin woman every day and have her executed the same night (cf. Bencheikh 41). In order to put an end to the massacre, Sheherazade resolves to marry the King and starts telling him stories, for a thousand and one nights, thus escaping her death sentence. Through Sheherazade's voice, Ltaif manages to disclose the "reality" of war, and proves the importance of "raconter . . . lire, dire, écrire" in order to face death itself (cf. Verduyn, "Nouvelles" 42). In addition to the salvational power of story-telling, a series of metamorphoses is prompted by the writer/narrator's exile and desire to embrace life.

### ***From Arabic to French: a change of skin and scheme***

The first metamorphosis occurs within the passage from Arabic to French, a transition that helps the narrator to communicate her experience with the other: "ma passion pour vous me fait changer de langue" (Les Métamorphoses 33). Switching from one language to another, her words and their connotations in French present another perspective on a world in conflict. Along

with the translation of an Arabian inspiration into French/Québécois, an alchemy of terms produces an "intrication . . . complexe de l'identité et de l'altérité" (Harel, "La parole" 394), since, in the other language, the narrator loses and restructures her self. "Changer de langue," Harel insists, "impliquerait du même coup changer de corps et l'on peut penser que l'exil territorial--abandon d'une terre matricielle--est perçu comme la perte de signifiants premiers associés à la figure maternelle" ("L'exil" 23). Geographically and linguistically in exile, the narrator integrates another verbal form, or body--"J'ai troqué ma peau contre la sienne" (*Entre* 26)--which initiates a psychological odyssey (cf. Verduyn, "Nouvelles" 43) to remember the past. In the absence of spatial and cultural landmarks to guarantee "identity," memory offers a known territory to her self. In that sense, Sheherazade's voice is evocative of the narrator's Arabian background and sensitivity. Yet transposed into French, that voice confronts the narrator with her alterity. In other words, she imitates Sheherazade--"à la manière de Shéhérazade" (14)--in the other lan(d)guage in order to remain faithful to her self (and to some cultural elements), and experiences at the same time her own alterity. We can therefore notice an alteration in the passage from self to other, which exile accentuates.

In relation to her displacement and linguistic transference, the reference to Sheherazade invokes a voice of mutation. Telling like the Arabian story-teller, the narrator speaks both about her self **and** the other in her: "Car Shéhérazade raconte au roi une seule et même histoire: son rêve à lui"(56). If, as Freud's theory of the unconscious suggests, "L'autre, c'est mon inconscient" (Kristeva, *Étrangers* 271), when narrating the King's dream, the story-teller projects her own unconscious (and dream) upon the other. In a parallel manner, the narrator can be in touch with her self through Sheherazade's voice, thus finding a means of expression for her unconscious. It is important to specify that the unconscious, as the hidden part of the self, stores up--albeit in a

chaotic way--political, cultural and symbolic values inherited from the native land.

### *A nightly "parole"*

The Thousand and One Nights intertext, or "interview," offers a fictional and propitious space for emerging memories and interrelations between the self and the other. Moreover, one of the fundamental characteristics of the Arabian Nights tales resides in the nocturnal performance of orality, as "L'imagination du conteur va . . . au-delà de l'usage reçu: c'est tout l'espace de la nuit qui est occupé ici par la parole, par l'amour. Bref pour le conteur, c'est toute la nuit qui est vivante" (Bencheikh 11). Night strengthens productive psychic activity when imagination combines dream and reality, the other and the self, according to the language of the unconscious. This nightly parole imposes itself beyond time, in a "hors-temps," and comes after the geographical exile to carry through an inner reconstruction out of scattered memories: "La mémoire se reconstitue à force de labeur et de résistance. Les choses finissent par former autre chose, et à naître, comme un enfantement. La terre reprend son or et son métal secret" (Les Métamorphoses 65). As a result, the trans/ition from self to other, within a dialogue between (personal) retrieved memories and orality, relies on a deferred introspection--looking into her self through the other--and is tantamount to a rebirthing.

At this point in our analysis, we can draw a comparison between Philip's and Ltaif's exploration and writing about orality. They perceive orality as a psychological and linguistic return to a native (or prenatal) culture and mother tongue. In Philip's poetical fiction, orality sets into motion a circular movement that drives the traveller back to an ancestral and matrix-like African time through the English language. Orality, with a capitalized O, partakes in a vital re(intro)spection to understand the double "OO as in how did they 'lose' their word?" ("The

Question" 70)—that roundness of a letter which epitomizes not emptiness, but an encircled silence of the Afro-Caribbean speech. In Ltaif's texts, traces of an Arabian oral tradition, inside the French structure, result from a memorial selection, and a breaking with oppressive Arabian customs and political violence. On this matter, the section "Histoire du Chameau" in Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, and in particular its ending, will serve to illustrate "oral" detachment and reappropriation in the poet's writing.

### *Refounding an oral tradition*

In this embedded narrative, the narrator's voice and the camel's story end up confounding each other in the report of "Les atrocités du Sphinx:" "L'histoire que j'ai à vous raconter/ je la tiens du Chameau(20)/. . .Le chameau nous raconte une très longue très lamentable histoire alors, je vous prie, écoutons par sa bouche l'histoire de ses malheurs."(21) The camel, with two humps on its back—"des bosses sur le dos"—bears a double memory: a personal and "national" link to the past. As well, when decomposing the word "chameau" into "chas" (the eye of a needle) and "mots/maux," thus playing on homophony, we can liken the ruminant to a "chest of words/wounds" (since "chas" signifies, according to its Latin etymology "capsus," a chest or case). Consequently, the camel stands for an obsession with the past, a "ruminating over" words of pain and violence in world history—hence the importance of its speech.

The narrated story—"par sa bouche"—may remind us of a thread passing through the eye of a needle (chas), a chain of words uniting the remote past of Egypt/Lebanon and other countries to their conflictual present. Orality illustrates here the continuity of violence, where "le règne de l'Homme" is defined in terms of mythology (sphinx) and compared to the "lion"'s cruelty: "Tu as un rival, ô lion,/ et c'est l'Homme qui règne à ta place/ de nos jours" (20).

Nevertheless, while subtly speaking against a "patriarchal" political authority, the camel's /narrator's voice(s) implicitly accuse the underlying and annihilating matriarchal-like culture and regulations. Lion and sphinx, in the Middle-East and Egypt were:

more commonly associated with the goddess . . . Bast-Hathor was the Sphinx-lioness, symbolizing the Destroyer. Sometimes she appeared with two lion heads looking forward and backward . . . [she] was a symbol of Time . . . the Lions of Yesterday and Today. (Walker, The Women's Encyclopedia 544)

Orality transmits a constant pattern of oppression and repression along Time, which is identified with the female image. This feminine aspect of violence should be perceived in terms of propagation and reproduction, processes cunningly interrupted by the narrator:

Alors,  
le voyant toujours immobile  
inconscient,  
mi-ahuri,  
mi-somnolent,  
je rompais le nez au Sphinx  
et partais en criant. (30)

When reading the above passage, we become aware that the deceiving function of story-telling occurs in the disjunction of cultural foundations (the sphinx image). Cutting the sphinx's nose suggests on one hand, castrating an Arabian social and political patriarchy, and on the other hand, splitting cultural as well as temporal devices. The nose, this olfactory sense, partly maintains the sphinx's power and predatory activity. Hence, by means of her symbolic gesture, the narrator reveals the break with Past and Time, in order to insert her own temporal (sense and) conception in her speech.

Story-telling gives an opportunity to speak and to speak about her self, to cross time and space, and finally to shift from reality to fiction (cf. Ltaif, "Écrire entre"). It conjugates the verbal magic with a musical magic (Maximin 231) for a voyage into the depth of her being--this abyssal in/vestigation that transports and transforms simultaneously. Alongside the translations--from

body to tongue, past to present—that orality stirs up, the story-teller's parole becomes the place and the tool for her resurrection. All the same, when transcribing her parole, she involves herself in a transfiguration process that supports her all along the physical and linguistic experience of exile. "Le passage du mode oral au mode écrit," Maximin explains, "a entraîné, pour les genres populaires, une métamorphose avec l'écriture" since "se forgent des techniques qui modifient les formes primitives" (257). In fact, through a transition from an oral to a written form, which alters the artistic devices, the story-teller or crafts(wo)man makes and unmakes herself in the semantic ground; writing thus saves her from incorporating a restrictive structure. The literary activity consists, therefore, in elaborating an alchemy between orality and writing, in combining different styles so as to guarantee the transitory quality of her parole and in communicating her unsettling self.

## II. Metamorphosis and Transculturation

These observations invoke the need to study closely the metamorphosed sequences and topics in Ltaif's and Philip's writing, as well as the mythological investment of their poetical and fictional work in a condition of exile. In the proposed analysis, I will focus mainly on Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, Entre les fleuves and Élégies du Levant, and underline similarities and differences with Philip's Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence and "She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks."

Firstly, we have to define the word "metamorphosis," which implies: "the action or process of changing in form, shape or substance; **especially** transformation by magic or witchcraft" (OED). Metamorphosis is a physical, physiological or essential conversion in an in-between or in/visible dimension from one form or condition to another. This passage is

particularly obvious in some synonyms such as trans/formation, trans/mutation and so on. The magic or supernatural characteristics sometimes attributed to metamorphosis describe an unnoticeable change that takes place inside a being or substance, thus making difficult—if not impossible—the observation of a trans/action. It is indeed an intrinsic alteration that Ltaif portrays in her work; and her first book, Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar, announces a plural transformation in relation to exile. In order to externalize her inner mutation throughout her geographical and linguistic "uprooting," Ltaif inquires into mythology. This thematic and stylistic enterprise correlates metamorphosis and exile with rebirthing by introducing two fictitious birds: the Phoenix and Simûrgh. These legendary birds share the imagery of renewal and raise questions about linguistic experiences in exile. Let's now look into the birds' specific features and meanings in Ltaif's poems.

### ***Pyrogenous words: bird language***

The phoenix "was supposed to live for several centuries and then build up its own funeral pyre, light it with a burning twig, throw itself on the flames, burn up and then arise newborn from the ashes" (Walker, The Woman's Dictionary 408). We notice a self-sacrificial (or immolation) propensity which can be likened to chosen exile and the use of literary activity for self-revelation. In that respect, the French/Québécois language offers "pyrogeous" words, in which the writer's Arabic tongue—her "langue brûlée"—can be revived. As well, Walker underscores another interpretation of the legend of the phoenix, which "In Turkey . . . was incorporated into that of the *simurgh*" (The Woman's Dictionary 408). The bird is said to bear the following inscription, written with "enormous letters" on its wings: "Neither the earth produces me, nor the heavens, but only the wings of fire" (409). Claiming an independent nature, the phoenix represents an

absence of origins, a self-creation that parallels Ltaif's desire to inscribe her poems in more than one single cultural tradition.

Like the phoenix, Ltaif's narrator dies, "Je suis morte très vite cette année-là" (Entre 37), and is reborn from her tales and letters: "Je raconte, comment j'ai été complètement amoureuse d'Elle, soudain, me voilà renaître à nouveau entre ses doigts, c'est moi qui avait placé ses doigts"(7). Rebirthing emanates from multiple cultural backgrounds and affiliations, and becomes possible under the narrator's condition of exile. In fact, as an epitome of the (Arabian) woman-in-exile's metamorphosis, the phoenix heralds a time of spiritual and cultural awakening. Exile helps her understand her universal kinship: "J'ai compris que je n'étais pas faite d'une seule civilisation" (Entre 35). Reflecting a phoenix-like perspective, the poet's parole arises from "nulle part et est de partout à la fois" (Simon Harel, "La parole"). A nowhere, thus, equals an everywhere that constantly enriches her words and endows her writing with a multi-cultural character. The simurgh, more than the phoenix, embodies a substantial plurality, as it is created out of thirty different species of birds (cf. Walker, The Woman's Dictionary 409). Its corporeal multiplicity mirrors a linguistic and scriptural freedom that transgresses a unique stylistic body, and therefore reinforces the narrator's voice. When comparing herself to the fabulous bird, the narrator assumes multiple origins in order to obliterate the concept of identity: "*Dans ce lieu choisi pour renaître de personne. Que de moi comme le Simûrgh de mon pays natal. De mes pays natales*" (Entre 35), and offer a beyond-the-bordeline-parole.

Crossing poetical and prosaical styles, and integrating Arabic and Western thematic and semantic elements, her writing echoes multiple voices which translate the simurgh's wisdom. For the bird is empowered with speech: "Il parle, il a la raison et discute comme un philosophe" (Clébert 372) and possesses a transtemporal knowledge. Furthermore, the analogy between the



Besides the mutilation story of Philomela, her metamorphosis into a swallow (or a nightingale, cf. Grimal 366) requires our attention on the manifestation of a "violated" language. Alongside the transposition of a human body into a bird shape, and especially of a(n) absent or destroyed tongue into a sound (utterance), language verges on resurrection. From a West-Indian context, metamorphosis indicates the re/composition of an African tongue, "burnt/ on the pyres of silence" and reborn into "a moan," "mutter," "chant" or music (the very meaning of "Philo/mela"). The idea of music brings us back to a multi-dimension, since this combination of sounds may infiltrate frontiers. As well, music sometimes intertwines international techniques, thus embracing a multicultural tonality.

In Ltaif's and Philip's writing, mythological or real birds correspond to an expansive and plural language, which testifies to both women poets' psychological and linguistic exile. The bird imagery also expresses a mystic translation "as travel[ing] freely between the earthly and heavenly realms, [birds] were everywhere regarded as angelic messengers, givers of omens, possessors of occult secrets, as well as soul-carriers" (Walker, The Woman's Encyclopedia 101). Flying between two realms, birds represent crossing of time and space, and embody in that way, freedom. In Ltaif's poetical space, flying reflects an embracing of a widespread cultural area and a meeting with various (pays/ages). In addition to this aerial movement, a transitory quality is suggested. The word "flying" encapsulates the principle of passing, of a trans/ition or even "trance"/ action, which inscribes Philip's and Ltaif's work in a migratory current. It is indeed the birds' voyage, their migration that opens up a plural perspective and cross-cultural observation through perpetual movement. Therefore, when writing a bird thematic, the poets assume a plural linguistic horizon, not to compensate for the loss (of a tongue and country) but to preserve an emancipatory sense of not belonging to one single place.

*Stealing words and flying (with) languages: an exaltation of exile*

In the writing of migrant women, flying refers to another attitude towards language, in other words to the act of stealing. The alliance between flight and theft offers a better understanding of a feminine writing-in-exile (cf. Gould 38). Thieving suggests picking up linguistic, legendary and mythological peculiarities in order to "decree" a language of their own. In this gesture, we notice again a "surreptitious, artful, or subtle manner" to create, instead of appropriating, a language. Thus, stealing motivates a reappropriation of etymology and mythology and allows an expansion of meanings. In their linguistic investigations, Philip and Ltaif become "tongues snatchers;" however when using this expression we have to bear in mind the correlation between flight and theft. In the points studied, we have observed how their research on linguistic articulation and sensitivity leads them back to the roots and stories of the words.

Now I propose to examine in Ltaif's work a last mythological feature in terms of a parasitic and transcultural power. Her three poetical books abound with Persian, Assyrio-Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek mythological references. Such a cultural richness enables the writer to retrieve her "hysterical" memory--the one that comes from her mother tongues and wombs:

Mon imagination séduite, infidèle et ma soif de mémoires anciennes jamais repue,  
 toujours débordante comme un fleuve. La rivière du rêve m'entraîne. Le berceau des  
 mythes m'ouvre le Livre d'infini de l'écriture qui console. (*Entre* 30)

and to bring back to life forgotten goddesses. Writing in the shade/shadow of Hecate about Ishtar, evoking Isis, Medusa and the "Errynnies," to quote the principal ones, or mentioning Morgana, Melusina, Ltaif introduces underground voices in her poems, in order to bridge the gap

between the underworld and the upper world, between Lebanon/Egypt and Montreal, and finally to speak about the "hecatomb" when "Reste la poétique des ruines/ s'il reste une poétique sans complaisance" (*Élégies du Levant* 27). In focusing on ancient female characters, the poet points out the long history of exile to which women were condemned, and from this perspective the allusion to the "Suppliantes" (Danaïades) in *Élégies du Levant*, perfectly illustrates the theme of banishment. As Kristeva asserts in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*: "les premiers étrangers qui viennent de l'aube de notre civilisation sont des étrangères: les Danaïades . . . natives d'Égypte" (63). "Les Suppliantes" fate and story figure the Arab women in particular, yet could be related to women in general. Despite the connotation of pleading in their "name," this group of women symbolises the refusal to submit to patriarchal rule--hence their expatriation-- and an inextinguishable desire to remain alive. Another example of female characters concerns the "Errynnies:"

L'autre jour Errynnie me surprit: violence, insistance, harcèlement, chantage à nouveau la faim qui vous dévore les entrailles. Sur ces refus obstinés je gémissais comme un animal en mal d'amour. (*Entre* 15)

These women, "Des sortes d'hystériques, révolutionnaires, qui s'insurgent contre le pouvoir patriarcal" (Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps* 17), personify a state of madness, which constantly threatens the woman-in-exile in struggle against memories of war. What the parallel between these two groups of women reveals, is first the narrator's mental landscape, then her will to connect and correlate with other women. By going through mythological pages of her memory, the narrator brings together goddesses and female protagonists of various civilizations, and hints at the existence of cultural "rhizomes,"<sup>27</sup> as opposed to cultural roots.

### ***Meta(mor)pho(r)(se) and linguistic rhizomes***

The "rhizome" or web metaphor, which could be applied to this interconnection between

women, now enables me to read Philip's and Ltaif's use of symbolic elements and legendary female characters as a means of developing a communication with their past, and especially with other women. The weaving activity in Philip's poetical fiction and Ltaif's bird imagery describe a feminine language of exile, or "langage des Sirènes," which manifests itself in its disjunctive and disruptive capacity, a language of exile that does not look for a place to anchor itself, but asserts, on the contrary, a nomadic thought.

In Philip's writing, we notice for example, "a method of . . . mé-tissage, that is the weaving of different strands of raw material and threads of various colors into one piece of fabric . . . [a] female textuality as métissage" (Lionnet, Autobiographical 213). In this manner, the poet coalesces her African/Caribbean/English origins and finds a common ground with other minority voices among her "hyphenated" identities. From her nomadic thoughts, she can speak about "the grief sealed in memory," ("She Tries" 92) and confirm her metis nature. By inversing, reversing, de/forming and in/forming the English language: "absencelosstears laughter grief," (92) she puts into practice the art of subterfuge characterizing the Greek goddess's (Metis) power. The author's knowledge "of the enemy's language" allows her to lay astray and deceive a linguistic system: "that tongue that roots/ deep/ in/ yank/ pull/ tear/ root/ out," ("Testimony" 80) to play the spy and "expose[] the fragile foundations of identity politics" (Rosello 97-98). Philip's subversion of the language "through alchemical (al Kimiya, the art of the black and Egypt) practices succeed[s] in transforming the leavings and detritus of a language and infuse[s] it with her own remembered linguistic traditions," (She Tries 19). What her "oeuvre au noir," her secret and "hidden" (re)creation or re/conversion unveils, is a hybrid language, not in a monstrous aspect, but a heteroglossia, a language--or "demotic Caribbean"--speaking over, in, about and against a "dominant" one. This hybrid image clearly appears in a "Gorgonesque" form: "Oh, but shall I?/ I

shall/ tame them--/ these snakes/ feed them/ milk/ from black breasts" ("Testimony" 80). A head surrounded by snakes, or speaking in tongues, stirs up a polyphony, a vertigo of senses to collapse into a "jouissance/ j'ouis/sens" (Kristeva, Revolution 79-80), and gives rise to a whole variety of sounds to parasite the other('s) language.

Ltaif's poems express a similar desire to arouse another sonorous undertone, in revising grammatical rules, "ne pas parler le français correcte," and thus providing the French language with a new sensitivity: "Mais comment vous avouer que mon inspiration vient d'ailleurs, que je ne suis pas d'ici . . . que ma langue vient d'ailleurs, que l'écriture est d'ailleurs, que mon rythme à moi n'est pas celui de l'hiver" (Les Métamorphoses 33). It is throughout her flights/ thefts that the poet draws on her inspiration, picking up here and there words that sound strange in their new combinations, composing in this way a ne(s)t of wor(l)ds and languages: "J'ai des langues en réserve. Je peux les brandir au besoin. Autour de ma tête je les répands hideusement pour éloigner les curieux, les méprisants. Ceux qui ne savent pas aimer mes soeurs. Je suis Méduse quand je veux" (Entre 46). Out of her tongues, Ltaif inscribes a pluri-voice that becomes cacophonous to a certain extent, and parasitic on "la langue de l'Homme." These disturbing and unsettling tongues resemble wind paroles—but not empty ones—that the narrator transcribes "Je suis transcriptrice de vent/ le vent connaît le mystère des choses" (Élégies du Levant 11).

### ***Transculturation: cultivating exile***

By transcribing their multi-tongues and voices, both Ltaif and Philip turn their words into infiltrators and generate nomadic meanings in the translating process. Their poems are transgressing and transcending, as they come along with traditional and cultural vestiges that overwhelm the other languages: French / English. Crossing and infiltrating with words—their

history (etymology) and stories (mythology)—operate a trans/cultural movement with/in the dominant tongue, for "transculturation suggests a shifting or circulating pattern of cultural transference" (Taylor 63). Furthermore, this "neologism" used by the Cuban poet Nancy Morejón for the first time (cf. Lionnet, Postcolonial 11), designates "a contact of cultures" that overlaps the concepts of assimilation and acculturation (cf. Postcolonial 10). What transculturation brings into relief is "the usually mutual and reciprocal influences" developing throughout exchanges between cultures (Postcolonial 11). Thereupon, the prefix "trans-" underscores an alchemical creation with various cultural factors that promote the appearance of a "third element." Quoting Nancy Morejón, Lionnet writes on this account that "no element superimposes itself on another; on the contrary, each one changes into the other so that both can be transformed into a third" ( Postcolonial 11-12).

In the creative space offered by transculturation, the two women poets can write their metamorphoses and portray their exile. Although the transcultural movement "expresses the different phases in the transitive process from one culture to another . . . the interaction between the dominant and the dominated"—especially in Philip's position as an Afro-Caribbean woman in an English speaking society—"is neither **equal** in power or degree nor, strictly speaking, reciprocal" (Taylor 63). Being aware of "these imbalances in the crossing of cultural borders" (63), we shall interpret transculturation as a sign of Philip's and Ltaif's sub/verting "mythopoetical" languages and re/versing of that other French/English tongue. This transculturation takes place in a poetical environment, the one which for Philip is synonymous with "another form of colonization and oppression," ("writing a memory" 227) and results from the transgressive paroles of migrant poets. Therefore, transculturation mirrors an attempt to deform the form through a legendary and mythological exploration and exploitation that define a thematic return

to a "maternal" tongue. Returning and re/versing, as I emphasized before, implies turning the linguistic world upside down, in a disgressive poetical space and with myth as "speech in excess" (Barthes, Mythologies 130). In an excessive linguistic passage, Philip succeeds in rebuilding herself in an (ex)oppressive dominant tongue, and Ltaif in gathering and recontextualizing her ancient memories. Their poetical writing displays a "ubiquity of the signifier" (Barthes, Mythologies 123), which enriches their tongues, in the recuperation of "lost" African customs and blending of diverse Arabian cultural values. As a result, both poets are reborn without being--that static position--by using words of exile and exile paroles in order to assert: "I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not" (Barthes, Mythologies 123).

Philip's and Ltaif's journey into ancient periods of time and rediscovery of oral traditions illustrate a "re/gression," in other words a return to a pre- and post-native condition. Orality symbolises an intimate relationship between mother and child, and allows a reconnection with, even reintegration of the maternal body. For, in Philip's and Ltaif's writing, references to cultural attributes of orality, such as story-telling and mytho-narratives, retrace the Black/Arab woman's desire to project herself into the primal matrix. If orality, as Kristeva specifies, also signifies an "appropriation of the breast, the so-called 'paranoid' certainty of the nursing infant that he has been in possession of it, and his ability to lose it after having had his fill" (Desire 284), then it becomes possible for Philip and Ltaif to find a nutritive complement to the "amniotic" quality of their cultural background in oral tradition. To put it differently, the two authors' cultural heritages, which remain constitutive of their essence, is nourished and reinforced by the verbal performance. In that way, related to the function of feeding, orality provides the Black/Arab woman with a means of survival to resist (the return of) traumatic experiences in a condition of

exile and warrants the transmission of language. This last point needs to be linked to the mother-child symbiosis and in particular to the breast (and mouth) image. Breast-feeding, as an epitome of orality, characterizes the linguistic chain of transmission from mother to child--the "infant" swallowing words along with the maternal milk--and develops a dependence in the child. However, in order to avoid or break from what could become a debilitating "anacritic" relation with the "Original Mother" (cf. Kristeva, Desire 282) Philip and Ltaif select linguistic particularities of their pre- and post-native "retrospections" (or cultures and tongues). This leads us to the fundamental creative skill that is required by orality, so as to pass on and re/form/ulate cultural traditions, and used by the two poets for a distinctive purpose.

In Philip's Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence, the symbolic return to the maternal womb helps her retrieve an African breath and introduce it into the English language. She thus infiltrates and overturns a "paternal" order. Ltaif, on the contrary, strives to wean herself from the Arabic maternal language (and land) and to engender her own voice in her French m/other tongue. To do so, she is plunged into the mythological Hecate/tomb where she can finally disrupt the "story of words"--the etymology of "mythology"--and be affranchised from Arabic traditions and Western philosophy.

Throughout their literary work, Philip and Ltaif speak of their rebirth by excavating and weaving together their plural cultures and tongues. Mixing linguistic, syntactic and stylistic techniques they uncover the metamorphoses of their creative performance and inscribe their own substantiated selves. Transforming in order to enrich their beings and tongues, Philip and Ltaif establish connections with the other (woman) while following the dynamic of exile. Migrant poets and ethereal beings, they live exile as a symbiotic experiment between their multiple bodies and tongues to dedicate themselves to their constant becoming.

## CONCLUSION

Writing (about) exile, Philip and Ltaif project their own selves and pain on the page and show the different stages of their "psychological odyssey" to overcome (remote) mutilation and imposed silence. If "**parler, c'est se parler**" (Kristeva, Le langage 13), writing entails writing oneself in a restless attempt to heal the wound. In that sense, the writer, like the story-teller, plays the role of the physician to apply some balm on the twinging tongue. However "to write, [they] need a language to write in, to write with" (Glad 63). To acquire and identify themselves with a language of their own, Philip and Ltaif involve themselves in a process of estrangement which is the linguistic adventure. Their explorations of language lead them through slightly different paths related to their initial question: "Mais par où commencer par où?" (Les Métamorphoses 9) and "Where was I going? I had forgotten where I had come from--Knew I had to go on" (Looking for Livingstone 7).

For Ltaif writing becomes a means of survival and a substantial activity to inscribe her life through her second mother tongue. In French she can tell her suffering and women's condition, unfold memories and filter the violence of civil war; for violence in Ltaif's texts does not only emerge with the words that name it, but rhythm, alliterations, echo-rhymes and repetitions, to quote some of her main techniques, translate it as well. The subterranean and tumultuous current that permeates her texts and poems is transmitted by her corporeal memory-- her whole skin being impressed by the Lebanese conflict. In addition to an intellectual memory, this body repertory infuses her words with multiple senses and sensitivity, thus rendering what her ears and

eyes perceived in Egypt and Lebanon. Writing turns out to be a transcription of a body language, of that Arabic essence that stirs up turmoil in the French language. In that way only she succeeds in narrating painful memories of death, destruction and war. All the same, relating death helps her "inoculate" a form of immortality into her textual body since in engendering poems on Egyptian and Lebanese lands, she literary gives birth to death. Evoking a lethal atmosphere, she strives to expel violent images from herself and prepare her rebirthing. Throughout her trilogy, Ltaif develops the theme of metamorphosis in order to banish death itself and describe her belief in existence.

Metamorphosis reveals the inner labour of a female body with her second language, that other maternal tongue providing her with regenerated voices, and evolves into an alchemical writing. This alchemy results from the inspiration of Arabic cracking through Ltaif's French language and a Québécois influence. Out of this tri-linguistic texture she creates a tongue, her tongue in trans/mutation. Such a linguistic phenomenon is strongly indebted to the writer's wanderings in Montreal: "J'étais comme de passage ne sachant/ si je devais y rester ou partir" (Les Métamorphoses 46). Indeed, the city does not seem to offer a place to settle in and transplant oneself, but sets up the regenerating process with/in the many surrounding languages. Montreal is imbued with:

l'imaginaire québécois [qui] lui-même s'est largement défini, depuis les années soixante, sous le signe de l'exil (psychique, fictif), du manque, du pays absent ou inachevé et, du milieu même de cette négativité, s'est constitué en imaginaire migrant, pluriel, souvent cosmopolite. (Nepveu 200-1)

Therefore in a space propitious to transferring and translating, Ltaif transforms herself into a physician and alchemist to put her tongues into exile and voice the pain. In this endless rebeginning of plural metamorphoses: "Me voilà recommençant à zéro une millièrme fois la lettre . . . Suis-je en train de naître sans le savoir?" (Les Métamorphoses 56), Ltaif associates with the

vital breath and dedicates herself to movement: "une chose me remplit de joie/ la fidélité du soleil dans le Levant" (*Élégies du Levant* 20) in order to avoid becoming "Claustrophobe/ de son propre corps" (46), that of the mother land and tongue. Strangeness is her plural identity and her languages an alchemy of exile.

Exile, for Philip, retraces the memory of an African tongue reduced to silence. As a result a question such as "to be or not to be" sounds totally irrelevant to an African woman deprived of her original organ of speech: her essence can neither be said nor identified in the absence of language. Philip's interrogations underline the difficulty of speaking and writing with a symbolically grafted organ. However exile enables the Black woman's handicapped tongue to be rearticulated. On that matter, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* suggests the African female subject's experimental enterprise to (re)appropriate or rather attune a language to her self and finally produce meanings.

Repeating letters, (un)spelling words, accentuating vowel sounds, gradually ordering sentences and commenting upon "THE THEORY OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR" ("Universal Grammar" 65), Philip proposes a re/vision of linguistic rules including exercises for a speech therapy. Trying to cure herself and transcend African colonial history through language, she scans the restrictions of English, opens up and dissects the tongue to create a vacant space. When decapitalizing "english" and therefore separating it from its rigid and authoritarian structure, Philip liberates that language from its disparaging connotations to rebuild it with raw materials--the roots of words. The reconstruction requires a readjustment of two foreign bodies: the Black woman's corporeal memory and the English language. For the implantation to be successful, or at least less hurtful, the other (s) language has to be bared. In that condition English receives African vibrations inscribed in the multi-layered skin of the Afro-Caribbean

woman.

Endeavouring to establish a symbiosis between the two foreign bodies, Philip lays stress upon the tactile and gustatory relation of the organic tongue with words. When touching and tasting the "english language," she recovers and introduces an African sensitivity so that it might "[develop] a language more attune to express [her] reality, [create] written forms of the demotic languages of the Caribbean--in which [she is] most at home" (*Frontiers* 69). As a sensitive organ of speech, the tongue brings together life and death into a symbiotic relation, makes the African reality more palpable and retrieves the substance of a corporeal memory to be "mothered" in E/english.

While reading Philip's poems we witness and listen to a re/animated tongue--the "soft breaking of silence." In the rearticulation of a language, the writer wins over a paralytic aphasia to which the Black female subject, or any minority "I," is condemned. As *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* demonstrates, speaking and/or writing depend on the return of a repressed language which starts invading the oppressing other tongue. The protagonist's ramblings among women's communities illustrate a potential linguistic resurrection in the license (another anagram) that silence permits.

Ltaif's and Philip's work with and provocation of exile is expanded by metamorphosing the poetical being and body. Subsequent to plural transformations in the context and cortex of their writings, transculturation appears as an exchange of languages.

In the writing of the two women, metamorphosis always acts upon their poetical fictions and poems from an underground level and operates through three interconnected techniques: subversion, infiltration and subterfuge. Subversion designates a re/interpretation and (re)appropriation of previous literary texts--the implicit reference to Homer in *Looking for*

Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence or to Ovid in Les Métamorphoses d'Ishar—and supposes a re/versing. Infiltration corresponds to the surfacing of a voice which disturbs and disrupts the "conventional" literary and acoustic patterns. Creating a cacophony, leaving blanks, adopting "le langage de l'Homme" or the dialectic of the English language, Ltaif and Philip cultivate stylistic artifices to penetrate and break apart the foundations of a logic of language. Finally subterfuge, which etymologically means "escape secretly," implies an emancipatory movement that only occurs in the substratum of language, allowing the two poets to build up a critical argumentation within the bases of the French/English tongues. In applying the aforementioned techniques, Philip and Ltaif promote metamorphoses of language prone to proliferate in a poetical context. Here I am alluding to a literary genre—poetry—in terms of transfiguration.

Poetry represents "revolutionary" stylistic and syntactic devices that trans/form language. By stirring up polyphony and polysemy, the poetical form leads to nomadic meanings or displacement of the senses. Because "poetry had to disturb the logic that dominated the social order and so through that logic itself, by assuming and unravelling its position, its synthesis, and hence the ideologies it controls," (Kristeva, Revolution 83) this rhythmic language provides all the necessary tools to metamorphose both tongue and being. However, the poetical art is also deviated from its traditional (metrical) norms and used by Philip and Ltaif for their rebellious purposes.

Philip transgresses the boundaries of the page by spreading her lines, scattering and cutting her words according to their prefix or suffix. Refusing to be circumscribed by a written language and considering that form as a colonial token of culture, the writer dis/locates the poetical framework (cf. "writing a memory" 227). Nevertheless, combined with prose, poetry guarantees a freedom of expression and stylistic artifices, a space for dreaming that endows Philip

with the power "to construct imaginative and poetical worlds as if [the Black woman] were at the centre. To design imaginative and poetic scapes with [her] at the centre" (*Frontiers* 70).

In Ltaif's writing poetry seems to lend itself perfectly well to an Arabic spirit and renders her emotional struggle against her mother land/langue. Incorporating various styles— poetical and narrative sequences, tales and mythological stories—Ltaif claims the right to diversity and protects herself from a single belonging. Both Philip and Ltaif demonstrate their "craftiness" in mixing genres or in passing from one form to another. They thus elaborate a hybrid writing faithful to their selves. In "an alchemy of genres," they carry out metamorphoses of languages and assert their "protean being" (Freedman 55). What motivates their heterogenous creations may be a fear of exile and unsettling ground or/and an exaltation in exile giving rise to transfiguration. At this point we could wonder with Diane P. Freedman whether "the more marginalized one feels, the more one wants to blur division between public and private life and language and to resist both dualism and separatism by crossing from language to language, genre to genre, discipline to discipline" (71).

The desire to eradicate boundaries and embrace all kinds of cultural devices sets up a transcultural movement in Philip's and Ltaif's writing. Since transculturation relies on exchange between civilisations, traditions and tongues, the two women introduce a Babel-like literary edifice to collapse the tower of indifference. By crossing lands, islands and "langues," and by taking some of their linguistic particularities, Philip and Ltaif offer an interweaving and interrelations of Arabic/African and Western cultures. In so doing they authorize multi-dialogues between these multi-voices which address the other woman. For along with their poetical quilt, they share a common thread: the need to communicate their silence and exile, and to join their own suffering to the Other's pain.

Writing exile in exile leads to a linguistic disembodiment that enables one to rethink the carnal relationship between words and the author's tongue. By transcribing inspirations coming from elsewhere, the writer decomposes and recomposes her "corps" text with a plurality of tongues. Wandering into a linguistic and geographical space would thus stimulate the emergence of a heteroglossia with tongues speaking from the different layers of her corporeal text. Throughout a crossing of tongues that determines her nomadic condition, the writer comes in touch with multiple cultures, banishes isolation and gradually learns how to cultivate her exile.

Spiritually evolving, becoming stronger with the experience of exile, and above all taking advantage of a nomadic condition to involve oneself into artistic creations becomes a means of guaranteeing one's freedom and of being closer to the Other. When exile "takes place" in a country such as Canada, it reveals a multicultural dimension of wandering; in other words, people from different parts of the world happen to meet, converse, exchange and improve their creative skills in this foreign territory. Because of these diverse voices that decide to "speak," a tradition seems to erase, or at least to weaken, the boundaries between nations: that is the tradition of exile. With respect to this nomadic spirit and condition, dialogues of exile and exiled beings should give a more humanistic value to multiculturalism to promote strong transcultural communications.

## NOTES

1. In her previous works, Nourbese Philip used to call herself Marlene Nourbese Philip.
2. The word "phallo(go)centrism" was coined by Irigaray to indicate the dominance of a patriarchal logic in the socio-linguistic structure.
3. The titles of the following poems will be abbreviated as such: "Meditations" for "Meditations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones," "Discourse" for "Discourse on the Logic of Language," "The Question" for "The Question of Language is the Answer to Power," "Testimony" for "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue," and finally "She Tries" for "She Tries her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks."
4. "In the beginning was" appears in the following pages: 17/18/30/31/40 and will gradually indicate the primacy of silence over the word.
5. I allude here to André Brink's book Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege.
6. When comparing herself to Sidon, "the chief city of ancient Phoenicia: founded in the third millennium B.C . . . now the Lebanese city of Saïda" (Collins English Dictionary 1994), the narrator insists on the cultural richness that was the token of this Phoenician civilization. In addition, this city used to be the heart of a market place where people from different countries would come and trade especially fabrics (cf. Collins English Dictionary). Sidon represents a crossing of time, space and cultures for the narrator— a transtemporal aspect that will be commented in the last chapter.
7. "Commencer par la mort" is evocative of the narrator's birth (including the emergence of her consciousness) in a country marked by war.
8. In Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar the metaphorical juncture between the narrator and Sidon, by means of the verb "être," allows a claim for identity against the dominant power. When bringing together two elements that have been denied (the woman and the city) by men, the poet utters the eventual positive result of the equation, that is to exist despite and through negatives: minus + minus = plus.
9. Heterogeneity turns out to be rejected from the (Western) structure (either . . .or).

bitch-white

nigger-woman

black

Victoria

Queen or Jemimah  
 whore-wife  
 virgin-slut

across  
 the ache in chasm  
 stretched the word

too tight  
 too close  
 too loose

nestled in the flesh

grounded  
 in the or of either (Looking for Livingstone 13)

10. The Lebanese space (Her) as well as the female narrator's body (her).
11. The woman is doubly affiliated to exile because of her gender and history, whether she belongs to African, Jewish or any other people forced to leave their country.
12. Françoise Lionnet speaks about French as one of the Languages of the Master. However, as regards Ltaif's and Philip's ethnic and historical context, Arabic (and not French, which "embodies" a language of emancipation for the former) and English are deeply related to—if not rooted in—violence and a patriarchal structure.
13. The comparison between the narrator's hunger and bulimia will be echoed in the section on "rejection."
14. I am referring to the civil war in Lebanon, where people speaking the "same" tongue are killing each other. Ltaif's sentence conveys the idea of an anthropophagic language: "On s'entre-dévorera" (Entre 47).
15. Colonial languages correspond to the ones spoken by previous hegemonic Empires and current dominant nations. In opposition, dialects, creoles, demotic idioms, vernaculars etc., can be considered as languages pertaining to ex-colonized people and as liberating modes of expressions, however paradoxical it might sound.
16. Betsy Warland, "Proper Deafinitions," Sounding Differences 301-302.
17. cf. Kristeva, Étrangers à nous-mêmes 278.
18. The word "matricide" can be applied to Ltaif's text in order to indicate the writer's (utopic) efforts to annihilate the origins of violence, and to extract them from the "matrix" of the land. In addition, what can be interpreted as a "symbolic matricide" in Ltaif's writing reflects her ability to overturn a Western concept of mythology.
19. The camel, symbol for memory, "transposes" the narrator's voice into another story-tale.

20. It is the idea of stubbornness that I would like to highlight with the expression "repeated attempt," which does not necessarily appear in Mireille Rosello's sentence.
21. That already defined place of women in any patriarchal society.
22. The emphasis of quotation marks and words in brackets are mine.
23. As Kristeva explains in Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie, depression and melancholy, according to the Freudian theory, both share the same "deuil impossible de l'objet maternel"(19). The loss of this maternal object triggers a psychological rupture that might affect language and lead to a behavioural dysfunctioning. Although these are not exclusive reactions to loss, death or absence, they nonetheless provide a fertile ground for a psychoanalytical exploration. Subtle distinctions between depression and melancholy are observed by Kristeva. She specifies on that matter that melancholy "a le redoutable privilège de situer l'interrogation de l'analyste au carrefour du biologique et du symbolique"(19). Kristeva's remark will be particularly helpful for studying Ltaif's and Philip's writing since they both insert biological responses (or a body language) against a social and linguistic authority—one of the symbolic systems. The biological and symbolic dimensions of melancholy are here extremely simplified; however I will attempt to develop them in relation to the question of linguistic exile.

Now, if we look carefully at the word melancholy, we observe a semantic field revolving around "gouffre de tristesse, **douleur incommunicable**, . . . désespoir" (13, emphasis added). This mental state, marked by sorrow or mourning, implies, as I said earlier, loss, death, absence or any dramatic event that suddenly overturns the "normal" current of life. In this manner, melancholy corresponds to a subconscious apprehension (fear and understanding) of death inscription in day-to-day life, and also relies on the Thanatos impulse that characterizes a disturbing attraction to death. There is therefore a morbid undertone that determines the "black bile" evolution or fluctuation from depression to exaltation and vice versa. In her book, Kristeva describes how these variations of mood can be invested into a creative activity and operate a new dialectic. At this point, it must be alleged that what seems to differentiate melancholy from depression is that potential access to a mode of expression, thus allowing a dialogue with death (and life) instead of its mute incorporation. Far from pretending that melancholy does not absorb death—"l'imaginaire cannibalique mélancolique" is a good example of that and involves "un **désaveu** de la réalité de la perte ainsi que de la mort. Il manifeste l'angoisse de perdre l'autre en faisant survivre le moi, certes abandonné, mais non séparé de ce qui le nourrit encore et toujours et se métamorphose en lui—qui ressuscite aussi—par cette dévoration" (21, emphasis added)—we have to see this psychic state as a means of representing death artistically. This outlines the melancholic power I will consider in Ltaif's and Philip's poems.

By assuming that mood does indeed possess a language (cf. "L'humeur est-elle un langage" 31-32), melancholy represents a mental space where systems of signs or "investissements énergétiques *fluctuants*" (32, in italics in the text) compose different languages of a pre-verbal stage. In order to discuss Kristeva's analysis, the terms semiotic and symbolic have to be introduced. To do so, I will refer to two expressions

quoted above, namely "douleur incommunicable" and "désaveu."

To speak about an unspeakable pain—and the phrasing already sounds ambiguous—intimates that words fail to communicate the feeling (inasmuch as the symbolic system is defective) or rather that the ordering of words chosen by the artist does not successfully render the experience of pain. Yet what does "unspeakable" mean? Is it what cannot or will not be said? Is it what will not and therefore cannot be expressed? In other words, is pain—and especially what arouses it—kept back by the unconscious, thus remaining unformulated? Finally can what becomes conscious or reaches a liminal space be verbalized? All these questions encapsulate a preoccupation common to every artist, that is how to say (paint, sculpture or dance, etc.) the affect? It seems important to stress here an essential distinction between saying the affect—through symbolic devices—and letting the affect say itself with a semiotic investment. This latter will be "recognized" in a pre-linguistic organization—what (pre-)orders words, syntactic structures, use of space—and in the disruption of grammatical rules. Semiotic offers an overwhelming language that suggests between, with and beyond words by creating a subtext and bearing the symptoms/ signs of melancholy.

Concerning the "désaveu de la réalité ainsi que de la mort," I will simply add that melancholy or the melancholic artist creates from death (or loss of a country and tongue[s]) either to exorcize that reality or to dismiss its ineluctable presence. It is as if by creating the artist were echoing Donne's line "Death, thou shalt die."

24. In "Nouvelles voies/voix," Verduyn comments about the film, in which Ltaif appears—L'Arbre qui dort rêve à ses racines (NFB, 1992)—gathering words from different exiled people. (41)
25. By "universal" I am referring to the danger of generalizing points of view (uni/verse) that may proscribe a whole people and its social, cultural and moral "values."
26. cf. Le Petit Robert 2: dictionnaire universel des noms propres.
27. Rhizome signifies an **adventitious** growth of roots, conveys the idea of a sporadic development, and finally suggests a coming from abroad—adventive roots. In that sense, rhizome can be used symbolically to describe the cultural expansion and acquisition of the exiled being. The word also illustrates the linguistic enrichment that is activated by crossing places and tongues. In opposition, root and more specifically "l'identité-racine," as Glissant designates it, "a [...] ensouché la pensée de soi et du territoire, mobilisé la pensée de l'autre et du voyage" (Poétique 158).

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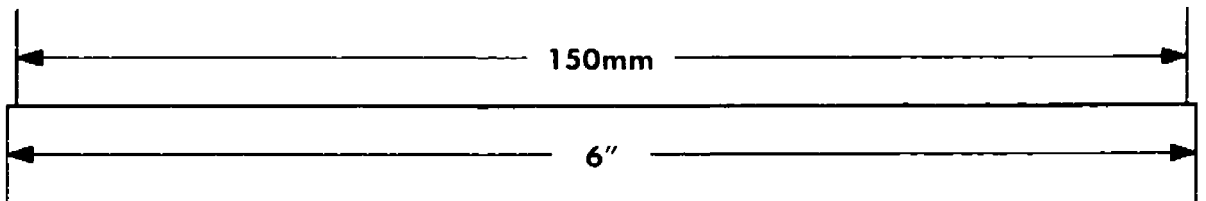
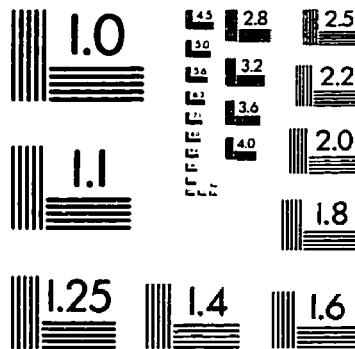
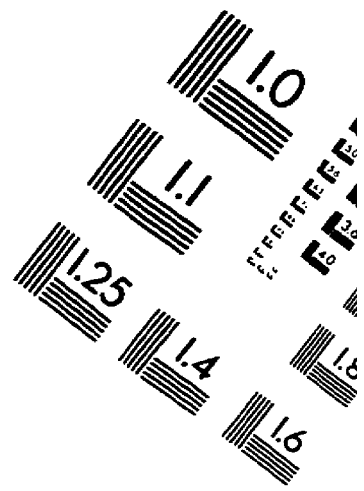
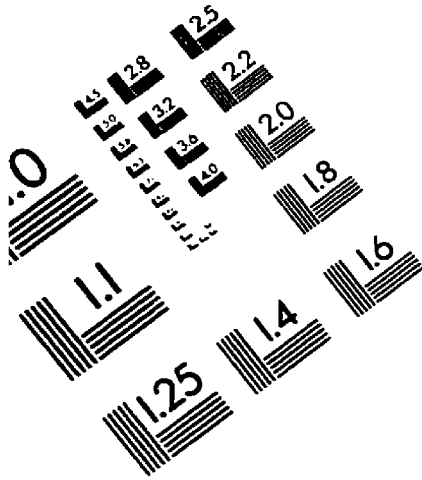
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