

Introduction

Eglė Kačkutė

National University of Ireland Maynooth
Ireland

Kate Averis

Universidad de Antioquia
Colombia

Catherine Mao

Independent Researcher
France

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, and in the latter part of its second decade in particular, women's writing in French has seen an increasing focus on mobility, that is to say "works of fiction which are affected and shaped by migratory flows" (Dagnino 2015, 145). Since the trope of the crossing is at the heart of all literatures of mobility, this special issue explores emerging trends of representing the many dimensions of the crossings in contemporary women's writing in French that are both physical and conceptual, focusing on ways in which recent women's writing in French crosses – or struggles to cross – formal, spatial, national, cultural, linguistic, racial and gender boundaries in texts produced in or between the African, Asian, American and European continents. Featuring bilingual and translingual works, and works infused by the multilingual, transcultural heritage of their authors, these articles identify the textual and artistic practices resulting from crossings between languages (in translingual texts), cultures (in texts that breach cultural frontiers), and media (in both textual and visual genres, including prose, poetry, photography and *bande dessinée*).

Scholarship on contemporary women's writing has focused extensively on its capacity and motivation to subvert and resist dominant cultures, discourses and concepts, particularly in relation to constructions of selfhood, identity, and gender (Rye 2004; Jordan 2004). The same could be said about recent research in contemporary women's writing and mobility (Averis 2014). If late-twentieth-century women's writing in French saw conceptual transformations enacted through productive engagement with the notion of hybridity, suggesting a tendency to absorb and integrate different elements, more recently there has been a turn towards negotiating multiple identities through crossings and ruptures, privileging alterity over assimilation. The range of texts examined in the present collection suggests that contemporary women writers are capable of radical conceptual transformations and departures in their crossing of both physical and symbolic boundaries.

The collection opens with an exploration of how far linguistic crossings affect personal subjectivity, as demonstrated in Simon Kemp's reading of the fictional writing of one of the most important authors working in French today: Marie

Darrieussecq. Kemp's article demonstrates the major crossing in Darrieussecq's oeuvre from the long-standing belief in the relation between self and language, and specific languages, to posit identity that withstands linguistic difference, and that may be expressed 'within language, between languages, and in the absence of language'.

The two following articles confirm contemporary female authors' ongoing investment in innovative forms of representation that contribute to transforming existing ethical norms of representation (Rye and Damlé 2015) by exploring the crossing of textual and visual boundaries. Catherine Mao's article focuses on women's spatial mobility in Dominique Goblet's album *Souvenir d'une journée parfaite* to reveal how the traditional male-dominated narrative structure of the *bande dessinée* is undermined to invent a new way of reflecting on the introspective world of the female narrative subject. Subsequently, Geneviève Guetemme reflects on emerging ethics in poetic and photographic representations of 'other' cultures in her comparative reading of the transcultural poetic and photographic work of, respectively, Laurine Rousselet and Leila Alaoui, in order to demonstrate each artist's bid to eschew binary hierarchical structures and embrace a horizontal bilateral gaze between viewer/reader and photographer/poet.

The collection continues with a focus on some of the more challenging aspects of the transnational crossings of authors, readers and texts. Adelaide Kuehn shows how the metafictional narrative strategy of first-time novelist Elizabeth Tchoungui is used to expose the ways in which the artistic identity of a Cameroonian author (and, by extension, other African writers) published in France is manipulated by the French publishing industry in order to fit a rigid narrative. The collection also includes discussion of some of the more ethically ambivalent creative practices in contemporary women's writing, notably in terms of representing ethnic, gender or social difference from a relatively privileged position. Nadia Louar argues that racial and gender stereotypes are reproduced through representations of men of colour in otherwise politically subversive feminist texts, while Mark Lee focuses on the motivation behind transgressive acts of violence committed by a female migrant in a transnational setting in two works by Shumona Sinha. Together, these articles point to persistent obstacles of crossing certain psychological boundaries that span continents and generations.

Generations prove to be an important theme in the closing essays of the volume. Recent scholarship of mobility in women's writing in French suggests that experiences and representations of mobility and migration are significantly marked by gender (Averis 2014; Averis and Hollis-Touré 2016). The current collection closes with two articles that explore maternal and/or filial experiences of transnational and transgenerational crossings. Nathalie Ségeral's article demonstrates how international crossings may be a means of breaking free from traumatic transgenerational identity patterns, whereas Eglė Kačkutė explores the impact of cultural differences on the relationship between migrant

mothers and their children, suggesting that cultural alterity enhances rather than obstructs their intimate bond.

Together, the articles gathered here underline the interconnectedness between the different dimensions of the 'crossings' to be found in recent women's writing in French, from physical to subjective and creative. While spatial, cultural and linguistic crossings may translate into textual and visual ones with a certain degree of fluidity, the crossing of gender and racial boundaries is shown in the texts analysed to remain more resistant. Like the cultural differences described by the multilingual, transcultural scholar Sylvia Molloy (2002, 410), the crossings evoked by these twenty-first-century texts might not be immediately comprehensible, recognisable, or translatable, and therefore insist on the crossings required of both reader and writer, viewer and artist, in the aesthetic encounter.¹

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Notes

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