

AGAINST TRANSLATION: Quebec and the Charter of Values

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In a chalk board image shown as part of the exhibition 'Coming to Terms' at the University of Toronto Jackman Humanities Institute¹, the Montreal-based artist Carl Trahan proposed an unusual visualization of the process of translation. Rather than showing juxtaposition or doubling, as is so often the case in representations of translation, he created a rhizomatic construction, beginning with one word 'dérangement' and branching into a dizzying infinity of possible meanings. The chalk board was covered with hundreds of words, arranged in a dense, erratic series of enbranchments. The principle ordering the translation is simple : each word is given a series of possible equivalents (taken from a bilingual dictionary), and then these words is in turn given a series of possible meanings – in each case moving from French to English to French again. What takes shape is a fantastic arborescence of meaning, a bilingual Roget's thesaurus, where equivalence moves across languages on its way to no particular conclusion. The choice of the initial word 'dérangement' is significant. With a capital D, it refers to the disturbance known as 'le grand Dérangement': the expulsion of the Acadians by the British in 1755. The historical exile is here dramatized as an exile from meaning though it also shows how words create new connections through their wanderings. Trahan, who is of Acadian origin, builds on this originary episode of dispossession to show how meaning is at once given and withdrawn, because caught up in an endless play of recommencement, each word rippling out into always enlarging nodes of interlocked meanings – not moving logically from large to small but heading in unpredictable directions. Because the space is circumscribed preventing the trees from developing vertically, the branches become more and more wildly intertangled as the meanings advance. Written in chalk, the piece is ephemeral, reproducing our vaporous attempts to pin down meaning, emphasizing what is unresolvable and always moving in the task of translation. Dérangement moves in a meticulously unprogrammed path to its final words – in one string *ravissement, enchantement*; in another *torment* – yet what is final on the board is only the beginning of some new potential chain. In contrast to more usual representations of translation which depend on a dualistic logic of symmetrical, quasi-identical artefacts, languages here are shown as being in perpetual conversation.

There is a strong link between Trahan's blackboard and the perceptions which emerge from Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire de la philosophie européenne* – the monumental work which shows that the history of philosophical thought is an unending movement of meanings through time and across languages. Both Trahan's image and the *Vocabulaire* (recently translated into English by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood) are predicated on the idea of translation as process rather than product, indeed as the process at the heart of all meaning-making. Philosophical terms, as Barbara Cassin has argued, are 'untranslatables', that is, by essence attached to the instability and mobility of meaning and therefore continually in a process of translation. The word *value* is an interesting example of a term whose meanings are constantly redefined according to the linguistic system and historical tradition within which it is being activated. While the English *value*, the French *valeur* and the German *Gewalt* all have a common origin in the Latin '*valere*' – to be worthy of, to have power, and also to be well, as in the salutation *Vale* which wished the Roman citizen both Good health and social influence –

the term takes on particular meanings in German territory as *Gewalt* takes valour in the direction of violence and *Wert* (worth) serves as the foundation for so much of 19th century German philosophical thought, including Nietzsche's *Umwertung der Werte* (transvaluation of values) and Marx's *Mehrwert* (surplus value) (Cassin 1337) (Apter 1195). What distinguishes the idea of value, we learn from the entry, is not only this deviation through German but the extremely wide range of domains to which it refers : value and virtue; value and truth; value and meaning; value and economy, value and esthetics. *Value* is an exceptionally slippery term that has accrued over the centuries meanings ranging from personal virtue, physical and moral strength to economic worth. In fact, we might conclude that while expressing absolute confidence in the nature of what is being promoted, *value* has become a term that profits from the vagueness of its grounds, taking advantage of the conflation of the many possible kinds of guarantees for worth.

Value in Translation

The troublesome nature of *value* was amply demonstrated in Quebec during the seven-month period from September 2013 until April 2014 when a proposed Charter of Values² was at the centre of political debate in the province. Introduced by the minority Parti québécois, the Charter was to be a cornerstone of cultural policy for Quebec were the Parti québécois re-elected. The sound defeat of the Parti québécois in the April 7th election in favour of the Liberal Party put an end to the debate. Yet, the terms and implications of the discussion merit further reflection. Why did a historically socio-democratic party take on a populist agenda which resembled that of the European far right? Why did a large part of the Quebec population seem to favour this agenda – if only for a short time? How was the idea of 'value' interpreted across sectors of society? There is a curious expression in Québécois French, one that it takes outsiders a long time to figure out. The expression is '*c'est de valeur*' ...as in '*C'est de valeur qu'elle ne soit pas venue*' (It's a shame she didn't come). *C'est de valeur* means the opposite of what it says : not something of value but rather what a pity, how unfortunate – apparently an ancient deformation of '*c'est de malheur*'. The expression is symptomatic of the ways in which 'values' were translated during the debate on the Charter. The word became increasingly coded, laden with meanings that were on the surface benign, but in reality virulent. How were the values of some to be negotiated *against* those of others?

Values and their meaning through translation – these are the elements which will shape these remarks. I will first describe some of the arguments of the Charter as both aberration and symptom, offensive weapon and cultural text, suggesting that the Charter itself enacted a politics of translation – one which can be critiqued and opposed through alternative logics. And then I'll give an extended example of one translational artefact that seems to me of particular interest in the current context – and this is the film *Incendies* by Denis Villeneuve.

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Translation is traditionally seen as a value in itself – an act of benevolence which also confers economic value : the *plus* that comes with movement out of home territory and away from the exclusive hold of the home crowd; the *plus* that comes with promotion to a new language, possibly one ranked higher on the global scale; the *plus* that comes with the addition of a second voice mingled with the first. But translation is inflected by singular lines of tension in Quebec. Few realities in Quebec are not in some way caught up in a dynamic of resistance or acquiescence to the English language or North American culture, a defence of national culture and an openness to cultural imports, a positioning with or against the political and economic policies of English Canada. But translation is increasingly an active force *within* Quebec, where the old stories of the English-French divide are slowly being supplanted by new language grids, by connections between French and Arabic, for instance, as I'll discuss in relation to the film *Incendies*. These many translational tensions define Quebec as a society traversed by diverse and sometimes conflicting self-definitions. The debate over the Charter was revealing of these conflicts, playing both along traditional fracture lines but also introducing new ones.

What exactly was the Charter to do? Designed to confirm secularism as a principle of Quebec society, the Charter decreed that employees in the public and parapublic sectors (that includes doctors, nurses, teachers, university professors, daycare workers and many more) would refrain from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, *des signes ostentatoires*, during work hours.³ While the religious neutrality of the state is already a principle well-accepted in Quebec, and appears in the Charter only for the purpose of strengthening Quebec's commitment to it – and therefore meeting with generalized approval – the ban on wearing overt religious symbols aroused strong opposition, even from within the ranks of the sovereignist movement – including two former PQ premiers. Other opponents include the Quebec Bar Association, the Quebec Human Rights Commission, teacher's trade unions, the Quebec Association of Health and Social Services Institutions and all major universities and many, in fact probably most of Quebec's most important intellectuals. And still the Charter according to media accounts and surveys at first found favour with roughly 50% of francophone voters – a large number of them from outside Montreal.

The intensely acrimonious debate created strange bedfellows – dividing sovereignists one from the other, throwing progressive secularists into the arms of fundamentalist religious groups, allying those same progressive secularists with English Canada, and dividing feminists into two camps (those who believed that Muslim women need help in their fight against patriarchy and those who feared that the prohibition of the headscarf would exclude Muslim women from public life). This was such a contentious issue that over the Xmas holidays the Parti québécois sent out a 'Guide' to its followers (adorned with a Xmas turkey) on how to respond to the angry objections of family members around the festive table.⁴ It is a debate that for once was not about language, but as ideological divisions fell across language lines, the traditional rifts remained in place. While francophones were divided about the charter, anglophones were unanimously opposed, remaining untouched by the fears, anxieties and enthusiasms that drove the proponents of Bill 60.

Dominating the news for months, the Charter nevertheless had some competition from the nightly bulletins of the Charbonneau commission, a public inquiry into corruption in the construction industry, implicating one municipal government after another, Quebec's flagship engineering firms and one of the main trade unions, leaving the public with a sickening sense of rot in public administration. This generalized despair was possibly one of the factors that motivated PQ strategists to introduce this appeal to values that allowed the populations of the regions in particular to reaffirm their identity, saying yes to identity in place of a more difficult debate on sovereignty (which remained unpopular), and showing enthusiasm for a secularism (*laïcité*) that Diane Lamoureux calls *Catho-laïcité*, a supposedly unmarked but in fact culture-laden form of religious expression.⁵

These events provided an ironic counterpoint to the last big *international* news event from Quebec, the student strikes of spring 2012 where an entirely different set of values was being defended. Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, the most brilliant of the remarkable student leaders, (against the Charter, by the way) has continued to lead a tough and coherent attack on neo-liberalism. The power of the student strikes lay in their double appeal – to the legacy of Quebec's Quiet Revolution which aimed at guaranteeing free education for its children and to the worldwide protest against austerity. The strong public support given to the students drew attention to the alternative movements that continue to animate Quebec society, the whole sector of the social economy, for instance, that enjoys a degree of institutional support in Quebec unequalled in Canada. One must remember that this is the province that supports universal, public \$7 a day daycare, that has a network of neighbourhood clinics that revolutionized preventive medical care, that first introduced legislation against discrimination against sexual orientation, and which has always valued culture – continuing to support Québec's cultural organisations and the export of its creative talent.

There are many provocative elements associated with the PQ rhetoric defending the Charter: the faulty comparison of this Bill with very successful Law 101, the language law protecting French that was passed in 1977; the suggestion that the Crucifix that stands over the speaker's bench in the National Assembly is not a religious symbol but a historical one (among the many who disagreed with this view were the Quebec branch of Femen, an offshoot of Pussy Riot, who bared their breasts in the National Assembly with the slogan 'Crucifix décâlisse' written across their bodies); the flawed comparison of the Muslim hidjab with the cassocks of priests in Quebec before the Quiet Revolution; and a final element, one that deserves some comment – the fact that the Charter depends on identification with the French republican model of universalism and its concomitant appeal to the most conservative European strains of multiculturalism-bashing.

In fact, there are many elements of Quebec culture that place it at odds with French universalism, if only in language terms: while feminism in France has had little impact on official discourse, and where women still speak of *Les droits de l'homme*, Quebec had a *première ministre*, plenty of *auteures*, *professeures* and an entire vocabulary of feminized occupations that are entirely foreign to a Hexagonal ear). But the debate over the Charter is in some ways a replay of the culture wars of the 1990s in France when multiculturalism became a 'repoussoir'

in the French context, what Robert Stam and Ella Shohat call an ‘an obscure object of projective hostility’, a caricature, in contrast to an idealized homegrown republican and universalist model. Why was there such opposition to multiculturalism when in fact ‘Just as the antagonism to multicultural identity politics was at its height, France was undergoing a thoroughgoing and irreversible process of multiculturalization, manifest especially in the arts and popular culture’ (Stam and Shohat 146)? It is clear that there is a gap between the realities of social and cultural diversity and the political interpretation given to this diversity. The anti-migration rhetoric of European right-wing populist parties interprets the multicultural and multilingual nature of large cities as the unacceptable face of a modernity that threatens unitary narratives of nation and community.

In Quebec, multiculturalism has also played the role of ‘straw dog’, but the context is different. There is general consensus in Quebec that multicultural policy is an English-Canadian idea, a policy put into place by Trudeau to undermine Quebec – and a great deal of energy has been expended in the search for alternative terms, with substantial agreement coming to rest in ‘interculturalism’ as defined by Gérard Bouchard (2013) – an acknowledgement of cultural diversity which still maintains the priority of a dominant cultural subjectivity and memory. This generalized distaste for the term ‘multiculturalism’ allowed Parti québécois ideologues to invoke Angela Merkel’s and David Cameron’s dismissal of European multiculturalism as a failure, part of a discourse that played into the rhetoric of the European far right.

Against Translation

There was from the start an acknowledgement in the rhetoric of the PQ that the Charter would not translate well, that it would inevitably meet with opposition from English Canada, from the federal government, from the anglophone minority in Quebec. But there was also a sense in which this untranslatability was freely chosen, a provocation, a laying down of the lines. This gesture in some way resembles the mood of Quebec in the 1960s, when literature was written in the in-group vernacular called *joual* with little concern for communication outside Quebec’s borders. But the differences between the translational force of these two moments are worth emphasizing because they underline the huge shift that has occurred in Quebec politics and culture. In the 60s, the French-Canadian minority in Canada was struggling to free itself from the economic and cultural oppression of Anglo-Canadian colonialism. Today a Québécois majority is imposing its political will on its own immigrant minorities. The Charter’s appeal to *us* against *them*, in the name of the right of the State to dictate its cultural norms, was not only a source of alienation but light-years away from the on-the-ground reality of an increasingly porous and translational Quebec. And this is why the Charter stood as a perverse product of a government intentionally out of step with the diversity of much of Quebec and in particular the cosmopolitan hybridity of Montreal.

I said before that the rhetoric of the Charter resisted translation, in the sense that it anticipated, indeed welcomed resistance and incomprehension from the traditional enemies of Quebec nationalism. But the universalist logic of the Charter also dictated the kinds of

translation which it allowed. Universalism does not allow for dissidence. Announcing the values of secularism that was to characterize the State, the Charter added a corollary: secularism expresses itself as the absence of 'marked' garb. All who express their adherence to neutral secularism can belong to the State: the others are excluded. This form of universalist logic is assimilationist : it unites the members of the State in an affirmation of sameness. Translatability in this equation is predicated on the creation of a community which is naturalized, which carries no marks of difference. This conception of universalist citizenship has a corresponding textual practice: the assimilationist translations which, as Antoine Berman has shown, were the hallmark of the 'French style' of translation. Berman denounced the imperialist sense of superiority which such practices came to serve, and both Doris Sommer and Emily Apter mobilize their politics of untranslatability against national 'monocultures' and ideals of assimilation which smoothe over differences to form a unifying whole – whether linguistic or social. Criticism of the Charter must therefore take the form of an appeal to alternative logics of translation – ones which acknowledge difficulties of transmission, points of blockage in intercultural traffic, as well as modes of creative interference which I call furthering – warmer, more volatile, form of interaction, allowing for the possibility of creating hybrid forms, more similar to a 'leap' than to a 'bridge'.

And so here is the moment when I would like to shift to countertrends and translational logics that belie the assumptions of the Charter. Here's one example. While most of the discussion around the Charter recognized the explicit targeting of Muslim women, the question of the Chassidic Jews – another visible and religiously attired religious minority – was less in the public mind. Yet as they are concentrated in small areas of the city they are much more of a real visible presence than Muslims. As the debate over the Charter started to gain momentum, few took the measure of the election of the first Chassidic woman Mindy Pollack to the neighbourhood municipal council, the first Chassidic woman in Canada to be elected to any public office.⁶ While it is true that the Charter would have had no bearing on elected officials, it would certainly have had an impact on the desire for a religious person to engage in public life. Mindy Pollak's riding is precisely on the border zone where Chassidic Jews and Outremont francophones have had irritated confrontations. That Mindy Pollak has drawn her community into neighbourhood political life through the front door is astonishing and positive. The figure of Mindy Pollak invites us then to place the debate over the Charter against the backdrop of the diverse city of Montreal.

I'd like to turn now to a work that seems to be emblematic of new logics of translation and that is the 2010 film *Incendies*, by the young Quebec filmmaker Denis Villeneuve, an adaptation of the play by Wajdi Mouawad. Mouawad was born in Lebanon in 1968 and moved with his family to Paris, immigrating to Montreal in 1983 – and becoming a very successful playwright and theatre director. Denis Villeneuve was born in 1967 in a town outside Montreal, and has now made 5 important films. In adapting the play by Mouawad, Villeneuve took considerable freedom, and achieved a remarkable effect. The movie was an Oscar nominee and listed as one of the best films of 2011 by the New York Times. Villeneuve turned an evocative, poetic, allusive play into a powerfully visual representation – where the pockmarked walls of a city in ruins, the desert sand, the flames of a burning bus – take on dramatic roles. The film *Incendies*

(2010) is a rich illustration of what I have called *furthering*, a mode of translation which extends and enriches the original.

In *Incendies* the main characters are young Québécois twins who return to Lebanon after their mother's death in search of a father and a brother they did not know they had. Their mother, with whom they had had a difficult relationship, has sent them on this quest, which requires them to move across the world and back through time to recover the memory of their origins. The quest is reluctantly undertaken, and the twins are mostly met with hostility and silence as they move from one informant to another – until the disparate pieces of information come together to their startling conclusion.

While the play is a powerful and stylized reflection on war, the movie fills in the blanks, furnishing visual concreteness and narrative continuity. The myth of Oedipus is central to the plot and references to the myth occur throughout the film, but it is only at the end that the spectator will understand this accumulation of references. The three dots on the ankle of the man known only as 'the torturer' recall the swollen ankles of Oedipus (that is the origin of the name in Greek: *oidos pos* – swollen foot), when he was hobbled as a child and abandoned (Mouawad had staged Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in Montreal several years previously).

Mouawad explains in an interview that he tried to use real names in his play: "Palestinians, Israelis, Syrians, Lebanese, but every time I do that, the poetry and the theatre stray far away from me. I stop and they come back. Maybe one day I will write political plays. For now, every time I speak about a Middle East tragedy, I can't name it." (Meerzon 2012, 215) The movie, by contrast, names. It names by using identifiable images and by writing the Arabic language back into the plot. The film moves the play away from its deliberate unsituatedness, both physical and linguistic. Language acts feature prominently as the twins are faced with extreme difficulties of translation: secrets are kept from them and translations are deliberately withheld.

While the plot of a play is deliberately confusing and excessive – too emotional, too violent, too coincidental – it takes on absolute clarity within the film's telling. Remarkably, the physical details of the film do not limit the scope of the story or work against this mythical interpretation, but rather open the landscape itself (the ravaged city, the deserted highways) to its symbolic dimensions. And so by the end of the movie, the spectator understands that the film has been translating not only between geographical realities (Montreal and Beirut, Quebec and Lebanon), but also between the realms of history and myth. The characters reveal themselves to be much more than individuals, as their actions take on horrific symbolic significance in the context of a country embroiled in civil war.

Incendies is a product of the dialogues between the separate but interconnected realms of "here" and "there". The film, as I have said, is based on symmetrical oppositions (French and Arabic, Montreal and Beirut, the Québécois notary and his Lebanese equivalent (added by Villeneuve) the twins as they show opposing attitudes to their mother's request, Jeanne willing to accede, Simon stubbornly refusing, the opposing camps of the civil war – all these oppositions highlighted by the very first shot of the movie, a rocky clivage in the desert

landscape – but the dénouement of the story throws the whole structure into disarray. The machine that ensures reproduction, the family, is shown to be defective – unable to create generational difference. In this chilling retelling of the Oedipus myth, Father becomes brother, the giver of life becomes a son, and the order of the family collapses and its structure is now formless, contaminated, mixed. Distances too are collapsed as Nihad the torturer immigrates to Montreal, and becomes one of many strangers forming new communities in the city, a body like any other that congregates at the local swimming pool. The twins no longer have to travel across the ocean to discover the disturbance at the centre of their family – that difference is now among them, in the variegated here that is now their present. This move from the logic of symmetrical opposition to one of internal difference and mixing mirrors the implication of the filmmaker – whose desire is not simply to transfer the text but to show his hand, to participate in its transformation.⁷

It is not insignificant to recall that the film written and directed by Denis Villeneuve prior to *Incendies* was *Polytechnique* (2008) the story of the massacre of fourteen women students at Montreal's Université de Montréal in 1989. It is as if this descent into the anti-feminist violence of his own city was preparation for an incursion into the prolonged violence of a civil war. And Villeneuve's subsequent films, notably *Prisoners*, have shown his ability to build up extraordinary intensity with images of violence at the same time questioning violence itself, making violence itself the very object of filmic scrutiny.⁸

In its dialogue between the linguistically divided cities of Montreal and Beirut, but also in its staging of the breakdown of these divisions, *Incendies* is a powerful symbol of Montreal's changing cultural scene – to be placed alongside a number of other important new films that engage with issues of immigration, *Inch'Allah* (2012) by A. Barbeau-Lavolette, *Monsieur Lazhar* by Philippe Falardeau based on a play by Evelyne de la Chenelière, *Rebelle* by Kim Nguyen, (these last two were both Oscar nominees for best foreign film) Denis Chouinard's *Clandestins* and *L'ange de goudron*, but also, in a slightly different vein, *Congorama* also by Philippe Falardeau – the movie he made in 2006 before the very successful *Monsieur Lazhar*.⁹ *Congorama* is a brilliant and quirky film that, like *Incendies*, takes on the family structure to question origins and filiation. The film tells the story of Belgian inventor, married to a Congolese woman, who comes to Quebec to investigate his origins as an adopted child, sent off to Belgium with his new family during the Montreal the 1967 Worlds Fair – but it also harks back to the Belgian Worlds Fair where a film called *Congorama* was shown, and evokes the traffic in languages, ideas, and diamonds between Quebec, Belgium and Africa. The film approaches questions of paternity, belonging and inheritance through the lens of the three interwoven colonial histories, but the characters that represent each of these histories are unexpected exemplars, the oppressed and the oppressor not where you would expect them. Though the film introduces lots of plot elements that have to do with Michel's work as an inventor, the most affecting parts of the movie have to do with the relationship of the blundering and gentle Michel with his famous writer father and his 10-year old aspiring tennis champion son – who is very black and doesn't resemble him at all. The refraction of this identity question against the backdrops of both Belgium and the Congo are ways of investigating the power politics that shape the family (among them the story of illegal adoption arranged by Quebec nuns) as well as

irregular patterns of filiation. Though adopting a much less dramatic tone than *Incendies*, a much more irreverent and backhand sensibility, *Congorama* like *Incendies* makes impossible any easy recourse to ideas of us and them, nous et les autres.

Incendies plots translation on a moving grid, like the words on Carl Trahan's blackboard, proposing not a symmetrical replica of the original but generating 'translation effects' opening into new regimes of meaning, all the while retaining a commitment to a central, common core. Furtherings are textual manoeuvres where a strong dose of second authorship is a beneficial addition.¹⁰ These are examples of unusual translations that are activating new axes of transmission across the urban landscape and that establish the translational nature of Quebec culture – and in particular of the city of Montreal – entering into contradiction with the translational logic of the Charter and its values as I hope to have shown, refusing the confrontation of us against them, the kind of logic that Jean-François Lisée, the PQ's Minister for intergovernmental affairs promoted in his 2007 essay called *Nous*.

The competing and overlapping voices of the city often define a reality at odds with the identity claims of the nation. The linguistic fragmentation of the city of Montreal draws attention to translation as process – a movement and not a state, the continual daily negotiation between the language or languages inhabiting the public, physical spaces of the city and digital spaces of communication – an intensification of the sense of lived, urban experience as a continuous engagement with the possibilities and aporias of translation.

Montreal offers a particularly intense version of a translational city – its gains and losses, its differing cultural objectives, its unsettling effects. Its sidewalks are today alive with the languages of migration and globalization. But many of these languages have only limited engagement with the city. It is the patterns of translation which will tell which languages and which communities count. What emerges for Quebec as a whole then is an image of divided and contested cultural space, where difference is engaged through movements of coercion and resistance, willful indifference and engaged interconnection.

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¹ 'Coming to Terms'. Jackman Humanities Institute, University of Toronto, September-June 2013-14, curated by John G. Hampton.

² Bill 60, commonly known as the *Charte des valeurs québécoises*, but whose full official title is *la Charte affirmant les valeurs de laïcité et de neutralité religieuse de l'État ainsi que d'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et encadrant les demandes d'accommodement*.

³ <http://pq.org/nouvelle/charte-des-valeurs-quebecoises-quebec-presente-ses/>

⁴ http://fichiers.pq.org/envoisgc/charte_valeurs/Charte_partys_des_fetes.pdf

⁵ Lamoureux, 'Le Triomphe de l'ersatz', *Le Devoir*, 30 septembre, 2013.

<http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/388788/la-chartre-ou-le-triomphe-de-l-ersatz>

⁶ <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/151394/montreal-elects-first-hasidic-woman-to-office>

⁷ In this context, one might wonder why the film's title was maintained in French when an English title was available? Linda Gaboriau's English version of the play is called 'Scorched' –an appropriately searing title-- and this English version has circulated considerably, both within Canada and abroad (for instance performed in Greece in 2012). Gaboriau has in her very extensive practice of some 100 play translations in Quebec never kept the French title, resisting the temptation even for Michel-Marc Bouchard's 'Les Feluettes', (from 'fluet') an untranslatable title she replaced with the very appropriate 'Lilies'. Or 'La Nef des sorcières' by Denise Boucher becoming 'A Clash of Symbols'. Keeping the French title points to the francophone origins and to the cultural matrix within which the

film was produced—even as it has gained wide circulation within the North American market. There are precedents like *Prochain episode* by Hubert Aquin or *Les Belles-soeurs* by Michel Tremblay, but examples like these and others hint at the extreme cultural embeddedness of the language, suggest some sort of resistance to translation. By contrast, *Incendies* exhibits an exilic subjectivity, one that wanders across languages.

⁸ The series of transformational gestures that resulted in *Incendies* includes a spin-off which is the film by Anais Barbeau-Lavalette called ‘Se souvenir des cendres—regards sur Incendies’, a documentary also from 2010, a ‘making of’ that follows the cast of Irakian, Palestinian and Lebanese refugees that Villeneuve has recruited for his film, and questions them about the scenes they are witnessing. Barbeau-Lavallée collects the testimonies of refugees who have survived conflict, watching the children playing their games of war, listening to woman tell tales of reconciliation. The documentary reconnects the film to its origins in the refugee experience of Mouawad himself, turning the scenes of violence in the film back onto those who may once have been spectators of analogous scenes, and finding contradictory answers. The film also allows the words of an older woman who utters some shocking words. Horrified by the crime of Nawal in the movie (she has a child with a Palestinian refugee), this woman is adamant in claiming that Nawal indeed deserves to die, and would have killed Nawal herself had she been there... The perspectives are the film are complicated by the testimony of this woman who maintains her own positions against the injunction of the play to ‘cut the thread of anger’. The strong message of *Incendies*, play and movie, has to do with the difficult reconciliation of memory and abandon, the requirement to make contact with the past and the obligation to break with the past. The documentary reinforces the conclusion that such an injunction is not easily complied with.

⁹ If novels and theatre were the important sites of what became known as ‘l’écriture migrante’ in the 1980s and 1990s, a flurry of works written in French by writers whose first language or cultural affiliation was not Québécois and which were influential in reshaping conceptions of cultural citizenship and which generated an immense amount of scholarship in literary studies-- some of these authors having become cultural icons in Quebec like Dany Laferrière, now an Immortal of the French Academy--it would seem that the energy of the new century has shifted to the cinema.

¹⁰ This recalls what the Montreal poet Erin Moure calls ‘transelation’, in her playful response to Fernando Pessoa, a rewriting that at the same time follows the structure of the original. Moure has been an important translator of Nicole Brossard, following and accompanying Barbara Godard and Robert Majzels, in making translation an important instrument of feminist writing--through intertextual references, through collaborative and reciprocal translation. This translational *poetics* became a central aspect of the feminist Canadian avant-garde writers such as Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, and Madeleine Gagnon. Writers, artists, cultural activists, theorists, spun a web of relations that made possible a new space of translational writing. Similarly, a playwright like Normand Chaurette, the playwright who has translated many Shakespeare plays for the stage, wrote *Les Reines, The Queens*, as a product of a failed translation of *Richard III*. In his essay *Comment tuer Shakespeare*, Chaurette uses fiction, opera, essay, to explore his relationship to the Bard, only one of the many dramaturges of the 1980s and 90s to adopt Shakespearean texts for their transformative and allegorical potential.