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POSTCOLONIALIZING THE *BAGNE*

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*Abstract*

In Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* project, there are no obvious references to the *bagne*. The omission is surprising, for this institution has long played a significant role in the French imagination. It persists in the French language in several prominent expressions, and continues to be associated with key national symbols such as the *bonnet phrygien*. This silencing is associated with representations of the penal colony in popular culture and in heritage practices, both of which tend to associate the penal colony with ‘dangerous’ white French *bagnards*, failing accordingly to recognize the wider impact of the institution on colonized spaces. The article draws on a corpus of postcolonial representations or discussions of the *bagne* to propose a new, more enabling way of exploring (and memorializing) this essentially nineteenth-century phenomenon. Analysis of texts by Léon Gontran Damas, Kateb Yacine, Leila Sebbar, Anouar Benmalek, Mehdi Lallaoui and Patrick Chamoiseau suggests that this ‘postcolonialization’ of the penal colony through new forms of creative engagement allows the recognition of transcolonial axes of penal transportation, exemplified by the banishment of Kabyle rebels to New Caledonia following their revolt against the impact of French occupation in spring 1871. The article concludes by drawing on recent postcolonial engagement with concepts such as ‘legacies’ and ‘ruins’ — particularly in the work of Ann Laura Stoler and Chamoiseau — to suggest that alternative narratives, and new critical and aesthetic approaches to the penal colony, have begun to emerge.

In the multiple volumes of Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* project (1984–93), there are no obvious references to the *bagne*.[[1]](#footnote-2) The omission is surprising, for this institution has long played a significant role in the French imagination. It has entered the French language in several prominent expressions, is associated with key national symbols such as the *bonnet phrygien*, and has been distilled into the copious iconography of several metropolitan sites (most notably the île de Ré, from where French *bagnards* left the Hexagon as they began their transportation). The absence of the penal colony follows, however, the logic of Nora’s collection, which silences places, objects and other phenomena associated primarily with the French Empire.[[2]](#footnote-3) The only well-documented exception is the 1931 colonial exhibition at Vincennes, although the author of the essay on this subject, Charles-Robert Ageron, seeks in his contribution to explain that the event has achieved the status of myth and so is not to be read as a *lieu de mémoire*.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The reasons for the absence of the nineteenth-century institution of the penal colony from Nora’s collection are unclear, although the editor has been explicit about his decision to exclude extra-territorial sites and his avoidance of questions of empire.[[4]](#footnote-5) These editorial decisions reflect the predominantly national and republican underpinnings of the *Lieux de mémoire* project, and also mirror the ways in which — in the French imagination, and often materially on the ground — a number of key sites associated with French colonialism have become *lieux d’oubli*. Where these locations relating to the *bagne* have been recognized as part of wider realms of memory, there has been a tendency to privilege their place in metropolitan memorialization, and to downplay the more complex, often transcolonial entanglements with which they are associated. Prominent among the *vestiges du bagne* in New Caledonia, for instance, is the *cimetière des déportés* on the île des Pins, an immaculately tended site that stands in stark contrast to the postcolonial ruination that characterizes other remnants of the penal colony on the island. The cemetery is absorbed into the republican logic of Nora’s project, and may be seen as related to the Mur des Fédérés in Père Lachaise, a different site which merits an essay (by Madeleine Rebérioux) in the *Lieux de mémoire* collection.[[5]](#footnote-6) A similar case could be made in French Guiana, where heritage practices — responding undoubtedly to tourist demand — foreground the places in which French ‘celebrity prisoners’ were incarcerated, most notably Papillon’s cell at Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni and Alfred Dreyfus’s house on the île du Diable.

Such memorialization of the penal colony is reflected in many literary representations of it, especially in travel writing and cognate genres, which often tend to replicate tropes and descriptions already common in nineteenth-century accounts of the institution. The aim of this article is to analyse a rich but largely unexplored alternative corpus of Francophone postcolonial representations of the *bagne*. It suggests that these texts perform critical work that diversifies histories of nineteenth-century penal transportation by emphasizing often silenced phenomena such as the transcolonial flows of convicts and the related entanglements of histories of oppression and violence (including slavery and indenture) at sites of suffering.[[6]](#footnote-7) At the same time, the article suggests that the creative interventions of contemporary Francophone writers and artists are central to the forms of reading and uncovering essential to the identification of a ‘postcolonial’ nineteenth century.

*France’s carceral archipelago*

In the carceral regimes that regulated nineteenth-century French society, the *bagne* —deliberately located at sites in the colonial peripheries of French Guiana and New Caledonia — played an increasingly central role.[[7]](#footnote-8) These penal establishments emerged in their institutionalized form in the middle of the century, in part to address criminality and political unrest in metropolitan, domestic space,[[8]](#footnote-9) in part to provide the muscle for a growing project of colonial expansion into often deeply inhospitable environments. Sentencing to various forms of hard labour had been a long-standing practice in France, evident in particular in the Mediterranean galleys operating from the fifteenth century onwards. The maritime orientation of punishment was, however, curtailed in the mid-eighteenth century, when the remaining *chiourmes* were transferred to the *bagnes métropolitains* opened in Brest (1748), Rochefort (1777) and Toulon (1784), all three of which continued to function, despite increasing evidence of their inadequacy, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The closure of Rochefort and Brest — in 1854 and 1858 respectively — coincided almost exactly with the beginning of penal transportation to sites in the French colonial empire, whereas Toulon, the largest of the three, only ceased to function in 1873.

Penal transportation to France’s colonies began, therefore, within a few decades of the inauguration of the post-revolutionary project of expansionism, a move associated primarily with the invasion of Algeria in 1830, begun under the Restoration monarchy and pursued by the July monarchy. Although *bagnes* also operated in North Africa (most notably the military prisons and associated *compagnies de discipline* known as ‘Biribi’ inaugurated as early as 1818),[[9]](#footnote-10) it was to the *ancien régime* colony of French Guiana, where the French had established Cayenne as a permanent colonial settlement in 1664, that administrators initially turned in the search for a location for their penal colony. The choice of France’s only South American colony was largely a result — as Damas confirms in his 1938 text *Retour de Guyane* — of ‘le double avantage qu’offre cette colonie, d’être éloignée et spacieuse’.[[10]](#footnote-11) This conversion of a space previously resistant to colonization attempts (in particular the ill-fated Kourou expedition of 1763) into a *bagne* addressed multiple needs. It permitted displacement from France to the colonies of those deemed, under the Second Empire and then the conservative early Third Republic, to be politically or socially undesirable or dangerous. It provided, in the wake of the abolition of slavery in 1848, and complementing the introduction of indentured labour, the workforce required to produce the infrastructure necessary for the development of the colony.[[11]](#footnote-12) Finally, *bagnards* — during their sentences, and often during the period of *doublage* that followed this initial spell of incarceration — provided potential settlers to consolidate France’s colonial holdings.[[12]](#footnote-13)

French Guiana had already been adopted as a site of banishment for those considered counter-revolutionaries during the 1790s, most notably Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varenne, exiled in 1795 along with Jean-Marie Collot d’Herbois and Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac. Billaud-Varenne refused to return to France, and died in Haiti in 1818, but another prisoner from the period, Louis Ange Pitou, initially sent to French Guiana in 1898, was repatriated relatively soon afterwards and in 1807 published his *Voyage à Cayenne, dans les deux Amériques et chez les anthropophages*, the very title of which reflects the ways in which the text inaugurates a tradition of often lurid, sensationalist troping in accounts of journeys to the colony — a tradition that continued throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The first formal Guianese *bagne* was established, however, in 1852 by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte at Cayenne, with the principal aim of removing the political opponents (*déportés*) of the Second Empire. The colony then began to receive convicts (*transportés*) following the 1854 decree relating to forced labour, central to which was the principle of *double peine*.[[13]](#footnote-14)

The physical conditions in French Guiana were testing for prisoners and officials alike, not least as a result of tropical diseases and the poor facilities of the *bagne*. The penal colony was known commonly, as a result, as the *guillotine sèche*: life expectancy was short, even for those who managed to avoid the mainland sites of the *bagne* or the prison hulks moored offshore, and were sent to the marginally healthier îles du Salut. Death rates were such that, from 1864, French prisoners were deported to the alternative location of New Caledonia, although *bagnards* from other colonies — most notably other French possessions in the Caribbean and Algeria — were still dispatched to French Guiana, which continued to function as a penal colony for a further four decades after the ending of transportation to the Pacific *bagne* in 1897. The place known as *l’enfer vert* continued to receive *bagnards* guilty of criminal offences, political prisoners (including most notably Alfred Dreyfus, in 1898), as well as recidivists (or *relégués*) sentenced for multiple petty crimes (the transportation of whom had begun under the Third Republic in 1885). Following a damning reportage by Albert Londres in 1923 and a series of other journalistic *exposés*, abolition of deportation to French Guiana was eventually confirmed by Gaston Monnerville, Under-Secretary of State for the colonies, in 1938. Prisoners began to be repatriated from 1946, with the final *bagnards* seeking return to France arriving in Marseilles in 1953. A nineteenth-century institution thus persisted well into the twentieth, encapsulating in a carceral context the progressive decline of colonial empire, demonstrating the impact of nascent anti-colonialism on its core institutions, but also illustrating the afterlives of penal transportation in postcolonial literatures and cultures (with the need for recognition here that the deployment of the term ‘postcolonial’ remains problematic in the neo-colonial context of uneven development and economic dependency in French Guiana).

The reasons for the development in New Caledonia of what would become France’s second major penal colony were similar to those underpinning the establishment of the *bagne* of French Guiana. They were, in particular, intended to make the colony more economically viable.[[14]](#footnote-15) Conditions in Melanesia were, however, more conducive to settlement, so that New Caledonia had a more stable population than its South American equivalent. Despite the condition of dependency that the two post-colonies still share, New Caledonia has a very different demographic mix, not least with a more powerful population of white settler origin (known pejoratively as *Caldoches*).[[15]](#footnote-16) The relative success of the penal colony as a driver for settler colonialism in New Caledonia is perhaps all the more surprising since it is based on a relatively brief period of operation: around 21,000 *bagnards* were sent to the colony between the arrival of the first convoy on board *L’Iphigénie* in May 1864 and the eventual suppression of transportation in 1897 by the then governor Paul Feillet (who famously described the flow of convicts into the colony as a ‘robinet d'eau sale’).[[16]](#footnote-17) The Melanesian *bagne* functioned actively, therefore, for just over three decades, but the impact of these nineteenth-century origins on the present overseas territory is still palpable, not least in the visible presence of numerous public buildings in the capital Nouméa constructed using convict labour. Postcolonial memorialization of the institution and more widespread recognition of its foundational role are, however, recent phenomena, in large part because the initial reaction following suppression of the penal colony was a sustained process of disavowal, epitomized by the renaming of the île de Nou as Nouville, but also reflected in the search for a new name for the whole archipelago.[[17]](#footnote-18) With the formal end of the *bagne* in 1931, many buildings were assimilated into civilian use, whilst others were demolished as part of an effort to create a post-carceral *tabula rasa* in the colony. The stationing of US troops in New Caledonia during World War II accentuated the process of modernization and the silencing of the colony’s nineteenth-century penal roots, and seemed to have distanced further remaining memories (if not the remaining physical traces) of the penal colony. In the 1970s, however, a number of local associations began taking an interest in the history of the *bagne*, a process that became increasingly apparent following Mélanésia 2000, a significant Kanak cultural festival organized by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1975. The violent state repression of Kanak nationalism in the 1980s accelerated this postcolonial engagement with the colonial past, and it was in this context that the New Caledonian population of European heritage — following a model already evident in Australia for several decades by that point — began a quest for roots not in France but in Melanesia itself. The process proved, however, to be a multi-directional one, with the recovery of memories of the *bagne* extending far beyond a Melanesian version of what in Australia has been seen as the construction of a predominantly white convict ‘aristocracy’ of European heritage, and including not only Kanak voices but also those — notably Kabyle or Algerian — representing the specific transcolonial flows associated with penal transportation in the French-speaking world.

*Penal tropes and postcolonial afterlives*

The structures of the *bagne* persisted into the twentieth century, and were reformed less because of public consciousness of the the role of colonized spaces and imperial structures in the deployment of everyday violence than as a result of growing understanding of the institution’s fundamental inefficiency. Postcolonial interest in the *bagne* — whether in the context of politics, cultural production or memory debates — cannot, however, ignore the fact that the penal colony operated as a fundamentally nineteenth-century phenomenon, epitomizing the extent to which colonial spaces were used to define and at the same time shore up the metropolitan republican French nation-state (or imperial nation-state). The afterlives of the institution — in the collective imaginary as well as in a range of popular representations — are consequently a striking example of what is an ostensibly colonial institution persisting into the postcolonial moment, and the contemporary interrogation of the *bagne*, most notably by Francophone postcolonial writers, illustrates not only the imbrication of the colonial within the postcolonial, but also the ways in which the postcolonial may offer ways of rereading the colonial past.

The *bagne* generated a rich corpus of travel narratives, memoirs, novels and colonial archives, with literary production focused predominantly on French Guiana. In many ways typical are works such as *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1862–1863* (1867), a travel narrative by the naval officer Frédéric Bouyer that exemplifies the troping of the penal colony to be found in a number of other works at the time. Bouyer begins his text with a *captatio benevolentiae* of the type common in travel literature, promising his reader an objective account of the penal colony, as his professional status required, but the sensationalist sections of the travelogue that follows are anticipated in the book’s paratext where a frontispiece depicts ‘des forçats cannibales’. The text seeks to negotiate the emerging and reductively metonymic relationship of *bagne* and colony:

j’espère pouvoir trouver encore à la surface d’un pays vierge, où la nature est si riche et si bizarre, quelques sujets de récits intéressants et neufs. Et si, par hasard, l’histoire de la transportation se présente sous ma plume, illustrée de ses drames lugubres et sanglants, dont le bruit a passé la mer, je tâcherai de concentrer la morale de mes faits divers dans la sphère exclusive des intérêts de la société coloniale.[[18]](#footnote-19)

But as the text develops, the author caters for the reader’s appetite for the lurid narratives with which French Guiana was already associated: ‘Que de drames sanglants inconnus des hommes se sont accomplis ainsi sous l’œil de Dieu, dans ces déserts de feuillage, à l’ombre de ces arbres séculaires!’[[19]](#footnote-20) Such ‘drames sanglants’ have continued to underpin a penal exoticism relating to representations of the *bagne* evident in the cluster of travel narratives devoted to French Guiana following Albert Londres’s reportage *Au bagne* (1923) in the interwar period, in the international popularity of Henri Charrière’s *Papillon* (1969) and the subsequent film adaptation (1973), and in a cluster of *bandes dessinées* devoted to penal colonies produced in recent years.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Of equal importance, however, although rarely studied as a body of literary representations in their own right, is a series of texts on the *bagne* produced by Francophone postcolonial authors. They demonstrate the potential of ‘postcolonializing’ the bagne. By this, I mean re-reading this nineteenth-century institution from a twentieth- or twenty-first-century perspective that not only challenges, deconstructs and seeks to rewrite previous representations, but also recasts the penal colony in the context of contemporary debates regarding postcolonial identity, politics and historiography. Ato Quayson coined the term ‘postcolonializing’ to question understandings of the ‘postcolonial’ that privilege ‘chronological supersession’. He suggests instead the need to identify ‘a process of coming-into-being and a struggle *against* colonialism and its after effects’.[[21]](#footnote-22) Such an approach provides a clear justification for one of the key and persistent aspects of the postcolonial project, i.e., the search for continuities between apparently discontinuous sets of circumstances, ‘drawing on a notion of the centrality of colonialism for understanding the formation of the contemporary world’.[[22]](#footnote-23) Quayson’s objective in such an approach is not to designate certain situations or phenomena as somehow existing in binary terms before or after empire, i.e. as essentially ‘colonial’ or ‘postcolonial’, but instead to ‘suggest creative ways of viewing a variety of cultural, political, social and chronological realities both in the West and elsewhere via a postcolonial prism of interpretation’.[[23]](#footnote-24)

*‘Retour de Guyane’: the penal colony and the end of of empire*

The representation of the *bagne* in twentieth-century Francophone postcolonial literature encourages such ‘creative ways of viewing’ a nineteenth-century phenomenon as well as its afterlives through a ‘postcolonial prism of interpretation’. Any genealogy of the re-figurings of the penal colony in Francophone literature begins in the work of Léon Gontran Damas. His poetic production — which tends to dominate accounts of his role in the emergence of the Négritude movement — is complemented by prose works including the relatively unknown travel narrative and ethnographic study *Retour de Guyane* (1938). Published the year after his initial poetry collection *Pigments*, this is a hybrid text, mixing the anthropological observation that was the original purpose of the author’s return with the acerbic barbs of an anti-colonial essay. So sensitive were the colonial authorities to its content that Damas’s book was banned, and it is alleged that 1,000 copies of it were burnt (of a print-run, *à compte d’auteur*, of only 1,500).[[24]](#footnote-25) The book is nevertheless a key work in the large but relatively unexplored corpus of literary representations of French Guiana, all the more so as Damas used his text to explore the entangled stories and intersecting trajectories by which the colony was characterized — and which any study of representations of the *bagne* must necessarily take into account.

Damas provides a damning account of French Guiana, the language and vocabulary of which echoes that of nineteenth-century works such as Bouyer’s *La Guyane française*:

terre d’expatriation des déportés de toute catégorie; réservoir dans lequel la France écoule toute sa lie; colonie privilégiée au profit de laquelle la mère patrie se débarrasse non-seulement de l’écume de ses prisons et de ses bagnes, mais encore de tous ceux qui, à quelque titre que ce soit, sont pour elle un sujet de gêne ou de crainte, une menace pour l’avenir ou une difficulté pour le présent.[[25]](#footnote-26)

*Retour de Guyane* goes on to evoke the beginning of the prison system in the mid-nineteenth century, and describes the brutality of the *tabula rasa* imposed on those first transported to the colony:

Trois cents condamnés constituaient le premier convoi. Rien ne fut fait, au préalable, pour recevoir la cargaison. Aucun camp ne fut installé. On répartit les envahisseurs sur les îles qui, bien qu’elles présentassent des avantages certains pour touristes en mal d’exotisme, étaient par trop exiguës et impropres au moindre essai de colonisation.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Part of a rich corpus of texts on the *bagne* published in the interwar period, *Retour de Guyane* seeks to provide a distinctive and critical account of the institution, suggesting that its failure — which played an integral role in the vicious circle of under-population and under-development in the colony — was evident from its mid-nineteenth-century inauguration. In Damas’s account of it, the penal colony is to be imagined as a heavily overdetermined place — simultaneously heaven and hell, utopia and dystopia — where, even if the convict and the tourist have not historically tended to co-exist, the one can still, as is happening in contemporary French Guiana, succeed the other at the same site. More so than other contemporary *reportages* (including Londres’s *Au bagne*, the purpose of which was predominantly social rather than political reform), *Retour de Guyane* seeks also to highlight actively the colonial context of the prison: ‘tout le problème colonial, français et international’, notes Damas, ‘se pose là.’[[27]](#footnote-28) One of the first readers of the text, René Maran, expressed the distinctiveness of Damas’s project, distinguishing it from contemporary French accounts of the colony, the aim of which was ‘l’illustration du bagne et du bagnard’, and underlining the ways in which these other, often sensationalist reportages tended to treat the Guyanese population as a ‘quantité parfaitement négligeable’.[[28]](#footnote-29) The tendency of the *bagne* — and of metropolitan accounts of it — to eclipse other populations and obscure other histories is at the heart of Damas’s account, the aim of which is to challenge French perceptions of the colony: ‘la Guyane c’est le bagne et les Guyanais des fils de bagnard, avec, toutefois, quelques nègres pour l’exotisme’.[[29]](#footnote-30) Damas critiques the ways in which the racial assumptions of colonial education have, as elsewhere in the French empire, created ethnic hierarchies: ‘Les frères de race de Toussaint-Louverture apprennent à se prosterner devant le vainqueur d’Austerlitz’, and outlines how the presence of the penal colony has failed to disrupt these: ‘La petite bourgeoisie aime cent fois mieux subir la contamination des forçats que d’admettre la promiscuité dans laquelle vivraient ses rejetons avec ceux de l’arrière-pays’.[[30]](#footnote-31)

*Retour de Guyane* thus inaugurates a critical reflection on the *bagne* that developed in the aftermath of its suppression, and has arguably culminated in a cluster of postcolonial texts devoted to the institution not only in French Guiana but also in New Caledonia. In this corpus, Damas’s work has the peculiarity of being published while the penal colony was still functioning, although he wrote knowing that its abolition was imminent and as a result he engages in the imagination of possible futures for French Guiana. He challenges understandings of the ways in which the penitentiary had contributed to the systematic underdevelopment of the country: ‘la Guyane continue à vivre son existence de paria… de paria lépreux’;[[31]](#footnote-32) and he reflects on the implications of the collapse of what he categorizes as ‘un État dans l’État’.[[32]](#footnote-33)

At points in *Retour de Guyane*, Damas is tempted by counterfactual analyses as he confirms that ‘les immenses richesses de ce pays seraient demeurées même avec une population normale décidée à les exploiter’,[[33]](#footnote-34) but his radical analysis focuses primarily on the socio-historical reality of the *bagne* and the implications of its postcolonial afterlives: ‘Aussi bien dans l’intérêt du condamné lui-même, dans celui du contribuable métropolitain, que dans l’intérêt de la Guyane qu’elle paralyse, infeste, c’est une sinistre plaisanterie’.[[34]](#footnote-35) Reversing the customarily racialized symbolism that posits white colonial expansion faced with a threatening indigenous population, for Damas it is the penal colony and the convicts themselves who are presented as an ‘infestation’.[[35]](#footnote-36) His conclusion, according to this logic of *infiltration*, is that *bagne* and colony have interpenetrated each other, have become more and more dependent on one another, to the point that the removal of the penal system becomes ‘tout à fait secondaire’ to another essential dilemma that would prefigure debates about departmentalization in the immediate post-war period: ‘coloniser la Guyane ou l’évacuer’.[[36]](#footnote-37) In 1938 the end of the prison was unavoidable, but Damas directs his attention already towards the spectral role of the institution following its abolition and the presence of its afterlives: ‘Pour préciser, le bagne disparaîtra fatalement de la colonie de la Guyane par l’excès même de ses erreurs. On peut seulement spéculer sur les chances qu’il y a: ou bien que l’abcès soit opéré et la colonie vidée, ou bien que malencontreusement la colonie crève’.[[37]](#footnote-38)

A wider sense of the collapse of empire underpins Damas’s reflections on the possible economic futures for French Guiana — including tourism and gold mining — that might follow the closure of the *bagne*. Central to his argument is a consideration of how the imprint of the penal colony on those futures might be addressed, with the text concluding with an indication of the ruination that was likely to result: the French, he suggests, ‘risquent de voir en cette même Guyane, déjà agonisante, commencer l’effondrement de l’Empire français’.[[38]](#footnote-39) For Guyanese writers in search of a national identity, the social and cultural importance of the *bagne* continued, as Damas had predicted, after its decline. In an article in *Présence africaine* in 1958, for instance, Serge Patient referred to the foundation, ‘à défaut de colons’, of a ‘colonie de bagnards’; he also mentions the persistence of ‘[l]e mythe de la Guyane meurtrière […] désormais ancrée dans toutes les imaginations’.[[39]](#footnote-40) According to the logic of the prison, it is now the Guianese themselves, not the convicts, who become exiled in their own country. As Patient concludes: ‘c’est ma dignité d’homme qui est en cause, autant dire ma liberté, tant il est vrai que l’une et l’autre sont indissolublement liées’.[[40]](#footnote-41)

*Transcolonial histories, postcolonial memories*

The inextricable links between the *bagnes* and the colonies in which they were situated, as well as the ways in which a colonial institution belonging predominantly (in the case of New Caledonia, exclusively) to the nineteenth century has persisted as an element of postcoloniality, have been recognized in the work of later Francophone postcolonial authors. This is particularly apparent in attention paid to the forgotten or silenced histories of the New Caledonian *bagne* and of the entangled transcolonial axes linking Melanesia to Algeria. Such accounts are deeply disruptive of popular (metropolitan) discourse surrounding the *bagne*. For a French public, the specific axis linking France to the penal colonies departed from the île de Ré, which has inspired a rich iconography relating to the departure of the *bagnards*. Both Damas and Londres nevertheless alluded subtly to the more complex itineraries also evident in French Guiana, providing traces in their work of a premature interest in what Claire Anderson has recently called a history of global mobilities ‘from below’, an approach that would disrupt our ‘Global North-centric understanding of migration’ by emphasizing the role of captivity, confinement and restriction as opposed to any freedom of movement.[[41]](#footnote-42) A major part of Anderson’s argument, rooted in an attempt to write a global history of penal transportation, focuses on the intra-imperial nature of demographic mobility. This is an aspect highly evident in French Guiana, characterized by intersecting and often overlapping regimes of mobility, most notably enslavement, indenture and convict labour, elements in a ‘continuum of unfree labour practices that underpinned overseas European expansion’.[[42]](#footnote-43) In French Guiana, Anderson notes, as in Portuguese Angola, French convicts worked alongside people of African heritage into the twentieth century, producing ‘blended flows of coerced labour’, with clear evidence of a historically creolized culture.[[43]](#footnote-44)

French penal colonies have customarily been associated with French metropolitan prisoners, both civil *transportés* such as Henri Charrière, whose story was made famous by the novel *Papillon* and its film adaptation, and political *déportés* such as the communard Louise Michel, exiled to New Caledonia in 1873, and Alfred Dreyfus, imprisoned in French Guiana in 1895. The increasing incorporation of the stories of North African *bagnards* (alongside those of prisoners from Senegal and Indochina) into more global histories of convict labour challenge such ethnic homogenization and allow us to understand more clearly the multi-directional, trans-imperial complexity of convict flows. An added dimension is the presence of military penal colonies in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, known as *Biribi*, established in 1818 as penal battalions, and associated with military convicts as well as civilian and political prisoners.[[44]](#footnote-45) The success of Londres’s exposé on French Guiana led him to focus — in a 1924 text entitled *Dante n’avait rien vu* — on these North African *bagnes*, where he finds evidence of conditions far worse than those he had observed in French Guiana, and where a common refrain among those incarcerated is that they would rather be sent to the Caribbean. Londres’s conclusion about the institution is that it is ‘une grande honte pour la France’.[[45]](#footnote-46) The *Biribi* share in the penal logic of situating places of incarceration away from metropolitan France, but in addition the battalions they housed were regularly deployed to other colonial situations. They also reveal the shifting role of Algeria in France’s carceral archipelago of sites of imprisonment and banishment: unlike French Guiana and New Caledonia, Algeria did not require extensive use of convict labour for the development of the colony; in 1848 and then 1851, it served as a place of internment for many of those who opposed Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte; equally important, however, were the Algerian political prisoners deported to New Caledonia (civil prisoners from North Africa were, in contrast, sent to undertake hard labour in Guiana). Particularly prominent in Algerian memory are the rebels associated with the El Mokrani revolt in Kabylia in 1871, but among the 300 or so North Africans banished to Melanesia, some were linked to different uprisings in Algeria as well as in Tunisia. Recognition of these itineraries not only challenges received ideas about penal transportation and deportation, but also situates the Maghreb in alternative, intercolonial networks that disrupt assumptions about the only important axes being Mediterranean ones linking North Africa to France.

Establishing global histories of the *bagne* in the Maghreb involves two challenges central to what might be seen as the ‘postcolonialization’ of the *bagne*: first, the recovery of these often-silenced histories from sparse archival traces and the rare surviving narratives of journeys they entailed; second, the identification of traces of these histories in current memory practices. These are essential elements in the engagement of Francophone postcolonial authors with the El Mokrani revolt of 1871, an act of resistance that occurred simultaneously with the Paris Commune but has attracted must less attention in literary representations of the period.[[46]](#footnote-47) In her collection of short stories ‘Écrivain public’, Leïla Sebbar includes a short text ‘Louisa’, the eponymous protagonist of which is a child born from a relationship between a Kabyle rebel incarcerated in Corsica and a local woman. The short story focuses on a girl growing up between cultures, between Catholicism and Islam, between Algeria and France, as her family decide where her future life will be located. In the background of the story are traces of a wider history: of ‘une île sauvage avec des sauvages’ where ‘les hommes de la tribu des Mokrani’ has been sent, and also of ‘une femme reléguée dans cette île du diable’.[[47]](#footnote-48) The references to New Caledonia and to Louise Michel suggest not only a convergence of histories, but also their levelling, as connections are explored between the Paris Commune (and in particular the stories of the Communards banished to the Pacific, and those of the Kabyle rebels). In a little known and unfinished play from the early 1970s, ‘Louise Michel et la Nouvelle-Calédonie’, Kateb Yacine also considers the themes of gender and resistance.[[48]](#footnote-49) Beginning with verbatim theatre based on the transcript of her trial, the opening fragment of this work moves into an imagined dialogue with fellow deportee Henri Rochefort.[[49]](#footnote-50) Rochefort describes to Michel those in the ‘cage’ reserved for male prisoners on board the ship taking the deportees to the Pacific: ‘Et nous cent vingt-trois hommes, dont soixante Algériens, insurgés eux aussi et pris les armes à la main’.[[50]](#footnote-51) The parallel between the Communards and the Kabyle rebels is clear, a theme explored further in the final brief fragment of the play in which Michel converses with two Kanak. They express surprise at her willingness to learn their language, and a sense of solidarity emerges from the convergence of the two groups’ struggles. The first of the Kanak addresses Michel: ‘Tu es guerrière comme nous. Tu as été vaincue, comme les malheureux Canaques qui voulaient resister…’,[[51]](#footnote-52) and Kateb symbolizes this connection by including in the play Michel’s gifting of the red scarf she had worn in the Commune to Nouli, a Kanak fleeing the French repression of the Ataï rebellion in 1878.[[52]](#footnote-53) This exchange forms the culmination of the play, for Michel and Nouli are joined at that point by one of the Kabyle rebels, forming what Kateb dubs in the stage directions ‘un trio symbolique’.[[53]](#footnote-54) In his only speech in the play, the Algerian character amplifies the connections between histories of the *bagne* by drawing Kanak resistance into the already parallel struggles to which Rochefort had referred at the beginning of the play: ‘Je te salue, frère Canaque, et je salue ton people au nom des soixante déportés arrivés d’Algérie. Nous nous sommes soulevés en même temps que les Communards. Notre insurrection, elle a été noyée dans le sang, comme la vôtre, et comme la Commune de Louise Michel’.[[54]](#footnote-55)

The fragments of Kateb’s play prefigure later literary attempts by Didier Daeninckx — in the context of Kanak culture — to create connections between strands of metropolitan and colonial history often treated as discrete.[[55]](#footnote-56) What is striking about Kateb’s play, however, is its focus on the transcolonial flows of people on which the *bagne* depended, and its implicit commitment, in the frame of its author’s wider œuvre, to locating the penal colony in an actively postcolonial frame that eschews any reductive comparatism, instead addressing often-obscured transcultural connections. Other authors in the Maghreb have contributed to a similar project: Moroccan-born novelist Anouar Benmalek, has, for instance, in *L’Enfant du peuple ancien*, imagined a widening of connections across Algeria, metropolitan France, New Caledonia and Australia; he describes the escape from New Caledonia of Kader, a Kabyle rebel, and his wife, the Communard Lislei.[[56]](#footnote-57) Whilst fleeing the *bagne*, the captain they have bribed to take them on board docks in Tasmania to collect Tridarir, the last living Aboriginal on the island, captured to be sold as a rare ethnographic specimen following the murder of his parents. Although the novel does not extend the trajectories to include close consideration of the Tasmanian penal colony, the genocide of the local population on the island accompanied the establishment of the institution, and the novel’s epilogue — situated in 1919 — evokes the containment of the Aboriginal population in ‘des réserves-prisons, gérées par les missions chrétiennes’,[[57]](#footnote-58) creating a clear connection between the containment of the *bagne* and subsequent modes of incarceration.

Also with a specific focus on New Caledonia, it is the work of Mehdi Lallaoui that provides the most compelling example of the possibilities of a more sustained effort to recover narratives of resistance and incarceration in their full complexity. In a book and film, both entitled *Kabyles du Pacifique*, he explores the geographical and historical displacements encapsulated in his title, namely the circuitous journeys that led members of this minority ethnic group from Algeria, disproportionately disadvantaged by the French colonization of Algeria, to political exile in Melanesia. Lallaoui’s approach combines travelogue with an archival quest to explore the sorts of entangled historiography to which I have already alluded in Sebbar, Kateb, and Benmalek. He provides a full and nuanced account of ‘un puzzle dont les morceaux sont disseminés dans le monde entier’,[[58]](#footnote-59) namely the ways in which — through the intersecting itineraries of penal transportation — the Kabyle revolt of 1871 becomes enmeshed with the French Commune of the same year and subsequently the Kanak rebellion of Ataï in 1878. The Kabyle insurrection — a response to prolonged famine and differential allocation of rights to different ethnic groups in the colony — was brutally suppressed, and led to a trial of the surviving leaders in Constantine in 1873. Condemned to political exile in the French penal colonies, the rebels found themselves subject to long and convoluted journeys. Initially held in Toulon, where their paths crossed for the first time with those of Communards still awaiting deportation (to whom we owe some of the few remaining accounts of the experience of the Algerians), they were then transferred to Brest. Thence, after a prolonged period of uncertainty about their fate and in rapidly deteriorating conditions, ships took them in 1874 and 1875 on the five-month journey to New Caledonia (a number of prisoners, considered civilian and not political, were instead sent to French Guiana.) On arrival in Melanesia, the itineraries of the Kabyle rebels and the Communards converged as they shared the penal spaces of the île des Pins, constructed their own accommodation and set about finding ways to survive in this new environment. The majority of the Communards were amnestied and permitted to return to France in 1879 and 1880, at which point a number campaigned — unsuccessfully — for the amnesty to be extended to the Algerian rebels. By 1895, a number of the Kabyle rebels had died, several had escaped, and in that year a handful returned to Algeria, where their daily lives continued to be closely policed. The remainder stayed in New Caledonia, where they formed the basis of a community of Algerian heritage that still exists in the country, responsible not least for the introduction of the cultivation of date palms.[[59]](#footnote-60)

Lallaoui’s book and film are part of a sustained *travail de mémoire*, essential to Algerian, French and Kanak history — the volume was published by Au Nom de la mémoire, an organization also instrumental in bringing to public attention the massacres of FLN supporters by the French authorities on 17 October 1961. In generic terms, they are experimental travelogues, in which itineraries are reconstructed from fragments whose assemblage is reflected in the form of the piece. Lallaoui’s narrative voice provides a frame for the account that emerges, and this is also implicitly — as his search for traces of the Algerian prisoners in contemporary New Caledonia makes clear — a narration of his own journeys, for the book is primarily a collage of other texts, archival and printed, many of which already belong to the wider category of travel writing (once the genre is extended to include ships’ logs, personal diaries, correspondence produced by those on the move, even photographs of the *bagne* itself). Within this accumulation of fragments, Algerian voices are rare: there is an 1874 letter from Mohamed Ben Belkassem, then incarcerated in Brest, requesting pardon; another from Azziz ben Cheikh el Haddad, who fled New Caledonia in 1881 and describes his stay in Sydney en route for Cairo and Jeddah, from where, fifteen years later, he would petition (as far as we can see unsuccessfully) for a return to Algeria. Lallaoui’s reconstruction of these ‘travel stories’ is at the same time a performance of its own ultimate impossibility; his is a subtle work of deconstruction, seeking traces in ships’ logs, in the writings of communards, in the diaries and letters of a naval surgeon and colonial officials.[[60]](#footnote-61) The outcome is a text whose fragmentary nature reveals the persistent absence of detail from the itineraries he evokes but fails to capture.

*The ‘bagne’ and the ruins of empire*

Lallaoui’s work on ‘les Kabyles du Pacifique’ reveals the challenges as well as the possibilities (both creative and memory-related) of postcolonializing the *bagne*. On the one hand, his project disrupts many generalized assumptions about penal colonies in the French-speaking world, especially regarding the perceived ethnicity of the *bagnard* and the simplistic axis linking the *bagne* directly to metropolitan France; on the other, he exemplifies a critical practice situated between cultural archaeology and deconstruction as he sifts through one particular subset of the remains of empire relating to the penal colony of New Caledonia. It is striking to see how, as a catalyst or a precursor, Lallaoui’s project has anticipated changes in memorial practices among the community of Algerian heritage in New Caledonia itself, as an essentially literary endeavour has been mirrored in concrete processes of memorialization: a major exhibition entitled ‘Caledoun’ (the Arabic word for New Caledonia) was held at the Institut du Monde Arabe in 2011, and in the memorial landscape of New Caledonia itself (particularly at key sites such as the *cimetière des déportés* on the île des Pins or the *cimetière des Arabes* at Nessadiou near Bourail), there are increasing efforts to recover the presence of the Kabyle deportees alongside the Communards and other less prominent French *bagnards*.[[61]](#footnote-62) This convergence of literary and memorial practices raises questions about the processes of recovery or unearthing central to such postcolonialization of the *bagne*, for the afterlives of the penal colony cannot be understood in terms of linear concepts such as ‘legacy’, not least because of the deliberate obfuscation of the institution’s traces evident for different reasons in both French Guiana and New Caledonia. Ann Laura Stoler, in a study that includes an extensive exploration of the *bagne* in the context of wider penal and colonial archipelagos, notes the ambivalence of the word ‘colony’ embedded in the term ‘penal colony’. She sees such institutions as part of a ‘protean archive […] constituted by a spread of disparate and related documents of island and landlocked colonies that stretched across the coercive and curative carceral and humanitarian globe’.[[62]](#footnote-63)

Stoler’s emphasis is on interconnections that colonial historiography has often ignored, highlighting entangled histories and thinking through the ways in which they are associated with sites that may be seen as sedimented palimpsests in their own right. This ‘protean archive’ stretches across the world colonized by the French to include: ‘the penal colonies of the French Antilles and British Guiana (the bagnes), which were always proximate to the white settler sugar colonies off their shores; the New Caledonian penal colonies that brought Maghrebian political agitators together with exiled *communards*; the Algerian prison colonies where French dissidents were deposited after revolution in 1848; the agricultural colonies in the same Algerian countryside designed to remove from Europe, and resettle, the numbers of urban poor who were considered increasingly dangerous’.[[63]](#footnote-64)

In approaching these sites and histories, Stoler proposes a focus on processes of postcolonial ruination:

At issue is at once the uneven sedimentation of debris and the uneven pace at which people can extricate themselves from the structures and signs by which remains take hold. Rubrics such as ‘colonial legacy’ offer little help. They fail to capture how people choose — and are forced — to reckon with features of these formations in which they remain vividly bound. They also gloss over the creative and critical — and sometimes costly — measures people take to defy those constraints, to name that damage, or to become less entangled.[[64]](#footnote-65)

At the heart of Stoler’s *Duress* is an interest in ‘not what is “left” but what people are “left *with*”’.[[65]](#footnote-66) This shifts the attention away from seemingly static colonial legacies or vestiges towards a more dynamic, creative and affective acknowledgement of what Stoler calls ‘the tangibilities of empire as effective histories of the present’.[[66]](#footnote-67) There has been much recent attention in heritage studies to related questions of ruins, and growing resistance to their preservation or stabilization, with Caitlin Desilvey’s *Curated Decay* serving as one of the most forceful reflections on vulnerability, impermanence, transition, loss and decay.[[67]](#footnote-68) The pertinence of interventions such as the Francophone postcolonial explorations of the *bagne* interrogated above becomes clear when connections are made between the fragments on which those accounts depend and the ongoing ruination of penal heritage sites around the Francosphere. These connections are particularly apparent in the work of Patrick Chamoiseau who, in a 1994 photo-essay produced with Rodolphe Hammadi, reflected in a French Guianese context on the implications of these entangled histories, complex inter- and intra-colonial transportation flows, and the multidirectional memories as well as multi-layered sites to which they give rise.[[68]](#footnote-69) Central to *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* is the Camp de Transportation at Saint-Laurent du Maroni, a key site in the Guianese penal colony, at which a new museum was opened in 2014. Chamoiseau and Hammadi claim, however, that sites such as this are best approached not as places of colonial memory (i.e., as part of a formally (re)constructed and acknowledged heritage, a *lieu de mémoire*), but in relation to what they call in their title postcolonial *traces-mémoires*.[[69]](#footnote-70) The term recognizes the present’s continued links to the past, and the co-existence of entangled memories and converging itineraries in the Americas.

Although the book is based on a critique of the memorial landscape of the territory, the overtly ethnicized and whitened dimensions of which are accentuated in official memorialization, the emphases of its text-and-image-based analysis pre-empt the forms of postcolonial ruination to which Stoler would later allude. In his glosses on Hammadi’s images, Chamoiseau associates the ruins of the residual Guianese penalscape with a form of memorial tangibility that — in a mode that echoes Damas — reveals the persistence of the colonial *bagne* and its constraints in this often-marginalized part of the Francophone Caribbean.[[70]](#footnote-71) He also detects in these ruins of empire the existence of postcolonial formations that provide the potential — in Stoler’s terms both ‘creative and critical’ — to narrate other silenced histories and to imagine alternative (in this case *Créolité*-inflected) futures. Postcolonial ruins become an alternative to the formal memorialization of colonial statuary: ‘ces édifices […] ne témoignent pas des autres populations (Amérindiens, esclaves africains, immigrants hindous, syro-libanais, chinois…) qui, précipitées sur ces terres coloniales, ont dû trouver moyen d’abord de survivre, puis de vivre ensemble, jusqu’à produire une entité culturelle et identitaire originale’.[[71]](#footnote-72) In a discussion of penal heritage and the motivations of travel to French Guiana, ethnologist Bernard Cherubini notes that ‘the tourist imaginaries cultivated prior to an actual trip to French Guiana continue to silence and hide the country’s Creole heritage’.[[72]](#footnote-73) As is the case with the texts focused on New Caledonia discussed above, the goal of Chamoiseau’s project is not merely an attempt, however urgent, to underline the diversity of origins and experiences that the singularizing term *bagnard* tends to obscure whilst acknowledging at the same time the other populations and social groups with which the convict coexisted. He seeks also, in a process of postcolonialization, to ‘réinventer la notion de monument, déconstruire la notion de patrimoine’.[[73]](#footnote-74) Writing complements an attention to the materiality of postcolonial spaces: ‘Dessous l’Histoire coloniale écrite, il faut trouver la trace des histoires. Dessous la Mémoire hautaine des forts et des édifices, trouver les lieux insolites où se sont cristallisées les étapes determinants pour ces collectivités’.[[74]](#footnote-75) Chamoiseau refers to a body of representations of the *bagne*, but simultaneously seeks to move away from and beyond them: he describes ‘des dizaines d’ouvrages, de chroniques, de témoignages, d’articles célèbres’, but gestures instead towards an alternative poetics rooted in his effort to ‘percevoir ce que les Traces-mémoires nous murmurent’.[[75]](#footnote-76)

Despite the preservation of a certain narrative of the *bagne* in the popular (French) imagination, the ruins of the penal colony are presented by Chamoiseau and Hammadi not as a *lieu de mémoire*, but as a *lieu d’oubli*. The photographs of ruination that the essayist takes as the trigger for his reflections are presented, however, in the context of a digressively disruptive mode of engagement: ‘Et me voilà dans ces Traces-mémoires du bagne de Guyane, non pas en visite mais en errance, non pas en flânerie mais en divagation’.[[76]](#footnote-77) In a postcolonializing approach that recalls the poetics of Lallaoui’s own determined reconstruction of the lives of Kabyle prisoners in the Pacific, Chamoiseau acknowledges that: ‘Les Traces-mémoires du bagne sont brisées, diffuses, éparpillées’,[[77]](#footnote-78) but he nevertheless performs in his text a commitment to voicing ‘des histoires dominées, des mémoires écrasées’.[[78]](#footnote-79) *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* is rooted in a rejection of much contemporary historiographic and literary representation of the *bagne*, as well as of the heritage practices that have often mirrored this; key to Chamoiseau’s refutation is a recognition that these interventions into the colonial past, although situated firmly in a postcolonial moment, reflect the persistence of colonial assumptions and constraints. The response is a postcolonial poetics: ‘Ici, le conservateur sera l’engeance des poètes. / Et la conservation sera une poétique’.[[79]](#footnote-80) From the ruins of the nineteenth-century (penal) colony emerge through postcolonial creative practice alternative narratives, and new critical and aesthetic approaches.

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   For the original series, see Pierre Nora (ed.), Les *Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–93). Gallimard produced a three-volume version in their Quarto series in 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. On this subject, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ‘Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory’, *The American Historical Review*, 106.3 (2001), 906–22, and Charles Forsdick, ‘Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Cultures of Commemoration’, in Charles Forsdick and David Murphy(eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 271–84. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Charles-Robert Ageron, ‘L’Exposition coloniale de 1931, mythe républicain ou mythe impérial?’, in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire I: la République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 561-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See Emily Apter, ‘French Colonial Studies and Postcolonial Theory’, *SubStance*, 76–77 (1995), 169–80 (p.170). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Madeleine Rebérioux, ‘Le Mur des Fédérés: Rouge, “sang craché”’, in Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire I: la République*, pp. 619–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The article focuses on French Guiana and New Caledonia, and pays particular attention to the Kabyle rebels exiled in Melanesia following the 1871 revolt. Other contemporary research has focused on other transcolonial axes, linking for instance French Indochina with the *bagne*, including that at Poulo Condore off southern Vietnam as well as others in West Africa (most notably Libreville in Gabon). See Lorraine M. Patterson, ‘Prisoners from Indochina in the nineteenth-century French colonial world’, in Ronit Ricci (ed.), *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), pp. 220–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For an overview of histories of the *bagne*, see Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies 1854*–*1952* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Criminal transportation was already complemented by the deportation of prisoners to Algeria for political reasons following the 1848 revolution and the 1851 *coup d’État*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See Dominique Kalifa, *Biribi: les bagnes coloniaux de l’armée française* (Paris: Perrin, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Léon Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane: suivi de Misère noire: et autres écrits journalistiques* (Paris: J.-M. Place, 2003 [1938]), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. On the interrelationship of slavery, indenture and convict labour in French Guiana, see Miranda Frances Spieler, *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The implication of *double peine* or *doublage* was that those sentenced to fewer than eight years were obliged to spend the same period in the colony following their release, whereas those with longer sentences were transported for life. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. For histories of the *bagne* in French Guiana, see Danielle Donet-Vincent, *De soleil et de silences. Histoire des bagnes de Guyane* (Paris: La Boutique de l’Histoire, 2003), and Jean-Lucien Sanchez, *À perpétuité. Relégués au bagne de Guyane* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. For a comprehensive history of the New Caledonian *bagne*, see Louis-José Barbançon, *L’Archipel des forçats: histoire du bagne de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1863*–*1931* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. On the origins of the term ‘Caldoche’, see Frédéric Bobin, ‘Caldoches, Metropolitans and the Mother Country’, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 26.2 (1991), 303–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. On this reference, in an 1899 lecture, to the tensions between the ‘robinet d’eau sale’ (convict labour) and the ‘robinet d’eau propre’ (free settlers), see Patrick O’Reilly, ‘Paul Feillet, gouverneur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (1894–1902)’, *Revue d’histoire des colonies*, 40 (1953), 216–48 (p. 223). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. On these questions of renaming, see Blandine Petit-Quencez, ‘L’Histoire du patrimoine lié au bagne en Nouvelle-Calédonie, du non-dit à l’affirmation identitaire’, Criminocorpus blog, 24 June 2016, available at https://criminocorpus.hypotheses.org/18816 [consulted 8 September 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Frédéric Bouyer, *La Guyane française: Notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1862–1863* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), pp. 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Ibid., p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. See, for example, J. Bouquillard and Florenci Clavé, *L’Île des Pins* (Paris: Dargaud, 1984); Pascal Bertho and Marc-Antoine Boidin, *Chéri-Bibi. 1 Fatalitas!* (Paris: Delcourt, 2006); Fabien Vehlman and Eric Sagot, *Paco: les mains rouges* (Paris: Dargaud, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Ibid., p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Ibid., p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. See Lilyan Kesteloot, ‘An Important Essay: *Retour de Guyane*’, in Keith Warner (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents, 1988), pp.155–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Ibid., p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Ibid., p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. René Maran, ‘Histoire des malheurs de la France équinoxale: *Retour de Guyane*’, *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 6 April 1938, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Ibid., p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Ibid., p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Ibid., p. 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Ibid., p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Ibid., p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Ibid., p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Ibid., p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Ibid., p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Ibid., p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Serge Patient, ‘Circonstances guyanaises’, *Présence africaine*, 20.3 (1958), 77–85 (p. 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Ibid., p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Claire Anderson, ‘Global mobilities’, in Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne (eds), *World Histories from Below: Disruption and Dissent, 1750 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 169–95 (p. 169). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Claire Anderson and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, ‘Convict Labour and the Western Empires, 1415–1954’, in Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (eds), *The Routledge History of Western Empires* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 102–17 (p. 102). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Anderson, ‘Global mobilities’, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. The *Bataillons d’Infanterie Légère d’Afrique* or BILA were given various nicknames by those condemned to join them, including ‘l’Enfer’ and ‘Biribi’. The latter referred to a game of chance, a simplified version of bingo, popular in the period. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Albert Londres, *Dante n’avait rien vu* (Paris: Arléa, 1997 [1924]), p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. On the El Mokrani revolt and its aftermath, see Germaine Mailhe, *Déportation en Nouvelle-Calédonie des communards et des révoltés de la Grande Kabylie (1872*–*1876)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995), and Seddik Taouti, *Les Déportés algériens en Nouvelle-Calédonie: L’Histoire d’une identité exilée* (Algiers: Dar El-Oumma, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Leïla Sebbar, ‘Louisa’, in *Ecrivain public: nouvelles* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2012), pp. 7–19 (pp. 9–10). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Kateb Yacine, ‘Louise Michel et la Nouvelle Calédonie’, in *Parce que c’est une femme* (Paris: des femmes, 2004), pp. 111–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Rochefort was the founder of *L’Intransigeant*, with which he was associated until it shifted to the right and adopted anti-Dreyfusard positions, but remembered equally for his escape from New Caledonia in 1874, the popular account of which was captured in two versions on canvas by Édouard Manet under the title *L’Évasion de Rochefort* (1880). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Kateb, ‘Louise Michel et la Nouvelle Calédonie’, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Ibid., p. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. See Louise Michel, *Mémoires de Louise Michel, écrits par elle-même* (Paris: Roy, 1886), p. 289. ‘Cette écharpe, dérobée à toutes les recherches; cette écharpe rouge de la Commune a été divisée, là-bas, en deux morceaux, une nuit où deux Canaques, avant d’aller rejoindre les leurs, insurgés contre les blancs, avaient voulu me dire adieu.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Kateb, ‘Louise Michel et la Nouvelle Calédonie’, p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Ibid., p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. See Charles Forsdick, ‘Siting Postcolonial Memory: Remembering New Caledonia in the Work of Didier Daeninckx’, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 18.2 (2010), 175–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Anouar Benmalek, *L’Enfant du peuple ancien* (Paris: Pauvert, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Ibid., p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Mehdi Lallaoui, *Kabyles du Pacifique* (Bezons: Au nom de la mémoire, 1994), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. See Mélica Ouennoughi, *Les Déportés maghrébins en Nouvelle-Calédonie et la culture du palmier dattier (1864 à nos jours)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. The term ‘travel stories’ is used by James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. See Louis-José Barbançon and Christophe Sand, *Caledoun: histoire des Arabes et Berbères de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Bourail: Association des Arabes et Amis de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Ibid., p. 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Ibid., p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Ibid., p. 348 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. Ibid., p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Caitlin Desilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). See also Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir (eds), *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. See Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi, *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* (Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1994). For more sustained studies of the work focused in the frame of memory and trauma studies, see Max Silverman, ‘Memory Traces: Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi’s *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne*’, *Yale French Studies*, 118/19 (2010), 225–38, and Andrew Stafford, ‘Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi in the penal colony. Photo-text and memory-traces’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 11.1 (2008), 27–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. In terms of the genealogy of Chamoiseau’s thought and associated terminology, it is important to note that the ‘trace’ is central to the work of Édouard Glissant, where it is the object of the author’s quest in the work of memory. Glissant writes: ‘la pensée de la trace, au bord des champs désolés du souvenir, laquelle sollicite les mémoires conjointes des composantes du Tout-Monde. La pensée de langues et langages, où se décide le jeu des imaginaires des humanités’ (*Philosophie de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. Such continuities are also explored by the anthropologist Peter Redfield in *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Chamoiseau’s intervention as a Martinican commenting on the French Guianese context within the uneven dynamics of the French Caribbean has attracted criticism, not least from Clémence Léobal who also detects an unwillingness to relate the ruins of the *bagne* to contemporary social problems in French Guiana, such as the presence of migrants of Maroon heritage at Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni during the Surinamese civil war. See Léobal, ‘Politiques urbaines et recompositions identitaires en contexte postcolonial: les marrons à Saint-Laurent du Maroni (1975–2012)’, rapport de recherche, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. Chamoiseau and Hammadi, *Guyane*, pp. 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. See Bernard Cherubini, ‘Imprisoning ethnic heritage in French Guiana: the seduction of a penal colony’, in Camila de Mármol, Marc Morell and Jasper Chalcraft(eds), *The Making of Heritage: Seduction and Disenchantment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 79–98 (p. 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. Chamoiseau and Hammadi, *Guyane*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. Ibid., p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. Ibid., pp. 23, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. Ibid., p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. Ibid., p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. Ibid., p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. Ibid., p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)