
Creative Paratopy in *Nulle autre voix* by Maïssa Bey*

Twórcza paratopia w *Nulle autre voix* Maïssy Bey

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Abstract. The present article analyses Maïssa Bey's novel *Nulle autre voix* [*No Other Voice*]. This feminist author deals with a new theme of an Algerian woman in prison, a place supposed to be only for men. Female criminality is a taboo subject in Algeria because prison represents, in a way, desocialization. A criminal is disowned by his own family for bringing dishonour. Since women represent their families' honour in Algeria, they are treated more severely than men. This manifests itself in the novel by the paratopic elements forming a discourse that will be analysed by means of an enunciative method.

Keywords: Maïssa Bey, *Nulle autre voix*, female criminality, enunciation, discourse, paratopy

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest analiza powieści Maïssy Bey *Nulle autre voix*. Feministyczna autorka zajmuje się nowym, trudnym problemem: kwestią obecności Algierki w więzieniu, miejscu przeznaczonym tylko dla mężczyzn. Podejmuje również problem tabu w kulturze algierskiej, jakim

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jest przestępczość kobiet taktowana jako rodzaj desocjalizacji – rodzina wyklucza przestępczynię za okrycie niesławą najbliższych. Powieść Maïssa Bey pokazuje, iż kobieta jest traktowana znacznie bardziej rygorystycznie niż mężczyzna, gdyż utożsamia honor rodziny. W artykule poddano analizie te kwestie za pomocą metody enuncjatywnej – pokazano, jak powieści *Nulle autre voix* tworzą one paratopyczny dyskurs.

Słowa kluczowe: Maïssa Bey, *Nulle autre voix*, przestępczość kobiet, metoda enuncjatywna, dyskurs, paratopia

INTRODUCTION

In her novel *Nulle autre voix* [*No Other Voice*], published in 2018, Maïssa Bey deals with the female prison environment in Algeria. It should be noted that the title refers to the enunciative process in the novel since, to quote Michel Foucault,¹ “the utterance is an atom of discourse” [“l’énoncé est l’atome du discours”].² In other words, there had been no other Algerian author who dealt with such a subject before, which bodes well for this feminist writer trying to make her “voice” heard, a voice of a woman who served fifteen years of imprisonment after having murdered her husband. Domestic violence remains *a fortiori*, a remarkably widespread social phenomenon, especially in Algeria. Therefore, through her creative process, the author proclaims herself the voice of Algerian women, whilst at the same time, questioning the place of women in society. An Algerian society that rejects an ex-convict because prison is not supposed to be a place for women.

Based on the Algerian collective imagination, it would be impossible to conceive that a woman could belong to a category of the marginalized since women, to a greater or lesser extent, are valued as mothers, sisters, daughters, or wives. This impossible act of belonging, highlighting the enunciative situation in the novel, represents primarily the creative paratopy (*paratopie*)³ that Dominique Maingueneau defines as follows: “it offers all the figures of dissidence and marginality, both literal or metaphorical” [“elle offre toutes les figures de la dissidence et de la marginalité, littérale ou métaphorique”]. This definition proves interesting as it questions the scope of dissidence and marginality proposed by the author as a symbolic representation of the real world. Hence the question is: how does a paratopic creation manifest itself in Bey’s novel given that the murder makes the ex-convict herself a paratopic character?

¹ Emphasizing the utterance in discourse analysis (Foucault, 1968, p. 106).

² Translator’s note: all the French quotations have been translated into English by the translator of the article.

³ A notion the author put forward already in 1993 and devoted a whole book to it in 2014 (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 86).

The answer to this issue requires consideration of all the paratopic elements of the enunciator's discourse in the novel. It is on her return home that the main character finds herself, *alone* and *marginalized* [*seule* and *marginalisée*], facing rejection by society and by her parents, but not her brother, who took care of her from the beginning. Let us note that it is in the first pages of the novel that the paratopy is visible in the enunciator's utterance the moment she describes her environment: "prison is neither a respectable place nor a conceivable eventuality. It is not a place I was born either" ["la prison n'est ni un lieu fréquentable ni une éventualité envisageable. Dans celui où je suis née non plus d'ailleurs"] (p. 45). Hence it should be noted that as a result of the murder committed by the main character, she exhibits the paratopic characteristics: *dissidence* and *marginality*. This leads us to three paratopic constituents of the protagonist's discourse in Bey's novel: *paratopy of identity*, *paratopy of family*, and *spatiotemporal paratopy*.

This analytical approach requires a methodology that takes into account the scenes of enunciation: the *englobing* scene (to specify the type of discourse); the *generic* scene (to refer to the medium that the author uses in her literary creation); and *scenography* (as the scenery which allows for the distribution of characters and words in the novel). This whole enunciative arrangement makes it possible, in this case, to reveal discourses connected to social representations in Algeria, as well as the resultant clichés and stereotypes, based on the novel in question. It should also be noted that the context of production is an essential element in discourse analysis, because according to Maingueneau,⁴ "the work reflects its time" ["l'œuvre dit son temps"] and that is why it is essential to focus on the "utterance/enunciation" relationship as it contributes to the production of discourse. This enunciative apparatus underlies any act of enunciation conveying a self-constituting discourse related to the creative paratopy in the novel.

1. PARATOPY OF IDENTITY

As Farida the writer intends to write a novel dealing with the women's prison environment in Algeria, she approaches the main character of the novel, who agrees to collaborate with her. Throughout the novel, she tells her story in fourteen letters. It should also be specified that what characterizes a writer is, among other things, their ability to symbolically turn social realities into novels, as is the case of female criminality in this novel. One finds this in the following statement of the main character: "An author of a novel does not have to account for reality or plausibility

⁴ It is from this perspective that we could relate the text to its context (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 29).

[...] I would've almost written this novel for you!" ["Un auteur de roman n'a pas de comptes à rendre à la réalité ou à la vraisemblance [...] Je l'aurais presque écrit pour vous ce roman!"] (pp. 189–190). This utterance puts into perspective the multiple voices that the author adapts in different situations of enunciation in her novel. This discursive intertwining is visible in a letter that the enunciator wrote to Farida at the end of the novel to conclude that: "this book belongs to me as much as to you" ["ce livre m'appartient autant qu'à vous"] (p. 195). This statement accentuates the discursive stratification when several voices come together as one single voice, namely that of the author of the novel. This *mise en abyme* constitutes the enunciative process in the novel by highlighting the characters' words (of the ex-convict and Farida the writer) through Bey's voice. In fact, there exists a circle around them so that the enunciative construction could be justified. This being said, let us refer to Maingueneau:⁵

the work legitimizes itself by closing a loop: through the world it constructs, it tacitly justifies the situation of enunciation that it imposes from the start. It is therefore up to the utterance to gradually create a universe of meaning that enables it to legitimize the speech scene that conveys it.⁶

What is more, the main character became a public letter-writer in prison where, on behalf of other prisoners, she wrote letters sent to their families. By doing so, Bey, who, let us recall, is known for her feminism, tries to legitimize the crime that the ex-convict committed as a result of domestic violence. So, it is about feminist discourse questioning the unsaid that the woman conceals, denouncing the patriarchal society in Algeria. This society assumes typical cultural and atavistic clichés which violate, in particular, women's rights. In fact, woman's discourse does not have to be legitimized against that of a man, which is based on sexism silencing all demands of an Algerian woman. Therefore, by means of her work of fiction, the author claims the rights of her Algerian compatriots through a symbolic representation of marital relations in Algeria, evoking at the same time their harmful consequences, in particular, crime. It stems from the conflict-ridden relationship between a woman and a man, which points to the paratopy of identity as the woman who cannot question her husband's decisions. This is exactly what the main character of the novel did not give in to, which led her to commit a crime. Her act of rebellion is but a result of spousal violence, which is strongly criticized by the author in her

⁵ This definition takes into account the author's voice in relation to the characters in her novel. It also underlies the author's pursuit (Maingueneau, 2016, p. 76).

⁶ "l'œuvre se légitime en traçant une boucle: à travers le monde qu'elle construit, elle justifie tacitement la situation d'énonciation qu'elle impose d'entrée. À charge dès lors pour l'énonciation de construire progressivement un univers de sens qui lui permette de légitimer la scène de parole qui le porte."

novel. However, the killer herself did not refrain from recognizing the indulgence of the judge, euphemistically confessing that: “Oddly enough, the sentence seemed quite lenient to me” [“Curieusement, le verdict m’a semblé assez clément”] (p. 24). She is, in fact, prone to suffer the worst punishment since she believes not to be worthy of being absolved after having taken a man’s life, as she adds:

Fifteen years. Is it enough for the life of a man? Who can tell? The act that I committed – in cold blood, as strongly attacked the public prosecutor – is registered on my criminal record, in usual terms. Words on paper: they’re all that’s left today. (p. 24)⁷

This utterance calls into question the court’s decision taken at the expense of human rights by treating a criminal act lightly. The enunciator introduces the underlying argument by means of a euphemism through the aphorism “Des mots sur du papier” [“Words on paper”]. This aphorism introduces a discourse questioning the legal discourse in the novel. Paradoxically, instead of trying to discredit the court’s decision which she considers lenient, the offender should have considered herself fortunate. That being said, the Algerian criminal code is governed according to Islamic law, the Sharia. The englobing scene supports the legal discourse since Islam is the religion of Algeria. However, as a component of identity, the scenography in the novel goes against Islamic law, namely the court’s decision violates the law of retaliation (the “eye-for-an-eye” principle). It is present in all the monotheistic religions, especially in Islam, as stipulated in the Holy Quran:⁸ “We ordained therein for them: Life for life, eye for eye, [...] ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal” [“Et nous y avons prescrit pour eux vie pour vie, œil pour œil, [...] dent pour dent. Les blessures tombent sous la loi du talion”].⁹ There exists, therefore, an apparent contradiction not only in legitimizing the main character’s discourse by means of a comment on the public prosecutor’s statement but also the paratopy of identity underlying her discourse in a generic scene from the novel.

As for the *englobing* scene, it is a matter of legal discourse stipulating that the offender must serve a sentence of fifteen years in prison. However, the convict herself calls into question the judge’s decision, implying that according to the law of retaliation, she should have been executed. What is more, to legitimize her discourse, the enunciator takes over the scenography in terms of distributing the roles, decisions and senses, by distorting the meaning of the term “Liberté” [“Freedom”]

⁷ “Quinze ans. Est-ce suffisant au regard de la vie d’un homme? Qui peut le dire? L’acte que j’ai commis – de sang-froid, a asséné avec force l’avocat général – est inscrit sur mon casier judiciaire, avec les mentions d’usage. Des mots sur du papier: c’est tout ce qu’il en reste aujourd’hui.”

⁸ Sourate Al-Maidah (La Table no. 05). Line 45.

⁹ As rendered into English in Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Quran (*The Quranic Arabic Corpus*, <http://corpus.quran.com/> [access: 10.06.2020]).

since in reality, she was never free, as she admits: “it was not the confinement that deprived me of my freedom. When the prison doors closed for me, I suddenly felt... free” [“ce n’est pas l’enfermement qui m’a privée de liberté. Quand les portes de la prison se sont refermées sur moi, je me suis brusquement sentie... délivrée”] (p. 30).

The term “freedom” acquires a different meaning for the enunciator considering prison as a place of relief. It should be noted that the meaning she assigns to the word “freedom” given that her married life was worse than life in prison, does not conform to the socially accepted one. This symbolizes a paratopic character whose discourse denounces sexism in the way a female criminal in Algeria is represented without looking for the causes which led her there, because “relief” always follows torture. This relief is an understatement provoking a denunciation of the crime committed in order to legitimize the imprisonment. However, if the criminal did not exhibit any psychological abnormality, committing a crime was her last resort to get rid of another type of crime that the legal system does not take into account, namely spousal violence that some women suffer in silence. In this regard, taking into account the prevention of the symptoms of crime, Michel Foucault states that:

the need to measure, from within, the effects of punitive power prescribes methods of intervention concerning all criminals: organizing prevention, calculating interests [...] constituting a horizon of certainty and truth, adjusting penalties to increasingly subtle variables; all this leads to the objectification of criminals and crimes. (Foucault, 1975, p. 104)¹⁰

As for Farida the writer, she is doing something she should not be doing as she is spending time with someone whom society rejects; and this is why, in order to go unnoticed during her meetings with the ex-convict, she wears a headscarf. As a result, paratopy of identity manifests itself in that the writer risks being reproached when she gets in touch with the criminal. Furthermore, the author is critical of the Algerian social approach in this respect, such as value judgement, or by appearances, given that the criminal and the writer are where they should not be: one tends to rehabilitate herself, while the other tries to establish professional relations with her. In their case, a woman is always obliged to justify herself, even during professional activities. In fact, throughout her novel, the author questions the situation of the Algerian woman, by trying to create a literary space for her as she perceives the woman as deprived of it in the social context. In other words,

¹⁰ “la nécessité de mesurer, de l’intérieur, les effets du pouvoir punitif prescrit des tactiques d’intervention sur tous les criminels: l’organisation d’un champ de prévention, le calcul des intérêts [...] la constitution d’un horizon de certitude et de vérité, l’ajustement des peines à des variables de plus en plus fines; tout cela conduit également à une objectivation des criminels et des crimes.” In this work, the author deals with criminality from a clinical and philosophical point of view.

there seems to be a correlation between the social self and the creative self, as underlined by Maingueneau¹¹ viewing paratopy as a sense of impossible belonging:

Far from enunciating anything on a neutral and stable institutional ground, the writer nourishes his (should the gender be female?) work with a drastically problematic character of his own belonging to the literary field and society. He is not a centaur with one part of him plunged into social gravity and the other, nobler, turned towards the stars, but someone whose enunciation is constituted through impossibility even to assign himself a real "place."¹²

It is worth noting that by describing the main character, the author believes that women are stigmatized in everything they do, which proves the sexism legitimizing any man's behaviour. Thus, according to social practices in Algeria, a woman is not predestined to be a criminal, as recognized by the heroine herself, who acknowledges that she has been already convicted even before the court passes the sentence, by declaring:

Women's criminality. It seems that these two words are hard to reconcile, to hold together. There is a discrepancy between them. Women do not kill. They give life. To be progenitors is their main role. Any attempt to break out of this pattern turns them into monsters. Monsters of cruelty and insensitivity. Women violating the norm. I am therefore a double anomaly: I did not give birth to a child and I took a man's life. (p. 27)¹³

On the one hand, what the enunciator perceives as an anomaly is an example of paratopy because criminality, as one should remember, should not be attributed to the fairer sex. Therefore, there exists a semantic inadequacy in the enunciator's discourse, which results in the enunciator's anomaly of identity as she does not conform to the Algerian social norm. Hence, a woman must not commit a murder, under any circumstances, or else she will be considered inhuman, which the enunciator qualifies as being "outside the norm." On the other hand, the enunciator cannot enjoy the fundamental female characteristic, namely fertility. In short, as in

¹¹ It is for the first time that the author puts forward the notion of paratopy that she called "impossible belonging" [*l'impossible appartenance*] (Maingueneau, 1993, pp. 28–29).

¹² "Loin d'énoncer sur un sol institutionnel neutre et stable, l'écrivain nourrit son œuvre du caractère radicalement problématique de sa propre appartenance au champ littéraire et à la société. Il n'est pas une sorte de centaure qui aurait une part de lui, plongée dans la pesanteur sociale et l'autre, la plus noble, tournée vers les étoiles, mais quelqu'un dont l'énonciation se constitue à travers l'impossibilité même de s'assigner une véritable »place«."

¹³ "Criminalité féminine. Il paraît que ces deux mots ont du mal à se côtoyer, à tenir debout ensemble. Il y a comme une discordance. Les femmes ne tuent pas. Elles donnent la vie. C'est même leur principale fonction : génitrices. Toute tentative de sortir de ce schéma fait d'elles des monstres. Des monstres de cruauté et d'insensibilité. Des femmes hors normes. Je présente donc deux anomalies: je n'ai pas enfanté et j'ai ôté la vie à un homme."

the case of every discourse, there appears an interdiscourse within which, in this particular example, consists of a woman being reduced to a simple reproductive tool. Sterility in women is a real problem undermining female identity since in Algeria it is believed that a woman who does not have children does not fulfil all the “functions” of the so-called “normal” woman. Let us refer to Catherine Ménabé’s studies¹⁴ on the paratopy of identity:

Dealing with a female criminal can be incongruous since the two terms seem antithetical: a woman could not be a criminal. The crime would be either so specific that it could not exist or, rather, so insignificant that it would not matter. (Ménabé, 2014, p. 18)¹⁵

This statement represents the exact situation of enunciation in Bey’s novel, resulting from its interdiscourse accentuating the apparent contradiction between the prison environment and the fairer sex, which corresponds to the paratopy of identity. As a result of the anomaly in question, the Algerian woman becomes ignored and frowned upon, even guilty, because her fundamental role is to “give life,” and not to “take it away.” Therefore, after her rehabilitation, the enunciator is in search of her new identity as an ex-convict since her previous life no longer makes sense to her, as she admits: “One thing is certain: the woman I was over fifteen years ago is no longer. She ceased to exist the day I decided to kill this man” [“Une seule certitude : la femme que j’étais il y a plus de quinze ans n’est plus. Elle a cessé d’exister le jour où j’ai décidé de supprimer cet homme”] (p. 28).

To be seen as a criminal is not easy in Algerian society, even less to be close to one, as is the case with Farida. Consequently, the two women do not meet the social norm, which matches the above-mentioned Maingueneau’s definition of creative paratopy “it offers all the facets of dissent and marginality” [“elle offre toutes les figures de la dissidence et de la marginalité”]. The latter constitutes the very essence of the main issues represented in the novel. It is worth mentioning that no name has been given to the main character, apart from her “prison number F277” [“numéro d’écrou ou matricule F277”] (p. 12). This lack of identity indicates that despite her rehabilitation, there is no social acknowledgement of a criminal in Algerian society. Even worse, no one takes into account the factors that led to the crime, which the enunciator demands by asking:

In fact, the only real question to be debated during the trial should have been formulated as follows: under what circumstances and for what reasons a human being who is not predisposed to

¹⁴ A specialist in criminology whose idea is similar to that of Maïssa Bey (Ménabé, 2014, p. 18).

¹⁵ “Traiter de la femme criminelle peut être incongru tant les deux termes semblent antagonistes: la femme ne serait pas criminelle. La criminalité serait spécifique en ce qu’elle n’existerait pas ou, plutôt, serait tellement infime qu’elle ne compterait pas.”

violence might fall? And to be more precise: how could this woman, whom everyone unanimously describes as weak and fearful could have committed such a violent act? (p. 159)¹⁶

These two rhetorical questions seem to represent the very reason for writing the novel because they are all about issues which are not taken into consideration during the trial, that is conviction or stigmatization of women. Despite the fact that one deals here with the enunciator's discourse in a work of fiction, it is based on a taboo subject that social actors do not recognize. Nevertheless, while for a woman the family unit is supposed to be the only refuge, whether she is a criminal or not, it proves to be the opposite for the main character in the novel. Her family situation is specific and thus it is necessary to identify its paratopic characteristics.

2. PARATOPY OF FAMILY

What characterizes the main character in Bey's novel is that she is categorically rejected on the pretext that her crime has tarnished her father's image. He is forced to disown his daughter even if he contributed financially to her care during her imprisonment. The decision taken by the father completely destroys the bond with his daughter, as the enunciator recalls: "By the act that I committed, I erased my identity and the first name that my parents chose for me the day I was born" ["Par l'acte que j'ai commis, j'ai effacé mon identité et le prénom que mes parents ont choisi pour moi le jour de ma naissance"] (p. 12). She is hardly reborn, with no filiation, as if she never had parents, when she realizes that they have abandoned her completely. This is manifested explicitly in the novel when the enunciator rejects her family ties by confessing: "I am no longer a wife nor a daughter. I no longer have any family origins or sense of belonging" ["Je ne suis plus ni la femme de ni la fille de. Je n'ai plus ni filiation ni appurtenance"] (p. 27). From this utterance emerges a discourse on a family denial, which makes the ex-convict suffer and puts her in a fragile mental state.

This rejection is apparent not only in her father but also in her entire family, as shown by the enunciator: "No one in my family was there to welcome me" ["Dans la famille, personne n'était disposé à m'accueillir"] (p. 19). This behaviour is rooted in Algerian social practices according to which a criminal could tarnish the image of his family, even if it may harm the identity of the protagonist. It should be also added that even the mother disowns her daughter, who believes that: "She crossed

¹⁶ "En réalité, la seule vraie question à débattre lors du procès aurait dû être formulée ainsi : dans quelles conditions et pour quelles raisons un être que rien ne prédispose à la violence peut-il basculer ? Plus précisément : comment cette femme, que tous s'accordent à décrire comme un être falot, craintif, a-t-elle pu commettre un acte d'une telle violence ?"

me out of her life. She would no doubt have liked to tear out a page of the family record book mentioning my birth” [“Elle m’a rayée de sa vie. Elle aurait aimé sans doute déchirer la page qui porte mention de ma naissance sur le livret de famille”] (p. 65). However, her little brother Amine was the only person left to her as they were very close following the assassination of their elder brother, Abdelhak, during the “years of blood.”

Despite her situation, the offender tries to justify her crime by indicating that she was the victim of another crime that in some atavistic way everyone was silent about in Algerian society. This crime dates back to the times she spent among her people, as the enunciator points out:

A lonely loveless childhood, an authoritarian mother, sometimes abusive, brothers showing their male attributes with calm confidence, an absent father, disconnected from reality, an almost congenital difficulty in finding her place first in the family then in society, and finally a husband who corresponds almost exactly to police descriptions of men classified as violent predators. (p. 146)¹⁷

This passage comprises all the constituent elements of family paratopy in Bey’s writing. The main character’s family relationships correlate with different representations, that is maternal, fraternal, and fatherly ones. The first one relates to the abusive authority of her mother, which left bruises on the protagonist’s psyche. In addition, there is another one referring to the brothers, considered to be superior to the protagonist, which once again involves sexism within their family. There is yet another representation, of the father, who himself being excluded from society, and even though no longer alive, personifies otherness to his daughter. As for the husband, he represents otherness embodying a despicable image that the Algerian woman has of her “man-husband.” They live like strangers, with him feeling such hatred that she puts an end to his life even if for her it means ending up in prison. This causality allows the woman to assert herself in front of her spouse by externalising her hatred through crime. This corresponds to Julia Kristeva’s concept of hatred:

“Living hate” [...] To constantly feel the hatred of others, to have no other milieu but this hatred. Like a woman who gives in, complacent and complicit, to rejection that her husband displays towards her the moment she makes the slightest gesture, remark.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Une enfance solitaire, sans amour, une mère autoritaire, abusive parfois, des frères qui portaient leurs attributs de mâles avec une assurance tranquille, un père absent, déconnecté de la réalité, une difficulté presque congénitale à trouver sa place dans la famille puis dans la société, et enfin un mari qui correspond presque exactement au portrait-robot des hommes classés dans la catégorie prédateurs violents.”

¹⁸ “»Vivre la haine« [...] Sentir constamment la haine des autres, n’avoir d’autre milieu que cette haine-là. Comme une femme qui se plie, complaisante et complice, au rejet que son mari lui

This sense of foreignness fuels the main character's desire to commit a crime as her husband constitutes the very essence of alterity distorting the legitimacy of their marriage. This erasure leads her to commit a crime because she was always rejected and belittled, not only by her husband, but also by her own mother when she was still single. The mistreatment left deep scars making her take revenge in order to impose her presence because she already felt discarded, as the enunciator reminds us:

The man was not jealous. Simply because he felt he had no reason to be. Who would want you? Who would think of giving you a look? He often threw at me contemptuously, without knowing it, repeating my mother's prophetic words. (p. 37)¹⁹

The attack on self-esteem drove the protagonist to take revenge. This element legitimizes the character's discourse which, given its idiosyncrasy, displays paratopic characteristics. A mother is supposed to be a mentor for her daughter, while, in this case, she was rather her jailer to the point of making her life difficult and degrading even in her private matters, as indicated below:

until I got married, she kept my period calendar up to date and used to rummage through my rubbish bins for my sanitary pads to check them. Is that enough? Is that enough for you to understand what brought me to this day in May? (p. 57)²⁰

This passage reveals a fundamental issue justifying the criminal act of the main character, calling into question her mental state given what she endured when she was still single. As a result, instead of arriving at hasty conclusions, it was necessary, first of all, to take into account the real causes that led to the tragedy prompting the judge to pronounce a sentence of fifteen years in prison instead of a life sentence. Additionally, the convict exhibited symptoms of distress in her married life. She did not have any way out, neither a listening ear nor medical help, let alone compassion, which is clear from the following utterance:

I wanted to understand. With my father, I tried several times to open the locked doors. Never in the presence of my mother. When I happened to be alone with him, I would launch into tell-me-why,

signifie dès qu'elle esquisse le moindre mot, geste, propos." In this work, the psychoanalyst raises the question of melancholy from a psychological point of view (Kristeva, 1988, p. 24).

¹⁹ "l'homme n'était pas jaloux. Simplement parce qu'il considérait qu'il n'avait aucune raison de l'être. Qui voudrait de toi ? Qui aurait l'idée de t'accorder un regard ? me jetait-il souvent sur un ton méprisant, reprenant sans le savoir les paroles prophétiques de ma mère."

²⁰ "jusqu'à mon mariage, elle tenait à jour le calendrier de mes règles et qu'elle allait jusqu'à fouiller les poubelles pour y rechercher et vérifier mes serviettes hygiéniques ? Cela suffit-il ? Cela vous suffit-il pour comprendre ce qui m'a menée à ce jour de mai ?"

I-would-like-to-know, when-where-how questions. Nods, elusive glances, snatches of muttered sentences behind his moustache, that's all I managed to get out of him while his hand was getting heavy on my shoulder and his gaze a little more anxious, a little more distant. (p. 66)²¹

Even before being sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment, the main character already felt imprisoned at home, in her marriage. Nevertheless, no one lent her a helping hand to get her out of her prison at home while everyone blamed her for the murder. This discourse of injustice exposes a difficult situation of women in distress, sentenced to life in a conjugal cell where a husband acts as a prison guard. Therefore, to escape successfully, the protagonist had no other alternative but to end her jailer's life. Let us note that this kind of prison has been already depicted in Assia Djebbar's (1995) novel, *Vaste est la prison* [*So Vast the Prison*], where an Algerian academician refuses to accept women's fate in Algerian society if we want to borrow an intertextual digression relating to the interdiscourse as follows: "But her husband, he's like another husband! [...] »An enemy«, that's the right term! I repeat: women talk to each other like that" ["Son mari, mais il est comme un autre mari ! [...] »L' ennemi«, c'est une façon de dire! Je le répète: les femmes parlent ainsi entre elles"] (p. 14).

As for Bey, she underlies the father's role in the family unit, and in particular, the relationship he has with his daughter. Fatherless, the author was not fortunate enough to have such a relationship, as she lost her father at the age of seven.²² His tragic death made Bey write a short story *Mon père* [*My Father*], published in 2007 in the collective work edited by Leïla Sebbar. A year later, she evokes her father's figure in her novel, *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes* [*Do You Hear in the Mountains*]. As the father figure is omnipresent in her writing, once again she tries to paint a picture of the paternal relationship in the novel analysed herein. With this regard, let us refer to the definition of "paratopy" by Maingueneau,²³ irrespective of its focus on the male creator:

paratopy of familial identity: abandoned children, orphans, illegitimate children [...] It plays such an important role because by nature an aesthetic activity implies that the male creator calls into

²¹ "Je voulais comprendre. J'ai essayé avec mon père – j'ai essayé plusieurs fois d'ouvrir les portes condamnées. Jamais en présence de ma mère. Quand il m'arrivait d'être seule avec lui, je me lançais dans des dis-moi-pourquoi, des j'aimerais-bien-savoir, des quand-où-comment. Des hochements de tête, des regards fuyants, des bribes de phrases marmonnées dans sa moustache, voilà tout ce que je parvenais à lui arracher pendant que sa main se faisait pesante sur mon épaule et son regard un peu plus anxieux, un peu plus lointain."

²² Based on a study devoted to Maïssa Bey (Détrez, 2014, pp. 5–21), article available online at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-travail-genre-et-societes-2014-2-page-5.htm> [access: 08.05.2020].

²³ The present study is based primarily on *paratopie de "l'auteur"* (paratopy of "the author") (Maingueneau, 2016, p. 28).

question the logic of inheritance. The artist has to give up making the heritage grow (in a double form of capital and genealogy), being his father's son, to weave words endlessly at risk of being pointless.²⁴

Hence, there is a discourse on the compassion of a father towards his daughter in the situation of enunciation in the novel. This symbolic representation displays the author's doubts, which could be seen as resulting from the paratopy of family. She makes the paternal relationship an essential part of the self-constituting discourse in her novel, which demonstrates a paratopic family aspect in her. Hence, one has to admit that the role of the father is very important in a woman's life since he is her only support in the event of divorce or her husband's death. In fact, such a portrayal is clear from the enunciator's discourse: "A letter written in my father's own hand tells me that I am the owner of my home. My brother gave it to me two weeks before my release date" ["Une lettre écrite de la main même de mon père m'apprend que je suis propriétaire de mon logement. Mon frère me l'a remise deux semaines avant la date de ma libération"] (p. 91). This statement gives an impression of the father's rejection based on an atavistic behaviour imposed on Algerian society. In fact, the father proved compassionate with his daughter by acknowledging his fault due to his silence and his absence so as not to interfere in her married life. This is revealed through a statement from which emanates a discourse on the father's inability to protect his daughter once taken under her husband's, supposed protective, wing. "The last sentence written in his trembling hand sums up all his life, but also mine. FORGIVE ME, MY DAUGHTER, FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO PROTECT YOU" ["La dernière phrase écrite de sa main tremblante résume toute sa vie, mais aussi la mienne PARDONNE-MOI MA FILLE DE N'AVOIR PAS SU TE PROTÉGER"] (p. 91).

It should therefore be stated that, despite being her father, he is not entitled to intervene in his daughter's married life. It is also worth adding that the enunciator admits that: "My father paid the cost of the trial and lawyer's fees" ["Mon père a payé les frais du procès et les honoraires de l'avocat"] (p. 95). Indeed, well aware that his daughter had committed a crime, the father still sided with her; a behaviour referring to the paratopy of family. These statements contribute to the production of a discourse on the difference between the mother's and father's behaviour. Such a discrepancy accentuates the importance of her father to the speaker as he is the only person who was compassionate towards her, even though he has severed all

²⁴ "la paratopie d'identité familiale: enfants abandonnés, orphelins, bâtards [...] Elle joue un rôle aussi important parce que par nature l'activité esthétique implique que le créateur masculin mette en cause la logique patrimoniale. L'artiste doit renoncer à faire fructifier le patrimoine (sous la double forme du capital et de la généalogie), à être le fils de son père, pour tresser des mots sans cesse menacés d'être vains."

ties with her. He is both absent and present to bring her help despite the social constraints which prevent him from maintaining ties with her. He is thus torn between the love for his daughter, social practices, and stereotypes. The latter are characteristics that should be taken into account in the enunciator's case because: "The enunciator always seems to be caught, despite themselves, by the constraints of stereotypes and preconceived ideas" [*"L'énonciateur apparaît toujours pris, malgré lui, dans les contraintes du stéréotype et de l'idée reçue"*].²⁵ As a result, the author's function boils down to exposing stereotypes by using the example of the father's relationship with his daughter in the society in which she immerses herself to write her novel.

In addition to the paratopy of identity and the paratopy of family contributing to Bey's writing, the spatiotemporal paratopy should also be highlighted. This could show the dynamics between all the paratopic elements, contributing to the production of discourse in the author's novelistic creation.

3. SPATIOTEMPORAL PARATOPY

The situation of enunciation in Bey's novel is particular since prison is not a place for a decent Algerian intellectual, as admitted by the enunciator: "It is true that in her world prison is neither a respectable place nor a conceivable eventuality" [*"Il est vrai que dans son milieu: la prison n'est ni un lieu fréquentable ni une éventualité envisageable"*] (p. 45). This impossible belonging represents an element of the spatial paratopy contributing to the creation of the novel. However, upon her release from prison, the main character is not able to return to the scene of the crime, where every corner triggers macabre memories. Her apprehension is easily seen in the enunciator's discourse when she tries to read her brother's mind, saying to herself: "Probably he wanted to know if I wasn't afraid to go back to the scene of the crime. My heart was heavy, for sure, but only from the apprehension of the unknown, of what the rest of my life was going to be like" [*"Il voulait sans doute savoir si je n'avais pas peur de retourner sur les lieux du crime. J'avais certes le cœur serré, mais seulement par l'appréhension de l'inconnu, de ce qu'allaient être les jours du reste de ma vie"*] (p. 19).

There are then two spaces where the enunciator does not want to go. This essentially corresponds to the spatiotemporal paratopy, which consists in that time when the ex-convict's incarceration is over, and that the prison and her old flat share the same

²⁵ The cliché related to relationships between text, imagination, and society (Amossy and Herschberg, 2015, p. 62).

characteristics. As a result, the two situations of enunciation are similar at the level of semantics. All the more so, there is a psychological anomaly in the main character because each word does not refer to the meaning attributed to it according to social norms: paradoxically, the term “prison” denotes “relief,” while the word “flat” before her incarceration referred to “imprisonment.” After her release, the same “flat” refers to “the unknown” that the enunciator comprehends insofar as her discourse pertains to social injustice ignoring the causes leading a woman to commit a crime. What is more, the unknown represents society’s reaction towards a rehabilitating criminal seeking to live among people who reject her. In addition, the imprisonment begins for the main character the moments he is handcuffed in her flat.

Although prison is the actual place of imprisonment, the enunciator also treats her flat as a place of detention. This contradiction, both semantic and discursive, reinforces the enunciator’s image forced on her following her crime as it also requires her reasoning to legitimize the discourse. According to the norm, one deals here with a reasoning that does not conform to the social norms, however, it is at the level of literary discourse that the flat is interpreted as a place where the protagonist suffered from confinement. The author attributes the characteristics of prison to the marital home of her protagonist, hence a discourse exposing marital relations that undermine some women’s mental health. The notion of space is but a pretext for unveiling the realities of daily life for these women. There is thus an impossible relationship between the place and the non-place, as indicated by Maingueneau:

Belonging to the literary field is therefore not the absence of any place, but rather a difficult negotiation between the place and the non-place, a parasitic location, which exists due to the very impossibility of stabilizing itself. We will name this paradoxical location *paratopie*.²⁶

The concept of time and space is recurrent from the beginning of the novel, when the enunciator keeps going back and forth between prison and her flat because she has trouble getting used to her old life, as she considers that: “I had to reclaim those places I had left handcuffed” [“Il fallait que je me réapproprié ces lieux que j’avais quittés menottes aux poignets”] (p. 20). The main character is rattled by this gap between the past and the present since the concept of time and space becomes a problem for her due to the gaze of people around her, as she presumes: “It should be said that they did not expect me to return to my place” [“Il faut dire qu’ils ne s’attendaient pas à me voir réintégrer les lieux”] (p. 34). This distressing

²⁶ “L’appartenance au champ littéraire n’est donc pas l’absence de tout lieu, mais plutôt une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une localisation parasitaire, qui vit de l’impossibilité même de se stabiliser. Cette localité paradoxale, nous la nommerons *paratopie*.” This is the first time that the author names *paratopie* based on the idea of the impossible belonging (Maingueneau, 1993, p. 29).

apprehension makes the criminal believe that she left prison to end her life in her flat, which she regards as yet another prison since her psychological state is conditioned by confinement. This impossibility of rehabilitation undermines her mental health because she could detach herself neither from the prison nor from the moment of her incarceration that haunt her, which Kristeva encapsulates by saying “that the past does not pass” [“qu’un passé ne passe pas”]:

The times we live in is the time of our discourse, foreign speech, slowed down or dissipated by the melancholic, leads it to live in decentred temporality. It does not flow, the before/after vector does not govern it, does not direct it from the past to its goal [...] Fixed in the past, regressing to paradise or hell from an unsurpassable experience, the melancholy is a strange memory: everything is over, it seems to say, but I am faithful to this past, I am nailed to it, there is no possible revolution, no future [...] the hypertrophied, hyperbolic past occupies every dimension of mental continuity.²⁷

For the ex-convict, her flat is yet another cell where she finds it difficult to come to terms with her past. This state of affairs explains the impossibility of breaking with one’s past even in the case of social rehabilitation, which is suggested by the enunciator who states that: “There is not a single day when I don’t think about prison. Not a single day without moments, faces connected with this place suddenly appearing in my memory” [“Il n’est pas un seul jour où je ne pense pas à la prison. Pas un seul jour sans que surgissent en instantanés dans ma mémoire des moments, des visages liés à ce lieu”] (p. 80). This inability to return to society is typical of both the spatial and temporal paratopy since the main character is unable to detach herself from her imprisonment nor from her memories of time spent with women of all social strata, who, once in prison, are all the same in the eyes of society, as indicated by the enunciator:

In what infamous place were these women considered almost unanimously as society’s waste, collected by the police waste truck which came to dump its human cargo, almost every morning, by the detention centre? (p. 81)²⁸

²⁷ “Le temps dans lequel nous vivons étant le temps de notre discours, la parole étrangère, ralentie ou dissipée du mélancolique, le conduit à vivre dans une temporalité décentrée. Elle ne s’écoule pas, le vecteur avant/après ne la gouverne pas, ne la dirige pas d’un passé vers un but [...] Fixé au passé, régressant au paradis ou à l’enfer d’une ‘expérience indépassable, le mélancolique est une mémoire étrange: tout est révolu, semble-t-il dire, mais je suis fidèle à ce révolu, j’y suis cloué, il n’y a pas de révolution possible, pas d’avenir [...] Un passé hypertrophié, hyperbolique, occupe toutes les dimensions de la continuité psychique.” *Melancholy from a psychological perspective* (Kristeva, 1987, pp. 70–71).

²⁸ “Dans quel lieu malfamé ces femmes considérées presque unanimement comme les déchets de la société avaient-elles été ramassées par le camion-poubelle de la police qui venait déverser presque chaque matin dans la maison d’arrêt son chargement humain ?”

This statement confirms the concept of spatial paratopy, and paratopy of identity at the same time since inmates are so marginalized that they are considered “society’s waste” [“les déchets de la société”]. This figure of dissent and marginality carries a stigma dismissing every woman with a criminal history, making her so much a citizen disowned by society that she struggles to return home, as confirmed by the enunciator: “I found my flat. My plan I was totally obsessed about was to regain possession of the place” [“j’ai retrouvé mon appartement. Des projets qui alors m’habitaient toute : reprendre possession des lieux”] (p. 179). This statement reveals a discourse of redeeming herself as the enunciator plans to reclaim the “place,” even though she realizes that it is too difficult a task for her. However, the ideal place of redemption is not the place where she was held captive by her husband; this is why the concept of space is so important as it has a therapeutic value for a criminal in search of a new life. The author makes this concept an important element of the self-constituting discourse so as to emphasize the social context in which her work is produced. The latter serves as an aesthetic representation of the society Bey is a part of, playing the role of the creative Self while attributing the function of the social Self to her main protagonist. This back-and-forth between the author and her main character exhibits a characteristic of the spatial paratopy, described by Maingueneau²⁹ as follows:

The one who utters within a self-constituting discourse can place himself neither outside nor inside society: he is doomed to nourish his work with a radically problematic nature of his own belonging to this society. His enunciation comes into being through the very impossibility of assigning itself a real place. Paratopy, the paradoxical location, which is not the absence of any place, but a difficult negotiation between the place and the non-place, a parasitic location, which exists due to the very impossibility of stabilizing itself.³⁰

It is also an example of temporal paratopy since the main character cannot liberate herself from her past, let alone come to terms with her present. This is clear as the enunciator admits: “The test has been successful: I am not yet ready to leave the security of the prison that I have recreated” [“L’essai est concluant : je ne suis pas encore prête à quitter la sécurité de la prison que j’ai recréée”] (p. 185). This

²⁹ An introduction to paratopy, connecting the author, his work, and society (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 52).

³⁰ “Celui qui énonce à l’intérieur d’un discours constituant ne peut se placer ni à l’extérieur ni à l’intérieur de la société : il est voué à nourrir son œuvre du caractère radicalement problématique de sa propre appartenance à cette société. Son énonciation se constitue à travers une impossibilité même de s’assigner une véritable place. Localité paradoxale, paratopie qui n’est pas l’absence de tout lieu, mais une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une localisation parasitaire, qui vit de l’impossibilité même de se stabiliser.”

proves that the moment she is held prisoner at home, the enunciator is not free, for fear of rejection from society. Thus, it needs to be recognized that the spatiotemporal paratopy constitutes the very essence of the creation of Maïssa Bey's novel.

CONCLUSIONS

The creative paratopy is so omnipresent in Maïssa Bey's novel that the main character herself could be considered as paratopic, displaying all the paratopic constituents in her discourse. From the paratopy of identity to the paratopy of family, the two complementary elements develop an enunciative system revealing discourses through the spatiotemporal paratopy. On the one hand, the literary discourse in Bey's establishes a demand for equality between men and women in the case of post-prison rehabilitation. On the other hand, one deals here with feminist discourse as the woman claims responsibility for her crime; this is why the enunciator regards the decision of the court as sexist. However, to the same extent as a man, a woman is a human being confronted with a crime. To conclude, the novel in question is a way of denouncing injustice against female criminals in "Algerian society." As shown by the representations in the novel, female criminality is a taboo subject in a society considering that women must not, under any circumstances, commit a murder.

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SOURCE

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