Our conversation was originally featured as an episode of *The Channel* podcast. In the following transcription, I have taken it back to beginning of their research project, discuss the material remains of a Moroccan-Vietnamese cooperative, and elaborate on mapping and representation.

Caroline and Nelcya, in 2006 your lives connect when Caroline meets Dung, a woman of Moroccan-Vietnamese descent. Dung is a central figure in your book: she doesn't just act as the catalyst of a series of events, but her persona also represents the complexity of individuals that have lived and worked in your work. Caroline, I am interested in your first meeting with Dung. Can you describe how you knew she was your research subject? What were your first impressions of her?

Yes of course. I met her in April 2006. At that time I didn't really know what that meant, of our “French” connection, even though at the time I didn't really know what that meant, but it certainly meant something for her, and she gave me access to her personal life. She described herself as the wife of a Chinese worker, and she was one of those women I was actually looking for in that place, one of those marriage migrants whose life choices I wanted to understand. In fact, she was a poor worker, she was surviving in this place in very poor conditions, without any plans for the future. She was in her thirties, she had a son back in Vietnam, her mother was in Vietnam, and she was alone in this part of China. She slowly told me about her life’s trajectory, and I found out that it was full of drama, which (look) to her where she was in the Spring of 2006. It was really out of curiosity for her life that I started to look further into her past, including a search for her father.

How did you decide to contact Nelcya? At first, Dung’s identity did not make any sense to me, but I was curious to understand how she could have an Arabic name and who her father could be. I knew she was telling the truth because she looked quite different, so there was something of mixed blood in her. So I simply went to an internet café and I googled a few key words, and miraculously, the algorithm of Google provided me with the name of Nelcya Delanoë, a French historian of Moroccan-Vietnamese descent. I phoned her, and I asked her advice.

Nelcya, you explained that your specialization is in native American history. Why were you drawn to Dung’s story in particular?

I wasn’t exactly drawn to Dung’s story in the beginning. I was amazed, and I didn’t know exactly what was amazing. I had spent four years documenting and then writing my Poussières d’Empire [Presses Universitaires de France, 2002]. When published in France and in Morocco in 2002, the book had created quite a surprise and lots of interest. Why? Because the story of Moroccan soldiers and many others from other origins in the French Indo-Chinese army during the so-called Indochina War, who had transgressed, deserted, and rallied to the Viet Minh, was unheard of, and I had found it out. Even more intriguing, these men, had eventually been stuck in Vietnam, until 1972, in a prison camp turned into a cooperative, for almost 20 years. Why? had they been stuck there? The causes are various: the war, the Cold War, the history of Morocco, the history of Vietnam, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the unification of Vietnam, the American war, the postcolonial world. Eventually I knew I was going to know more about my work.

After the French retreat from Vietnam in 1954, Moroccan soldiers in the French army, had rallied to the Viet Minh, such as Dung’s biological father Hoummane Ben Mohamed, remained in Vietnamese cooperatives, together with their Vietnamese wives. As an art historian with an interest in Visual Culture, I am fascinated by the material remains of these cooperatives, and particularly a monument made by a cattle-raising Moroccan-Vietnamese settlement. I am talking about a gate, inspired by the 1732 Bab Al Mansour Gate in Meknes, Morocco. This gate features on the cover of your book and in your title, and is concrete, tangible evidence of the existence of a Moroccan-Vietnamese community between past and present, between countries, and between lives “here” and “there.” Nelcya, can you describe the monument to us and elaborate on when, how and why it was made?

It was built between 1956-1965 with sand, earth, cement, white paint, and that’s it. Most of the life they had while doing all this was hard work was unusual for these men from the countryside, because they were paid for it, and not a bad pay. The families could see doctors if and when necessary, the children went to school, everybody had clothes, and food was good. So gradually everybody, and particularly the men, they were proud of themselves, because of the work that they were given, and which they never had experienced before, was such that they were grateful forever. Even when I interviewed them later, I was often shocked by the fact that they were angry at their “hosts,” they still respected the dignity they gave them. As they wanted to go home, but couldn’t for reasons incomprehensible to them, and pending that, they insisted they would finish that door, a Moroccan door with three arches. The arch in the middle is taller and larger. The two arches on the sides are turned down and they are sculpted with flowers, leaves, a small crown. [The gate] has strong pillars. In fact, it was very strong because when I found it in 2000, it was still there. It had not been destroyed, and was just looking great, with cobwebs and moss and rain stains, but it just needed polishing and it was just there, gorgeous. According to me, it symbolizes national pride and their declaration of sovereignty as Arabs, as Moroccans, as Muslims, with a king and a country they were going to go back to. For me, and later, it has become a stone archive.

In addition to the gate, to which we will return once more at the end of our conversation, your book includes two other figures. This is a map of Morocco and a partial map of Vietnam, you have captioned the maps “Map of “their” Morocco” and “Map of “their” North Vietnam.” Caroline, can you explain the captions? What does “their” mean?

“Their” Morocco shows the cities or regions where most of them originated from, excluding the capital and the places that symbolize their country, their kingdom. Not all of them were literate, so they probably didn’t know much about their own country, also because they left quickly when they had married, but at the end they had never experienced before, was such that they were proud of themselves, because of the dignity that they were given, and which they had never experienced before, was such that they were grateful forever. Even when I interviewed them later, I was often shocked by the fact that they were angry at their “hosts,” they still respected the dignity they gave them. As they wanted to go home, but couldn’t for reasons incomprehensible to them, and pending that, they insisted they would finish that door, a Moroccan door with three arches. The arch in the middle is taller and larger. The two arches on the sides are turned down and they are sculpted with flowers, leaves, a small crown. [The gate] has strong pillars. In fact, it was very strong because when I found it in 2000, it was still there. It had not been destroyed, and was just looking great, with cobwebs and moss and rain stains, but it just needed polishing and it was just there, gorgeous. According to me, it symbolizes national pride and their declaration of sovereignty as Arabs, as Moroccans, as Muslims, with a king and a country they were going to go back to. For me, and later, it has become a stone archive.

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