

Adapting Brittany

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Adapting Brittany: The Ker-Is Legend in *Bande Dessinée*

Armelle Blin-Rolland

Abstract:

This article examines two *bande dessinée* versions of the Breton legend of the flooded city of Ker-Is, Robert Lortac's 1943 *À la découverte de Ker-Is* (published in children's magazine *O lo lê*) and Claude Auclair and Alain Deschamps' 1981 *Bran Ruz*. It argues that through the continuation or appropriation of the legend, these comics offer ideologically filtered views of Bretonness and Brittany from two different politico-historical contexts, occupied France and the postcolonial era. The article also analyses how comic art can be used in productive ways to represent Brittany as a stateless culture, including through text/image reiteration or supplementarity, and using the double page for a bilingual parallel textual-visual practice. It concludes by suggesting that the study of internal colonialism and peripheries such as Brittany is an important addition to research into postcolonial comics.

Keywords: Brittany; adaptation; internal colonialism; Ker-Is; *O lo lê*; Claude Auclair; minority culture; *Bran Ruz*

The story of Ker-Is, a mythical city swallowed by the ocean in the fifth century, is one of Brittany's best-known legends. Its first known mention dates back to the fifteenth century, and it has since been repeatedly iterated across time and media.¹ The reason for the cultural prevalence and endurance of the Ker-Is legend and, in addition, its serial adaptation, can be explained by its significance as a story of origins, taking place at the outset of the transition from polytheist Armorica to Christian Brittany.² Moreover, as Matthieu Boyd points out, the legend is characterised by a certain flexibility and un-finishedness, in the way that it leaves open the possibility of Ker-Is resurfacing.³ It therefore provides rich material for processes of not only re-writing, but also narrative continuation. This idea of submerged Ker-Is potentially re-surfacing, and what this can mean with regard to Brittany as a non-state culture within France and the articulation and representation of Bretonness in different politico-historical contexts, will be key to my reading of the two *bande dessinée* adaptations that are the focus of this article.

Robert Lortac's *À la découverte de Ker-Is, la mystérieuse cité sous-marine* [Discovering Ker-Is, the Mysterious Underwater City] is a sequel to the legend in which a Breton engineer named Le Floc'h dries out the Douarnenez Bay in order to find the mythical city. It was first serialised in 1941 in *O lo lê*,⁴ a Breton children's magazine founded by Herri and Ronan Caouissin, published between 1940 and 1944, and whose discourse is characterised by Yvon Tranvouez as implicitly nationalist and explicitly Catholic.⁵ In Alain

¹ For a history of the legend, see Yann-Ber Piriou, 'Transmissions et contacts entre l'écrit et l'oral: le thème de la ville engloutie dans la littérature bretonne', in *(Re)Oralisierung*, ed. Hildegard L.C. Tristram (Tübingen: Gunten Narr, 1996), 379-394.

² I am borrowing the term 'serial adaptation' from Brian A. Rose, *'Jekyll and Hyde' Adapted: Dramatizations of Cultural Anxiety* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).

³ Matthieu Boyd, 'L'enfant d'Ahez ou le fabuleux parcours du conte *Kristof*, une légende de la ville d'Is', in *Littératures de Bretagne: Mélanges en honneur de Yann-Bêr Piriou*, ed. Francis Favereau and Hervé Le Bihan (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 309-26 (311).

⁴ It was serialised in issues 37-74, and then published as Robert Lortac, *À la découverte de Ker-Is, la mystérieuse cité sous-marine* (Landerneau: Editions de Propagande Culturelle Bretonne pour la Jeunesse de l'Urz Goanag Breiz, 1943).

⁵ Yvon Tranvouez, 'Les catholiques et la question bretonne (1940-1944)', in *Bretagne et identités régionales pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, ed. Christian Bougeard (Brest, CRBC: 2002), 285-306 (295).

Deschamps and Claude Auclair's graphic novel *Bran Ruz* [Red Crow], which was first serialised in (*À Suivre*) [(To Be Continued)] from 1978, the legend is re-framed by bilingual Breton-French chapters set at a *fest-noz* [night party] in the late 1970s, at which two singers perform a *kan ha diskann* (a polyphonic form of singing that translates as 'call and recall') telling the story of Ker-Is.⁶ These two case studies therefore enable us to examine the iteration of the legend in two different contexts of creation and publication, and different periods of the *Emsav*, a term that can be translated as 'revival' or 'uprising' and is used to designate the whole of the political and cultural Breton regionalist and nationalist movement. The first *Emsav* (1870s-1914) was essentially a literary and cultural movement in defence of the Breton language and culture, in the context of the third French Republic's 'neglect' of Brittany in economic terms, and 'mistreatment' of Breton culture in particular through language policy in schools.⁷ Indeed, children caught speaking Breton at school had to wear a *symbole* to 'signify their failure to modernize and assimilate', a practice that continued well into the twentieth century.⁸ The *O lo lê* version of the Ker-Is legend is inscribed in the context of WW2, occupied France and the second *Emsav* (1914-1945), a 'more assertive nationalist movement' than the first.⁹ The dissolution of the third French Republic in 1940 was perceived as an opportunity for Brittany by a proportion of nationalists, which led a minority of them to collaborate with Nazi Germany.¹⁰ *O lo lê*, while not a Breton equivalent of *Le Téméraire* [The Bold] as an organ of Nazi propaganda, was openly Pétainist, using Vichy's politics of provincialisation and *petites patries* [small homelands] to promote the Breton language, culture and identity to its young readers. *Bran Ruz* was published during the third *Emsav* (1946-today), and is influenced by a radical change in the Breton movement, epitomised by the title of the Union Démocratique Bretonne's (UDB) 1972 mission statement: *Bretagne = colonie*. This new political awareness started largely as a response to the Algerian War, which led Breton militants to reflect on Brittany's own status as an 'internal colony' within France and inspired them to fight for 'internal decolonisation'.¹¹

Through the analysis of these two *bandes dessinées*, the main questions that will be addressed in this article are: how do these two case studies reflect, and aim to contribute to, the construction of Bretonness through the re-framing of Ker-Is in different politico-historical contexts? What views of Brittany and Bretonness are represented in these texts? Finally, how do flooding and re-surfacing function as metaphors through which to read and articulate questions of identity expression and construction in a non-state culture such as that of Brittany? This analysis is therefore related to broader questions regarding the relationship between myth and nation, two concepts whose association was established in the 1980s and 1990s in particular by Ernst Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, who argued that the idea of nations as natural is a myth belonging to the modern period.¹² Moreover, scholars have explored how specific myths and legends with a mythic element have been used to display and shape

⁶ Claude Auclair and Alain Deschamps, *Bran Ruz* (Paris: Casterman, 1981).

⁷ Aviv Amit, *Regional Language Policies in France during World War II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 32.

⁸ Heather Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany: Literature between Languages* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 130.

⁹ Alistair Cole, 'Politics on the Periphery: Brittany and Republican France', in *Redefining the French Republic*, ed. Alistair Cole and Gino Raymond (Manchester: MUP, 2006), 44-64 (52).

¹⁰ See Michel Denis, 'Le mouvement breton pendant la guerre: un bilan', in *Bretagne et identités régionales*, ed. Christian Bougeard, 151-166.

¹¹ *Bretagne = colonie* (UDB: Rennes, 1972), 105-106. The Breton movement had been anti-colonial throughout the 20th century; see Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany*, 128-129.

¹² See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

national identity.¹³ My discussion is inscribed in the specific context of Brittany, an ‘invisible nation’ (in Sharif Gemie’s words) within a nation-state, that remains understudied within French Studies.¹⁴ A focus on comics adaptation shows ways in which the flooded and potentially re-surfacing Breton city has functioned as a ‘usable myth’, to borrow Albert B. Friedman’s term, deployed here in a text-image, popular medium in historically-situated re-tellings attempting to articulate and promote different views of Brittany and Bretonness.¹⁵

Resurrecting Ker-Is

À la découverte de Ker-Is recounts the ‘résurrection’ of the city ‘dans toute sa gloire’ [in all its glory], fifteen centuries after its flooding.¹⁶ It includes a micro-adaptation flashback over three panels of the flooding of Ker-Is, but as a sequel to the legend, it is excluded from Linda Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation. Indeed, Hutcheon points out that there is a difference between ‘never wanting a story to end’, as in prequels and sequels, and ‘wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways’ in adaptations that are repetitions without replication.¹⁷ However, both prequels and sequels involve a certain degree of adaptation. In Thomas Leitch’s taxonomy of adaptive strategies (that go from ‘celebration’ to ‘allusion’, as the hypertextual shades into the intertextual), they are found in the ninth and penultimate category of ‘secondary, tertiary, or quaternary adaptations’, that are ‘adaptations not of an earlier story, but of an earlier character, setting, or concept’.¹⁸ The concept here is that of the flooded and potentially resurfacing Breton city and its adaptation is, as we shall see, filtered through the ideology of the Caouissins’ project, which aimed, in Tranvouez’s words, to ‘promouvoir une Bretagne idéale fondée sur les valeurs religieuses et familiales’ [promote an ideal Brittany based on religious and family values].¹⁹ Lortac, also a novelist and director, was originally from Normandy and seems to have had no cultural or political links to Brittany other than his work for *O lo lê*. He had met Herri Caouissin in Paris before the war, when Caouissin worked for Catholic youth publications, including *Cœurs Vaillants* [Valiant Hearts].²⁰ The use of artists (though Lortac is both the writer and artist of *À la découverte*) perceived as non-politically affiliated in Brittany, such as Etienne Le Rallic (who also contributed to *Le Téméraire*), was important to the project as a way to reassure the clergy, wary of radical nationalism.²¹

¹³ For a study of the relationship between myth and national identity, see for instance Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Sharif Gemie, *Brittany, 1750-1950: The Invisible Nation* (Cardiff: UWP, 2007).

¹⁵ Albert B. Friedman, ‘The Usable Myth: The Legends of Modern Mythmakers’, in *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, ed. Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 37-46.

¹⁶ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 3, 35.

¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

¹⁸ Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From ‘Gone with the Wind’ to ‘The Passion of the Christ’* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 120.

¹⁹ Tranvouez, ‘Les catholiques et la question bretonne’, 295.

²⁰ After returning to Brittany in 1932, Herri Caouissin created the first Breton-language comic, *Per ar c’holin*, published in *Feiz ha Breiz ar vugale*; and in 1937 he published (with Léone Calvez) the play *Bécassine vue par les Bretons*, a ‘demolishing’ of the stereotypical character. Charles Forsdick, ‘Exoticising the Domestic: Bécassine, Brittany and the Beauty of the Dead’, in *The Francophone Bande Dessinée*, ed. Charles Forsdick, Laurence Grove and Libbie McQuillan, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 23-36 (29).

²¹ Christophe Carichon, ‘O Lo Lê: un journal illustré pour les petits Bretons’, *Jean-Christophe Cassard: Historien de la Bretagne*, ed. Yves Coativy and others (Morlaix: Skol Vreizh, 2014), 409-420 (412).

The ideological framing of *À la découverte* is evident in the album edition of the *bande dessinée*, published by the Editions de Propagande Culturelle Bretonne pour la Jeunesse de l'Urz Goanag Breiz [Editions of Breton Cultural Propaganda for the Youth of the Order of the Breton Hope], that stemmed from the magazine. *À la découverte* is characterised as being part of a series of 'éducatives et attirantes' [educational and appealing] publications, underlining the aim of attracting young readers to the Breton cause through image-based narratives. An advertisement for the youth movement Urz Goanag Breiz features on the back cover, encouraging its readers to join if they want 'un bel idéal' [a beautiful ideal]. The Urz Goanag Breiz was founded in 1943 and sprang from *O lo lê*'s success, and in particular the series *Les Loups de Coatmenez* [The wolves of Coatmenez] (written by Gilles Le Denays, the pseudonym of Jeanne du Guerny, and illustrated by Le Rallic). References to Brittany as not only Catholic but also Celtic are made repeatedly in the official letter for the movement, which the Caouissins wanted to become an 'ordre de chevalerie celtique' [order of Celtic chivalry].²² This reflects the 'official strategy of pan-Celticism' adopted by the second *Emsav* in the 1920s, to show solidarity with other oppressed Celtic nations and establish the linguistic heritage of Breton as different from that of French.²³ Ireland in particular, now an independent nation, was held up as an inspiration by the *Emsav* during the interwar years.²⁴

Filtered and framed by this ideological project, the view of Brittany and Bretonness presented in *À la découverte* is articulated primarily through the search for Ker-Is, a symbol of the region's Celtic Christian roots whose resurrection is enabled by cooperation between Breton, Scottish and Irish 'cousins'.²⁵ The *bande dessinée* follows a traditional, *histoire en images* [story in pictures] format, which was common in *O lo lê*. This format could lead to redundancy, which comics scholars commonly consider should be avoided;²⁶ but, instead, there are processes of supplementarity either in text or image, and of reinforcement of meaning and message, through reiteration and text/image consonance. As the *bande dessinée* does not feature speech balloons, it is in the text under the image that Brittany's bilingualism is rendered, dialogue between characters regularly featuring Breton words. Elsewhere, the image supplements the textual narrative of a visit to a woman in a nearby village, by positing the Christianity of the landscape and the Breton homes: we see the Douarnenez church, a calvary on the road, and the wall ornament of a saint in the woman's living room, echoing the one seen in Le Floc'h's own home on page 2. In another example, as the Douarnenez Bay is dried out, what is first revealed of Ker-Is, to the cheers of the team, is a Celtic cross at the top of the cathedral, an image accompanied by seemingly redundant text: 'une croix celtique apparut au faite d'un clocher, saluée de cris de joie, car elle symbolisait la résurrection de l'antique cité bretonne!' [a Celtic cross appeared atop a church tower, greeted with cries of joy, because it symbolised the resurrection of the ancient Breton city!].²⁷ Text-image reiteration is here used for purposes of not only dramatization, but also reinforcement through duplication of the Celtic Christian symbol, infusing it with further religious connotations through the use of the word 'résurrection'.²⁸

²² *Journal officiel*, 25/06/1943, quoted in Carichon, 'O Lo Lê', 416. *O lo lê*, 102 (1943), 7.

²³ Amit, *Regional Language Policies*, 33.

²⁴ Denis, 'Le mouvement breton pendant la guerre', 158-159.

²⁵ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 35.

²⁶ About text-image redundancy see for instance Jan Baetens and Pascal Lefèvre, *Pour une lecture moderne de la bande dessinée* (Brussels: CBBB, 1993), 20.

²⁷ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 28, 35.

²⁸ Ann Miller discusses text-image reiteration in terms of dramatization rather than redundancy in some cases, for instance Edgar P. Jacobs. *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 100.

Before turning to the significance of *when* Ker-Is resurfaces, it is important to reflect on *what* is resurrected. This version of the flooding presents a significant departure from the legend, in which Ker-Is is a city of sin and its flooding understood as divine punishment. As seen in the micro-adaptation flashback, the flooding is here, by contrast, explained purely by natural disasters, and Ker-Is is represented as a rich but devout city. This is echoed at the end of the story, when the father of Tanguy Bouldu, the local boy who has been financially rewarded for helping the team, is shown lighting a candle to Sainte Anne and described as now rich but ‘*toujours pieux*’ [still pious].²⁹ Visual links reinforce the lineage between Ker-Is and the contemporary context, highlighting the Christian roots of Brittany and erasing any sense of sin, past or present. In the first panel of the flashback to the flooding on page 4, the sole survivor sits on a chair featuring a carved triskele, echoing the triskele-resembling embroidery on Le Floc’h’s daughter Janig’s dress on the first page, and behind him pillars are decorated with ermine flecks, a symbol of Brittany. Later, while on an exploratory mission under the sea, Le Floc’h goes past ‘*un calvaire comme il s’en rencontre tant chez nous*’ [a calvary similar to those we see so often back home], textually reinforcing the visual echo to the calvary mentioned above and, therefore, the link between fifth-century Ker-Is and contemporary Brittany.³⁰

That a staunchly Christian and Celtic Ker-Is should resurface in the early 1940s may be read in parallel to the Caouissins’ hope for the resurgence of Brittany – or, rather, of their ‘ideal’ Brittany. The *bande dessinée* makes no explicit reference to the occupation and its effect on daily life. Nonetheless, it is still anchored in contemporary, and therefore post-Franco-German armistice Brittany, through recurring references to *La Bretagne*, a newspaper that was published between 1941 and 1944. Moreover, the fact that the team is helped by a French police officer to evade the traps set by, and to defeat, English villain Démonax (a recurring character in Lortac’s work) resonates with the geopolitical context, without directly referring to it. The ‘government’ is mentioned once in the story, when Le Floc’h needs to take a two-week trip (whether this is to Paris or Vichy is not stated) to obtain the authorisation to dry out the Douarnenez Bay. All that is shown of his trip is his return and this ellipsis (‘*quinze jours plus tard*’ [two weeks later]) is also a non-representation of the reconfigured French context beyond the image of a seemingly un-disturbed Brittany. In the album, the non-representation of the visit is in fact inscribed on the double page, as it occurs in the margin between the hyperframes – in a sense, relegating France to the periphery of the page.³¹ This contributes to giving an image of the region as somewhat removed or separated, with more links to its Celtic ‘cousins’ than to France, and where the police officer needs the help of a local Brittophone boy in order to navigate. Significantly, it is with Ker-Is that Brittany’s relative isolation from France seemingly turns into economic autonomy as the city, recovered thanks to solely ‘Celtic’ funding, has become a key destination of international cultural tourism and has ‘*enrichi le pays*’ [enriched the country, or region]. It is unclear what ‘pays’ is referring to here and it may be ambiguous enough to be read through the implicitly nationalist discourse of the magazine. The idea of Brittany’s potential (and political rather than solely economic) autonomy can also arguably be seen in the link with Ireland, which is cemented after the resurfacing of Ker-Is with Irishman O’Donnell and Janig’s wedding, a union that ‘*crée des liens entre les deux familles celtiques*’ [creates links between the two Celtic families].³²

²⁹ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 35.

³⁰ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 20.

³¹ Lortac, *À la découverte*, 6-7. For an analysis of the ways in which the margin can ‘inform the contents of the page and inflect its perception’, see Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 31-34.

³² Lortac, *À la découverte*, 35.

Ker-Is appears as a past that contemporary Brittany can draw on and utilise to set itself up as a culturally and economically rich entity and this is achieved by consolidating Christian values and Celtic co-operation. Going back to the purpose of the comic as attractive and educational, what this story may have encouraged in its young readers is to search for, and harbour pride in, their roots and origins – as they were also exhorted to do by *Les Loups de Coatmenez* and the *Urz Goanag Breiz* – and to develop a feeling of identity anchored in pan-Celticism and Christianity. Unlike in the popular *O lo lê* series *Une grande et belle histoire: celle de notre Bretagne* [A great and beautiful story: that of our Brittany], written by Herri Caouissin and illustrated by Le Rallic, here it is the legendary, rather than the historical, that is rewritten. The story takes on an allegorical dimension, as the concept, and usable myth, of Ker-Is is adapted to the ideology and to the context. Flooding is here not given any political resonance through which to read Franco-Breton relations as will be the case in *Bran Ruz*, since this version retains the idea of Ker-Is' glory, but not its fall from grace. On the other hand, resurfacing may be read as a metaphor in the context that is un-represented in the comic. The resurrection of Ker-Is occurs parallel to hopes for the resurgence, in a reconfigured geopolitical order, of an 'ideal' Brittany as the Caouissins understood and promoted it to young readers, with a view towards independence. This text/image sequel therefore articulates, through its continuation of a Breton legend, a historically and ideologically situated idea of Brittany, and Bretonness, as part of a project that would end with the last issue of the magazine in May 1944. The Caouissins, who were arrested but had their case dismissed at the Liberation, would remain cultural militants: they founded the production company Brittia Films in the 1950s and revived the magazine under the name *L'Appel d'O lo lê* [The O Lo Lê Call] (1970-1974). Yet, their traditional, right-wing values would become at odds with a Breton movement that, from the 60s, predominantly shifted to the left – tellingly, while the Caouissins understood Bretonness as a 'race',³³ this term was strongly rejected by the UDB, who talked instead of a Breton people ('people').³⁴ This new *Emsav* is, as we shall see, key to *Bran Ruz*'s very different use of the Ker-Is legend for the Breton cause.

Giving Political Resonance to Ker-Is

Bran Ruz offers a re-telling of the Ker-Is legend that is framed by a denunciation of the drowning of local cultures by the centralised politics of the French State. The political message of *Bran Ruz*, in its criticism of over-centralisation and its call for unity between French regions, echoes regionalist positions in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. The defence of minority cultures is a recurring theme in Auclair's œuvre, seen for instance in the Scotland-set *Histoire de Tuan Mac Cairill* (1982), along with environmental concerns notably in *Simon du Fleuve* [Simon of the River] (1973-1978). The message of *Bran Ruz*, an appropriation in Julie Sanders' sense of an iteration 'more politicized' than adaptation, is explicitly stated from the start, as the text opening the first chapter makes clear its use of the Breton cause, and case, as a symbol for other non-state minority cultures.³⁵ The *bande dessinée* was in fact criticised for its explicitness by Bruno Lecigne and Jean-Pierre Tamine, who argue that its didactic approach limits its aesthetic value.³⁶ *Bran Ruz* is certainly not subtle in its defence of minority

³³ The *Urz Goanag Breiz* aimed to 'inculquer à la jeunesse bretonne la conscience et la fierté de son âme, de sa race, de sa langue et de ses traditions ancestrales' [instill in Breton young people the awareness and pride of its soul, race, language and ancestral traditions]. *Journal officiel*, in Carichon, 'O Lo Lê', 416.

³⁴ *Bretagne = colonie*, 17.

³⁵ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 22. *Bran Ruz*, 9.

³⁶ Bruno Lecigne and Jean-Pierre Tamine, 'L'épique et le politique', *Les cahiers de la bande dessinée*, 58 (1984), 35-36.

cultures but the way in which this is articulated, engaging with the position of contemporary *Emsav* and re-framing the Ker-Is legend, makes it a fruitful case study for the representation through comic adaptation of Brittany as a bilingual stateless culture.

Both Auclair and Deschamps posit, in the album version's acknowledgements, their own relation to minoritised cultures and languages through family links (Brittany and Occitania for Deschamps, the *marais breton* [Breton marsh] for Auclair) and influential figures in their lives (Brittany for both). The *marais breton* (now *marais breton-vendéen*) is at the border with historical Brittany and shares many similarities with it according to Auclair.³⁷ In a 1982 interview Auclair, who moved to Nantes as a child, had even defined himself as 'breton, définitivement, culturellement et politiquement' [Breton, once and for all, culturally and politically].³⁸ In addition to a certain fluctuation in terms of identity expression, perhaps due in part to the liminality of Auclair's place of origin, and the sense of Bretonness as a chosen identity, what is interesting here is the idea that in a non-state culture such as that of Brittany the cultural and the political are intertwined. This is a key aspect of *Bran Ruz* and it was more broadly key to contemporary *Emsav* and the Francophone theorists that frequently served as its inspiration.³⁹

Bran Ruz's appropriation of the Ker-Is legend is openly filtered through, and engages in text and image with, contemporary *Emsav*.⁴⁰ The UDB's 1972 slogan 'Bretagne = colonie' encapsulates the redefining of Brittany and Bretonness at a time when the majority of French colonies had achieved independence. Significantly, this redefinition was articulated not only politically but also poetically, through the work of the self-styled 'poets of decolonisation'. Their revolutionary poetic practice, as Heather Williams states, paved the way for the embracing of a postcolonial framework for Breton literature in the 1990s.⁴¹ References to contemporary *Emsav* occur in the first and last chapters of *Bran Ruz*, framing the retelling of the legend. The phrase 'décolonisation salutaire des esprits' [salutary decolonisation of the minds], used in the authors' comment closing the first chapter, echoes the call for internal decolonisation found in the UDB's mission statement and in Morvan Lebesque's 1970 essay *Comment peut-on être breton?* [How can one be Breton?]. Lebesque is directly referenced in the last chapter, in a panel that features his portrait in an insert. Moreover, this last chapter opens with an image stating 'défense de cracher par terre et de parler breton' [it is forbidden to spit on the ground and to speak Breton].⁴² The footnote under this image explains that it is redrawing the reproduction by the UDB of a notice found in the interwar years in some public and administrative spaces in Lower Brittany and adds that the phrase was the title of the 1971 anthology of 'poèmes de combat' by poet of decolonisation and UDB co-founder Yann-Ber Piriou.⁴³ This phrase, which is now part of collective memory, was therefore used as part of a poetic and political act to re-articulate and redefine Bretonness as an asserted and creative

³⁷ Thierry Groensteen, 'Entretien avec Claude Auclair', *Les cahiers de la bande dessinée*, 58 (1984), 7-13 (7).

³⁸ Gilles Ratier, 'Claude Auclair: itinéraire d'un homme libre', *Dommage*, <http://bdzoom.com/92017/interviews/claude-auclair/>, accessed 21 June 2016.

³⁹ Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany*, 132.

⁴⁰ We must however note the involvement of Goulven Pennaod, who translated the first and last chapters of the comic into Breton. Pennaod, who was deprived of his citizenship rights after WW2, is here the sole representative of the 'dark years' of the *Emsav*, and of the minority far-right fringe of the Breton movement (predominantly left-wing since 1968).

⁴¹ Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany*, 154.

⁴² Auclair and Deschamps, *Bran Ruz*, 24, 188, 177.

⁴³ The variant 'Il est interdit de cracher par terre et de parler breton' is also the title of a 1971 poem by Paol Keineg.

cultural identity.⁴⁴ There has, however, been a controversy around the authenticity of this and other similar notices, and of the phrase itself, which may be an ‘extrapolation’ based on the colonial treatment of the Breton language, in particular in schools.⁴⁵ Whether *Bran Ruz* is here in fact re-using an evocative counter-slogan, or redrawing actual ‘colonial-era’ material that has already been appropriated by a decolonising movement, there is a clear attempt to inscribe the *bande dessinée* in the political and artistic process of redefining Breton identity. This reproduction posits *Bran Ruz*’s status as a political *bande dessinée* utterance drawing on, and redrawing, contemporary *Emsav* and it establishes an echo between the ‘drowning’ of the Breton language and the flooding of Ker-Is that has just been recounted in the previous chapter.⁴⁶

The legend is given contemporary resonance through its reframing, and it is in these chapters that we find the most striking use of the medium to represent the bicultural and bilingual status of Brittany. When *Bran Ruz* was published in (*À Suivre*), dialogue at the *fest-noz* was in Breton, with the French translation (technically the ‘original’ text that had been translated into Breton by Goulven Pennaod) provided at the end of the chapter. In the album, the double page is used to juxtapose the Breton version, on the left-hand page, and the French version, on the right-hand page. This bilingual parallel textual-visual practice echoes the bilingual parallel text publication practice of the poets of decolonisation, who self-translated into Breton, which for many of them was a second language.⁴⁷ The case of *Bran Ruz* is obviously very different, as there is no process of self-translation, but there is a comparable political intent to translate *into* the minority language and to inscribe its presence on the page, even though the Breton translation is technically redundant.

The last, also bilingual, chapter is devoted to the interpretation of the legend by the people present at the *fest-noz*. The version of the legend of Ker-Is that is told loosely follows the ‘pagan’ one, in which King Gradlon’s daughter Dahud has a child; but what is most interesting is that *Bran Ruz* uses the mythologised colonisation that founded Armorican Brittany in order to denounce the colonisation of Brittany by France.⁴⁸ Gradlon is the successor of Briton Conan Mériadec, who was constructed as the first mythical king of Armorican Brittany in tenth- and eleventh-century historiographical productions.⁴⁹ *Bran Ruz* follows the legendary view of Mériadec as a warrior king figure who imposes a language and a religion: the conquest of Armorica is represented as a violent invasion, with Britons killing the men and cutting off the women’s tongues. While Dahud and her Armorican lover Bran Ruz, respectively a sinner and a devilish character in other versions, are heroic figures in *Bran Ruz*, the evangelising saint Gwénolé is here a fanatical Christian. After Ker-Is has been conquered by Bran, it is Gwénolé who is responsible for opening the city’s gates, leading to the deaths of Dahud and Bran.

⁴⁴ Michel Denis theorised the three different ‘states’ of cultural identity, as refused, asserted, and creative – a ternary analysis that is also found in Francis Favereau and Ronan Le Coadic. See Ronan Le Coadic, *L’identité bretonne* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998), 182.

⁴⁵ Fañch Broudic, *Le breton: une langue en questions* (Le Relecq-Kerhuon: Emgleo Breiz, 2007), 99. As Williams points out, ‘suppression of language is one of the main instruments of colonialism’. *Postcolonial Brittany*, 130.

⁴⁶ For an analysis of cartoonists redrawing French Empire by reworking colonial-era material, see Mark McKinney, *Redrawing French Empire in Comics* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013).

⁴⁷ See Heather Williams, ‘Between French and Breton: The Politics of Translation’, *Romance Studies*, 27.3 (2009), 223-233.

⁴⁸ For a comparative analysis of *Bran Ruz* and other iterations of this ‘pagan’ version, see Boyd, ‘L’enfant d’Ahez’, 312-321.

⁴⁹ Joseph Rio, *Mythes fondateurs de la Bretagne: aux origines de la celtomanie* (Brest: Ouest-France, 2000), 79-89.

The story of colonisation and language suppression acquires political immediacy when transposed to a context in which Breton is now the language of a minoritised culture. The *kan ha diskan* ends with the well-known proverb entwining the city's re-surfacing with Paris' engulfment.⁵⁰ Flooding and resurfacing are seized upon as metaphors through which to read Franco-Breton relations, Ker-Is becoming a symbol of Brittany and Paris that of the centralised French State. This is articulated in particular through a reference to the Plogoff affair, as the host of the *fest-noz* compares engulfed Ker-Is with 'skinet' [irradiated] Brittany.⁵¹ The Giscard government and Électricité de France's plan to install a nuclear power station in Plogoff met with sustained popular mobilisation between 1978 and 1981, which led to the project being abandoned. This plan was perceived, as Gilles Simon has shown, as a further attack from the centralised French State against Brittany, symptomatic of France's treatment of the region, and it is here likened to a flooding. Moreover, the *fest-noz* host's statement that the wind is turning (associated with the Ker-Is/Par-Is turn of fate in the panel above) and that Plogoff does not want to be France's waste bin, links re-surfacing with the rejection of the unequal relationship between France and Brittany.⁵² The social mobilisation in Plogoff, through which Breton identity was 'puissamment réactivée' [powerfully reactivated], is understood as part of a process of resurgence, and Bretonness is here articulated in terms of revolt.⁵³

It is useful here to turn to the case of another stateless nation, Wales, a context in which the political immediacy of the trope of flooding (a theme also found in the legend of *Cantre'r Gwaelod* [The Lowland Hundred]) translates powerfully.⁵⁴ The monoglot Welsh-speaking village Capel Celyn was flooded in 1965 to supply water for Liverpool. The drowning of a community, which can be read symbolically as the drowning of the language, was seized by the nationalist movement as a marker of democratic deficit, which led to a surge of support for Plaid Cymru – echoing *Bran Ruz*'s understanding of re-surfacing as political and social mobilisation entwined with identity expression.⁵⁵ The idea of resurfacing as, more broadly, the resurgence of a now-minority culture (found in both *Bran Ruz* and *À la découverte*, but articulated through different ideologies) may also be read in the figure of Owain Glyndŵr, the 'national redeemer' whose awaited coming will 'restore the land to its former glory'.⁵⁶ It is therefore easy to see the political resonance of flooding and re-surfacing in the context of stateless nations, often shaped by unequal power relations with unitary states.

A young woman in attendance at the *fest-noz* furthers the reading of Franco-Breton relations through the legend by shifting from the contemporary to the historical, adding a gendered perspective. She takes drowned Dahud as a symbol and likens her to Duchess Anne of Brittany, whose marriage to kings of France Charles VIII and Louis XII, which would lead to the Union of Brittany and France (1532), is here described in terms of a 'prise en otage' [hostage-taking]. She also sees Dahud in the thousands of 'Bécassines', 'déportées au

⁵⁰ This proverb is linked to a phenomenon of popular etymology based on the reading of Paris as 'Par-Is' [like Is]. See Joël Hascoët, 'La longue vie de l'étymologie Ker-Is, Par-Is', *Britannia Monastica*, 10 (2006), 85-92. Other proverbs link the fate of Ker-Is with the engulfment of Brest, Kemper or Eusa however.

⁵¹ He also talks of Brittany being sold off, bludgeoned, and oil-polluted.

⁵² Auclair and Deschamps, *Bran Ruz*, 184.

⁵³ Gilles Simon, *Plogoff: l'apprentissage de la mobilisation sociale* (Rennes: PUR, 2000), 85-89, 342. Xavier Grall mentioned Ker-Is in his *Le Monde* articles against the implantation of a nuclear power plant; see Simon, *Plogoff*, 88.

⁵⁴ My deepest thanks to Phil Davies, Aled Llion Jones and Owain Wyn Jones for their help with my questions about the Welsh context.

⁵⁵ Plaid Cymru MP Liz Saville Roberts referenced *Cantre'r Gwaelod* at the fiftieth anniversary of the reservoir. See <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-10-14/debates/15101449000001/CapelCelynReservoir%2850ThAnniversary%29>, accessed 30 June 2016.

⁵⁶ Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: UWP), 23.

Montparnasse pour y être bonniches ou putains' [deported to Montparnasse to be skivvies or whores there], in this way taking the stereotype back to the ethnotype.⁵⁷ This young woman speaks French *both* in the Breton and in the French versions, which is significant not only because it reflects a socio-linguistic reality, but also because she is coming to a militant understanding of her identity as part of a minoritised culture and articulating a critique of unequal Franco-Breton power relations through the language of the coloniser – which is also her own. Appropriation of the Ker-Is legend leads, rather than to folklorisation, to politicisation in *Bran Ruz* as a *bande dessinée* utterance engaging with the contemporary re-defining of Brittany and Bretonness.

Conclusion

Through the continuation or appropriation of the Ker-Is legend, these two *bandes dessinées* represent historically-situated, and ideologically-filtered, views of Bretonness and Brittany. The legendary, used as 'un-historic' history, provides tropes through which to read unequal power relations (flooding in *Bran Ruz*) and their potential upheaval (re-surfacing in both). In *À la découverte* this is articulated through the unearthing and consolidation of Christian Celtic roots and by looking to Ireland, while *Bran Ruz* addresses it explicitly in terms of a decolonising process as social mobilisation and politicisation. While studies of the complexities of Breton identity and its cultural representation have generally focused on its literary construction and expression, the analysis of these two *bandes dessinées* has shown some of the ways in which comic art can be used in productive ways to represent Brittany as a minoritised, bilingual, and visual culture. This is done through text/image reiteration or supplementarity, and by relegating France to the periphery of the page; or by drawing on and redrawing contemporary *Emsav* and using the double page for a bilingual parallel textual-visual practice. The way in which the mythical flooded city is translated over time reveals something of the way in which Bretonness and Brittany are themselves translated, adapted, and re-defined in different historical contexts – from the Occupation (a period for which Laurence Grove's and Pascal Ory's respective works have shown the historical value of children's comics magazines) to the postcolonial era.⁵⁸ Internal colonialism, which remains understudied within research into postcolonial comics, further complexifies the broader field of postcolonial studies, making peripheries such as Brittany or Wales an 'important addition to the portfolio of case studies'.⁵⁹ In relation to the central question of how 'comics studies connect to postcolonial histories, criticisms, and writing',⁶⁰ it is fruitful to explore questions of identity construction and representation in stateless nations and minoritised cultures in text-image compositions that are concerned, as we have seen with *bande dessinée* adaptations in the context of Brittany, with the drowning of a culture through internal colonialism, and/or its revival or uprising.

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⁵⁷ Auclair and Deschamps, *Bran Ruz*, 186. For an analysis of the shift of the figure of the Breton maid from ethnotype to stereotype through Bécassine, and the Breton reaction to the character, see Forsdick, 'Exoticising the *Domestique*'.

⁵⁸ Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context* (London: Berghahn, 2013). Pascal Ory, *Le Petit Nazi illustré: vie et survie du 'Téméraire' (1943-1944)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Nautilus 2002).

⁵⁹ Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany*, 159.

⁶⁰ Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji, 'Introduction', *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2015), ed. Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji, 1-26 (2).

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