Between History and Fiction
The Destabilisation of Masculinist History in Contemporary Algerian Women's Fiction

Kosniowski, Jennifer

Awarding institution:
King's College London

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

You are free to:
• Share: to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:
• Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
• Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
• No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Between History and Fiction

The Destabilisation of Masculinist History in Contemporary Algerian Women's Fiction

Jenny Kosniowski
King's College London
Department of French

Submitted for the degree of Doctor Of Philosophy in September 2014
Abstract

Masculinist constructions of Algerian history relegate women to symbolic roles. The texts by Algerian women writers studied in my thesis all use fiction to express agency and create empowerment through – or in spite of – these symbolic positions. My thesis is concerned with how fiction highlights and negotiates various manifestations of the tension created when authors engage with masculinist historical discourses by casting women in – and so perhaps validating – the roles that they are assigned within these same discourses.

Chapter one defines what I am terming 'masculinist history' by analysing historical documents. Chapter two examines how, in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*, Leila Marouane's *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, and Maïssa Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*, real-life freedom-fighters are fictionalised in a way that negotiates the tension between filling in the blanks of history and upholding discourses of martyrdom. The third chapter explores the more recent violence in Algeria, how Bey's *Puisque mon cœur est mort* and Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* employ fiction to create sites of mourning that are otherwise unavailable because of the amnesty for crimes committed during this period – although the violent conclusions of the texts imply the limitations of fiction in this respect. Chapter four moves away from representations of women caught up in extraordinary circumstances and focuses on the everyday. This chapter investigates the figuration of the domestic as a site of female resistance to both patriarchal and colonial oppression – a figuration that simultaneously risks reinforcing women's symbolic position as bastions of tradition – in Djebar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* and Bey's *Bleu blanc vert*. Finally, the fifth chapter inspects how Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Chaos of the Senses* reconfigures her earlier fictional work in a way that spotlights female agency, and how Malika Mokeddem's autobiographical *La Transe des insoumis* does something similar, but in a much more personal way. Across the thesis I therefore conceptualise a history/fiction *entre-deux* that is not so much a space of emancipation as it is multiple spaces that allow for an exploration of agency within traditional – and often oppressive – female roles.
Contents

Introduction: Facts and Fictions ..................................................................................................................5

1. The Representation of Algerian Women since 1954 ................................................................................23
   Moudjahidates ........................................................................................................................................25
   The 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women .................................................................................................33
   Post-Independence Disappointment .....................................................................................................40
   The Family Code ....................................................................................................................................43
   Islamism, Violence and Amnesty ...........................................................................................................45
   Algerian Women in the French Collective Consciousness ....................................................................52
   Contemporary Algeria .............................................................................................................................56

2. Heroism Between History and Fiction ....................................................................................................60
   Ethical Appropriations: Assia Djebar's La Femme sans sépulture .......................................................61
   Writing as Resistance: Leila Marouane's La Jeune Fille et la Mère .....................................................73
   Transnational Reading: Maïssa Bey's Entendez-vous dans les montagnes .......................................78

3. Forced Forgetting: Mourning and Amnesty .........................................................................................84
   Mourning Mothers: Bey's Puisque mon cœur est mort ..................................................................84
   Bodily Remembrance: Marouane's Le Châtiment des hypocrites ..................................................99

4. Domestic Bliss? .......................................................................................................................................110
   A History of Domesticity: Bey's Bleu blanc vert .............................................................................111
   The Individual and the Domestic: Djebar's Nulle part dans la maison de mon père ......................123

5. Reconfiguring the Reconfigured ..........................................................................................................140
   Fiction within Fiction: Ahlam Mosteghanemi's Memory in the Flesh and Chaos of the Senses ....140
   Nomadic Rewriting: Malika Mokeddem's N'zid, La Transe des insoumis and La Désirante ..........152

Conclusion .....................................................................................................................................................169

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................................175
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Nick Harrison, who supervised this thesis, for his guidance and support. His scholarly insights have been equal parts inspiring and invaluable. I am also grateful to Dr Siobhàn McIlvanney, whose suggestions added elements to the study which would otherwise have been lacking. I would also like to thank all the staff of the King's College London French Department for the encouragement and thoughts offered at various times as my research progressed – in particular, Prof. Anne Green, Dr Jo Malt and Dr Andrew Counter for their comments on various chapters, and Dr Soizick Solman for her professional support.

More postgraduate colleagues and friends are due thanks for their valuable scholarly and moral support than I can name here, but two were particularly influential on the thesis: Sara Leek acted as a valuable sounding board in the beginning stages; Rym Ouartsi has provided references and insights into Algerian culture, and much needed friendship in these final stages. Thanks are also due to the organisers of various postgraduate conferences and reading groups where I was given the opportunity to test out my work – both in London and New York.

Finally, special thanks go to my family, in particular my partner Simon, who has supported and encouraged me throughout, and Tango, my ever faithful friend.
Maïssa Bey, Assia Djebar, Leïla Marouane, Malika Mokeddem and Ahlam Mosteghanemi come from different regions in Algeria, currently reside in various countries, and do not all write in the same language (Mosteghanemi writes in Arabic, while the others write in French). What they have in common is that they all insert historical facts into their texts in ways that expose the fictions – in particular those about women – in masculinist conceptions of history. I want to argue that these texts are not historical novels where history provides the backdrop – and in some cases the characters – for the story, in the same way another writer may use a city.¹ Nor is the history in them used simply as a means to contextualise the lives of the women about whom they write. Rather, because modern Algeria has been built to such a great extent on the anti-colonial struggle, it is almost impossible to write about the present without engaging with history, since the past continues to influence constructions of women whether in literature or in wider discourses. This means that the texts find themselves in a space between history and fiction, where history is imposed on the fictional and thus fiction cannot help but engage with history: they are *entre-deux*.

The focus on how the past intrudes on the fictional text is what (along with my corpus) differentiates my study from others such as Samia Mehrez’s *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction*. Mehrez is concerned with how the authors she studies purposefully blur the boundaries between history and fiction in order to question the dominant discourse in Egypt, and how in doing so they create an alternative mode of historical documentation. While I argue that this is something that some of the authors I study also do (in particular Djebar), my primary concern is how fictional texts negotiate a relationship with rigid forms of remembrance (and in Chapter 3, non-remembrance). Other studies have discussed Maghrebian women’s writing in terms of the intrusion of the past on the present: Fiona Barclay’s *Writing Postcolonial France* explores how France can be seen to be haunted by spectres of its colonial past and the ways that literature in particular may offer a space for respectful encounters with these ghosts;² and Mireille Rosello’s *The Reparative in Narratives* isolates a reparative element that bridges the so-called ‘colonial

---

fracture' in certain forms of fiction. My study follows these critics in creating a new framework in which to analyse how fiction interacts with history, but where my study differs from theirs is in its focus on the Algerian perspective, and in particular the relationship of Algerian women to their own history (both Barclay and Rosello concentrate on the relationship between France and the Maghreb, and examine texts by female and male authors and filmmakers from both sides of the Mediterranean). In this respect, my study resembles Alison Rice's *Polygraphies*, which discusses the intertwining of fiction and personal histories (both of the authors and other women) in a variety of texts by Bey, Djebar and Mokeddem, along with other well-known women authors with ties to Algeria such as Hélène Cixous and Marie Cardinal. My study builds on Rice's by focusing on different texts, and where Rice's study, in examining the interaction of fiction and reality, pays particular attention to how literary form is used to tell autobiographical truths without conforming to traditional modes of confession, testimonial or autobiography, I foreground how the fictionality of the texts I study acts as a means to express, but also temper, female agency.

The overlap between history and fiction is clearly not something invented by the authors I study. In addition to literary critics such as those mentioned above, it has also been discussed by historians such as Hayden White, who champions the idea that for any historical event to be represented in language, a narrative must be created to make sense of that event. Indeed, the often-used play on words *(hi)story/(hi)stories* demonstrates a common acceptance of the blurring between the two genres. The common root of these two words (the Latin *historia*) makes this word-play possible, and is equally, if not more, obvious in French where *histoire* can be translated as both story and history. Similarly, in Arabic, the three letter root around which story and history, and their verbal derivatives, are based is the same, روي، *RWY*. The intertwining of history and fiction does not belong exclusively to the Western traditions; it surpasses cultural boundaries. It is nonetheless important to maintain a division between history and fiction. On the one hand, a notion of historical accuracy should be maintained so that revisionists cannot efface or deny events such as colonial-period atrocities. On the other hand, a notion of 'pure' fiction apart from historical recovery seems necessary in order to allow writers artistic freedom to invent, and may help circumvent censorship, such as the recent illegalisation of historical investigation in Algeria in order to facilitate the amnesty for crimes committed during the violence of the 1990s (although

---

6 See Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction*, p.2.
later in the Introduction I will discuss how this idea of circumventing censorship is problematised by the murder of writers in Algeria in the 1990s. It is for this reason that I focus on the idea of between-ness: it helps maintain a sense of the distinctness of history and fiction, even as it emphasises their interconnections. That is to say, one cannot imagine being between history and fiction if one does not first have a concept of what history and fiction are separately.

What is Fiction?

An unread text has no powers of subversion: the texts studied in the coming chapters are only subversive in their interaction with the reader, in how they affect her perception of the discourses they criticise.\(^7\) In order to understand how the texts can destabilise masculinist conceptions of history, it is therefore necessary to understand how the texts might be received by readers – and specifically how they might be received in a different way to non-fictional historical texts. The definitions of different genres that follow, as well as the discussions about their relationship to truth, are all articulations of conventions that are widely accepted by modern readers (although, as I will discuss later on, not universally accepted). Moreover, the five female authors studied in this thesis all use intertextuality to position themselves and their texts within Francophone (and in some cases Arabophone) literary traditions that adhere to these conventions. Outlining these conventions will consequently aid our understanding of how the specific fictional mechanisms isolated in the coming chapters can be said to be subversive (or said not to be).

Linguistically there are no markers which definitively distinguish fictional language from factual language; both grammatically and syntactically, fictional statements are identical to non-fictional statements.\(^8\) Some conventions are more usual in history than in fiction and vice versa –

---

\(^7\) For a provocative analysis of the importance of discussing reception when talking about the subversive value of a text, and the relationship of this to how reader's receive specific genres, see Nicholas Harrison, 'Metaphorical Memories: Freud, Conrad and the Dark Continent', in Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form, ed. Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp.49-70.

\(^8\) This is something accepted by a number of critics. One of the more detailed studies is Gérard Genette, 'Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative', Poetics Today 11, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 755-74. See also, for example, Derek Attridge, Reading and Responsibility (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.90; Peter Lamarque, The Philosophy of Literature (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), p.177. Genette does argue that strictly speaking the definitive mark of fictionalisation of a statement is not in the sentence structure but in its content, in the expression of the other's thoughts, because one can never know for certain what someone else it thinking (Genette, 'Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative', pp.762-3). Banfield expands this to include one's own consciousness because consciousness is extra-linguistic and so expressing it always entails a level of fictionalisation: Ann Banfield, Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (Boston: Routledge, 1982), pp.258-60. Of course, as Rancière argues, thinking (and all linguistic expression) itself could be called fictionalisation because reality is extra-linguistic: Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2008), p.38. Taking both Genette's and Banfield's
free indirect discourse, for example, often signals the fictionality of a text – but genres often borrow conventions from one another and there is stylistic overlap between them.\textsuperscript{9} For example, fictional autobiographies borrow the conventions of traditional autobiography, and there are no linguistic markers that distinguish the two. Indeed, the example of fictional autobiography demonstrates how there are no definitive markers between history and fiction when it comes to content – fiction often emulates the kind of content found in non-fiction, and, as Genette notes, historians often use fictional elements such as the expression of consciousness for stylistic purposes (the expression of consciousness being always fictionalised, since it is impossible to know the thoughts of the Other).\textsuperscript{10}

Consequently, I want to argue that the distinction between a fictional text and an historical one lies in the way a text is approached by the reader. Certain texts invite the reader to judge them against external yardsticks of truth and falsity, while others do not. Moreover, as Harrison argues, those that do ask the reader to judge them according to this yardstick, such as history (or in his example, theory), have some kind of an obligation to let the reader know when the narrative moves from truthful description to supposition or fantasy.\textsuperscript{11} What therefore distinguishes history as a genre from fiction as a genre is the reader’s expectations when she reads the text. Lamarque notes that ‘readers come to texts with expectations of certain kinds of rewards. Reading a letter, a manual for dishwashers, a philosophical essay, or a police summons are quite different exercises; they satisfy different interests, and call for different modes of attention’.\textsuperscript{12} In other words, what we expect from – and get from – a text is different depending on how we approach it.

In claiming, as I did above, that fiction does not invite the reader to judge it as truth, I am aligning myself with Derek Attridge when he argues that fiction is the name ‘for writing that situates itself outside the true/false distinction’.\textsuperscript{13} This is not the claim that fictional statements are untrue; rather they are subject to different yardsticks of truth. The exact nature of the relationship of fiction to truth(s) is something to which I will return in a moment, but, for the moment, I want

\begin{footnotes}
\item[9] For a detailed analysis see Genette, ‘Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative’.
\item[10] Ibid., p.772.
\item[12] Lamarque, \textit{The Philosophy of Literature}, p.132. This way of distinguishing history from fiction does not rely on the writer’s intentions, but on the reader’s understanding of the writer’s intentions (contrary to what some critics have claimed, such as John Searle, \textit{Expression and Meaning} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.60-1).
\end{footnotes}
INTRODUCTION

to argue that this relationship gives the writer a certain freedom to create and invent, a sense that she is not bound by external parameters in the same way as the historian. A distinction should nevertheless be made between the way the reader approaches the text as a whole, and the way she approaches individual statements in the text: the texts studied in the coming chapters present historical facts to the reader which can be judged according to external criteria. There are factual statements in the texts that could be found written in the exact same way in a history book. Yet to some extent, the reader approaches these statements differently when they are in fiction: if a statement is in an historical text the reader expects it to be accurate according to the available evidence, but when reading fiction the reader does not always have this same expectation. Although the reader may wish to measure the accuracy of the statement, certain inconsistencies may be expected, such as the addition of fictional characters to historical events, while non-plot-related inconsistencies may be more easily forgiven, or even read as purposeful on the part of the author to destabilise the historical record. There exist facts in fiction, but the reader does not always know which facts are to be strictly measured by the external yardstick of truth and falsity and which are not.

The works I will go on to discuss in the coming chapters are presented as fiction: they are either marked paratextually as novels, or have elements within the text that signal their fictionality in an overt manner. Readers consequently approach them with the expectation of fictionality, and I will argue across this thesis that it is for this reason that these works are able to do certain things that works presented as factual, and therefore approached as factual, are not. I will argue that these texts fictionalise the past, by which I mean they place historical events in an overtly fictional context, describing the event in a narrative which is indicated to the reader to contain fictional elements. I am not arguing that this means the reader will approach historical details as fictional. I am instead drawing a distinction between fictionalisation of the past and what White calls the narrativisation of the past that takes place in historical texts. The point I want to stress is that

---

14 This does not necessarily correspond to the actual truth value of the statement. For example, if a history book describes the thoughts or feelings of an historical figure a reader can argue based on the available evidence that the description is not convincing, but they can no more definitively say that the description was wrong than the author can say it was right. Although strictly speaking readers in these circumstances cannot judge the statement according to truth or falsity, they may, however, lose faith in the historical narrative if it seems to contradict the available evidence, at least to a greater extent than when a fictional narrative contradicts the available evidence.

15 Narrativisation could be used interchangeably with the notion of fictionalisation as laid out by certain critics, such as Attridge or Banfield who both claim that all language is fictionalised to some extent since truth and experience in their pure forms are extralinguistic. See Attridge, Reading and Responsibility, pp.91-4; Banfield, Unspeakable Sentences, pp.258-60. They are not alone in arguing this: Wood also talks about the 'fictions' surrounding historical events, noting that this line of argument is linked to Nietzsche who talked about there only being interpretations (Michael Wood,
fictional texts are approached differently by the reader by virtue of the fact that they are labelled or presented differently. This difference in approach allows the authors to be inventive in ways that may destabilise masculinist conceptions of history.

**Between History and Fiction**

In terms of genre, outside Chapter 1 which studies non-fictional representations of women, and with the exception of Mokeddem’s straightforwardly autobiographical *La Transe des insoumis*, all the texts studied are presented by the authors as fictionalised to some extent. It is to these texts that I now turn. As I argued at the start of the introduction, I contend that because the texts fictionalise historical facts they can be described as being between history and fiction. That being said, the texts are not all between history and fiction in the same manner. Some overtly challenge the line between history and fiction. Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* (2002), which I study in more detail in Chapter 2, gives us such an example. Bey's text tells the story of an Algerian woman who is joined on her train journey by a second protagonist, a French doctor who was a soldier in Algeria during the War of Independence. Through the alternating thoughts of these two characters the reader finds out that the Algerian woman’s father was arrested and killed during the War of Independence and that the French man was one of his torturers. Bey's own father was killed in a similar manner to that of her fictional protagonist's, and the text is framed by historical documents which evoke his death. An annex includes documents that belonged to the author's father, and a photograph of him precedes the text. This is followed by the immediate use of the third person, the first word of the text being *elle*, rather than the first person which one might expect since the photo is directly linked to the author. The details that we learn about the protagonist's father mirror the details about Bey's own father presented in the documents — for example, both were teachers.\footnote{Maïssa Bey, *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* (Paris: Aube, 2002; reprint, 2010), p.38; p.83. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.} The juxtaposition of the autobiographical document and the fictional third person narrative invites the reader to question where traditional historical documentation ends, and fiction begins.

The photograph and the text could also be said to be exploring history in different ways, which implies a historiographic element to the text. This historiographic element is combined with

*Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.159-60). However, since I want to draw a specific distinction between the function of historical and fictional writing, I will use fictionalise (and its derivatives) to express the notion of writing about events in an overtly fictional manner.
metafictional elements. For example, on finding herself face to face with the French doctor, the protagonist thinks to herself: 'On pourrait presque en faire le sujet d'une pièce de théâtre, en choisissant un titre anodin, d'une banalité recherchée, par exemple: « Conversation dans un train ». Acte I. Les personnages sont en place' (pp.43-44). The text can consequently be read as an example of what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon argues that the combination of historiographic and metafictional elements in texts such as this highlights that there is a clear distinction to be made between history and fiction. She argues that since the texts do not make it entirely clear where history ends and fiction begins, the overt highlighting of this distinction serves to draw attention to the blurring of the boundary between history and fiction in the text. Hutcheon goes on to argue that this leads to a questioning of totalising historical narratives (which is to say narratives that deny the validity, or even existence, of other representations of history) because it draws the reader's attention to the fact that history is, like fiction, made up of narratives.

Consequently, each event potentially has a multiplicity of narratives attached to it. For example, in relation to the 1830 invasion of Algeria by France, on the one hand, the French narrative justified France's colonial exploits by insisting that the invasion 'civilised' and unified Algeria, while, on the other, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) later created a narrative of cohesive resistance stemming from 1830 which they traced through to their post-independence regime. The two narratives deny each other: the French narrative denies that there was a people already in Algeria organised enough to resist, while the narrative of the FLN denies any influence the French may have had on the country by insisting that the only legacy of the Algerian people is that of the pre-colonial culture. The overt blurring of the line between history and fiction in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... (as well as in a number of the other texts I study) draws attention to this potential multiplicity of narratives because it questions where the truth in any one historical narrative begins and ends.

Hutcheon's assertions are not so much a discussion about what truths can be found in fiction, so much as which sorts of claim on truth it denies. That is to say, historiographic metafiction denies totalising narratives which claim to be the only truth. Hutcheon is, of course, not denying the possibility of discriminating between accurate and inaccurate accounts of

---

19 Martin Evans and John Phillips, Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.3-10. Evans and Phillips also discuss the narratives put forward by the Islamists and Berbers to challenge these two narratives.
historical events. Rather, she criticises the way that one narrative can be taken to be the one and only truth, which leads to the dismissal of all other narratives about the event. In Chapter 1, the importance of the notion of totalising historical narrative to the texts will become clear, when I discuss how the FLN, who have been in power since independence, attempted, particularly in the immediate post-independence period, to impose an historical narrative on the nation that effaced certain aspects of history that cast the party in a bad light, glorified the War of Independence and its martyrs, and legitimised the FLN’s grip on power. This can be classed as a totalising narrative in the sense that it was (and to some extent still is) disseminated to the population (for example, through school text books) as the one and only version of history. In fact, when, in the 1980s, certain historians began to publish works that questioned the FLN’s version of history, the books were quickly banned.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, the denial of totalising narratives is something that is important to Bey in the case of Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... because it deals with the death of her father. Throughout her œuvre she is concerned with the overcommemoration of the heroes of the independence struggle, and she therefore does not wish to add to this discourse and lionise her father by writing about him. Exactly how she, and Djebar and Marouane, mobilise the history/fiction entre-deux to negotiate the appropriation of the heroes of the War of Independence by the state is something I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2. What I want to stress at this point is that in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... the overt blurring of history and fiction undermines the idea of one totalising narrative. That is to say, the history/fiction entre-deux that is created through the historiographic and metafictional elements is a space which highlights the existence of competing narratives that describe the same event, all or some of which may be true.

The blurring does not, however, have to be this overt to destabilise totalising narratives. In contrast to Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., Bey’s more recent text, Puisque mon cœur est mort (2010), which I examine in detail in the third chapter, is presented as straightforwardly fictional. It is nonetheless my contention that it is also between history and fiction. The narrator’s inability to overcome her grief at the death of her son, murdered by Islamists during the violence of the 1990s, means that the past continually intrudes on the present within the fiction. The narrative, like the narrator, cannot escape the past. This is not an historical novel set in the past, neither is it a novel about history. The history does not so much define the narrator’s motivations

---

as subsume the narrative, insisting on its importance even as others tell the narrator to move on with her life. In this sense the narrative is not simply fiction which talks about the repercussions of the past, it is an attempt to mourn the past, and an attempt that is unsuccessful, for reasons I will detail later on. *Puisque mon cœur est mort* is between history and fiction because Bey writes the history of her nation, but fictionalises it in order to create a site of memorial for the violence of the 1990s (since there is no other site of memorial available in the public sphere because, again as I will discuss in Chapter 1, there was a ban on any critical historical investigation into the violence). As a result, the text is as much between history and fiction as *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes*..., but in a different way.

Although the texts inhabit the *entre-deux* in different ways, texts such as *Puisque mon cœur est mort* are, I think, just as able to challenge totalising narratives as are texts such as *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes*... which more overtly blur the boundary between history and fiction. First, all the texts I look at talk about either reading or writing, which is a way for the authors to draw attention to their textual constructions, to the way that they are using different methods of referencing historical truths than those used in non-fictional texts. Second, the texts all highlight their fictionality, and so create multiple possibilities in terms of the relationship between history and the narrative: the narrative could represent the whole truth, partial truths or no truth at all. Just as in historiographic metafiction, it is the difference between the methods of referencing (fictional and non-fictional referencing) that draws the reader's attention to the act of referencing itself. It is the highlighting of the different modes of referencing that causes the destabilisation of any totalising or dominant discourse. I contend, therefore, that fiction as a concept is capable – in the right circumstances – of subversions which are not available through more traditional methods of historical representation (since, in the cases studied here at least, fiction complicates its own relationship to history in a way that straightforward historical investigation, with its need to claim a direct correlation to historical truth, is not able to do). The chapters that follow discuss a variety of manifestations of the history/fiction *entre-deux*, all of which are created in different ways and used by the authors for different purposes. In every case, the fictionalisation of history questions (and hence destabilises) one aspect or another of the FLN's totalising historical narrative.
Truth and Fiction

The potential of fiction to destabilise masculinist constructions of history should not be over-emphasised. The texts do not overwrite masculinist discourses; they constitute a subversion that I will argue has limited real-world impact. Nonetheless, any real-world impact that these fictional texts do have (through changing the reader's perceptions) is only possible because the reader understands that the texts have some kind of relationship to historical truths (since without this relationship, fiction could be simply dismissed, as it often is, as irrelevant). In Mosteghanemi’s *Memory in the Flesh* (1993), which I discuss in Chapter 5, the young novelist in the middle of the love-triangle around which the plot centres claims: ‘A writer is a human being living on the edge of truth, but not necessarily mastering it. That’s the work of historians. In fact, a writer’s job is to become an expert at dreams or some kind of polite lies. A successful novelist is either someone who lies with amazing honesty or a liar who speaks of real things’. Mosteghanemi here pinpoints the notion that the novelist’s relationship to historical truth is different to the historian’s. Nonetheless she underscores that to be successful, fiction needs to have some kind of relationship with honesty or to real things – in other words to truths. I now turn to what this relationship entails.

Peggy Kamuf argues – after Derrida – that fiction has a different manner of referring to a referent (the thing that is represented) than a non-fictional text has. She argues that fiction ‘suspends’ the referent, by which she means a fictional text removes the referent from its relationship with our everyday reality. For example, when Bey fictionalises her father in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* she does not ask the reader to think of the fictional father as directly corresponding to her real-life father; she suspends the direct correlation between the referent and the language referring to it. All the same, as Kamuf goes on to clarify, the act of suspension itself implies a relationship between the text and the referent, just a different kind of relationship to the direct correspondence we might expect in a non-fictional text: it is a relationship of disconnection. To clarify using my example: the non-fictional texts I examine all attempt to represent history in a manner that can be trusted to convey the reality of what

---

22 For a discussion of the arguments about truth in literature across the ages, starting with Plato, see Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, pp.220-54.
25 Ibid., p.143.
happened, and in this sense to create a relatively direct relationship between writing and the referent (which in this case is historical events); in contrast, Bey’s real-life father is suspended as a referent when he is represented as the fictional father in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... but no-one would deny that they are still connected – it is a relationship of purposeful detachment.

Our understanding that Bey’s father has been fictionalised relies on our understanding (which may or may not be self-conscious or explicit) of different mechanisms of referencing, on our ability to comprehend that fiction suspends the relationship between reality and the text so as to purposefully represent him in a different way to any non-fictional perception we may have of him. In this case this is linked to the fact that there are gaps in our non-fictional perception, but in other cases I look at in the thesis the aim may be (among other things) to subvert the FLN’s historical narrative, or to protect those who are represented from being directly linked to their fictional representations.

What is important to note is that the texts I study all have a relationship to historical truths – it is for this reason that I argue in Chapter 2 that there is an ethical imperative when representing the Other, even in fiction. The fictional texts just engage with historical truths in a different way to the non-fictional texts I examine.

I am here promoting a somewhat idealised vision of fiction (in line with critics such as Derrida), which, among other things, is associated with a certain freedom for the author, the idea that the author of fiction can say anything without the need to answer for what is said. Derrida argues that literature can ‘say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything’. In this vision of fiction, writers of fiction are able to write about things that may not be open to writers of factual texts. Bey, for example, in an interview centring on her text Bleu blanc vert, states that because she is writing fiction she is able to say things that the newspapers or even history books cannot say. The previously mentioned Puisque mon cœur est mort (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3) is an example of this claim since it deals with crimes that took place during the 1990s in Algeria. Critical historical investigation of these crimes is outlawed, but Bey exploited the disconnect between the referent and the narrative in the text to avoid legal repercussions. Be that as it may, many people around the world do not share this understanding of fiction – in fact, in various countries across the world fiction writers have been sued for libel or issued with death

threats, and, specifically in the case of Algeria, fiction writers were targeted for assassination in the 1990s alongside non-fiction writers such as journalists (Mokeddem for example talks in her autobiographical works about how she received death threats during the 1990s because of her writing). This thesis is promoting a utopian vision of fiction, while recognising that for the majority of the authors studied this freedom to invent was only possible in the first instance because they use pen-names in order to escape reprisal, and for most is still only possible because they live in exile – in fact, Bey is the only author I study who has remained in Algeria.

**L'Algérie-femme**

Djebar claims in *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, a theoretical text about her writing project: ‘Ce qu'ils espèrent de moi, c'est l’Algérie-femme’. What she touches on here is that the publication of Algerian texts outside Algeria may be influenced by the desire for another type of truth, an insight into another culture. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, Djebar problematises the notion that she acts as a representative or spokesperson for Algerian women. Yet she does not reject the role entirely. Since all the texts engage with Algerian history, and specifically with how the representation of this history has affected women, all the authors can be said to be engaging with a notion of what it is to be an Algerian woman. Although patriarchy operates on a global scale, there is a certain system of oppression that is specific to Algeria – a system exemplified by the Family Code (which, as I discuss in Chapter 1, reduces women to the status of minors in the eyes of the law). The authors all respond to this specific manifestation of patriarchy, and in some respects they therefore act as spokespersons for women who are affected by this particular system of oppression. Nevertheless, the fictionality of the texts ensures that they have the same relationship to any insights into what it is to be an Algerian woman as they do to historical truths: the narrative could represent the whole truth, partial truths or no truth at all. The overt flagging of fictionality in the texts stops the reader from accepting any one of the fictional representations of Algerian

---

28 Salman Rushdie was sued by Indira Ghandi for libel because in the fictional *Midnight’s Children* he wrote that she was responsible for her husband’s death. He was eventually forced to remove the sentence (Katherine Frank, 'Experiments with Truth: Writing Biography Today', *India International Centre Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 1-12 (p.11)). As is well known, Rushdie was also issued with death threats after the publication of *Satanic Verses* because of his depiction of Muhammad. For a detailed analysis of how the reception of *Satanic Verses* complicates Derrida’s notion of literature see Nicholas Harrison, ‘La Liberté littéraire : Assia Djebar entre roman et histoire’, *Œuvres et critiques* 36, no. 2 (2011), 45-56 (pp.53-54).

women studied here as a new totalising narrative that represents the situation of all Algerian
women (the notable example of this in my corpus is, again, Mokeddem's autobiographical *La
Transe des insoumis*, which has a more direct relationship to truth, but, as I will argue in Chapter 5,
Mokeddem nonetheless avoids homogenising female experience by focusing on the peculiarity of
her own specific position).

All the texts chosen as objects of study in the following chapters were selected because of
their engagement with Algerian history since the War of Independence (although they cover
different periods of this history). Taken together, they therefore do convey something that could
be characterised as a truth about the relationship of Algerian women to the history of their nation
– specifically that the lived reality of Algerian women does not conform to the symbolic
constructions represented in the masculinist discourses I discuss in Chapter 1. Throughout the
thesis, in addition to the fictional (and in the case of Mokeddem, autobiographical) texts, I will also
draw on a number of historical texts that tell the same truths about Algerian women (for example
in the case of Djamila Amrane-Minne, that they participated in the War of Independence in a vital
capacity that has been overlooked). The focus of my analysis is consequently how the fictional
texts are able to convey this message in a different manner to non-fictional texts because of the
non-direct relationship fiction has to truth, the ability of fiction to make tangential connections
and disrupt accepted historical truths through literary means such as metaphors or allegories. Of
course, although what they say is grounded in a specific cultural context and historical position,
the fictional mechanisms used by the authors to convey the truths about Algerian women are not
mechanisms that are specific to Algerian women’s writing.30 Put differently: the framework of the
history/fiction *entre-deux* has the potential to be applied outside this study and to texts other than
those written by Algerian women, but in this thesis I am specifically using it to lay out a coherent
picture of how, over the past twenty or so years that my corpus spans, five Algerian female
authors have responded to representations of the history of their nation.

**Female Agency**

What the texts also all have in common is that they challenge the masculinist assumptions of the
FLN’s historical narrative, as well as other masculinist historical narratives (such as French colonial

30 The notion that what we classify as postcolonial literature does not have any specific literary quality that sets it aside
from other types of literature is discussed at length in Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).
narratives that exoticised Algerian women), by exploring Algerian women's subjectivity and agency. Other studies have suggested how Algerian women writers feel a pressing need to express Algerian women's subjectivity and agency: Schahrazède Longou's 2009 thesis examines texts by Mokeddem, Bey and Marouane, arguing that the authors create subjectivities in their works that escape 'traditional structures'; Rachel Van Deventer's 2010 thesis studies texts by Bey and Djebar, alongside texts by Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar, examining both the agency of the characters within the text, and the agency that the authors express through the act of publication, arguing that 'Une approche agentiviste permet aux critiques de souligner la valeur singulière d’un texte et d’évaluer la capacité de l’écrivain(e) ou des personnages à se positionner comme sujet de leur discours et de leur existence non pas en fonction des pouvoirs dominants, mais malgré ces derniers'. My study builds on the work of these critics by focusing on how important the expression of female agency is to the destabilisation of patriarchal norms. Longou and Van Deventer, however, both focus on forms of agency that allow women to surpass their traditional roles, while I have chosen texts (with the exception of Mokeddem's texts, which I use as a counter example) where women's subjectivity and agency is expressed from within the traditional positions that women have been assigned by the prevailing patriarchy, something that, I argue, places them in a complex, perhaps compromised, position in relation to masculinist discourses. For this reason, the authors temper the potential of female agency in the texts I study (and, as I will discuss at various points, the potential for political engagement with the reader). I will argue nonetheless that, on a general level, the very act of rewriting these roles remakes them in some way, since it places the control over their representation back in the hands of women.

In Chapter 1, I discuss in detail the representation of the role of women throughout Algerian history from the start of the War of Independence in 1954, but for the moment it suffices to say that during the independence struggle the family and home were conceptualised as a bastion of an idealised vision of pre-colonial values, and women (traditionally confined to the domestic space) as keepers of these values. The texts studied in the coming chapters (again with the exception of those by Mokeddem) were chosen because at least one woman represented in

31 Schahrazède Longou, 'Violence et rebellion chez trois romancières de l’Algerie contemporaine (Maissa Bey, Malika Mokeddem et Leila Marouane)' (University of Iowa, 2009), p.1.
32 Rachel Van Deventer, 'L’Agentivité et la naissance de la femme-sujet dans la littérature algérienne contemporaine' (Université d’Ottawa, 2010), p.357.
each of the texts (although not necessarily the protagonist) is defined by her position within the family, as a mother or a daughter. These fictional(ised) women all attempt to assert agency within these roles, in contrast to the expression of female agency in texts such as Bey's *Cette fille-là* (2001), in which a group of women live in an asylum, where they create an alternate space of female subjectivity separated from the outside world and their traditional roles, or Djebar's *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (1997), in which the narrator, Thelja, expresses her agency through her activities as a female *flâneur* in Strasbourg, entering into the male space of the city and casting off her traditional female role. Of course, the expression of Algerian women's agency from within traditional positions is by no means unique to the texts studied, or even to the authors considered here. Bouraoui's *La Voyeuse interdite* (1991), for example, expresses the agency and subjectivity – as well as the limitations of both – of an Algerian girl who lives locked away in her home, and only leaves at the end of the text to fulfil her traditional role in her new life as 'une épouse parfaite'. The texts I study are distinctive, though, because in addition to conveying a sense of female agency (as does Bouraoui’s, say), they also engage with history in complex ways that place them, I will argue, in the history/fiction *entre-deux*.

The key question this thesis asks, then – and this is where its originality lies – is how the authors mobilise the history/fiction *entre-deux* to negotiate the tension that is created because they undermine masculinist history through remaking the roles that women are assigned within this same masculinist history. That is to say: on the one hand, literature contributes to nation-building, and so portraying women's traditional roles in fiction may continue to uphold the post-independence narrative of the FLN; on the other, the authors create agency within these positions that are imposed on women in their lived reality, which allows for the possibility of a more direct political engagement – it is a form of resistance from within. In this respect, the texts differ from the historical investigation of, say, Amrane-Minne, since her work centres on reinserting effaced

---

33 For example, when studying *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, I will look at the agency expressed by the mother rather than the protagonist (whose agency, as discussed by Longou, is more transgressive, and leads to her moving from her home in Algeria to France).
or marginalised women's histories into the historical record. This is, of course, something that Algerian women's fiction also does – and in fact this is one of the primary focuses of Djebar's earlier works such as *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985), or *Loin de Médine* (1991). The texts studied in this thesis are not so much interested in reinserting women into the collective consciousness, however, as remaking the roles of women which already exist in the collective consciousness – and to do this they must represent women in these roles. The textual analyses in Chapters 2 to 5 will explore the different ways that the history/fiction *entre-deux* creates a space in which the tension of this representation is highlighted, explored, and negotiated.

**Heroism, Mourning, Domesticity and Fictionality**

In order to facilitate an understanding of how the fictional works studied in Chapters 2 to 5 undermine what I am calling masculinist history, I must first explore what this term entails, and why it should be employed in relation to what I will call 'official' Algerian history. Consequently, Chapter 1 is an overview of the representation of women in non-fictional works from 1954 onwards, including the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid*, the Family Code and Nacéra Belloula's harrowing collection of testimonials about the violence of the 1990s, *Algérie, le massacre des innocents* (2000). These analyses are placed within their historical context, thus also providing an overview of Algerian history. This chapter lays the foundation for the four thematic chapters that follow it, by demonstrating that within this masculinist nationalism women are overwhelmingly represented in relation to their role in the family. Nonetheless, I also contend that women throughout Algerian history were (and indeed still are) able to create agency within their defined gender roles. This sets the stage for my exploration of how fiction is used by the writers I study to create empowerment through – or in spite of – these enforced positions.

In Chapter 2, I examine the fictionalisation of Bey's father in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* alongside two texts that fictionalise real-life heroines of the War of Independence. Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002) represents a neighbour from her childhood home; Marouane's *La Jeune fille et la mère* (2005) fictionalises her own mother. Since heroism can be seen in many ways to be a literary notion, this chapter examines the tension between the way in which the authors use fiction to construct these heroines, but simultaneously undermines their appropriation by the state for the purposes of masculinist nation building. In doing so, I argue that Djebar and Marouane create a direct link between female participation in the Algerian War and
the female collectivities that each author champions in the present, in a way that undermines rigid understandings of heroism and challenges monolithic constructions of Algerian history and post-independence nationalism, while Bey's Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... provides an ideal reading model for texts that create a history/fiction entre-deux of the kind found in all three texts.

The third chapter deals with a different period of violence in Algerian history: the 1990s. Following the violence of the 1990s in Algeria, members of groups accused of terrorist activities by the state were granted amnesty. Mourning was thus sidelined in favour of national reconciliation since amnesty is only possible if the violence of the crimes – in this case rape, torture and murder – is forgotten. Bey's Puisque mon cœur est mort and Marouane's Le Châtiment des hypocrites (2001) are both critical of the amnesty – Bey's narrator is unable to get justice for her murdered son, and Marouane's cannot get justice for her own horrific ordeal at the hand of Islamists. I argue that both authors use fiction to create a site of mourning that is otherwise not available because of the forced repression of the past – although the violent end to each text implies the limitations of fiction in this respect.

Foregrounding the themes of heroism and mourning, as I do in Chapters 2 and 3, may itself in some way help promote their centrality to debates over Algerians' relationship to their own history – and the authors criticise the regime for doing just this. In particular, the authors (as well as historians such as Amrane-Minne) suggest that the focus on particular types of heroism and mourning efface discussions about aspects of female resistance that do not neatly fit into these specific categories. It is for this reason that Chapter 4 turns to texts that do not talk about women doing extraordinary things, but rather foreground the everyday. In this chapter, I suggest that Bey's Bleu blanc vert (2006) and Djebar’s Nulle part dans la maison de mon père (2007) undermine masculinist historical representations of women by reconfiguring the domestic as a heterogeneous and historicised space, into which they insert female agency.

In the final chapter, I compare rewriting in Mosteghanemi’s Chaos of the Senses (1997) with Mokeddem's La Transe des insoumis (2003). Mosteghanemi’s text – written in Arabic – is the second in a trilogy, and reconfigures the first text in the trilogy, Memory in the Flesh, by casting it as a (possible) creation of one of the characters in the text. Mokeddem's (as I have mentioned) is somewhat different to the other texts examined as it is presented as a straightforwardly autobiographical text – one that discusses the author’s life in the first person for the first time. I argue that Mokeddem feels able to express herself in the first person because of her earlier explorations of a nomadic subjectivity in the fictional N'zid (2001) – a subjectivity that she
continues to develop a decade later in another fictional text, *La Désirante* (2011). This chapter contrasts how the two authors go about creating female agency – Mosteghanemi through fiction within fiction and Mokeddem through the creation of what I will call a fictional nomadic practice – with the eventual aim of seeing how the difference in these two approaches affects the political implications of the texts.

Across the four thematic chapters, I therefore intend to establish both the potential and the limitations of specific fictional mechanisms to subvert masculinist historical narratives, focusing in particular on how these mechanisms relate to what I am calling the history/fiction *entre-deux*. What will become clear across these four thematic chapters is that my conceptualisation of the history/fiction *entre-deux* is not of a space that is always created or used in the same way; it is rather multiple spaces that are created in different ways and to different extents in the texts I study across the thesis. The second chapter examines the fictionalisation of real-life hero(in)es, who are placed between history and fiction; the third chapter explores how the past can be remembered in fiction when there are no real-world means to do so; the fourth chapter studies how Bey and Djebar explore history from within a fictionalised domestic space in a way that suggests the space belongs in the wider historical record; and the fifth chapter argues that the two texts studied create a history/fiction *entre-deux* that acts on each author’s own literary history by reconfiguring their œuvres up to that point. What should also become clear by the end of the study is that the history/fiction *entre-deux* I conceptualise is not necessarily a space of female emancipation: it is multiple spaces that allow for an exploration of agency within traditional, and often oppressive, female roles.
In 1933, Berthe Bénichou-Aboulker, an Algerian woman from a prominent Jewish family in Oran, became the first Algerian woman to have a text published in her native Algeria. The play, *La Kahéna, Reine Berbère*, fictionalises an historical woman from the seventh century (most often referred to as El Kahina), representing her as a devoutly Jewish Berber queen, who rallies her troops against the invading Arab army, but is betrayed by an Arab prisoner with whom she has fallen in love, leading to her capture and execution. The play ends with what Bénichou-Aboulker imagines as El Kahina’s final words:

```
Adieu peuple énergique, ardent et résolu !
Aurès, adieu ! vers toi va mon dernier salut.
Ecoute Israël, l’Eternel est notre Dieu.
L’Eternel ! ...
(Le bourreau lève sa hache).
```

Bénichou-Aboulker praises the Jewish people and evokes Israel (in the sense of the ancient home of Jewish peoples), and thus claims El Kahina as a symbol of Jewish and Berber resistance, erasing claims by Arab chroniclers that, after her defeat, El Kahina later converted to Islam. *La Kahéna, Reine Berbère* can thus be seen as taking part in what Robert Gildea characterises as collective constructions of the past – he argues that a political community defines itself through these collective constructions, which are often created through suppression of conflicting accounts, and subject to change with new events or new political leanings as the collective memory reworks its perception of the past according to the current climate.  

---

figure of El Kahina as an uncomplicatedly Jewish woman no doubt due to its author’s belonging to the Jewish community and her desire to add to this community’s collective memory.

Bénichou-Aboulker is far from alone in claiming El Kahina as belonging to her own collective past: she has been claimed by both Algeria and Tunisia, hailed by French historians as a Joan of Arc figure, praised by Arab chroniclers for her eventual conversion to Islam, and mobilised by Kabyle-Berber activists who used her as a symbol of anti-Arabisation.⁴ El Kahina thus sets the tone for the representation of women throughout Algerian history: as symbols. This chapter takes snapshots of some of the key moments in terms of the representation of women as symbols from the beginning of the War of Independence in 1954 onwards. I start my history with the representation of Algerian women at this point in time, first because all of the texts I study in the coming chapters are concerned with historical moments either during or after the war, and second because in all the texts the shadow of the war (and in particular the overcommemoration of the war) is felt. While this chapter tries to look at the representation of women from different viewpoints where possible, it is predominantly concerned with the way that women are mobilised across a variety of mediums by dominant masculinist discourses specifically for nation building (in particular those employed by the FLN, as their hold on power since independence means this can be characterised as ‘official’ history). As with any representation, not only will there be exceptions (a few of which I will explore), but the representations will not conform to the viewpoint of everyone, indeed may not even be the commonly held view, and may be subject to frequent challenges by groups with differing agendas.

Moreover, although the representations of women this chapter will go on to discuss may draw from and impact on women’s material condition, the so-called traditional role of women was (and still is) a representation of the societal norm with which women were supposed to comply. The enduring image of the traditional Algerian woman as wife and mother, as espoused both by nationalists and by certain academics,⁵ speaks of the inferior social status of women in general, but the role and participation in society of individual women varied according to the time period and geographical area – and in fact many women found ways to circumvent these gender norms,

---

⁵ Including female academics such as Minces who argued in 1989 that ‘Women did play a relatively important role within the family, but this role was restricted by the very fact that they did not play any role at all in the wider society’ (Juliette Minces, ‘Women in Algeria’, in Women in the Muslim World, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp.159-71 (p.166)).
such as women who dressed as men in order to go out in public with their male friends.\textsuperscript{6} Just as in all patriarchal societies, cultural norms may indicate general patterns of subordination, but women have found (and still find) ways to assert their agency. One of the aims of this thesis is to argue that the fictional texts I study bring to light or imagine individual examples of agency within the parameters of patriarchal norms, and in order to isolate the specific mechanisms by which these texts do this, it is necessary to understand what these norms were, and are, and their socio-historical context. Put differently: this brief overview of the representation of women in Algerian history, from the beginning of the War of Independence in 1954 to the present day, charts the norms, so as to better understand the exceptions (real or imagined) laid out in the fiction I will go on to discuss in the coming chapters.

**Moudjahidates**

Women's history in Algeria does not, of course, begin in 1954, and to suggest so would be to reproduce the overcommemoration of the War of Independence that I talked about in the Introduction,\textsuperscript{7} but the continued impact of this mythologisation in present day Algeria means that the figuration of women at this time continues to inform the role of women in Algerian society today. The emphasis on the war is seen, for example, through education policies. In 2002 the Algerian education system underwent reforms that changed the history curriculum so that some (although not all) of the effacements and rewritings taught to earlier generations were corrected.\textsuperscript{8} The most recent laws in relation to education in Algeria, passed in 2008, nonetheless continue to stress explicitly the importance of the legacy of the War of Independence in all aspects of education. Article 2 of the law focuses on how schools should encourage a sense of Algerian citizenship in their students, detailing the specific values that this should encompass:

- d’enraciner chez nos enfants le sentiment d’appartenance au peuple algérien ; de les élever dans l’amour de l’Algérie et la fierté de lui appartenir ainsi que dans l’attachement à l’unité nationale, à l’intégrité territoriale et aux symboles représentatifs de la Nation ;

\textsuperscript{6} Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, p.115.

\textsuperscript{7} For an overview of the evolution of women’s rights from pre-colonial Maghrebian society to the institution of the Family Code (and how the political conditions differ from Morocco and Tunisia) see Mounira M. Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco* (London: University of California Press, 2001).

d'affermir la conscience, à la fois individuelle et collective, de l'identité nationale, ciment de la cohésion sociale, par la promotion des valeurs en rapport avec l'islamité, l'arabité et l'amazighité ;

- d'imprégnner les générations montantes des valeurs de la Révolution du 1er Novembre 1954 et de ses nobles principes ; de contribuer, à travers les enseignements de l'histoire nationale, à perpétuer l'image de la nation algérienne en affermissant leur attachement aux valeurs représentées par le patrimoine historique, géographique, religieux et culturel du pays ;

- de former des générations imprégnées des principes de l'Islam, de ses valeurs spirituelles, morales, culturelles et civilisationnelles ;

- de promouvoir les valeurs républicaines et l'Etat de droit ;

- d'asseoir les bases de l'instauration d'une société attachée à la paix et à la démocratie et ouverte sur l'universalité, le progrès et la modernité, en aidant les élèves à s'approprier les valeurs partagées par la société algérienne, fondées sur le savoir, le travail, la solidarité, le respect d'autrui et la tolérance et en assurant la promotion de valeurs et d'attitudes positives en rapport, notamment, avec les principes des droits de l'Homme, d'égalité et de justice sociale. [my italics]9

Arabo-Islamic values are stressed, something that can be traced back to the nationalist movement that figured these values as key to resisting colonialism (about which I will talk in more detail further on in the chapter). More significant still, the anti-colonial movement is explicitly set out here as a founding principle of Algerian citizenship.

The Algerian war officially began on 1 November 1954 and ended with independence in 1962.10 Djamila Amrane-Minne published a seminal study of the participation of Algerian women in the war in 1991, followed in 1994 by a series of interviews with women who had participated in various ways. In the first book, entitled Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre, she systematically goes through the different ways that women participated directly in the war, splitting them into three categories: maquisardes (who joined the maquis), fidayates (the urban bomb carriers) and moussebilate (volunteers in the community who provided housing, food and other supplies to the

---


Amrane-Minne (who was herself a fidayate during the war) also talks about the wider support of women in the community, who supported their families while the men were in prison, and participated in demonstrations. It is important to note that the vast majority of women were moussebilate (Amrane-Minne estimates 82%). This is somewhat at odds with the enduring image of women during the War of Independence as that of the heroic female bomb carrier made famous by the trials of women such as Djamila Bouhired in 1957 and immortalised in Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger*, which came out in 1966, four years after independence. In fact, the urban guerrillas, or fidayate, made up only 2% of the total number of women involved in the independence struggle, but because their participation was the most spectacular, it was they who received most of the media attention, and who were held up during the war as symbols of the struggle.

In particular, Amrane-Minne notes that Djamila Bouhired – one of the female bombers depicted in *La Bataille d'Alger* – was the only person (female or male) to have a film and several songs dedicated to her during the period of the war itself, while Djamila Boupacha, another bomb carrier, was the only person to have an entire book dedicated to her (a text written by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi that denounced Boupacha's torture and treatment at the hands of the French authorities). Bouhired was used specifically as a tool of propaganda by the FLN as a symbol of the revolution, for example in *El Moudjahid*: 'les hommes et les femmes d'Algérie sont engagés, comme Djamila Bouhired, dans un combat implacable contre la domination étrangère' (n° 12, 15-11-1957). Bouhired became an individual example of the more general role of women in the war: symbols of the struggle. That a female bomb carrier would be held up as a symbol is not as radical as it may seem since, as Neil Macmaster notes in his detailed study on the role of women during the Algerian War, the bomb carriers did not in fact challenge gender roles in any particularly radical way. As seen by the example of El Kahina, the idea of a woman warrior is not

---

11 For details of Amrane-Minne’s own participation in the struggle (as well as an interesting analysis of her project alongside Djebar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*) see Mildred Mortimer, 'Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls: Algeria’s Women Combatants Depicted by Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Louise Ighilahriz, and Assia Djebar', *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 101-17 (pp.103-07).
13 Amrane-Minne, *Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre*, p.91. For details of the involvement of these women in the war see the chapter 'La guérilla urbaine' in Amrane-Minne, *Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre*, pp.90-114.
15 *El Moudjahid*, (Yugoslavia, 1962). The issues of the newspaper were reprinted in three volumes in 1962. The first dated edition is from November 1957. All references to *El Moudjahid* will follow quotations, giving the issue number and date of publication.
without precedent, and so the FLN were happy to make use of these women during the war as propaganda tools; they were allowed to surpass gender norms for the sake of the nationalist cause on the understanding that they would return to their defined gender roles once independence was gained. In France, the focus on the bomb carriers also did not change the stereotype of the Algerian woman as victim (which was one of the main ideologies behind the emancipation campaign that I discuss in a moment). For example, the text about Boupacha is predominantly Halimi’s account of her trial (Halimi was her lawyer) and was written for a very specific polemical purpose, to denounce torture and rape. Although at that time this was a pressing cause, and so the sentiment behind the text should not be dismissed, nonetheless the text should not be regarded as radical in any way in terms of the representation of women as it continued to cast women as victims – just as victims of French brutality rather than Algerian patriarchy.

It was in fact the mostly educated women who spontaneously flocked from the cities to the maquis that disrupted gender norms in a more radical way. These women were often met with suspicion or even open hostility by those from the more conservative rural areas (for example in some Wilaya they were subjected to virginity tests on arrival) since they did not act according to the patriarchal norms (unlike the majority of rural women, who, for example, avoided eye contact and did not speak unless spoken to). This is possibly one of the reasons that women were withdrawn from the maquis to Tunisia and Morocco in 1957, where they were forced to conform to conservative norms and even had to undertake protests in order to be allowed access to education and employment. A directive from December 1958 specifically bans further women from joining the maquis: ‘il est formellement interdit à toutes femmes de rejoindre nos rangs ; si elles rejoignent nos rangs, elles doivent être refoulées à leur destination d’origine, même si l’ennemi les appréhende’. The official reason given was that the changing nature of the conflict meant that the maquis units had moved from being based in single locations to being on the move, but they continued to recruit young mountain women to move with the soldiers and cook and clean their clothes, suggesting that this change in policy acted simply as a good excuse to marginalise the young women who challenged gender roles. This did not mark an end to women's involvement in the nationalist movement, for example, they provided an invaluable presence in

18 This is discussed in Macmaster, *Burning the Veil*, pp.319-22.
the demonstrations of 11th December 1960, which marked a turning point in the negotiations for independence. Nevertheless, it did mark an end to the possibility of a more progressive agenda.20

This change in women's roles is charted in a testimonial by a maquisarde in the 'organe officiel' of the FLN, the newspaper El Moudjahid. 'Journal d'une maquisarde' is split across six issues of the newspaper, from issue 44 (22nd June 1959) to issue 49 (31st August 1959). The anonymous narrator describes how, at the beginning of the war, she was deemed too young to join the maquis and so she carried weapons and medicine for the FLN. She goes on to explain how she joined the maquis in 1956, where she was tasked with the day-to-day care of the fighters, working for the most part alongside nurses. In 1958 she moves from Wilaya IV to Wilaya III, and, at this point, she is sent to a local village where her job is essentially to undertake propaganda for the FLN (although she refers to her task in terms of education and helping the villagers to understand the meaning of liberation). The tone of the narrative in many ways repeats nationalist propaganda, which is unsurprising since any criticism of the FLN would not have been printed in its official newspaper. For example, when she is sent away from the maquis she repeats the official explanation: 'Nous n'avions plus guère que de rares contacts avec nos combattants. Ceci n'était pas un principe mais les circonstances locales l'imposaient. La région était suffisamment dangereuse pour que nous n'augmentions pas nos risques en suivant les groupes de moudjahidines. Nous risquions de gêner leur mobilité de mouvement' (n° 48, 17-8-1959). Similarly, she describes how when she is told to go to the village to undertake propaganda, the commander explains to them: 'il nous expliqua donc que c'était à cette tâche que des femmes étaient le mieux faites : une œuvre de dévouement, ce qu'il y a de plus pur dans la Révolution' (n° 47, 3-8-1959). The evocation of purity suggests how women were conceptualised as the core of the revolution but in a symbolic capacity – something reinforced by the fact that she is being sent away from the actual fighting. Her job is to become a living symbol, an embodiment of the revolutionary goals rather than an active participant fighting for them.

In this latter example, the repetition of the ideology behind women's role in the struggle, is nonetheless placed in the mouth of the commander. In some ways this distances the narrator

---

from the symbolisation, flagging to the reader that she is repeating the official line and not necessarily agreeing with it. In fact, throughout the narrative, although there is no outright rejection of FLN policies, there is an undercurrent that rejects the marginalisation of women. This is mostly in the form of a repetition of the vital role that women have played in the struggle up to the point of publication. The narrator stresses the role of the masses of un-named women in the local communities who suffered during French attacks and whose loved ones were killed, as well as those who came to the aid of the maquis: 'Ces jeunes filles attendent à toute heure le moindre appel de nous pour venir nous apporter les médicaments nécessaires. Il leur arrive de faire plusieurs kilomètres à pied, et pour tromper l’ennemi elles ont mille ressources. Certaines par exemple dissimulent les médicaments dans les cruches d’eau vides qu’elles portent sur la tête' (n° 44, 22-6-1959). The narrator thus stresses the vital role of women in the wider community in terms of the everyday running of the maquis. Furthermore, aside from describing her own roles in detail, the narrator describes the participation of many other women, from long accounts of heroism (such as a nurse who was killed when she took up arms and defended the camp against the French) to more simple accounts of cooking and cleaning. She also often lists the names of the women, and at one point lists the different backgrounds and regions the women are from. In this way, she bypasses the homogenous mass of women as symbols and gives them individual identities. This is framed within the realm of the official discourse: 'Nous comprenions que cette diversité existant entre nous était une des preuves que le pays avec toutes ses villes, tous ses villages, de bas en haut de l’échelle sociale, bref l’Algérie avec toutes ses fibres participait à la lutte' (n° 46, 20-7-1959). The individual is framed as an example of the masses, in line with FLN discourse about the revolution of the people (the title page of El Moudjahid is always adorned with 'La révolution par le peuple et pour le peuple'). Nonetheless, the narrator stresses that the masses are made up of individuals, albeit individuals who have chosen to come together to fight for a larger cause.

There is one example in the narrative that borders on criticism of the exclusion of women from the war efforts. At one point, the narrator describes the experience of one of the other women:

Je l’entends encore raconter comment elle écoutait ses deux frères s’entretenir se [sic] soir, entre eux, des grandes choses qui transformaient notre pays. Cependant, quand elle se hasarde à avouer son désir de participer elle aussi à la lutter, ses frères rétorquèrent qu’elle était encore trop
jeune. « L'un d'eux, dit-elle, ajouta même que ce n'était pas l'affaire des femmes. Je fus alors
violemment frappée de son erreur : car c'est aussi l'affaire des femmes ; c'est celle de tous les
Algériens : femmes, hommes, enfants ».
Elle raconta ensuite comment elle décida d'agir contre l'avis de son frère car elle savait qu'elle
était dans son droit et que son but était noble (n° 46, 20-7-1959).

The vocabulary of brothers and sisters evokes the language used by the revolution. This could be
an honest coincidence and the narrator could simply have thought this was an interesting
anecdote. Nevertheless, she puts the most inflammatory section, that which denounces the
rejection of female participation, in the voice of her friend, which seems to me to be a
sophisticated literary device to distance her from the words and any possible backlash. This
suggests that the parallel here is no accident and that the narrative is indirectly criticising FLN
policies. Despite the reluctance (or indeed inability in a publication of this kind) to engage in open
criticism, the narrative weaves these glimpses of discontent into the first-person narrative – a
narrative that also gives a voice to the female symbol, stressing her active choice to be part of the
struggle. It is worth stressing that this is an expression of agency that works within the boundaries
of the patriarchal framework within which it is confined. The narrator thus works in much the
same way as do the fictional women I discuss in the coming chapters.

This is by far the most extensive article on women in *El Moudjahid* during the war, and is
among only a handful – the majority of which are direct or indirect responses to the emancipation
campaign (which I will discuss in detail in a moment). There were, of course, other newspapers
and mediums for women to express themselves, but the situation is much the same as in *El
Moudjahid*: articles by or about women are in the minority. Stora also notes that, during the War
of Independence, the majority of full-length texts by women were those written by authors in
metropolitan France, such as the well-known and previously discussed text by Simone de Beauvoir
and Gisèle Halimi about Djamila Boupacha.21 A small number of *pied-noir* women published texts
during this period, but only two Algerian women (as far as I am aware): Zohra Drif, who wrote a
testimonial entitled *La Mort de mes frères* while in prison in 1960, and Assia Djebar.22 Djebar
published three novels during the war, *La Soif* (1957), *Les Impatients* (1958) and *Les Enfants du
nouveau monde* (1962) as well as one further novel in the immediate post-war period, *Les

---

22 For a list of the *pied-noir* writers and a selection of their novels see Ibid., pp.83-4.
Alouettes naïves (1967). In Chapter 4 (on the domestic), I discuss how Djebar’s novels were dismissed because they were said not to be concerned enough with the anti-colonial struggle. I challenge this to some extent when I discuss how the personal and domestic can be seen as political, but the main point that I want to make at this stage is that women’s voices only went unchallenged when testifying for the sake of accepted forms of nationalism, in other words, while acting as symbols of resistance. While ‘Journal d’une maquisarde’ contributed to a counter-narrative of sorts, it was arguably only able to do this because for the most part it toed the party line in terms of the representation of women and was presented in the form of a testimony that stressed the nationalist cause.

Although counter-narratives did, therefore, exist, these were in the minority. This is unsurprising, and justifiable insofar as the anti-colonial struggle was the pressing concern. What these counter narratives do demonstrate, though, is that the dominant or official narrative is not necessarily how the past is viewed by all. This is significant in light of Natalya Vince’s fairly recent study of current views on the war in Algeria – in 2007 she interviewed a number of trainee teachers in a university in Algiers about their views on the moudjahidates. In her article she describes a general distrust by the students of written history that is linked to the regime in any way, such as history represented in school textbooks, which have been under the control of the regime since the 1970s. Of particular interest to this study is Vince’s point that a large number of students view the role of the moudjahidates through the more recent past:

Women who participated in the anti-colonial struggle are not only sanctified as national heroines, they have also been reimagined as saints in a much more literal, religious sense, and relocated in an abstract and intemporal framework of ideas about licit and illicit social organisation, sacrifice for God and cultural authenticity. This is suggestive of a degree of failure on the part of the post-independence state to put a religious language of jihad, mujahidin, shuhada and fida’iyn in the service of the construction of the nation – instead the transnational religious reference has engulfed the national specificity. Whilst some students adopt the version of the mujahida as an inspirational figure for women’s rights activists, for many others the image of the warrior woman

\[\text{\smallfootnote{23 For a discussion of these texts in terms of Djebar’s writing career and the trajectory of her œuvre see Jane Hiddleston, \textit{Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp.21-52.}}\]

has become a tool of moral and social control in an era of resurgent religious forms of identification.\textsuperscript{25}

This should be viewed in terms of Gildea's notion of collective constructions of the past that I mentioned at the start of this chapter. The past is rewritten according to current values, and viewed through the lens of current dominant ideologies. Nevertheless, Vince's study also suggests that what I am calling the 'official' discourse has \textit{influenced} how the war and the moudjahidates are seen by subsequent generations. It is for this reason that an understanding of the FLN's historical representation of women is important to this study, especially in terms of the notion of women as bastions of tradition – an idea that was significantly reinforced by the French 'emancipation' campaign.

\textbf{The 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women}

It is perhaps no coincidence that the official turn in opinion about women by the FLN around 1957 coincided with the beginnings of a series of reforms enacted by the French authorities that targeted women, which it claimed 'emancipated' them from Algerian patriarchy. From the beginning of the war, in an attempt to deprive the resistance fighters of their support base in the community, the French authorities had attempted to win over the population through, for example, access to medicine, education, and better housing. From late 1956, the warfare specialists began to turn their attention specifically to women, running a propaganda campaign on the radio and by organising women's groups. Of particular note, in 1957 voting rights were extended to Algerian women for the first time (although this was late even in relation to Algerian men), a right that was enacted in 1958, and this was followed in 1959 by reforms on marriage and divorce.\textsuperscript{26}  The response by the FLN was to stress traditional values (that were linked to an idealised idea of pre-colonial society) as a form of resistance. For example, in an interview in \textit{El Moudjahid} with a woman who had been emprisoned by the French, the interviewee claims that the primary concern of women should not be the question of whether to reject the veil, but

\begin{itemize}
\item[Ibid., p.49]
\end{itemize}
should instead be to: 'Faire prendre conscience à toutes les femmes du rôle qu'elles ont à jouer dans la société. Dans l'immédiat, les femmes devront continuer à bien élever leurs enfants, mais celles qui en seront capables devront éduquer les autres femmes' (n° 72, 1-11-1960). The interviewee repeats the official rhetoric that women should resist first and foremost from their position within the home, which was visualised as a fortress of Algerian identity that was impenetrable by the coloniser. This stressing of the traditional role of women was not caused by the emancipation campaign – throughout the colonial period, Algerian traditionalism was seen as a form of resistance to colonial culture. Nonetheless, the emancipation campaign arguably reinforced the assertion of these values as a form of resistance, and had a lasting effect in post-independence Algeria, where feminism and women’s movements are often – and in some cases rightly – still viewed as 'Western' or even colonial in nature. Throughout the colonial period, women had been figured as a means to penetrate the colony. The emancipation campaign was a natural progression of this line of thinking; as Fanon puts it (paraphrasing colonial thinking): 'Ayons les femmes et le reste suivra'. Although the emancipation campaign did bring material gains to women, the term 'emancipation' was not used in the way we use it in a contemporary setting in terms of equality between the sexes. The so-called emancipation of Algerian women was an attempt to bring them in line with French cultural norms, which, as many feminists have discussed, themselves were repressive for women in many ways. Moreover, this was a somewhat symbolic gesture, designed for propaganda purposes – in practice, a large majority of the Muslim population were unaware of the reforms, and the laws which dealt, for example, with divorce required the marriage to first be registered with the French administration, which many marriages in the Muslim community were not.

32 See Seferdjeli, 'French "Reforms" and Muslim Women’s Emancipation during the Algerian War', pp.40-42.
The fact that the main aim was propaganda is suggested by one of the key moments in the emancipation campaign: the fraternisation ceremonies of 1958. These ceremonies were organised as a show of support for de Gaulle – who had recently assumed power (and issued in the Fifth Republic in France) in response to a crisis in Algeria that had seen right-wing settler organisations and factions in the French army who opposed the government in France storm the General Government buildings in Algeria. De Gaulle did not want to be seen as the leader of a military and white-supremacist coup, and so the military leaders in Algeria organised ‘fraternisation’ parades during which pro-French Algerians were encouraged to join hands with French settlers, supposedly to demonstrate that the continuing military action in Algeria was the will of the people. The pro-French-Algeria factions proclaimed these fraternisation ceremonies a success; for example, Alain de Sérigny states in *La Révolution du 13 mai* (written in 1958): 'Une chose est certaine : c'est à partir du 16 mai qu'on put sereinement affirmer que l'Algérie était peuplée de dix millions de Français. Les dernières barrières entre les deux communautés venaient de s'abaisser'. On 17th May, one of these parades also involved women removing and burning their veils. Whether this was a spontaneous outburst or a piece of well-orchestrated propaganda is unclear, but regardless, this powerful image was seized on by those in power, who co-ordinated mass unveilings across the country during the next few months. The FLN vehemently disputed views propagated by those like de Sérigny who upheld that the fraternisation and unveiling ceremonies were spontaneous outbursts by the Algerian people, instead characterising them as 'les manifestations forcées' (n° 27, 22-7-1958), 'Les mascarades organisées par le mouvement ultra-colonialiste' (n° 26, 4-7-1958), and the unveiling ceremonies in particular as 'une sorte d'adaption grossière du strip-tease au goût méditerranéen' (n° 42, 25-5-1959). From the French point of view, however, these ceremonies were perceived as a resounding success, and the unveiling ceremonies in particular were hailed by the French as proof of the Algerian woman's desire to be 'emancipated'.

The unveiling ceremonies were accompanied by more widespread propaganda about Algerian women's desire for emancipation. The lack of any real equality after this so-called 'emancipation' is, however, demonstrated through the example of Nafissa Sid Cara, who was elected into the French government in 1958 along with Khedira Bouabsa and Rebiha Kebtani.

---

33 Alain De Sérigny, *La Révolution du 13 mai* (Paris: Plon, 1958), p.97. Of course, this was not the universally accepted view in France; others were sceptical about the ceremonies, a view put forward, for example, in Maurice Mouillaud, *La Mystification du 13 mai au 28 septembre* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1958).

34 The fraternisation ceremonies, including the unveilings, are discussed in detail in Macmaster, *Burning the Veil*, pp.114-51. Historians have debated at length who the women who took part in the unveiling ceremonies were and whether they took part willingly: see Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, p.135.
These women provide an important counter-example to the moudjahidates, since they believed in French-Algeria, demonstrating the obvious point that Algerian women of this period (or indeed any period) cannot be homogenised because they did not all have the same aims and opinions. Nonetheless, they still became symbols: for the French, symbols of the positive aspects of female emancipation; for Algerians, a symbol of the subversive influence of this emancipation campaign.

Bouabsa was a primary school teacher, who was already unveiled prior to the emancipation campaign. Kebtani, in contrast, was not part of the assimilated elite but was a veiled housewife who had been married at age fifteen, and was in fact a success story of the emancipation campaign since she participated in women's groups and took part in the unveiling ceremonies. Sid Cara is perhaps the most interesting example though, since, in 1959, she was appointed Secrétaire d’Etat aux Affaires Sociales auprès du Premier Ministre, meaning she was supposedly in charge of all affairs relating to improving the life of the Muslim population. She was, like Bouabsa, a school teacher who was part of the educated elite, and her brother, Dr Cherif Sid Cara, was also a well-known politician. Despite her position, her niece later described that she felt that she was being used as a symbol: 'She had the feeling that she had been chosen because of what she represented and that she was being used. Her speeches were written for her, but she would re-write them. She knew she was being used since she was well accepted by the population in Algeria'. This feeling is reinforced by the lack of duties she was given, for example when she visited Algeria and was tasked with only a visit to a kindergarten (although when she threatened to immediately return to Paris she was also allowed to give a speech), and incidences such as when she was trotted out to meet President Eisenhower during a dinner in his honour as a symbol of Muslim integration. Be that as it may, in these examples there is a sense that she attempted to assert her agency, for example rewriting her speeches. She is yet another example of a woman fighting against her objectification from within a system that casts her as a symbol.

The FLN portrayed these women as traitors – indeed, Sid Cara was threatened and several attempts made on her life. This is exemplified in one of the appel: 'Par ta participation aux batailles électorales, tu pourras devenir député [sic], comme Mademoiselle Sid Cara, Madame Kebtani et autres traîtresses de la religion et de la patrie'. I want to draw attention here to the

35 For more details about Bouabsa and Kebtani see Seferdjeli, ‘French "Reforms" and Muslim Women’s Emancipation during the Algerian War’, pp.48-49.
36 This is described in Ibid., p.52.
37 For more details about Sid Cara see Ibid., pp.52-54.
38 Ibid., p.52.
fact that these women are figured not only as traitors of nationalism, but also of Islam. This can be attributed to the pact between the FLN and conservative Islam, something that came about because there was a lack of coherent political agenda during the anti-colonial struggle other than anti-colonial sentiment, and so ideologically there was little to hold the fledgling nationalism together other than the fact that a vast majority of Algerians were Muslim.\(^4\) This pact coloured the response of the FLN to the emancipation campaign, leading them to counter the French propaganda with calls to assert Arabo-Islamic values. In another example, a directive advises on how to convince women not to fall for the emancipation project, and the emphasis is again on Islam: 'Par ce vote, tu t’engageras, toi Algérienne, à être Française, donc tu renies ta RELIGION, ta PATRIE...\(^4\) Again, the nation is linked directly to religion, suggesting how women were not just conceptualised as bastions of tradition, but of a specifically Islamic tradition.

The focus on traditional values went hand in hand with the general lack of interest of those in powerful positions within the FLN vis-à-vis the creation of a serious agenda for women's rights. Female politicisation had started prior to the war, resulting in the founding of L'Association de Femmes Musulmanes d'Algérie (AFMA) in 1947, but this organisation was disbanded in 1954 in order not to distract from the fight for independence.\(^4\) The dissolution of the feminist movement is strongly linked to the idea put forward by Fanon in his 1959 essay, 'L'Algérie se dévoile', that the fight for Algerian independence would naturally lead to the liberation of women: 'Ce sont les exigences du combat qui provoquent dans la société algérienne de nouvelles attitudes, de nouvelles conduites, de nouvelles modalités d'apparaître'.\(^4\) A somewhat more simplistic version of this was, in fact, the official policy of the FLN. As early as 1956, the FLN had been mobilising propaganda that evoked women as liberated within the nationalist movement, and this was reiterated more vigorously from 1958 onwards in response to the emancipation campaign: 'les femmes algériennes n’ont pas besoin d’une «émancipation». Elles ont accédé à leur pleine dignité de citoyennes algériennes depuis le 1er jour de la Révolution algérienne, car, dès le premier jour, elles étaient aux côtés des combattants' (n° 27, 22-7-1958). There is a double standard inherent in the statement: although women are supposedly liberated through the independence struggle, they are 'alongside' the men, separate from them, suggesting their auxiliary positions. Something similar happens at the end of Fanon's essay: 'Côte à côte avec nous,

---

42 Aitsiselmi, 'La femme algérienne', p.247; Stora, 'Women's Writing between Two Algerian Wars', p.84. For a detailed overview of the women's liberation movement in Algeria from 1945-1954 see Macmaster, *Burning the Veil*, pp.27-67.
43 Fanon, *L’An V de la révolution algérienne*, p.47.
The rhetoric simultaneously states that women will become liberated through the liberation of Algeria and continues to place them in an inferior position within the struggle itself, indirectly recognising that the claimed equality is not a reality. In another example of similar rhetoric: 'l'Algérienne n'attendait [sic] pas, n'attend pas d'être « Êmancipée ». Elle est déjà libre parce qu'elle participe à la libération de son pays dont elle est aujourd'hui l’âme ; et le cœur, et un titre de gloire' (n° 42, 25-5-1959). This rhetoric does not talk about women's vital participation in the war effort, but focuses on the more abstract, and symbolic, notion of women as souls of the revolution. Rather than respond to the emancipation campaign with a real policy of emancipation, the FLN chose to ignore the legitimate real-life problems that the emancipation campaign flagged up and instead focused on women as symbols of nationalism.

That being said, one must not fall into the trap of repeating the French propaganda and claiming that women were passive victims of Algerian patriarchy. Many Algerian women also expressed a belief in the idea of emancipation through the liberation of the nation, such as the interviewee in El Moudjahid whom I mentioned earlier:

« El Moudjahid » : Avez-vous posé le problème des droits et des devoirs des femmes en entrant dans l'organisation ?

Réponse : Nous pensions acquérir ces droits en faisant nos preuves. Nous pensions qu'il nous seraient naturellement reconnus par la suite. (n° 72, 1-11-1960)

As I argued earlier, this is the official paper of the FLN, and so the repetition of the official rhetoric is to be expected. In spite of this, and similarly to the example of the 'Journal d'une maquisarde', there is a sense that the interviewee has not simply internalised the official rhetoric, but that she works within it:

« El Moudjahid » : Et les « réformes » de De Gaulle et Mlle Sid Cara sur le statut de la femme musulmane ?

Réponse : Les femmes, en majorité, ne s'y intéressent pas, parce que ce soit [sic] des décisions prises par le Françaises. Les femmes algériennes sont actuellement « en état d'hibernation » à l'égard de ces problèmes, elles ne pensent vivre d'une vie telle qu'elle l'entendent qu'après la victoire de la Révolution. (n° 72, 1-11-1960)

44 Ibid., p.50.
The idea that women are in 'hibernation' does not suggest that the liberation of women is a done deal, only that it is secondary to the anti-colonial struggle. She implies that she sees the actual position of women in the FLN in a more nuanced way than the official rhetoric allows, but that she is willing to put that aside momentarily for the sake of independence. She is not simply a passive victim who has internalised her oppression; rather her immediate concerns are the nationalist struggle and she is therefore willing to espouse these values herself, but, as she makes clear, on a temporary basis.

Like many other women who shared her view, however, the interviewee was to be disappointed. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, by the end of the war women were no more integrated in the FLN than they had been earlier. During a series of interviews that Vince undertook of former fidayate between 2005-2007, one of the women described how, just after her release from prison in July 1962, she was expelled from an FLN meeting at gunpoint and told to 'go back with the women'. This example not only reinforces the lack of realism in the official rhetoric that claims women fought side by side with men (in this example the woman is literally expelled at gunpoint from her position alongside men), it also forewarns of the lack of realisation of the promise of female emancipation in the post-independence period. The emancipation campaign was certainly a significant factor in this lack of realisation. The interviewee herself touches on this longer lasting impact of the emancipation campaign: 'Le seul résultat, c'est que des jeunes Algériennes, qui sans cela ne l'auraient pas été sont maintenant voilées, et pensent le rester jusqu'à la Libération' (n° 72, 1-11-1960). Although she envisages the return to traditional dress as a temporary measure designed as a show of nationalism, the effect was much more long-lived. The emancipation campaign in fact created an atmosphere where those pushing a conservative agenda in the post-independence period could permanently align traditional conservative values with Algerian nationalism, since any kind of feminist sentiment was dismissed as being colonial in nature and a western subversion of Arabo-Islamic values.


46 A similar sentiment was espoused by Fanon: 'Spontanément et sans mot d’ordre, les femmes algériennes dévoilées depuis longtemps reprennent le haïk, affirmant ainsi qu’il n’est pas vrai que la femme se libère sur l’invitation de la France et du général de Gaulle' (Fanon, *L’An V de la révolution algérienne*, p.46).
CHAPTER 1

Post-Independence Disappointment

The period 1962-1979 marked Algeria's development from a colony to a major player on the world stage. Yet in terms of the representation of women, with a couple of key exceptions that I detail below, this period was generally marked by a continuation of the status quo, and for this reason I will only provide a quick overview. On 5th July 1962 Algeria became an independent state. In the few months following independence various factions in the FLN struggled for power, with Ben Bella eventually emerging as leader. However, he was ousted in June 1965 when Boumediene took power, under whom the FLN began the process of creating what, in L'Algérie en 1995, Benjamin Stora calls a 'surabondance de mémoire falsifiée', by which he means an excess of memories which were manipulated by the FLN to justify their one-party regime and homogenising policies. Among other things, they effaced any plurality from the historical narrative by rewriting the story of resistance through the effacement of groups such as the MNA; marginalised any history before the war of independence; ignored Algerian on Algerian violence both during and after the war, such as the harki massacres; and effaced controversial figures such as Ben Bella who might suggest political dissent. Moreover, they created a cult of martyrs, one that arguably strengthened the religious associations of the struggle for independence because nationalism was defined as an opposition to colonial rule based on Islam and so-called traditional values. The FLN rhetoric focused on the image of the hero of the War of Independence as the symbol of the nation and by claiming these heroes as its forerunners, the FLN legitimised its one-party rule. Aside from rhetoric, they disseminated this 'official' view through, for example, school text books, which were under state control from the 1970s, and which included not only omissions, but also blatant lies, for example about the death of Abane Ramdane, who was executed in 1957 by the FLN, but whom the textbooks represented as having died as a martyr during a skirmish at the Moroccan border.

49 For an analysis of school textbooks from this time (and of those after the school reforms in 2002) see Remaoun, 'L'enseignement de la Guerre de libération nationale (1954 - 1962), dans les anciens et nouveaux manuels algériens d'histoire. Un enjeu pour l’affirmation d’une culture de la citoyenneté.'
Ben Bella embraced socialism, although with a distinctly Islamic flavour, and this was re-affirmed by Boumediène, who further stressed the importance of Muslim values. The emphasis on egalitarianism associated with socialism meant that equal rights for women were initially guaranteed by the constitution ("tous les citoyens des deux sexes ont les mêmes droits et les mêmes devoirs"). Women's participation in politics did not, however, increase markedly: in the first national assembly there were 10 female members out of 194, and by the second assembly there were only 2 out of 138. In fact, the main political space allowed for women was the Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes (UNFA) founded in January 1963, a group which internalised the official discourse about women as wives and mothers, as well as rejecting feminism as westernised. In addition, despite increased literacy among women – at the start of the War in 1954 only 9.5 percent of girls aged six to fourteen were in primary education, while by 1987, 71.56 percent were – there was no marked increase in women in the workplace, with the pre- and post-independence figures both remaining under 3 percent.

At least some of this post-independence marginalisation of women can be linked to the fact that political and social power in the post-independence period was derived from being a registered war veteran. The criteria for registering were largely based on participation in fighting, so because the majority of women who were involved in the anti-colonial movement acted in auxiliary roles (tending to the wounded, cooking and cleaning) only a very small percentage of women who had helped during the struggle were eligible to register as official war veterans – in 2009 women made up around three percent of the 336,784 officially recognised war veterans. This effacement of women's involvement was therefore partially due to the fact that women's participation in the war effort was largely in terms of activities that were already components of their everyday life (and continued to be after the war), meaning their contribution was quickly forgotten when the grand narratives of the war (which focused on heroism) took over. It was also to some extent due to the fact that, after the war, the emphasis moved from the female

---

52 See Macmaster, Burning the Veil, pp.369-93.
53 Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities', p.154. War veterans also receive material benefits, such as not paying tax on imported cars and free airline tickets (Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities', p.163).
54 Amrane-Minne, Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre, p.147.
soldiers and bomb carriers to the women who had fulfilled their traditional gender roles – roles that did not warrant a veteran card.\textsuperscript{55}

There was also little in the way of female literary voices to counter the marginalisation of women during this period. Aside from Djebar (whose novels, as I already mentioned, were vehemently attacked), the only novel by a female author in the immediate post-war period was \textit{O mes sœurs musulmanes, pleurez l} by Zoubeida Bittari, published in 1964. Stora notes that this text, set during the War of Independence, attacked religious principles through the protagonist who, married at 12, is repudiated after bearing a child and saves herself by working for a French family, leading to its being criticised for anti-revolutionary sentiment and nostalgia for the colonial past.\textsuperscript{56}

This lack of female authors was coupled with male authors who continued to characterise women in terms of their roles as symbols. In 1985 Mostaghanemi published a book of her doctoral thesis (submitted in 1980) entitled \textit{Algérie: femme et écritures}. The book charts the chronological evolution of Algerian literature (fiction and poetry) up until the end of the 1970s, just before more female-authored works began to appear. Mostaghanemi notes that aside from in the texts by the few female authors writing at the time, women are not well drawn – there are a few examples of female militants, but these women are under the control of men, and all other women fall into the category of either objects of sexual desire, symbols of the nation, mothers or French women who act as a means to conquer the coloniser.\textsuperscript{57} This was all to change, however, by the end of the 1970s, when a number of female authors, feminists and academics began to raise their voices in protest against government attempts to implement new laws that restricted their rights as women.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p.114; Marie-Blanche Tahon, 'The Anti-Heroine in the Algerian Revolution', in \textit{Women and Counter Power}, ed. Yolande Cohen (New York: Black Rose Books, 1989), pp.86-92 (p.89). Tahon argues that this is because the association with rape, made public during their trials, stigmatised the female bomb carriers. It could however equally have been a part of the conservative agenda to confine women to the traditional sphere of the home.

\textsuperscript{56} Stora, 'Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars', pp.87-8.

\textsuperscript{57} Mostaghanemi, \textit{Algérie: femme et écritures}. The roles of women as laid out by Mostaghanemi are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 in relation to her fictional works. She also notes that during the 1970s the general trend shifted from writing in French (which most authors had done during the war and immediately after independence) to writing in Arabic. When women began to publish at the end of the 1970s, they did not adhere to this trend, and Mostaghanemi was herself the first Algerian woman to publish an Arabic language novel in 1993 (Zhour Ouanissi published fictional short stories earlier than this, but as Mostaghanemi herself comments in \textit{Algérie: femme et écritures}, Ouanissi has received little attention).
The Family Code

Despite the reality of the situation for women, their inferiority in the eyes of the law was not cemented until 1984 when the Family Code was finally passed. The change in the Family Code came during the regime of Chadli Benjedid, who took over in 1979 after the death of Boumediene. This period was marked by civil unrest, which began in 1980 with the Berber spring. Thirty people were killed and hundreds more injured during protests against the increasing Arabisation of Algeria, and the emphasis on Algerian identity as Arabo-Islamic, thereby excluding Berber identity (something which has in the time since been rectified, as is evident from the inclusion of l’amazighité in the legislation about educational values at the start of the chapter). Simultaneously, the perceived corruption of the regime led to a rise in popularity of Islamism (which had been on the rise since the 1970s) and which presented itself in opposition to the self-proclaimed secular government (although, as I have noted, the regime was not straightforwardly secular by any means). To balance the emerging Berber political force, Chadli courted the Islamist movement, and it was in this climate that the Family Code was able to be passed in 1984.

This was not to say it passed without opposition. The 1980s in fact marked the beginning of a feminist movement. In 1980, the mobilisation of a small number of women was triggered by the prohibition of women leaving Algeria without a male chaperone, and the resulting protest led to the lifting of the ban. Collectif femmes was founded shortly after, led by Khalida Messaoudi, with the aim of defending women’s rights. They did have initial successes, for example they were able to have an early draft of the Family Code shelved in 1981, and even though this was only a temporary victory, it did not discourage the founding of further women’s groups after 1985 in response to the passing of the Family Code into law. Nonetheless, much of the credit for the 1981 victory in shelving the Family Code went to the female veterans of the war who had participated in the demonstrations alongside the young women. Messaoudi echoed sentiments at the time when she claimed in Unbowed that 'the revolt of the "history-makers" put him [Chadli] in a difficult situation. He could not claim that this was a revolt led by women on the extreme left [...]
or by feminists [...] The moudjahidat are the most legitimate women in the eyes of the people'.

Tahon argues that framing the victory in this way played into the existing power structure, which excluded younger women by emphasising only the role of the heroines of the war. By attributing the capitulation of the government to the women's demands solely to the intervention of the heroines of the war, the state in effect could ignore any other feminist voices and any change they might call for. In other words, the discourse that Messaoudi uses here reproduces the official rhetoric, something that reinforces the position of the regime and ensures that women are still represented as having legitimacy only through their role in the War of Independence. The official discourse permeates other types of discourse – and of note in this case, even those discourses such as Messaoudi’s that may class themselves as counter-discourses to the 'official' narrative.

There is, in fact, a strong link between the rhetoric of the War of Independence and the Family Code. The code solidifies in law many of the values espoused during the War of Independence – although with an undeniably Islamist flavour. The legislation set in law the earlier conception of the family as the fortress of national identity, starting with a general section that set the tone for the code:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Article 1er.} & \quad \text{Toutes les relations entre les membres de la famille sont régies par les dispositions de cette loi.} \\
\text{Art. 2.} & \quad \text{La famille est la cellule de base de la société, elle se compose de personnes unies par les liens de mariage et par les liens de parenté.} \\
\text{Art. 3.} & \quad \text{La famille repose dans son mode de vie sur l'union, la solidarité, la bonne entente, la saine éducation, la bonne moralité et l'élimination des maux sociaux.}
\end{align*}
\]

The statement that the family is the base of society is placed second only to the more practical announcement that all family life is dictated by the code. The symbolic nature of this position is in fact suggested by this first article, which implies a homogeneity to family life that is found in symbolic constructions rather than real-life ones where norms vary across ethnic and religious groups, and indeed regions (for example urban versus rural areas). Article 3 then clarifies further

---

60 Messaoudi and Schemla, *Unbowed*, p.50.

Unless indicated otherwise, all references to the code are taken from these two websites.
what the symbolic position entails by focusing on traditional values, *la bonne moralité et l'élimination des maux sociaux*. This suggests the conception of the family as a bastion of tradition that I talked about earlier. Furthermore, although Islamic values are not mentioned specifically here, the link between Islam and the Family Code is made clear by Article 8, which mentions Sharia law (laws derived from readings of the Koran and other Islamic texts): 'Il est permis de contracter mariage avec plus d'une épouse dans les limites de la chari’a si le motif est justifié'. The traditional values are specifically Arabo-Islamic values.

The patriarchal nature of these norms is also clear. For example, the code favoured the rights of men in terms of inheritance and divorce. Moreover (as seen above in Article 8), it legalised polygamy, but only in the case of men having multiple wives, not women having multiple husbands, and made it impossible for a Muslim woman to marry into a non-Muslim family: 'Art. 31. La musulmane ne peut épouser un non musulman'. On a symbolic level, the code stripped women of their subjectivity, since they were reduced to eternal minors, subject to the designs of their father, brother or closest male relative until marriage, at which time they became the responsibility of their husband. For example:

Art. 39. L'épouse est tenue de:
1º) obéir à son mari et de lui accorder des égards en sa qualité de chef de famille,
2º) allaiter sa progéniture si elle est en mesure de le faire et de l'élever,
3º) respecter les parents de son mari et ses proches.

Men were legally in charge of the family, while women were cast as mothers, tasked with the raising of children. The emphasis on respecting the husband's relatives further suggests the wife's lesser position in the wider family unit, while again also stressing the importance of the family. This example consequently makes it clear that women were legally cast in their traditional positions, as auxiliaries to men.63

**Islamism, Violence and Amnesty**

In 1976 Aïcha Lemsine's *La Chrysalide* became the first novel by an Algerian woman to be published since Djebar's *Les Alouettes naïves* in 1967. From 1979 onwards, other female-authored

63 The Family Code and its implications have been discussed by a number of critics, see for example Aitsiselmi, 'La femme algérienne'; Charrad, *States and Women's Rights*, (in particular pp.169-200).
texts such as Yamina Méchakra’s *La Grotte éclatée* (1979) began to appear, and women more generally made their voices heard in the form of mémoires and through historical and academic investigation (such as Mosteghanemi’s aforementioned *Algérie: femme et écritures*). The 1980s were also more generally marked by intellectual dissent: historians such as Harbi and Ali Haroun published texts that openly criticised the official version of history (although, as I mentioned in the introduction, the regime responded by banning many of these books), and cynicism about Chadli’s regime continued to grow as the decade went on. This was partly because Chadli solidified the link between the War of Independence and the one-party system by passing legislation that all officials in the mass organisations had to be FLN members, while ensuring that it became nearly impossible for new members to join the FLN. The nepotism and culture of ‘favours’ that had emerged was made more evident both by this action and by the issuing in of capitalist reform which put an end to the earlier socialist rhetoric of equality. The simultaneous hardships of everyday people that accompanied the global economic crisis of the 1980s led to escalating violence, with riots throughout the 1980s, culminating in October 1988 in Algiers when thousands of youths, mostly students and the unemployed, ransacked Algiers.

Following the riots of 1988, Chadli began to issue in cosmetic reforms to stem the budding civil discontent, one of which was to allow the creation of opposition political parties. By the end of 1991, these numbered sixty, but most were small. The one with the most support was the Front Islamique du salut (FIS), which wanted to make Algeria a conservative Islamic state based on Sharia Law and to abolish democracy, which the FIS labelled a French concept – suggesting the extent to which, nearly thirty years after independence, national identity was still being framed in terms of opposition to colonial culture. The Islamist movement had capitalised on the discontent of the population and had continued to gain popularity and momentum throughout the 1980s, and so when what have been called the first democratic elections in Algeria since independence were held in June 1990, the FIS won 54 percent of the vote in the first round, on a 65 percent turnout. It should be noted that women were able to vote in these elections. Unhappy with this result, since the reforms had really only been an attempt to recast the FLN as the legitimate leadership, the pouvoir, the ruling elite, stepped in and cancelled the second round of elections in

---

64 For an overview of literary, historical and academic writings by women in this period see Stora, ‘Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars’, pp.88-90.
66 This was nationwide, in Algiers, Oran and Constantine they won 70 percent of the vote (Evans and Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, p.157).
CHAPTER 1

1991, imprisoning the leaders of the FIS, declaring the party illegal and announcing as President Mohamed Boudiaf, one of the original leaders of the anti-colonial uprising in 1954. This sparked armed resistance by the Islamists, who refashioned themselves into a number of armed groups, among the most well known of which was the Groupe islamique armée (GIA). In 1992 Boudiaf was assassinated; it is unclear whether this was by an Islamist group or a faction within the government itself. Abdelaziz Bouteflika was inaugurated as President, a position he continues to hold. Boudiaf was not the only casualty of this period of Algerian history: over the next decade it is estimated that up to 150,000 lost their lives, both at the hands of Islamists, and through the violent repression by the government forces in response to the crisis. 

From the start of 1990, the FIS opposed women's groups who were calling for a repeal of the Family Code, but after 1991 this escalated to violent threats against the women who had headed the opposition to the Family Code: in 1993, as a result of her challenging the FIS on Algerian television, Khalida Messaoudi was condemned to death. She survived two assassination attempts. In addition to this, political opponents of the FIS and prominent intellectuals such as Tahar Djbouti were targeted for assassination, along with professional women (in particular French and sports teachers, magistrates and journalists) and more generally all those who refused to wear the veil. This was in part due to the demonisation of women in general by the Islamist movement (which Stora says believed about women that 'Elle suscite le désir et l'envie et doit être réprimée'), but can also be traced to the more general demonisation of the former colonial culture, of which unveiled and educated women were seen to be a representation.

As the conflict continued through the 1990s, women, along with men, were victims of the escalation of violence, killed or injured by bombs and during massacres, but women faced other particular threats: forced marriages and kidnappings. In 2000, Belloula, a journalist, published Algérie, le massacre des innocents, in which she weaves together testimonies from multiple girls and boys that she obtained through interviews during the 1990s. The text focuses on the violence against all children during this period, including many shocking details of murder – either that of children or the murders of family members witnessed by the children. A number of the girls she interviewed talked about how they were forced to 'marry' terrorists against their will and

---

subsequently raped, while others described how they were kidnapped and taken as captives in order to undertake domestic work for the Islamist groups. Once these women were in the camps they were not just used as domestic workers: the testimonies describe multiple rapes and bear witness to the murder of other women, in particular of those who became pregnant, and often in horrific manners.\textsuperscript{71} Whether women had worn the veil before being taken captive was irrelevant, as Mériem, one of the girls taken captive describes: ‘Nous n'avions pas le droit d'accomplir la prière, ni de couvrir nos cheveux ou de nous voiler le corps. Les filles qui portaient le hidjab comme moi n'avaient plus le droit de la porter. Tous ces gestes quotidiens étaient devenus des privilèges accordés juste aux femmes dites libres, les épouses, mères ou sœurs des terroristes’ (p.116). This suggests the escalation of violence by groups such as the GIA, whose policy from 1996 was that anyone who did not support them was an enemy of God and a justifiable target of violence.\textsuperscript{72} In addition to this policy, Belloula implies that many of the men in the armed Islamist groups used their cause as an excuse to simply do as they pleased, such as in the case of one lieutenant in the GIA who slaughtered a girl's family because he was in love with her and wanted to abduct her (pp.118-20). Incidents such as this suggest the way in which religious teachings or rhetoric were twisted and the Koran read selectively in such a way as to justify the violent desires of the groups or individuals (desires which Evans and Phillips put down to expression of masculinity and pent up frustrations at the worsening condition in the camps),\textsuperscript{73} rather than the rapes and kidnappings being themselves in some way linked to any overarching Islamist policy itself.

What happened to the victims of this violence is shocking, and in discussing how these events were represented I do not want to detract from the horror of the events themselves. Martin Evans and John Phillips, in \textit{Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed} – which presents a chronological history of Algeria since the beginning of the French occupation – discuss a documentary that aired on 10 April 1998 about women who were kidnapped, raped and brutalised by Islamists. They document how some people ‘claimed this was government propaganda, cynically using these women to blacken the Islamist cause as a whole’.\textsuperscript{74} While Evans and Phillips go on to note that the horror of the women’s experiences was nonetheless undeniable, the people that made this claim also raise a valid concern: the objectification of

\textsuperscript{71} See Belloula, \textit{Algérie, le massacre des innocents}, (in particular pp.34-38 and pp.109-23). Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.

\textsuperscript{72} Evans and Phillips, \textit{Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed}, p.219.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.220. This television programme is also referenced in Stora, ‘Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars’, p.78.
women by the state for political purposes. Non-satellite television was (and still is) state-controlled, and in this instance, as far as Evans and Phillips describe, the suffering of the women seems to stop short of openly criticising government policies. It is easy to see how a television show could be perceived as mere propaganda when those in charge of its transmission focused on this over material gains that might aid these women, for example by making changes to the Family Code which at the time allowed men to repudiate raped wives for 'dishonouring' them.

Of course, Belloula's narrative is itself polemical, since it not only condemns the violence (on both sides) and bears witness, but has a specific agenda: to provide material aid to children affected by the violence ('L'ordre du jour était l'urgence de dégager un plan d'action commune afin de porter aide aux enfants démunis' (p.168)). In this respect, and others – such as the fact that it was not until 1998 that the government arranged for a fetwa that permitted women who were raped by terrorists to have abortions (p.39) – Belloula is explicitly critical of the government, but she, like Messaoudi before her, nonetheless echoes the discourse of the state. On multiple occasions she frames the experiences of these children in terms of martyrdom – for example: 'un enfant martyr' (p.121); 'son martyrre' (p.117). Moreover, in order to convince the reader that the children of those deemed to be terrorists should not be shunned by society, she refers back to the children of the harkis, framing the current debate in terms of the War of Independence (p.172). It is interesting that, as McDougall notes, this was something that the Islamists and the government also did during this period. For example, the Islamists portrayed the FLN as having betrayed the revolutionary values and characterised them as the 'party of France' (hizb fransa), while the government described their actions in putting a stop to the elections as 'novembriste' (evoking the start of the war in November 1954). McDougall argues that this is not because the emphasis on the war has somehow ingrained this vocabulary into the political sphere, but that it is an intentional mobilisation of the images of the War of Independence, a deliberate appropriation of something that is widely held as important within wider society.\footnote{James McDougall, 'Savage wars? Codes of violence in Algeria, 1830s - 1990s', \textit{Third World Quarterly} 26, no. 1 (2005), 117-31 (pp.127-28). Vince also notes that the Islamists were cast by the government as sons of harkis (Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities', p.162).} I will argue in the coming chapters that this is one of the reasons that the authors I study continue to engage with the War of Independence: they redeploy these terms in order to challenge them. Perhaps more importantly for the moment though, whether Belloula purposefully or unconsciously frames her narrative through this lens, it speaks to the permeation of the 'official' discourse into other
discourses, even those that are, like Belloula’s, or those of the Islamists themselves, critical of some aspects of the regime.

Aside from Belloula, many other female voices sprang up during this period, many in response to the violence. Both Bey and Marouane began publishing in order to engage with the Civil War, and other well-known female authors published during this period such as Latifa Ben Mansour (La Prière de la peur, La Différence, 1997), and Feriel Assima (Une femme à Alger, 1995; Rhoulem ou le sexe des anges, 1996). It was in 1993 that Mosteghanemi published Memory in the Flesh, becoming the first Algerian woman to publish a novel in Arabic. Moreover, with the start of the Civil War, Djebar’s œuvre shifted from presenting history as a possible space of reappropriation of women’s experiences to presenting it as a potentially haunting and destructive presence, while Mokeddem, who had already published two novels, also shifted the focus of her œuvre to engage directly with the violence.

Non-fictional writings by women also began to appear in greater numbers during the 1990s, such as Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic Fundamentalism, an extensive interview between Messaoudi and Elisabeth Schlema (from which Messaoudi’s earlier quotations were taken). As I briefly mentioned earlier, it was also during this period that Amrane-Minne published her texts about women in the War of Independence, in 1991 and 1994. Her studies were particularly relevant at this time since the Islamists had cast themselves as the rightful heirs of the war, arguing that the FLN had betrayed the Islamic principles of the revolution, all the while denouncing the rights of women, even though women had been vital to that fight. Although Amrane-Minne’s investigations in some respects supported the emphasis on the war, she did not simply reproduce the official narrative of female participation, but filled in the gaps that had been forgotten (or indeed effaced). In particular, her second book, which is a collection of historically situated interviews, let women tell their stories in their own words. Testimonials of the war were certainly not without precedent (as demonstrated by ‘Journal d’une maquisarde’), but what she did that had not really been done before was to highlight the vital everyday participation of women. In these respects, Amrane-Minne’s historical investigations can be viewed in a similar vein to the fictional texts I examine, as a form of disruption of masculinist norms from within.

---

76 Stora, ‘Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars’, p.90.
77 This change in Djebar’s œuvre is discussed in detail in Hiddleston, Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria.
78 Starting with L’Interdite (1993).
79 Messaoudi and Schemla, Unbowed.
CHAPTER 1

The violence finally began to slow down by the end of the 1990s and in January 2000, following the Law on Civil Concord of the previous year, former members of the GIA, and other groups accused of terrorist activity by the state, were granted amnesty (although in certain areas the fighting has continued, with some groups for example allying themselves with international Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda). This amnesty was inscribed into law in 2005, granting immunity from prosecution to the majority of the armed Islamist groups and notably also to all agents of the state. Although the amnesty theoretically did not extend to those who committed rape, murder or terrorism, in practice these crimes were not investigated seriously and so no-one was brought to justice. Moreover, critical historical investigation of the violence was made illegal by the following decree, made by the government in 2006:

Anyone who, by speech, writing, or any other act, uses or exploits the wounds of the National Tragedy to harm the institutions of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state, or to undermine the good reputation of its agents who honorably served it, or to tarnish the image of Algeria internationally, shall be punished by three to five years in prison and a fine of 250,000 to 500,000 dinars.

Just as it did in the immediate post-war period, the regime attempted to efface the parts of history that did not comply with its vision of national identity and unity. The amnesty acted as a tool by which it could do this; as Le Sueur argues, bringing an end to the hostility in this way forced the population to forget the violence, meaning the amnesty has become 'a policy that attempts to inoculate a population from violence and retribution by giving it a historical lobotomy'. Nevertheless, as in previous periods, this did not stop counter-discourses from emerging. Aside from fictional interventions (including those I discuss in Chapter 3), the National Association of the Families of the Disappeared and SOS-Disparus were established in 1998 to petition the

---

81 Le Sueur discusses this criminalisation in relation to the amnesty in general: Le Sueur, Between Terror and Democracy, pp.90-94.
82 This is quoted by Ibid., p.91. For his original source see: Human Rights Watch, 'Algeria: New Amnesty Law Will Ensure Atrocities Go Unpunished', http://www.hrw.org/legacy/english/docs/2006/03/01/algeri12743.htm.
83 Le Sueur, Between Terror and Democracy, p.206. For an analysis of this period, from the riots of October 1988 to the introduction of the amnesty, see Roberts, The Battlefield Algeria. For an analysis which includes the later developments up to and including 2009 see Le Sueur, Between Terror and Democracy.
government about, and investigate what happened to, the many young men who were arrested during the 1990s and 'disappeared'.

**Algerian Women in the French Collective Consciousness**

As the violence of the 1990s was winding down in Algeria, in France the War of Independence began to receive a lot of attention. In the years immediately after the war a series of amnesties were granted for crimes committed during the War of Independence, and further laws were passed in 1974 and 1982 which undid all convictions relating to the war and pardoned those involved. It was not until 1999 that the French government finally passed a law which acknowledged that what had previously only been euphemistically referred to as military operations or 'pacification' was in fact a war, making it possible to refer to 'la guerre d'Algérie' in legal texts. This was sparked by the 1997 trial of Maurice Papon for the deportation of Jews during the Second World War, during which his involvement as police chief during the massacre of Algerian demonstrators in Paris in 1961 came under scrutiny. Because of the amnesties there had been no trials in relation to the War of Independence and so it was at Papon's trial that for the first time a judge, a representative of the state, admitted that there had been a massacre in Paris in 1961. This led to further discussions of the events surrounding the Algerian independence struggle.

Throughout the post-independence period, the official silence in France was challenged by historians such as Benjamin Stora, testimonials by victims and perpetrators, and in literature and films – often by specific groups with an interest in promoting their community’s collective memories, such as the children of harkis who succeeded in getting a plaque placed in the Invalides, and instituting a national day of homage to the harkis (the first of which took place in 2001). In 2000, however, the war was launched into the spotlight: Raphaëlle Branche defended her doctoral thesis on torture during the War of Independence; 'L'appel des douze', signed by notable anti-torture activists such as Gisèle Halimi, called for the official recognition by the French government of the torture committed in its name; and on 20th June 2000, an article by Florence

---

85 For details see Stora, *La Gangrène et l’oubli*, pp.281-83.
86 Jo McCormack, 'Social Memories in (Post)Colonial France: Remembering the Franco-Algerian War’, *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 4 (Summer 2011), 1129-38 (pp.1131-2).
87 Ibid., p.1133. The different groups involved in trying to gain recognition, as well as details of key films, literature and historical writings are discussed in Raphaëlle Branche, *La Guerre d’Algérie : une histoire apaisée ?* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), pp.15-54.
Beaugé featuring the testimony of Louisette Ighilahriz, a former moudjahida who was tortured and raped during the Algerian War, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde*. Two days later the newspaper published interviews with two men who had been generals during the war, Jacques Massu and Marcel Bigeard, who admitted using torture. This was followed later in the year by a similar admission by General Paul Aussaresses, but he, unlike the previous two generals, stood by the use of torture. General Maurice Schmitt, however, caused a storm in the French media when he dismissed Ighilahriz’s testimony in the abovementioned article and subsequent 'autobiography' (in fact written by Anne Nivat) as fabricated. During the 2003 trial brought by Ighilahriz against him for defamation of character, he backed up his claim by flagging up inconsistencies in the dates and facts both within the testimonies themselves and in relation to the testimonies of other people. Schmitt lost the initial trial, but the case was subject to a number of appeals which lasted until 2007 when the judge ruled that Schmitt should be let off and no further appeals could be made.

Ighilahriz did not volunteer her testimony, but was convinced by Beaugé to tell her story. Beaugé chose to write about and to present Ighilahriz as a victim of French torture, something which does not challenge the narrative of the victimised 'Third-World' woman. This was followed by the 'autobiography' by Anne Nivat. Presented as an authentic expression from an Algerian woman, Nivat’s framing of the text through a foreword and afterword, but lack of intervention in the body of the text, gives the impression, not that they are collaborating, but that Nivat is in control of the space which she allows the seemingly authentic voice to inhabit (the ethical implications of which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2). Moreover, emphasis is placed on Ighilahriz's longing to find the male French doctor who helped her, stressing her indebtedness to the figure of the French patriarch. Not only do these representations fail to challenge the representation of Algerian women in French society as victims, they in fact reinforce it. The text echoed in many ways the kind of discourses that were prevalent in France during the war itself, such as the book co-written by de Beauvoir and Halimi about Djamila Boupacha that I mentioned earlier: Ighilahriz, just like her fellow Algériennes during colonial time, was represented in France

---

88 For an overview of the 1999-2000 period see Prochaska, 'That Was Then, This Is Now', pp.136-7. 'L'appel des douze' was followed in 2004 by 'L'appel des 11', which reiterated these same sentiments. The signatory who did not take part in this second appel was Laurent Schwartz who died in 2002. Both texts are available at http://www.fabriquedesens.net/L-appel-des-12-a-la-condamnation


as a victim. Although this does not negate the fact that testimonies such as Ighilhariz’s brought attention afresh to the atrocities, the overly simplistic representation (that I discuss in detail in the next chapter) did not challenge the forty-year-old representation of Algerian women, but simply recreated it, just using a different woman as a symbol of her nation.

The fact that the symbolic nature of the Algerian woman has not moved on much from colonial times was further suggested by the banning of headscarves, and also more recently the burqa. These laws limiting women's rights to wear what they choose were passed under the guise of 'liberating' victims of Islamic patriarchy. While this is not isolated to Algerian women or women of Algerian ancestry, it does evoke the earlier emancipation project and partly explains why the idea of the Western feminist trying to liberate the third-world woman is still such a controversial image in Algeria today. The laws not only speak to the prevailing fear of the veiled woman who can see without being seen, they also imply that the casting of Algerian women as victims of Algerian patriarchy in the French national consciousness as part of the emancipation project continues to inform views on Algerian women (and Muslim women more generally) in France, just as it does in Algeria.

Of course, as I earlier argued in relation to Algeria, just because these views exist does not mean that they constitute the dominant or majority view. In 2005 in France, the UMP-controlled government (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) passed a law which stated that only the positive aspects of colonialism should be taught: 'Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit'.\(^91\) This met with strong opposition from academics who protested against the attempt at legislating the interpretation of history, and the law was subsequently retracted in 2006.\(^92\) The incident demonstrates the struggle to control the 'official' historical narrative in France, but it also shows the potential power of counter-discourses to disrupt these attempts. Literature has been cited as one of the ways that Algeria was created in

---

the French national consciousness, and so the fiction I study in the coming chapters can certainly be seen as part of the counter-discourse to official policies such as this in France.

The emergence of Francophone Algerian women writers in the 1980s and 1990s that I discussed earlier was an important development in this counter-discourse. In terms of women writing about Algeria, for nearly two decades, it was only pied-noir women who wrote about Algeria. In this phase the representation of Algerian women as Other was not truly challenged. For example, the most well-known of the pied-noir writers is arguably Marie Cardinal, who was born in Algiers. Fiona Barclay, talking about Cardinal’s 1980 novel which engages most directly with Algeria, *Au pays de mes racines*, argues that although sympathetic to Algerian women, the narrator does not actively take on their cause, describing their oppression, but dealing with it and them for only self-serving purposes. The representation of women had not evolved from earlier colonial times, since the Algerian women are described in a way that evokes a Western viewpoint looking in rather than an engagement as a fellow woman. In the 1980s, however, writers of mixed French and Algerian origin began to emerge and give voice to the immigrant experience. For example, Sebbar’s 1982 novel, *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, which tells the story of a run-away of Algerian ancestry, challenges the orientalism of earlier representations of Algerian women through the protagonist after whom the text is named, who explores and takes control of her own exoticisation. This emergence of writers like Sebbar in the 1980s in France coincided with the emergence of female writers from Algeria writing in French and publishing in France, which also challenged these orientalist images. This was followed in the 1990s by writers like Bouraoui (*La voyeuse interdite*, 1991) and a host of female writers of Algerian descent who wrote about their experiences as second and third generation immigrants (commonly referred to as *beur* writers). This diverse growing body of work undoubtedly nuanced the representation of Algerian women and women of Algerian heritage in the French collective consciousness.

As I will argue throughout the thesis, though, the power of counter-discourses to reshape and disrupt should not be overstated. For the most part the texts I study were originally published in France (with the notable exception of those by Mosteghanemi), and subject to French publishers’ views on how their texts should be presented. In a telling example, Mokeddem refused

---

93 For a discussion of how literature narrated the creation of French Algeria and therefore helped to shape it in the minds of the French population see Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
94 Stora, ‘Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars’, p.84.
95 Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France*, p.78.
96 This is discussed by Stora, ‘Women’s Writing between Two Algerian Wars’, p.89.
to be published by Harmattan, as she did not want to end up in a ‘ghetto tiers-mondiste’. Nevertheless her texts have still been subject to pigeon-holing, for example on the initial publication of *L’Interdite* the cover was adorned with a picture of veiled women. This was one of the texts written in response to the violence of the 1990s, but far from evoking the protagonist who refuses to bow to Islamist oppression, or the violence the nation was currently suffering from, this image of veiled women presents the stereotype which still prevails in France, the orientalist image of anonymous, veiled Algerian women. This suggests that the counter-discourse these authors provide has the potential to disrupt masculinist and colonialist discourses, but that this disruption is neither guaranteed to permeate all of society, nor to prompt any changes if it does.

**Contemporary Algeria**

With the exception of Mosteghanemi’s *Chaos of the Senses*, all the texts studied in the following chapters were published after the worst of the violence that took over Algeria in the 1990s. They all return to Algerian history in one way or another, but even when they describe the events of the past that I have explored in this chapter, this is undoubtedly with the present in mind. Despite the fact that the representation of Algerian women has changed only a little since colonial times, the material condition of women has improved, particularly over the past decade. Recent studies have shown that women make up around 60% of university students and over half of professionals in fields such as medicine and law. In 2011, in the wake of the so-called Arab spring, the state of emergency which had been in place since the violence of the 1990s was finally lifted, which in theory means less government control. Nevertheless, censorship of the press is still rife, with arrests of journalists not uncommon; in their 2011 report, Reporters Without Borders stated that ‘press offences remain punishable by prison sentences and fines. Article 144a of the Algerian criminal code, in force since 2001, provides for jail sentences of two to twelve years and fines for any comments seen as defamatory’. As I mentioned earlier, television has been controlled by the state since independence, and even though legislation is in the works to allow private stations to operate more freely, currently they must broadcast from abroad (with licences granted to

---

undertake limited filming in the country) – although tellingly in 2014 in the run-up to the elections one such channel was raided a number of times and eventually temporarily shut down after airing footage of anti-government protests. The fact that there were protests suggests the ongoing counter-discourse, but the examples of censorship cited above show how the government continues to attempt to control the national narrative as played out in the media.

The War of Independence continues to play an important role in this national narrative. 2012 marked the fifty-year anniversary of independence, and unsurprisingly this was accompanied by festivals, road renamings, and similar types of events. More generally than this, the war continues to be the focus of nationalism. According to the online news site Algérie Focus, the Ministère des Moudjahidine (which is responsible for paying the pensions of war veterans and covering the numerous other expenses linked to the privileges afforded them) was allocated more money for 2014 than the ministries of agriculture or justice. In fact, it benefitted from an increase of 20 billion Algerian dinars from 2013 (approximately equivalent to 150 million pounds sterling), leading the journalist Abdou Semmar to surmise that ‘notre État, dans ses prévisions budgétaires, se préoccupe davantage de son passé que de son futur’ – although interestingly, he is specifically critical of the way the funds have been divided rather than of the need to fund the Ministère des Moudjahidine, which he says has ‘Une mission certainement noble’.

In terms of women in 'official' discourse, since the 1990s, the Algerian state has portrayed itself as the defender of women's rights in contrast to the Islamist opposition, and in doing so has often returned to the ideas of the anti-colonial struggle. Vince quotes the following, written by Bouteflika for International Women's Day in 2007: 'The Algerian woman has, over time, faced many challenges. From Lalla Fatma N'Soumer to [1990s athlete] Hassiba Boulmerka, through the valiant mujahidat and the women martyrs of the national tragedy [the 1990s civil violence] the Algerian woman has forced respect by her courage, her resistance and her heroism' (El Moudjahid, 8-3-07). Here the victims of the 1990s are explicitly linked to the moudjahidates, and the evocation of them as martyrs, and of the heroism of women in general, evokes the discourse

103 Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities', pp.32-33.
surrounding the War of Independence. Yet despite this rhetoric, the Family Code continues to cast women as objectified wives and mothers.

As of 2014, the Family Code is still in place in Algeria. In 2005, after years of campaigning from women's groups and their supporters, some of the more restrictive elements of the law were repealed, such as the banning of Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, and the entirety of Article 39 which dictated the duties of a wife (quoted earlier). Reforms were also made that, among other small improvements, protected women in case of divorce, but the government stopped short of fully repealing the law due to pressure from Islamists and other conservative elements. Although much improved, the code as it stands today still favours the rights of men, for example, polygyny is still legal and while men can still repudiate their wives without question (although with a more stringent legal process than before), women can still only request a divorce under certain circumstances (although there is a stipulation that if the husband abuses his power he must pay his former wife reparations): 'Le divorce est la dissolution du mariage. Il intervient par la volonté de l'époux ou à la demande de l'épouse dans la limite des cas prévus aux articles 53 et 54'. The code creates an inequality before the law, and this inequality favours men in terms of material conditions. Aside from the material disadvantages, the continued existence of the code acts as a form of official discourse which places women symbolically in the position of objects, and, since Articles 1, 2 and 3 are still in place, continues to emphasise the symbolic nature of the family in Algerian society as a foundation of nationalism.

Yet the continued fight by women’s groups against the Family Code reinforces the fact that, as I have argued throughout this chapter, these representations may influence and legislate reality, but they do not represent the whole picture. The fight against objectification is encapsulated in one of the most well-known literary examples of a woman as a symbol of the nation, that of the titular figure of Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*. The non-linear narrative written during the War of Independence and hailed as one of the key literary texts of Algerian nationalism, tells the story of four men's obsession with Nedjma, a woman with a French mother and unknown Algerian father, who is coerced into running away to their ancestral home in the mountains. Nedjma's figuration by Kateb as capable of 'électriser la rumeur publique' echoes the mobilisation of women in general for the sake of national identity (their role being to capture the attention of the nation as symbols), but Winifred Woodhull undertakes a feminist reading of the text, arguing that the novel does contain the promise of liberation for women, and although

---

Nedjma's seclusion at the end of the text conveys the risk to women when they are used as symbols, Nedjma does not go willingly to her fate, but tries to escape and is led by force to the women's encampment.\textsuperscript{107}

In Woodhull's reading Nedjma therefore sets an example of resistance by women to their symbolic roles. In the coming chapters I will discuss the various ways that the fictional women in the texts I study attempt, like Nedjma in Woodhull's reading, to create empowerment through – or in spite of – the positions enforced upon them. Or to put it another way: in my analysis, the texts attempt to challenge the various representations I have examined in this chapter in a somewhat similar way to Woodhull, by undertaking feminist readings of the past. What the protagonists of the texts studied in the next four chapters have in common is that, just like Nedjma in Woodhull's feminist reading, they may not be able to escape female stereotypes, but they are drawn into them unwillingly, destabilising them in the process.

\textsuperscript{107} Woodhull, \textit{Transfigurations of the Maghreb}, pp.24-37.
CHAPTER 2

Heroism Between History and Fiction

Djebar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*, Marouane’s *La Jeune fille et la mère* and Bey’s *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*

In a short piece entitled 'Les Cicatrices de l’histoire', Bey discusses her concerns over writing about her father, who was tortured and killed during the War of Independence:

J’ai longtemps hésité parce que je ne voulais pas qu’à l’instar de beaucoup d’écrivains de mon pays ou d’ailleurs, mon travail d’écriture soit centré sur la déploration et/ou la célébration d’un passé forcément glorieux élevé au rang de mythe qui détermine tout le devenir des générations suivantes. Il n’est pas facile, et des milliers de jeunes Algériens vous le diront, de succéder ou de s’identifier à des héros. Surtout quand les héros (parfois autoproclamés) porteurs d’une vérité, leur, sont vivants et qu’ils s’arrogent des privilèges à ce titre.¹

Despite these concerns, in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* Bey does indirectly deal with her father’s death. In the récit, an Algerian woman, whose father was – like Bey’s – tortured and murdered during the War of Independence, shares a train carriage with a Frenchman who was complicit in these crimes, and who recounts them in italicised sections throughout the text. In this way, fiction allows Bey to explore the aspects of her father’s death that she cannot know because of the amnesty in France (which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, was implemented immediately after the War of Independence and silenced any investigation into the crimes).

Djebar and Marouane also use fiction to fill in historical gaps in *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* respectively – they both fictionalise real-life heroines and so combat the effacement of female participation in the war. Djebar’s *La Femme sans sépulture* deals with the return of the narrator to her home town of Césarée to make a film about Zoulitha, a real-life female resistance fighter who was killed during the War of Independence and who appears as a ghost in the text. Marouane’s *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, which explores the relationship between the narrator and her mother, is more straightforwardly fictional, but Marouane has stated that the text is ‘biographique’ in the sense that the mother in the text is based on her own mother, who

was a freedom fighter during the war nicknamed Jeanne d’arc, just like the mother in the text. The above passage consequently sums up the dilemma for all three authors: on the one hand there is a desire to bear witness, to fill in the blanks of history; on the other, the very act of writing about hero(in)es upholds discourses of heroism and martyrdom that continue to shape a rigid understanding of Algerian national identity within the post-independence state.

It is my contention that fiction offers peculiar resources in confronting this dilemma. I will draw on arguments made, in a very different context, by Judith Butler, in her article ’Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion’, where Butler argues that although the appropriation of femininity by drag artists undermines the gender divide, it also upholds femininity in a misogynistic way. According to Butler, drag artistry highlights this ambivalence and so creates a gap between that which has been appropriated and its new form, and it is in this gap that subversion can take place. The literary ’appropriation’ of hero(in)es in the two texts presents a similar ambivalence: literature (as a medium through which history transforms to cultural memory) perpetuates notions of heroism, while literary devices allow the authors to undermine heroism as defined by the post-independence state (such as reinserting women into the historical record). I contend that overt fictionality – suggested by a ghost in Djebar's text, an angel in Marouane's and metafictional elements in Bey's – foregrounds the gap between history and fiction by reminding the reader of the gap between the real person and the representation of the person. This casts new light on the instability of all discourses about heroism, both by the state and the texts, and means the texts avoid replacing one monolithic interpretation of history with another.

Ethical Appropriations: Assia Djebar's La Femme sans sépulture

As I mentioned in the Introduction, throughout her fictional oeuvre, one of Djebar's projects has been to reinsert women into the historical record – for example, when she recreates the brutality against women in colonial history in L'Amour la Fantasia, or when she foregrounds women within

---


3 Leïla Marouane, La Jeune Fille et la Mère (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p.21. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.

the history of Islam in *Loin de Médine*.\(^5\) In *La Femme sans sépulture* the history she attempts to recuperate is that of female participation in the War of Independence, and in particular the participation of one woman who was her neighbour when she was a child: Zoulikha, the *femme sans sépulture* of the title. Zoulikha was left without a tomb after she was tortured and killed by the French, and her body left by the side of the road where it was found by a local man who buried her (in the text this location remains unknown, although at the time the text was published the man had in fact come forward and the burial site had been found).\(^6\) *La Femme sans sépulture* weaves four monologues by Zoulika's ghost into a narrative that describes the interactions of the narrator with the women who had known Zouikha when she was alive— in particular Zoulikha's two daughters, Mina and Hania. The interactions with the various women who know Zoulikha is itself a loosely autobiographical rendering of Djebar's own investigations into Zoulikha, which she undertook before making her film *La Noubâ des femmes du Mont Chenoua* in 1978, and in which Zoulikha is also represented. I will return to Djebar's autobiographical voice in Chapter 4, when I discuss the more recent *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, but here I focus on how Zoulikha is represented, and specifically on the ethical implications of rendering her in fiction.

As a number of critics have noted, *La Femme sans sépulture* blurs the line between reality and fiction.\(^7\) This is established from the beginning of the text, which starts with an 'Avertissement':

>`Dans ce roman, tous les faits et détails de la vie et de la mort de Zoulikha, héroïne de ma ville d'enfance, pendant la guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie, sont rapportés avec un souci de fidélité historique, ou, dirais-je, selon une approche documentaire.

>Toutefois, certains personnages, aux côtés de l'héroïne, en particulier ceux présentés comme de sa famille, sont traités ici avec l'imagination et les variations que permet la fiction.

>J'ai usé à volonté de ma liberté romanesque, justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée davantage, au centre même d'une large fresque féminine — selon le modèle des mosaïques si anciennes de Césarée de Maurétanie (Cherchell).\(^8\)`

---


\(^6\) For historical details of Zoulikha's life and death and how they differ from the text see Mortimer, 'Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls', pp.111-12.

This 'Avertissement' positions Zoulikha between history and fiction. In doing this, Djebar immediately highlights the difference between the heroine and the representation of the heroine, signalling the gap between the real-life heroine that has been appropriated and her new fictional form. Djebar then explicitly foregrounds the reconfiguration through the evocation of the mosaics that form a motif throughout the text. Later in the text, Djebar visits these mosaics with one of Zoulikha's daughters, and particular attention is paid to a mosaic depicting the story of Ulysses and the sirens. Djebar flags up to the reader that the mosaic reconfigures the original myth, since the narrator notes that in the mosaic the sirens are 'femmes-oiseaux' (p.116), but emphasizes that 'd’ordinaire, les sirènes sont imaginées en femmes-poissons' (pp.117-18). The narrator sees Zoulikha as one of the bird women, thus linking the reworked sirens to the reworked heroine, and reminding the reader of the gap between the representation and the represented.

Overt reconfiguration is not something new in Djebar's œuvre. Her 1980 collection of short stories, Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement, for example, reconfigures Delacroix's painting after which the text is named. In this collection, Djebar places herself in a lineage of reconfigurers, talking about the series of paintings by Picasso which also reconfigure Delacroix's paintings. Djebar sees Picasso's reconfiguration as emancipating: 'Car il n'y a plus de harem, la porte en est grande ouverte et la lumière y entre ruisselante'. She highlights the emancipating elements through comparison with the original, implying that this emancipation takes place through the reworking of the original Orientalist painting, something she emulates. Nonetheless, she is drawn to Delacroix's original, seeing something in the image that she finds attractive – she does not include the painting to reject it, but embraces certain aspects of it (such as the fact that the women are unveiled, and that they form some kind of feminine community). Djebar does not straightforwardly oppose herself to Delacroix, but places herself within the same tradition as him, and as Picasso. All of these elements in the text signal the ambivalence of her appropriation of the painting: on the one hand she undermines the original by creating her own version complete with female agency; on the other, by reworking the painting (rather than rejecting it outright) she upholds its importance to the tradition of representing Algerian women, and thus upholds the Orientalist tradition it represents.

8 Assia Djebar, La Femme sans sépulture (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p.9. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.
In the case of the myth of Ulysses and the sirens in *La Femme sans sépulture*, something similar is at play. The evocation of the sirens upholds the misogyny of the original myth, but undermines it by reworking the sirens as bird women (although it is interesting to note that Djebar does not make it clear whether the reworking of the sirens is something done by the mosaic or by her interpretation of the mosaic, meaning the image of the bird women could be her reconfiguration, or it could be the original artist's reconfiguration that she further reconfigures as she does with Picasso's paintings in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*). When the narrator links Zoulikha to the bird women, she not only signals the gap between the real-life heroine and the fictional heroine, she also flags up the ambivalence of her appropriation of the heroine, since Zoulikha is implicitly linked to the original sirens along with the bird women, just as Djebar's representation of a heroine in fiction relies on certain narratives of heroism that have been used to silence women in the post-independence state. Djebar's repeated return to the myth throughout the text reminds the reader of the fact that the fictional heroine is a reconfiguration and that this reconfiguration is not a straightforward subversion of the overcommemorated figure of the heroine.

When Djebar likens Zoulikha to the sirens on the mosaic, she stresses that one of the aspects that draws her to make the comparison is that the image of the sirens is half effaced, just like Zoulikha's story has been effaced from history: 'Femme-oiseau de la mosaïque, elle paraît aujourd'hui, pour ses concitoyens, à demi effacée!' (p.236). This suggests why Djebar feels the need to write about Zoulikha, to fill in the gaps of history that have led to her story being forgotten, along with that of countless other women. As Anne Donadey argues: 'post-independence writers feel the necessity of rewriting the past because the dominant versions of history have left blanks, gaps, and misrepresentations. These writers thus overwrite the palimpsest of historiography, filling out its blanks and responding to its misrepresentations through fiction'. In this respect, Djebar's text is very similar to the project of Amrane-Minne that I discussed in the previous chapter: both recuperate the experiences of women during the war. Yet there are certain historical facts that can never be recovered through traditional historical investigation, such as the exact circumstances of Zoulikha's death, or indeed what she was thinking when she was tortured by the French. What Djebar is able to do that Amrane-Minne cannot, is to represent not only what has been effaced, but what cannot be known about Zoulikha.

---

10 Anne Donadey, 'Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*', *L'Esprit créateur* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2008), 81-91 (p.66).
Fiction is able to fill in the gaps in this case because, as I discussed in the Introduction, it does not have the same obligation to the truth.

The indefinability that makes fiction so malleable, however, is also the thing that requires it to rely on history such as Amrane-Minne's interviews when filling in historical gaps. The fact that fiction functions under a different obligation to truth than history does affect the nature of its authority – although fiction can to a certain extent circumvent the hazards of representing the past, it is also open to being dismissed as speculation or lies. It is for this reason that the history/fiction entre-deux is so important: history needs fiction to fill in the gaps, but fiction needs history to lend it the power associated with the real-life event. That is to say: without the pre-existence of historical investigations which show that women really did participate in the war in a material and vital manner, fictional texts such as La Femme sans sépulture could be accused of simply making up an alternate history. Equally, the overt fictionality reminds the reader that the fiction does not substitute for historical investigation. Attridge argues that although literature allows us access to aspects of history and culture that are forgotten, we must be wary since 'there is a danger that the "reality effect", the created illusion of a real referent, may interfere with as much as it aids accurate historical and human judgment'.

Djebar's insistence on the fictionality of the text counters the reality effect and stops her fictional rendering of Zoulikha standing in for the real-life heroine and others like her.

The overt fictionality is also important in terms of the ethics of representing the Other. One of the main things that critics who study biography agree on is that biographies, like history, have an obligation to the truth. A number of critics of biographical writing also argue that authors must hold themselves to a higher ethical standard when they represent someone who is 'vulnerable', which is to say someone who has no power to counter any representation of them (such as children) – Zoulikha is dead, and so vulnerable in the sense that she cannot respond to Djebar's text. For Djebar the problem that arises is that, as I mentioned a moment ago, in the

---

12 Truth as the basis of ethical biography is advocated by a number of critics (some of whom are biographers): see Elizabeth Bidinger, The Ethics of Working Class Autobiography: Representation of Family by Four American Authors (London: McFarland, 2006), pp.4-6; Frank, 'Experiments with Truth', pp.11-12. Manis goes further, suggesting that biographers should be subject to a code of ethics (similar to those of social scientists or doctors) based on a responsibility to the truth. See Jerome G. Manis, 'What Should Biographers Tell?: The Ethics of Telling Lives', Biography 17, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 386-95. For a discussion of different types of biography see Frank, 'Experiments with Truth', pp.3-5.
13 For a discussion of how the dead are vulnerable Others see Frank, 'Experiments with Truth', p.12. For a discussion of the ethics of representing other vulnerable Others such as children see Bidinger, The Ethics of Working Class Autobiography, p.3; G. Thomas Couser, 'Raising Adam: Ethnicity, Disability, and the Ethics of Life Writing in Michael Dorris's The Broken Cord', Biography 21, no. 4 (Fall 1998), 421-44.
case of Zoulikha certain truths cannot be known, and so fiction is the only option open to her to represent these aspects of Zoulikha's life and death. The way that Djebar overtly signals that her representation of Zoulikha is fictional by representing her as a ghost constitutes, I would argue, an ethical engagement with the Other. Djebar wants to represent Zoulikha's torture and murder at the hands of the French in order to recuperate her sacrifice into the historical record, but she has no way to do this using traditional biographical methods because the truth of what happened has been permanently effaced. Biographies make assumptions or summations on behalf of the Other, based on the available evidence. In light of the lack of available evidence, Djebar makes the same kind of assumptions, but overtly signals that these are not based on known historical truths by stressing their fictionality – although of course, they are based on the historical truth that women were tortured and raped during interrogations by the French. Djebar recognises the ethical implications of representing Zoulikha, and uses fictionality to implicitly highlight this problem.

The fictionality is especially important because of how Djebar undermines the post-independence conceptualisation of the figure of the heroine by linking torture to sexual desire: 'Est-ce que, si cela continuait, la torture sur mon corps aurait le même effet que presque vingt ans de nuits d'amour avec trois époux successifs ? Ou cette confusion était-elle sacrilège ? Torture ou volupté, ainsi réduite soudain à rien, un corps' (p.218). Donadey talks in detail about the implications of linking torture to sexual desire in this way, citing two possible co-existing interpretations: the first is that Zoulikha is complying with the Orientalist desire to show complicity of women with their rape (real or metaphorical); the second is that it problematises Zoulikha so she cannot be appropriated for postcolonial propaganda by the post-independence regime. Donadey contends that while the second possibility is more palatable, Djebar purposefully implies both to make the reader uncomfortable.14

To Donadey's analysis, I want to add that by making the reader uncomfortable, the linking of torture to sexual pleasure undermines the figure of Zoulikha as a heroine. In La Disparition de la langue française (2003), the text Djebar published after La Femme sans sépulture, the protagonist says of torture: 'Pour nous, à la Casbah, la torture, cela ne pose qu'un problème : il y a ceux qui tiennent et il y a ceux qui ne tiennent pas. Deux catégories : des héros (de vrais salauds quelquefois, mais héros) et des non-héros'.15 While Zoulikha does not give up any information, and thus falls into the category of hero by this definition, the linking of torture to sexual pleasure and

---

the connotations which accompany it undermine this black or white definition of what it is to be a hero(ine). Djebar thus challenges rigid understandings of heroism, but stresses the fictionality of the text in order to separate the real Zoulikha from her sexually transgressive fictional double, and to avoid tarnishing the reputation of the real-life heroine – indeed, the desire is expressed by Zoulikha's ghost, so when the text is at its most fictional. None of this is to suggest that writing about a person in a fictional context bypasses the ethical problem of representing the Other. What I want to argue is that Djebar's particular rendering of a real person in fiction is ethical because of the very self-conscious way that she presents her own role in the process of representation and the overt way that she signals the gap between the representation and the represented.

It is not enough to simply point to this gap. Butler argues that this sort of gap is not subversive if the reader is able to exoticise the subject of the appropriation. Butler’s article is about the documentary *Paris is Burning*, which is about the drag ball culture in New York City. She argues that although the appropriation of dominant culture by the drag artists can successfully remake the terms of domination, the film is only able to highlight this remaking if it implicates the spectator in his or her own performance of gender. In other words, if spectators are able to distance themselves from the performance by exoticising the drag artists (which is to say distancing the performance of gender enacted by the drag artists from their own performance of gender), no subversion takes place. The same can therefore be said of Zoulikha: if the reader does not recognise her own implication in the creation and maintenance of the discourse of heroism that Zoulikha troubles, if she 'others' Zoulikha and the text along with her, no subversion takes place.

Butler – after bell hooks – criticises *Paris is Burning* because the white documentary maker, Jennie Livingston, puts the documentary together in such a way that the camera acts as a white gaze looking upon predominantly non-white subjects, thus exoticising them. As Butler summarises: 'the ethnographic conceit of a neutral gaze will always be a white gaze, an unmarked white gaze, one that passes its own perspective off as the omniscient, one that presumes upon and enacts its own perspective as if it were no perspective at all'. In this respect, the fictional texts examined here stand in contrast to a text such as *Algérienne*, Louisette Ighilahriz's 'autobiography' – in actual fact written by Anne Nivat, a Frenchwoman – about her torture and rape during the War of Independence. Nivat does not acknowledge her position as a collaborator.

---

16 Butler, 'Gender is Burning', p.393.
17 Ibid., p.391. This point is closely linked to the now generally-accepted argument made in relation to gender by Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* 19, no. 3 (1978), 51-112.
in the writing process – the only authorial intrusions in *Algérienne* are in the form of historical or linguistic footnotes, casting Nivat in the role of ethnographer, and exoticising Ighilahriz by positioning her as the Other (in relation to a presumed audience to whom the historical context and Arabisms must be explained). There is an introduction credited to Nivat, but at the end of this introduction Nivat claims about Ighilahriz’s testimony: ‘Je lui laisse la parole’.\(^{18}\) Nivat is in control of Ighilahriz’s words, but presents the text as if, to echo Butler’s phrasing, hers were no perspective at all.\(^{19}\)

Butler implies that by more heavily emphasising the place of the camera as an instrument of Livingston’s cinematic desire in the making of the film, for example by emphasising her position as filmmaker through her intrusions into the frame, the white phallic gaze would have been undermined.\(^{20}\) The narrator in *La Femme sans sépulture* is represented as being an outsider and an insider. She is from the village, which is established from the very beginning of the text – ‘Je me trouve chez la fille de l’héroïne de la ville. De ma ville, « Césarée »’ (p.13) – but she refers to herself in such ways as ’la visiteuse’, (p.78) and 'l’étrangère pas tellement étrangère' (p.77). This arguably refers to her place as ethnographer, as she is at once outside the story of Zoulikha (it is not her own story to tell), and, as the one writing it, within the story itself, implicated in the text. Unlike Livingston, Djebar acknowledges her implication in the creation of the text: she is within the text, influencing the actions, while also outside it as a visitor to Zoulikha’s world and story.

It should be stressed that Ighilahriz was educated and was part of the feminist movement so she need not be considered vulnerable in the same way as Zoulikha, since she had a voice, and was from a stratum of society where her voice could be heard (which it in fact was, during the trial I discussed in Chapter 1). Nonetheless, there are certainly things that Nivat could have done in order to implicate herself in the narrative. In *Algérie, le massacre des innocents*, discussed in the previous chapter, Belloula implicates herself in the writing process by telling the stories in the third person and commentating throughout. Moreover, Belloula’s focus on the act of writing highlights her intervention on the page: ‘Je suis désorientée comme au sortir d’un cauchemar. Mon cœur bat fort et mes pensées sont encore brouillées. […] Mes doigts se crispent sur le stylo et refusent de se mouvoir. Mes doigts contractés s’entremêlent aux cheveux de Nour El Houda. Dieu,


\(^{19}\) My reading here is in contrast to critics such as Mortimer, who reads the text as a collaboration and example of female solidarity. See Mortimer, ‘Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls’, pp.107-10.

\(^{20}\) ‘I would have liked to have seen the question of Livingston’s cinematic desire reflexively thematized in the film itself, her intrusions into the frame as “intrusions”, the camera implicated in the trajectory of desire that it seems compelled to incite’ (Butler, ‘Gender is Burning’, pp.392-93).
quel joli prénom pour, encore, un enfant martyr' (p.121). Another example from the previous chapter that also implicates the author is *Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic Fundamentalism*, written by Elisabeth Schemla about the earlier mentioned Algerian feminist Khalida Messaoudi. Schemla inserts herself into the text through the use of an interview format that suggests that the creation of the text was an interaction between herself and her subject. The implication of the author is also possible in historical investigations. Of particular note, Amrane-Minne acknowledges her intervention in the interviews she transcribes when she states at the beginning of the volume that she not only translates, but also changes some turns of phrase because she is moving from the oral to the written: 'Lorsqu’une paysanne compose une chanson, elle réfléchit à son texte et, mentalement, elle le modifie, l’améliore. Il faut donc corriger, supprimer les détours de la mémoire qui recherche le fil des souvenirs, et contracter le texte pour lui donner de l’intensité tout en sauvegardant la spontanéité du récit oral et en respectant la personnalité de chacune'.\(^{21}\) She thus tells the reader of her intervention from the start of the text. Moreover, before each woman's story, she undertakes an historical interlude, where she verifies the story and situates it, meaning she is ever present in the narrative, reminding the reader that her presence is the catalyst for what is being said.

Djebar also talks about moving from the oral to the written in relation to her attempts to capture the female oral tradition in her writing. In *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, she says: 'Certes, l'écriture littéraire, parce qu'elle s'accomplit sur un autre registre linguistique (ici le français), peut tenter d'être un retour, par translation, à la parole traditionnelle comme parole plurielle (parole des autres femmes), mais aussi parole perdue, ou plutôt, *son de parole perdue*.\(^{22}\) Here Djebar suggests that she reconfigures the oral tradition in the same way that she reconfigures Zoulikha and Delacroix's painting. In fact, in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Djebar links the reconfiguration of the oral tradition directly to Zoulikha – her eldest daughter, Hania, is not able to have children because of the loss of menstruation after the disappearance of her mother's body and this loss of menstruation is accompanied by outbursts of speech:

\[
\text{Ainsi, une parole menue, basse, envahit la fille ainée de Zoulikha, dans l'étirement de son insomnie. Elle parle sans s'arrêter, pour elle seule. Sans reprendre souffle. Du passé présent. Cela la prend comme de brusques accès de fièvre. Une fois tous les six mois ; quelquefois une seule fois par an ; cette maladie a tendance à faiblir.}
\]


\(^{22}\) Djebar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, p.77.
Il y a dix ans tout juste, germa en elle cette parole ininterrompue qui la vide, qui, parfois la barbouille, mais en dedans, comme un flux de glaire qui s'écoulerait sans perte, mais extérieur...

[...]

[...] La parole en elle coule : à partir d'elle [...]. Quêter sans fin sa mère, ou plutôt, se dit-elle, c'est la mère en la fille, par les pores de celle-ci, la mère, oui, qui sue et s'exhale.

[...] une sorte d'hémorragie sonore persiste. Elle n'eut plus jamais de menstrues, précisément depuis ce jour de sa recherche en forêt. Elle n'y prend garde. Les voisines, les parentes, quand elle s'alite dans la silence, interrogent : « Quand nous annonceras-tu une grossesse ? Une naissance ? »

Hania ne répond pas. (pp.63-5) [my italics]

The loss of menstruation is juxtaposed with the image of a verbal haemorrhage. Combined with the images of the speech as bodily fluids flowing from her and the rhythmic nature of its return, this suggests that the menstrual cycle is replaced by a verbal form of menstruation. Menstruation is linked to fertility, so Hania's verbal menstruation can be linked to an alternative form of motherhood suggested in Ces voix qui m'assiègent: 'la femme qui peut écrire (on écrit d'abord pour soi, car l'écriture amène le dialogue avec soi), cette femme risque d'expérimenter un pouvoir étrange, le pouvoir d'être femme autrement que par l'enfantement maternel' [my italics].23 The fact that Djebar uses the phrase 'enfantement maternel' rather than 'motherhood' suggests that writing is another type of 'enfantement'. Hania's outbursts in the passage above are pour elle seule, linking them to the idea that writing is pour soi. This links Hania's outbursts to the alternative form of 'enfantement' that is writing. She physically creates her mother from her body as either sweat or breath and the orality is made physical just as when it is written: it is as if the bringing forth of the oral tradition is Hania's 'enfantement', just as the writing of the oral tradition is Djebar's.

Donadey argues that Hania's channelling of her mother is a sign of incorporation, which is a psychoanalytic theory of haunting set out by Abraham and Torok, whereby someone imagines having swallowed that which has been lost and so the lost body becomes incorporated into the body of the 'swallower', who becomes inhabited, or haunted. Donadey clarifies that incorporation comes from the desire to cover up the shame of the lost one's secret, which she argues is linked to Zoulikha's desire for Costa, suggesting that the secret is that of a whole generation: the rape of moudjahidates and also their possible sexual desire for the coloniser mentioned above.24

23 Ibid., p.76.
24 Donadey, 'Introjection and Incorporation', p.82.
Chapter 2

Donadey’s analysis certainly accounts for the physicality of the passage, but it does not take into account the bringing forth of the mother by Hania. Abraham and Torok posit that ghosts come only from the past to affect the present, but the bringing forth of the ghostly mother evokes the more atemporal notion of the other main strand of what we might call hauntology: Jacques Derrida’s notion in *Spectres de Marx* that ghosts come from the past, present and future. The ghost of Zoulikha comes from the past generation to haunt her daughter, but is in some ways also the future generation created by her daughter.

The ensuing atemporality undermines the linear temporalisation of women’s reproductive function within nationalism. Spivak argues that mothers, as the ones who bring children into the world, represent the time before, the already-there, while daughters hold the future of the nation in their wombs. The atemporality of the daughter giving birth to the mother subverts the linearity of the rigid line of succession in which women are perpetually held. Hania does not hold the future of the nation in her womb, as she is not able to have children; rather she bears the past, in the form of her mother. In other words, just as Djebar remakes Delacroix’s painting rather than reject it, and just as she reconfigures the figure of the heroine rather than dismiss her from history, Djebar embraces the important role of women as mothers and the need for a female lineage, but remodels both in a way that subverts the linear temporality that fixes women within one role in the nation. The resulting female collective is not idealised in the text – for example, solidarity is shown to break down when Zoulikha needed a place to stay for the night and was turned away by the women who were a part of her resistance network: ‘La dame fait non, très vite non et seulement de la tête, puis ferme la porte aussitôt’ (p.174). Nonetheless, the very act of reinserting the female collective and its oral tradition into the historical record is an act of resistance to masculinist historical discourses.

The inclusion of the spectral voice in Djebar’s reconfigured oral tradition highlights its reconfiguration from the oral to the written. *La Femme sans sépulture* is not, though, the first time

---


that the spectre has been given a voice in Djebar’s œuvre. ‘La Femme en morceaux’ is a short story in *Oran, langue morte* (1997), a collection of stories published at the height of the violence of the 1990s. It tells of Atyka, an Algerian school teacher who, while examining *1001 Nights* with her French class, is beheaded by Islamists, but whose head continues to speak after her murder, finishing the story which she had begun: the tale of the *femme en morceaux*, set in Baghdad. In ‘La Femme en morceaux’, the story is split between the ‘reality’ of Atyka’s classroom, and the ‘fiction’ of Scheherazade’s tale. In the first part of the story, the parts set in Algiers are italicised and the parts in Baghdad are not, but the formatting is switched when Atyka is attacked, leading to a blurring of history and fiction which allows the spectre to speak. Atyka’s voice fades away after she finishes the tale – ‘Le corps, la tête. Mais la voix ? Où s’est réfugiée la voix d’Atyka ?’ – in direct comparison to Zoulkha’s, which persists at the end of the text: ‘sa voix subsiste, en souffle vivace’ (p.242). I want to argue that Zoulkha’s voice persists due to the absence of her body. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery F. Gordon argues that ‘Death exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present’. Gordon is talking in terms of the ‘disappeared’ of Argentina, and the fact that for their families there is no closure because, while the dead can be (metaphorically) laid to rest, the uncertainty over the fate of the disappeared means that they continue to haunt their families, and society. Zoulkha’s family, and indeed the reader, know she is dead, and if her body were discovered she could be laid to rest, fixed in a tomb. Therefore, her presence as a spectre in the present, and not just in the past like Atyka, relies on her body continuing to be ‘disappeared’.

Some critics have argued that the text acts as a tomb for Zoulkha, but I want to align myself with Donadey who argues that Zoulkha is purposefully not laid to rest by the text, something I think is suggested by the fact that Djebar leaves her unburied even though, as I mentioned earlier, Zoulkha’s body had been found at the point she finished writing the text. If the text did act as a tomb it would stop Zoulkha from remaining ‘disappeared’, and so relegate her from the present to the past like Atyka. On the one hand, the persistence of Zoulkha’s voice reminds us of the continued haunting of the past by the present; on the other, the difference between the persistence of Zoulkha’s voice and the disappearance of Atyka’s suggests that Djebar, as Hiddleston puts it, seems to want to give the text ‘contemporary resonance’.

---

30 See, for example, Miléna Horváth, ‘La médiation par l’écriture : entre-deux et interculturalité chez Assia Djebar’, *Dalhousie French Studies* 68 (Fall 2004), 37-44 (pp.43-44).
arguments such as Clarisse Zimra's (in relation to Atyka) that the spectral voice can 'render Algerians back to themselves and each other' too idealistic, since I would argue that the inclusion of the spectral voice in the oral tradition suggests the partial failure of Djebar's project to find a voice of expression for Algerian women that she set out to find in her earlier works. Nevertheless, what Zimra does pick up on is the sense that Djebar wants to somehow connect this spectral voice to the Algerian situation, thus making it relevant to the real world: by including the fictional Zoulikha in the oral tradition, Djebar creates a tangential link between the resistance of her fictional characters in the present and the resistance of a heroine of the War of Independence. To explore the implications of linking resistance through fictional writing to the resistance of a heroine of the war, I will now turn to Marouane's more straightforwardly fictional text, with its somewhat similar lineage of female resistance.

**Writing as Resistance: Leïla Marouane's *La Jeune Fille et la Mère***

Marouane's *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* does not blur history and fiction in the same overt manner as *La Femme sans sépulture*. Nevertheless, I contend that the gap between the represented and the representation of the heroine in *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* is flagged to the reader through overt fictionality, and this results in a similar history/fiction *entre-deux* to that discussed in relation to *La Femme sans sépulture*, and thus in a similar undermining of the figure of the heroine. Although the text does not claim to represent a real-life heroine within it, the fact that Marouane chooses to represent her mother at all still raises the same ethical questions as have just been discussed. The need to negotiate the ambivalence of representing a heroine in fiction, and the means by which Marouane does so, is therefore less overt, but nonetheless very similar to *La Femme sans sépulture*. Before I discuss this in detail, however, I want first to show that Marouane reinserts female experiences into history in the same way Djebar does, and examine how Marouane presents writing as part of a female lineage of resistance that stretches back to the mother and the heroines of the war that she represents.

The titular mother in Marouane's *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* was, as I mentioned at the start of the chapter, in the maquis, and was thus, like Zoulikha, a heroine of the war. The story is told from the point of view of an adult narrator looking back to her childhood at the end of the 1970s,

---

when she is caught by her father engaging in sexual activity. The narrator describes how her mother, who grew up during the colonial period, did not have the chance to be educated and so is adamant that her daughter will be allowed to stay in school rather than be forced to get married. Nonetheless, she is obsessed with her daughter's virginity, conducting periodic checks of her hymen to check it is still intact. Once her mother discovers what the narrator's father has caught her doing, the mother slowly dissolves into madness, subjecting her daughter (the narrator) to severe beatings and tying her outside until she is saved by her brothers at the end of the text (after which the narrator is sent to France and her mother to an asylum).

In the first chapter of the text, Marouane introduces the mother as a former resistance fighter. She tells her story in some detail, describing how she began as 'l'agent de liaison le plus couru de la région' (p.16), then how she was captured, tortured, and very nearly raped. After this she ran away to the maquis, where she met the narrator's father. The narrator stresses that she ran away to the maquis in part to escape being married off by her father, and that she chose her own husband against her father's wishes, earning her a reputation as a 'Femme-qui-n'en-fait-qu'à-sa-tête-La-fugueuse-qui-se-marie-sans-l'accord-de-son-père-La-briseuse-d'avenir-de-ses-sœurs. Etc' (p.21). The mother's narrative of the war is told chronologically, as a personal history and her agency within this history is stressed: she refuses to marry the suitor her father chooses, and picks her own husband. The husband she chooses (the narrator's father) turns out to be abusive, and repudiates her repeatedly, suggesting the limitations to this agency within a patriarchal society that favours the rights of men. That being said, just as Djebar does, Marouane inserts female agency into the historical narrative of the War of Independence by highlighting how the narrator's mother was not just a passive spectator or symbol during the war, but was an active participant who made her own mind up to join the maquis against her father's wishes.

Also in a similar way to Djebar, Marouane brings the mother's story into the present of the narrative. Siobhan McIlvanney argues that 'The novel is polyphonic in its inclusion of a narrative mise-en-abîme, whereby the narrator relates her mother describing her own past as a young woman. This serves to create a temporally fragmented narrative, in which the past is always present and the filial and maternal perspective often conflated'.

34 I want to argue that the temporal fragmentation McIlvanney pinpoints is a means to stop the narrative fixating on the past and reproducing the overcommemoration of the war by the state. The narrator allows the mother

---

to interject into the story directly, for example: 'Une fois lancée, plus rien ne me faisait peur, me racontait-elle. Rien n’aurait pu m’arrêter, ni la torture ni la mort. Car, vois-tu, j’étais consciente que je ne serais jamais libre si les hommes, mon père, mes oncles, mes frères, mes cousins, mes voisins ne l’étaient pas' (p.17). The use of the imperfect _racontait-elle_ does suggest repetition, implying the continual influence of the past on the mother’s identity. Nevertheless, within the text the past is related to the present of the narrator’s childhood, as it immediately continues: ‘Et voilà le résultat, terminait-elle un ton plus bas, l’esprit déjà ailleurs’ (p.17). This refers to the lack of realisation of the equality that the mother hoped for after independence, as well as her oppression at the hands of the narrator’s father. The important role the mother played in the liberation of the nation is celebrated, but the narrative stops the mother from being relegated to the mythic past by highlighting how her life is not reduced to that one moment in time.

In the first quotation from the text in the paragraph above, the mother repeats the rhetoric of the FLN that I discussed at length in the previous chapter. Even though the reader may be aware of this well-known mantra, the text does not present it as being imposed on the mother, but as if it were her own realisation: she is not a passive recipient of wisdom, but a subject who makes decisions based on her own opinions. As I mentioned above, the equality that she hopes for does not materialise, and she is most disappointed by the fact that the promises that she would be educated after independence did not come to fruition – when she joined the maquis she was promised ‘une fois ses preuves de résistante accomplies, et si Dieu l’épargnait d’une balle ou d’une arrestation ennemies, la garantie de l’envoyer commencer des études à Damas ou au Caire’ (p.20). Marouane inserts female agency into the historical record, but the impact of this agency in real-world terms is not over-emphasised, above all because the mother becomes a representative for the general post-independence disappointment that I described in the previous chapter.

Marouane suggests, in fact, that the fight for independence from France may have ended with the War of Independence, but the battle to secure the post-independence equality promised to women when they joined the anti-colonial struggle has continued into the twenty-first century. _La Jeune Fille et la Mère_ presents writing as a continuation of this battle by placing the narrator in a female lineage of resistance traced back to the mother. Towards the end of the text, an angel – who has visited the narrator periodically throughout the text – discusses the narrator’s future as a writer:
– [...] ta mère n’a jamais connu autre chose que la douleur.
– Est-ce à dire que je connaîtrai la douceur ?
– Oui, répondait l’ange. À condition que les lois de ton pays changent. Qu’elles cessent de te défavoriser.
– Tu parles comme un tract, l’ange.
– Ne souris pas, car c’est ainsi que tu parleras et que parleront les femmes de ton pays, comme ont parlé d’autres femmes avant vous et d’autres parleront après vous. Il faudra t’y faire dès maintenant, le combat sera long et dur.
– Et si les lois, comme tu dis, ne changeaient jamais ?
– Il te faudra alors partir vers une contrée où tu serais respectée et protégée. Sache aussi que les lois, nécessaires pour s'affranchir de la force et des hégémonies, ne changent pas obligatoirement les mentalités.
– Comment ça ?
– Où que tu sois, il se trouvera toujours quelqu’un, un homme ou une femme d’ailleurs, pour te dire directement ou indirectement que tu fais du bon boulot... pour une femme. Que c’est presque l’œuvre d’un homme. Ou pour soupçonner un homme derrière ton travail.
– Mince...
– Si ! J’aurais une pile d’exemples dans ce goût-là à te citer. Mais tout ça est un moindre mal que tu ignoreras comme la caravane qui passe ignore les chiens qui aboient. Il te faudra surtout fuir ceux qui tuent pour une idéologie, ensuite les combattre par les armes ou par les mots. De toute façon, pour les armes, ta mère a largement donné, et puis tu n’aimeras pas ça... (pp.161-62)

The narrator’s writing is directly linked to the fight for gender equality through the evocation of the problems she will face as a woman writer, and through the evocation of the laws that are unfavourable to women, one of which is mentioned by her brothers just a few pages later: ‘même s’ils [her parents] la tuaient, le tribunal ne les condamnerait pas, on mettrait ça sur le compte d’un crime d’honneur’ (p.164). The narrative is set at the end of the 1970s, a period marked by the rise of conservative Islam that would lead to the implementation of the Family Code, of which the adult narrator would be well aware. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this was also a period when women writers began to emerge, and in fact Marouane hints that the narrator is part of a collective of female writers because she names three of her four sisters Malika, Maïssa and Latifa, evoking the names of three other female authors, Malika Mokeddem, Maïssa Bey and Latifa Ben Mansour. As in La Femme sans sépulture, any potential for solidarity between women is not overemphasised, since her sisters are the ones who tell her father about her sexual activities, and
they attempt to stop her brothers when they save her from her mother's cruelty. Nonetheless, the quotation above places the narrator, and particularly her resistance through mots – which is to say her writing – in a line of female resistance that stretches past the end of the text (because of the use of the future tense and evocation of women who will resist after the narrator) and into (and beyond) the reader’s present day in the twenty-first century.

Just as in La Femme sans sépulture, this lineage of female resistance is directly linked to the anti-colonial resistance of a heroine – the narrator’s mother, whose resistance as part of the war effort is evoked directly at the end of the long quotation above. I want to argue that linking the narrator’s resistance through writing to the mother’s anti-colonial resistance risks mythologising heroines in the same way as I argued the post-independence state has; that is, it risks suggesting that female resistance is only legitimate when linked to a mouldjahida. A similar ambivalence to those I have been discussing throughout the chapter is therefore at play: including the mother’s resistance lends legitimacy to her female lineage of resistance, but it also upholds discourses that only value female resistance when it is linked to the war.

Marouane, like Djebar, does undermine the mythologised symbol of the heroine. First, the mother continually talks about her friends from the war who she says will help her when the narrator’s father threatens to repudiate her, evoking the idea that she holds a special place and power in society because she was a heroine. This is contrasted with her mistreatment at the hands of the narrator’s father, who calls her ‘Folcoche’ and repudiates her repeatedly – in fact, the father directly talks about how her notion of the position of former heroes in society does not correspond to reality: ‘Les combattants dont tu parles, vieille folle, ne sont plus. Ils ont été vite remplacés par des transfuges et des traîtres qui se moqueront de toi et de ta révolution’ (p.104).

Second, at the end of the text, as I mentioned earlier, the mother loses her mind when she finds out about her daughter’s sexual awakening, beats the daughter repeatedly, but while doing so tells her: ‘j’ai mis mes plans à exécution, j’ai réussi à contacter des camarades, mes camarades de lutte [...] et tu les rejoindras dans les montagnes où ils t’attendent’ (pp.169-70). Eventually she is found wandering the streets with a knife in her hand saying that she is going to ‘prendre le maquis’ (p.176) to save the world and her daughter. The abuse of her daughter becomes associated with her role as heroine, something that undermines the nobility of her position as saviour of the nation (since her daughter, as a member of the next generation, is the future of the nation).

Moreover, although I agree with Longou and McIlvanney when they claim that the mother's madness is one of the only forms of, respectively, liberation or self-expression that is available to
her because of the prevailing patriarchy, this madness, I would add, nevertheless subverts any claim the mother may have to political legitimacy within the post-independence state.

The subversion of the figure of the heroine on its own does not negate the potential complicity with discourses of mythologisation that the linking of the lineage of resistance to the female resistance fighter implies. Rather, I maintain – in line with Butler's arguments about drag artistry – that it is the overt fictionality of the text that negotiates the tension between the desire to include heroines and the need to undermine discourses of heroism. In the case of *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, the disconnect between Marouane's real-life mother and the representation of her mother is not flagged up in as direct a manner as this same disconnect between Zoulikha and Djebar's representation of Zoulikha. Nevertheless, I maintain that the overt fictionality in *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* – signalled by Bouzoul the angel – is a means of drawing the reader's attention to the same gap that Djebar directly links to Zoulikha. Bouzoul is the only supernatural element in *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, but there is no indication that he should be read in any way other than as being real within the world of the text. His status as the lone supernatural element makes him stand out all the more because the text does not draw the reader into an entirely supernatural world, instead presenting her with a periodic reminder of the fictionality of the text through the angel's visits to the narrator. With each appearance his overt fictionality stands in contrast to the more or less realist tone of the rest of the novel and reminds the reader that the text is fictional, that there is a disconnect between real-life heroines like Marouane's mother, and the depiction of a heroine in fiction. In highlighting this gap, Marouane destabilises discourses surrounding heroines, while ensuring she does not create a new – albeit much less glorified – monolithic construction of heroism in place of the old.

**Transnational Reading: Maïssa Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes***

In the Introduction I talked about Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes*... as an example of historiographic metafiction. As I mentioned there, the juxtaposition of historical documents relating to Bey's father with the fictional third person narrative invites the reader to question where traditional historical documentation ends and fiction begins. The juxtaposition of the historiographic and metafictional elements is something that draws the reader's attention to the

---

gap between the represented and the representation. Thus, the general points that I have made in relation to both *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* in terms of the destabilisation of discourses of martyrdom also apply to *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*, and the text provides another example of the same manifestation of the history/fiction *entre-deux* that has been discussed throughout this chapter. What *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* provides us with in particular is a model of how to read the text without recreating the harmful overcommemoration of the post-independence regime. Mertz-Baumgartner argues that the text ‘n’est pas un roman sur les événements historiques de la guerre d’Algérie, mais sur les différentes manières (individuelles et collectives) de les écrire, commémorer, remémorer, oublier et falsifier’.

I want to argue along these lines, that the text highlights different modes of commemoration, but where Mertz-Baumgartner foregrounds writing, I want to focus specifically on how the text represents reading as a mode of commemoration. *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* provides us with a model that can, and I think should, be used as an ideal reading model for texts that deal with the particular manifestation of the history/fiction *entre-deux* seen throughout this chapter (which is to say, a history/fiction *entre-deux* that is created when a real person is fictionalised), especially in a cross-cultural context.

The Algerian protagonist in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* is herself a reader of Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader (Der Vorleser)*, a German novel about the effects of the Nazi atrocities on the generation who came after the Second World War – a status highlighted by the title of the novel she is reading. At the start of *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*, her first impression of the Frenchman is mediated through reading: 'Pourquoi a-t-elle eu cette pensée en le regardant furtivement pendant qu'il s’installait: il a dû être beau dans sa jeunesse ! Sans doute à cause de la phrase qu'elle vient de lire' (p.12) [my italics]. Reading acts as a catalyst for the protagonist’s interaction with the Frenchman, suggesting it can act as a trigger for cross-cultural interactions. Arguably, in this case, the interaction is only a constructive one because the past is explored separately by the two characters – the Algerian woman’s and Frenchman’s two different perspectives about the same events only come into contact with each other within the dialogue. The text permits multiple perspectives to co-exist independently of each other and so the history of one nation does not overwrite that of another. In this respect, *Entendez-vous dans les...*  


montagnes... moves towards a transnational understanding of history. Perhaps more significantly though, the text also suggests a transnational approach to history that surpasses the Franco-Algerian relationship through its link to The Reader (which is about confronting the past in Germany). Reading is presented as a potential gateway to a transnationalism that rejects not only discourses of martyrdom, but any monolithic construction of the past.

The conversation about Algeria starts in earnest after the Frenchman picks up The Reader when the Algerian reader-protagonist drops it – an interaction initiated by a third person in the carriage, a young girl called Marie (whose grandfather was a pied-noir, implying she embodies the present-day French colonial legacy):

[Marie] regagne sa place, s’assoit en repliant les jambes sous elle et se tourne vers la femme assise en face d’elle :

– Vous avez fait tomber votre livre, Madame.

L’homme se penche, le ramasse et le lui tend, non sans avoir jeté un coup d’œil sur le titre, Le Liseur, de Schlink.

Il hoche la tête. D’une voix à peine audible, elle le remercie, sans même le regarder. (p.27)

Marie's questioning of the past drives the dialogue between the three characters, and when the Algerian woman wants to end the conversation, Marie's questions keep her talking: 'c'est à elle que la femme a envie de parler' (p.47). As Ireland notes, Marie represents the need for the younger generation to recover the past.38 To this I add that the text thus implies that it is through Marie that the text comes into dialogue with the present. Marie is a symbol of the present, and so by forcing the Algerian reader-protagonist to engage with her, she forces her to engage with her own history in terms of the present, rather than simply dwelling on the past.

Bey herself (in an interview) said about the process of writing Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...: 'cette incursion dans l'histoire est motivée non par un désir de non oubli, mais plutôt par un désir d'élucidation du présent'.39 This emphasis on the present – which is also suggested by the use of the present tense, meaning that whenever the text is read there is always an immediacy to it – is important because Bey is concerned, as I mentioned earlier, with the mythologisation of heroes. In Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... Bey addresses this issue

directly: ’il y a plein de blancs dans notre histoire, même dans l’histoire de cette guerre. Pendant des années, nous n’avons entendu qu’un seul refrain, dit sur le même air. Un air patriotique, forcément. Et ça continue... [...] Les héros seuls ont le droit de parler. [...] Et ils parlent tellement fort qu’ils peuvent croire qu’on n’entend qu’eux’ (p.65). Just as I argued in relation to La Jeune Fille et la Mère, the focus on the present is arguably an attempt to avoid recreating the harmful mythologisation of the past – something that is all the more significant in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... because Bey’s father’s death at the hands of the French marks him as a martyr and so the very blancs she criticises are perpetuated in his name. The forward momentum of the train ride stresses that the past needs to be confronted in order to move forward. Bringing the past into dialogue with the present is a way of focusing on the past while still moving forward.

Reading in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... is another way that the past comes into dialogue with the present. As I discussed earlier, the reader-protagonist begins her interaction with the Frenchman by mediating the present in terms of her reading – and she also grounds her later investigation of the past in this initial present-day encounter. In my reading, the emphasis on the exploration of history in terms of the present acts as a model for the reader of Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., suggesting that any interrogation of the past needs to start in the present, and maintain its link to the present. The link between the past and the present is made dynamic because, as Derek Attridge argues in The Singularity of Literature, reading is an interaction between the text and the reader, an event whose meaning is created as we read it. Each event is singular, it cannot be repeated in the exact same way, even by the same reader since the cultural context in which the reader reads is constantly changing, and the reader is influenced by this fluctuation. The version of the fictional world created by the reader during this process cannot help but be linked to the reader’s present in the same way that the Algerian woman’s reading in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... is experienced in relation to her present. Overt fictionality reminds the attentive reader that she is reading fiction and is therefore involved in the interactive process of bringing the past into dialogue with her present – in other words, that she is in part responsible for the creation of the fictional world.

The implication of the reader in the creation of the fictional world is, I think, vital in terms of transnational readerships because it negotiates what Butler calls ’ethnographic conceit’. The presumed objectivity of texts such as Algérienne invites the reader to join the author’s ’ethnographic conceit’. In contrast, openly fictional fiction – that is to say fiction that does not

---

40 Attridge, The Singularity of Literature, in particular see pp.1-15.
claim to present reality in an objective way – reminds the attentive reader that she is not an objective spectator, but a participant in the construction of the fictional world that is created for her, and partially by her. While I earlier claimed that certain non-fictional texts were able to ethically represent the Other by implicating their own participation in this representation, texts such as these are nevertheless still unable to implicate the reader in the same way as fiction. When Schemla represents Messaoudi, for example, she attempts to render a faithful portrait of her. The reader is led to understand that this portrait is mediated by Schemla, but she is unlikely to consider herself an active part of the process of mediation. In contrast, when reading fiction, the reader creates aspects of the fictional world through the event of reading. We are asked to imagine the ghost of Zoulkha, whereas we are presented with a portrait of Messaoudi. The overt fictionality therefore reminds the reader of fiction not only of the author’s implication in the process of representation, but of her own.

Of course, the reader is not free to invent completely, as she finds herself implicated in whatever the author has created. In Entendez-vous dans les montagnes..., the reader is therefore implicated in the creation of a transnational approach to history, one that encourages readers to find commonalities between their own history and that of other people and nations – all without overwriting one experience with another. This is important because Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... was published in France, which for a book such as this already seems to imply a transcontinental readership. Encouraging any international readers to avoid exoticising the texts is therefore of paramount importance, for example, to avoid discourses of victimisation (something that is especially problematic for women, since, as Mohanty argues, so-called ‘Western’ feminists often cast ‘Third-World’ women as victims). As I mentioned a moment ago, it is my contention that Bey’s characterisation of fiction as a trigger for transnational interactions can be used as an ideal reading model for other overtly fictional works with a transnational readership, such as La Jeune Fille et la Mère, in which Marouane talks directly about this international readership: ‘un jour je vivrais de mes livres et […] ils seraient lus dans une grande partie du monde’ (pp.21-22). In this reading, Marouane’s international reader is invited to join the female lineage of resistance through an interaction with the text – just like the narrator, the reader resists through mots, but through reading them, rather than writing them. Using Bey’s reading model, the reader cannot homogenise female experience and ‘colonise’ the text because rather than assume her

---

41 This is discussed in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.22-33.
perspective is no perspective (as does Nivat) she brings her perspective into dialogue with the perspective of the Other (which in this case is the text and what is represented within the text). Nonetheless, although the gap between the represented and the representation might destabilise discourses of martyrdom, the reader is still implicated in the potential mythologisation of heroines through her participation in a lineage that relies on their importance. What is particularly important about Bey’s reading model is, therefore, its emphasis on the link of the past to the present – for the female lineage to continue and move forward the reader must bring the past represented in the text into dialogue with her present in order to avoid further mythologising heroines (and the lineage of resistance they are linked to) by confining them to the past.

There is one final thing that the gap created through overt fictionality does: it reminds the reader that she must step away from the text at some point. Although fiction acts as a trigger for the interaction in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*, the dialogue does not start in earnest until the Algerian reader-protagonist has, as Marie says, *fait tomber* the book. This is arguably a suggestion that fiction can invite the reader to interact on a transnational basis, but that in order to make any actual difference she must put down the book and engage in real life. Indeed, the limitations of fiction are flagged in the very last line of the text, which is an indirect confession by the Frenchman to the Algerian woman: ‘Je voulais vous dire... il me semble... oui... vous avez les mêmes yeux... le même regard que... que votre père. Vous lui ressemblez beaucoup’ (p.77). The confession is barely a confession – the ellipses suggest that the real-life amnesty in France after the War of Independence means that he is still unable to fully admit to his actions. That is to say, Bey suggests that although the Frenchman makes a tentative step towards fully disclosing his crimes, fiction can only go so far in righting real-life historical wrongs, and so it is forced to work between these real-life silences. Similarly, *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Jeune Fille et la Mère* may invite the reader to join fictional lineages of resistance, but the transition to any kind of real-world female political solidarity by the reader is out of the scope of the texts. Nevertheless, Marouane’s and Djebar’s fictional texts encourage their readers to emulate the Frenchman at the end of *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...*, and take the first tentative step.
Forced Forgetting: Mourning and Amnesty

*Bey’s *Puisque mon cœur est mort

and Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*

The overcommemoration of the War of Independence discussed in the last chapter might, at a cursory glance, seem to stand in stark contrast to the regime’s silencing of critical historical investigation into the violence of the 1990s. It is though, in fact, simply the other side to the same coin: an attempt to control the historical narrative. The amnesty enshrined into law in 2000 was not only a means to end the violence, it was an attempt by the regime to completely efface it – in part due to its desire to cover up its own crimes, and in part due to its need to ignore the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of violence (the elections which questioned its legitimacy to rule). The Algerian government thus decreed that it was in the best interests of the nation to move on, in effect outlawing any public mourning after the amnesty was enacted. Although, as I discuss in the first half of the chapter, grief can still be explored and expressed in private, there is a lack of public space to mourn. This chapter argues that fiction allows Bey and Marouane each to create a textual site of memorial for victims of the violence in a way that is otherwise unavailable in the public sphere in Algeria.

Mourning Mothers: Bey’s *Puisque mon cœur est mort*

The son of the narrator in *Puisque mon cœur est mort* was killed by an Islamist during the violence of the 1990s, but because of the amnesty the killer returns to Algerian society having suffered no punishment – what the narrator calls ‘pardon sans justice’.\(^1\) The text is written as a series of diary-like entries addressed to the dead son, which document the narrator’s grief, as well as her quest to seek out and kill her son’s murderer – although she is stopped at the last minute by her son’s best friend, whom she inadvertently shoots in his stead. It is my contention that this violence, coupled with the cyclical structure of the text, creates a particular reading model that memorialises the past (something the amnesty does not allow), without overemphasising the potential of fiction to overcome the amnesty. The text thus becomes a public site of mourning, which, I argue, also calls

\(^1\) Maïssa Bey, *Puisque mon cœur est mort* (Paris: Aube, 2010), p.148. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.
for a solidarity between mourning mothers on an international level – a solidarity that bypasses traditional hierarchies within mass movements by focusing on the individuality of grief.

The narrator represents her grief as privatising, as something that separates her from others: 'Les larmes font écran entre moi et les autres' (p.47). In part this is simply because part of the grieving process involves the need to work through a loss in private, as the narrator suggests when she expresses her desire to be left alone: 'J'avais hâte de me retrouver seule avec toi' (p.29) – the toi here is her dead son, the focal point of her grief. That being said, the separation she feels from others is also in part because of the amnesty, which means that there is no public space to express her grief. Towards the beginning of the text, the narrator says: 'On a voulu bâillonner ma douleur. On a voulu me réduire au silence. M'obliger à vivre ton départ sans bruit, sans éclat, à jouer ma partition en sourdine. Et surtout, me suppliait-on, tu ne dois pas proférer d'imprécations ! Pas non plus de démonstrations intempestives en ces temps de suspicion et de menaces ! Tout excès dans l'expression de la souffrance est scandaleux' (p.15). The on is not specified as referring to a specific group of people, it is a generalisation that stands in for all of those who accept the silencing of her grief, both by the government because of the amnesty, but also, as is hinted here, by the violence of the Islamists. The silencing of grief because of the amnesty and the violence means that there is no public space for her to mourn. Her larmes in the quotation at the beginning of the paragraph are an outward expression of her internal grief, and so when she says they separate her from others, she hints at the fact that it is her public display of grief – or at least her desire to publically display her grief – that separates her from those around her in society.

_Puisque mon cœur est mort_ not only criticises the amnesty for its lack of justice and its silencing of external displays of grief, the violent end to the text also suggests that the amnesty does not put an end to the violence. This is further suggested, for example, at the end of the following brief chapter, which I quote in its entirety:

Alors je cherche.
Je cherche partout.
Dans la trace des sillons sanglants sur les joues des mères.
Dans leurs mains refermées sur l'absence.
Dans le regard des filles violentées.
Dans les gestes hésitants d’un père qui vacille faute de pouvoir s’appuyer sur l’épaule d’un matin pour affronter le jour.

Je cherche comme on cherchait un brin d’espérance parmi les herbes sauvages qui envahissent des cimetières.

Dans le désastre des nuits.
Dans les tressaillements des jours.
Dans les silences grèves de cris étouffés.
Dans les ruines calcinées qui parsèment nos campagnes.

Mais je n’entends que le bruit sec des armes que l’on recharge et le crissement acide des couteaux qu’on aiguisé. (pp.37-38)

The narrator does not state what exactly she is looking for, whether it is the reconciliation with which she begins the first paragraph and which she does not find, or whether it is the vérité that ends it: Bey uses the ambiguity of fiction to suggest both possibilities. The physical appearance of the chapter on the page, combined with the imagery and the repetition at the beginning of each line (of dans and je cherche) all suggest a poem, an extremely literary form of expression. Within this literary form, Bey expresses both the vérités and the lack of reconciliation evoked in the first paragraph. She thus suggests that her literary intervention fills in the gaps of history that have been created because the investigations that might bring them to light have been illegalised by the government, while also not overidealising the potential of this fictional intervention by underlining a continued lack of reconciliation along with it.

Bey stresses throughout Puisque mon cœur est mort that the amnesty imposes silence on the population, meaning that fiction is the only space open to those wanting to explore this history within Algeria (where Bey, unlike the other authors I study, still resides). That said, Bey focuses on the aftermath of the violence, rather than the violence itself, arguably so as not to create a rigid narrative of the violence that risks emulating the narrativisation of the past by the post-independence regime. The search for a narrative that explains the violence is implied to be futile since the mother spends a large portion of the text attempting to imagine why her son was chosen as a target, but later finds out that there is no narrative: the son was killed because he was mistaken for his best friend, Hakim. The mother’s attempts at narrativising the past are for nothing, and when she does discover what actually happened, because the amnesty still denies her justice, it results in neither a catharsis nor some kind of real reconciliation such as that hinted at in Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... (as opposed to the false reconciliation imposed by the
amnesty). Bey does not dwell on the actual details of the murder of the son, but on the mother's grief.

The history/fiction *entre-deux* in *Puisque mon cœur est mort* does not stem from the fact that the text fictionalises history (since the history is not foregrounded). Rather it is linked to the fact that the past becomes all-consuming for the narrator because the amnesty hinders her ability to move forward as the Algerian woman does in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* (symbolically at least, courtesy of her train ride). Mourning is defined by Freud as the healthy process which follows a loss and which allows the subject to move forward once the mourning process has finished. The need to move on after a loss is stressed in *Puisque mon cœur est mort*. For example, the narrator describes the music she listens to at night: Chopin’s *Valse de l’adieu* and Eric Clapton’s *Tears in Heaven* (something which implies how, as I will discuss in detail in a moment, grief surpasses national borders – Chopin was Polish and Clapton is British). The narrator quotes Clapton’s song, first in English, and then translating to French:

« Would you know my name, if I saw you in heaven?  
I must be strong and carry on...  
Would you hold my hand if I saw you in heaven?  
I’ll find my way through night and day »

... « Je dois être fort et continuer à avancer...  
À travers la nuit, à travers le jour, je trouverai ma route. » (p.186)

She does not translate the whole passage, rather focusing on the idea of moving on, and stressing the journey of grief through the emphasis on *route*, placed at the end of the quotation. The *avancer* is picked up immediately at the start of the next chapter, which begins:

J’avance, j’avance.  
C’est Kheïra qui me sert de pion. (p.189)

Kheïra knows the family of the Islamist who killed the narrator’s son, and so the advancement she talks about here is that of her violent quest, not her mourning process. Kheïra not only tells the

---

narrator where the murderer lives, she also talks directly about how he has been pardoned because of the amnesty. The reader is thus reminded of the fact that the amnesty stops the narrator moving through the process of grief – the only forward movement available to her is the advancement of her revenge. Unlike Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... and the texts I examined alongside it, *Puisque mon cœur est mort* is therefore not between history and fiction because it explores an aspect of the past in fiction; *Puisque mon cœur est mort* is between history and fiction because there is a sense that the amnesty renders the past all-consuming, and so the text is inescapably inhabited by the past along with the narrator.

*Puisque mon cœur est mort* calls for a different mode of reading to that explored in Chapter 2, because of this difference in the manifestation of the history/fiction *entre-deux*. This different mode of reading is linked to my contention, mentioned above, that *Puisque mon cœur est mort* acts as a site of memorial for the violence of the 1990s. Before discussing the specific way in which this works, however, it is necessary first to explore how Bey gives us a model for reading based on the way that the narrator interacts with other mourning mothers. Initially, the narrator describes how people are generally sympathetic to her loss, but as time goes on they begin to take up the government mantra and tell her to forget her grief for the good of the nation. Gradually she becomes more removed from society, loses her job, and takes to frequenting the cemetery where her son is buried. There she meets other mothers who do the same:

Les habituées. Celles qui ne rateraient pour rien au monde l’unique sortie du jour. Un peu comme celles que l’on appelle « les Folles de la place de Mai » en Argentine. Je ne sais pas si tu as entendu parler de ces mères qui, depuis plus de vingt ans, se retrouvent chaque jeudi pour tourner autour d’une place de Buenos-Aires dans le sens inverse des aiguilles d’une montre, à « contre-temps » pourrait-on dire. Inlassablement, elles réclament des nouvelles de leurs enfants disparus. Avec un entêtement courageux, elles refusent d’abdiquer devant la loi du silence. Elles exigent que lumière soit faite et que justice soit rendue. Un peu comme chez nous, où, depuis quelques années des mères de disparus tiennent des sit-in à Alger pour réclamer, elles aussi, des nouvelles des leurs. Rien ne peut étouffer l’exigence de vérité et de justice qui bat dans le cœur des mères que l’on a privées de leur enfant. (pp.189-90)
The mothers she evokes in Argentina are the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who, to this day, protest for justice for their children who were 'disappeared' during the Dirty War (1976-1983) – a conflict that pitted government forces against left-wing militia, and which, in a similar way to Algeria, resulted in an amnesty in the late 1980s. The narrator highlights the similarity between how the two nations handled their respective periods of violence by linking this group of mothers to a group of mothers in Algeria, the Mothers of the Disappeared, who – despite threats against them and a hate campaign that labelled them as the mothers of terrorists – came together to protest about the disappearance of their sons who were accused of being members of Islamist groups. Moreover, Bey’s last sentence evokes a solidarity with all mothers deprived of justice for the death of their children. This suggests the wider potential for solidarity with the many other groups of mothers around the world who protest against the effacement of atrocities committed against their children – older movements such as in China, where the Tiananmen Mothers still continue to protest for justice for their children who were killed at the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1988, and more recent movements such as in Iran, where the Mourning Mothers protest about those who disappeared during and since the civil unrest in the wake of the 2009 elections. Bey thus reminds the reader of the wider scope of the text, that the culture of silence is not just an Algerian problem, but an issue that haunts many countries around the world. The narrator explicitly links herself and her own community of mothers in the graveyard to these wider national and international communities of mothers. The solidarity between mothers that Bey evokes is thus a cross-cultural one.

What is most significant about Bey's evocation of these groups of mothers is that all of them mourn in spite of their respective governments' refusal to acknowledge the atrocities committed against their children. Fiction is able, in the example above, to elide the mother with

---


4 Many of the issues that have been discussed in relation to Argentina resonate with the discussions in this chapter in relation to Algeria. For example, for a discussion of what he characterises as 'chronic mourning' and the reasons behind it in Argentina, see Antonius C. G. M. Robben, 'How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of Argentina’s Dirty War', *Cultural Critique* 59(Winter 2005), 120-64. Argentina has also been discussed in relation to haunting theories discussed in the previous chapter: see Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, pp.63-135.


7 Amnesty International, 'Iran's 'Mourning Mothers' Must Be Released', http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/iran-mourning-mothers-must-be-released-20100111. These are just a few examples of groups of mothers, for further details on these and others, see the Amnesty International Website: Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org/. This also suggests the wider impact of my argument about 'forced repression' since it could be adapted to act as a way to examine a number of other cases, both on a national scale such as in Argentina, or in terms of very specific oppressed groups.
the Mothers of the Disappeared, something that bypasses the illegalisation of critical investigation into the violence by indirectly criticising the government involvement in the violence. In this respect the text makes a political statement, but this statement is indirect and ambiguous because of the nature of fiction. In contrast, the groups of mothers evoked in the text all make concrete and actual engagements with politics that directly stand up to their government. For example, the Mothers of the Disappeared in Algeria continued to protest despite incidents such as when, while they were haranguing Bouteflika during a public meeting, he lost his temper and told them to forget their grief for the good of the nation. The international solidarity in mourning between the mothers that the text implies is therefore political in nature, because the mothers continue to mourn despite attempts by their respective governments to efface the victimisation of those who are being mourned, and hence the public mourning itself. In other words, because the solidarity is based on the challenging of amnesties and other laws that force collective repression of atrocities, it is a politicised solidarity.

Creating international solidarity between women in a way that does not recreate traditional hierarchies is not always straightforward. Critics such as Ien Ang have argued that mainstream feminist movements in 'Western' countries (Ang herself is concerned primarily with Australia) are often based around the ethnocentric assumption that they represent the interests of all women, when in fact some of the values they promote are 'Western' in nature. Ang uses as an example the well-known slogan 'when a woman says no, she means no', arguing that it invokes an ideal feminist who is assertive and confrontational, and who has the ability to 'say no': 'The slogan does not just speak to men (who are commanded to take no for an answer), but also implicitly summons women to take up these feministically approved qualities and mean no when they say it. However, these qualities are far from culturally neutral: they belong to a repertoire of rules for social interaction which prizes individualism, conversational explicitness, directness and efficiency – all Western cultural values which may not be available or appeal to "other" women'.

Mohanty also criticises the same sense of universalism, arguing that it comes from a failure on the part of 'Western' feminists to recognise the 'historically specific material reality of groups of women'. Patriarchal oppression is not uniform across cultures, and it interacts in complex ways with other forms of oppression – for example, in the Algerian situation, as with other colonised nations, white women were themselves historically oppressors, and the persistence of racism and

---

9 Ang, 'I'm a Feminist but...', pp.194-95.
10 Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, pp.22-23.
neocolonial power dynamics means that any sense of shared sisterhood is not always straightforward.\footnote{The issues pertaining to the creation of a shared sisterhood between the (formerly) oppressed and their (former) oppressors is discussed in detail in relation to women in South Africa in Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism", in Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp.89-112.} Mohanty nonetheless maintains that cross-cultural solidarity is possible – and indeed important – as long as cross-cultural feminism (and feminists working in this space) are aware of the specific micropolitics of different groups of women, so as not to subsume the particular into the universal.\footnote{Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, p.223.} Grief is universal in the sense that we all experience it, but each person's experience of grieving is unique: mourning is a combination of practices idiosyncratic to a culture and reactions particular to individuals. I believe that the solidarity between mothers suggested in Puisque mon cœur est mort bypasses traditional hierarchies because commonality is based on the particularities of the mourning process rather than on a homogenising category such as Woman.

In the long passage from Puisque mon cœur est mort about the mourning mothers quoted above, Bey stresses the international nature of the solidarity, but she brings this back to a specifically Algerian context when she evokes the Mothers of the Disappeared. Moreover, throughout the text, the grieving process is shown to be culturally specific. The narrator's behaviour in the wake of her son's death is dictated by mourning practices particular to Algerian culture, and in fact particular to her community within the wider society – the Muslim majority. The narrator talks about how custom dictates that she leave her door open for seven days following her son's death to receive visitors, and she also, for example, talks more generally about traditions dictated by Islam such as 'idda (p.90) a period of mourning lasting four months and ten days after the death of a spouse during which the woman cannot remarry. She links her grief to mothers across Algeria and the world, but the specificity of her cultural mourning practices is highlighted.

Although the narrator abides by these norms, she questions some of the traditions: 'Ainsi je n'ai jamais su pourquoi, dans les maisons où séjourne la mort, tous les miroirs doivent être recouverts de draps blancs. Pourquoi le blanc est la couleur du deuil chez nous. Comment et selon quelles règles immuables doit être accomplie la toilette funèbre. Pourquoi les femmes n'ont pas le droit d'accompagner le défunt jusqu'au cimetière' (p.28). The narrative thus locates her within a specific culture but simultaneously undermines the rigidity of some of these cultural norms and (particularly in relation to her ability to accompany her son's body to the cemetery) challenges
their patriarchal bias through the internal thoughts of the narrator. The very questioning of these norms suggests the particularity of grief that I mentioned above. In fact, the narrator shows that the norms are not always adhered to: 'Je me souviens même que, écrasée de chagrin, j’ai refusé catégoriquement de prendre part aux préparatifs rituels lors des obsèques de celle qui comptait le plus pour moi, ma mère' (p.27). Moreover, she makes it clear that she does not stop mourning when others think she should, which implies that the mourning process cannot be dictated by others. The narrator makes it clear that, within the cultural landscape of mourning, she experiences grief in a way particular to her alone: while the protagonist has a commonality with other mothers and women who grieve, her own grief, and grieving process, is unique. The emphasis on individuality means that the solidarity between mothers is based on the relationship between individuals, that there is no hierarchy, only empathy.

Focusing on a collectivity of mothers could be seen to be reinforcing the idea that women are only important as mothers. The mother’s role as giver of life is, however, undermined by the murder she commits at the end of the text:

\[
\text{Non !}
\]
\[
\text{Il criait, il criait. Non ! Non ! Ne fais pas ça !}
\]
\[
\text{C’était lui. J’ai entendu son cri.}
\]
\[
\text{C’est Hakim qui a détourné mon arme.}
\]
\[
\text{Pourquoi, ô mon Dieu, pourquoi ?}
\]
\[
\text{Le vent a emporté ses paroles.}
\]
\[
\text{Le vent a emporté mon cri.}
\]
\[
\text{Sa main sur mon épaule.}
\]
\[
\text{Je me suis retournée.}
\]
\[
\text{J’ai hurlé. Au moment où le coup est parti.}
\]
\[
\text{J’ai hurlé.}
\]
\[
\text{Hakim !}
\]
\[
\text{C’est lui, c’est lui qui a détourné ma main.}
\]
\[
\text{Oh, son visage ! Sa main, sa main qui s’accrochait à la mienne. Là, sous mes yeux... Son corps qui s’effondre.}
\]
\[
\text{Ya M’mà ! Ya Yemma !}
\]
\[
\text{Mes mains, mes mains tachées de son sang.}
\]
\[
\text{Tu es... Tué. C’est moi. C’est moi qui l’ai tué. (p.254)}
\]
On a number of occasions, the narrator describes her son’s best friend, Hakim, as looking like her son (which is why the murderer mistook him for Hakim). She even goes so far as to say: 'on pourrait très facilement vous prendre pour des frères' (p.102). This suggests that the narrator also has a mother-like connection to Hakim – something highlighted in the above passage because 'Ya M’a ! Ya Yemma !' (which means mother) is not italicised like the rest of the conclusion, and because, in the final line, the tu that has addressed the son throughout *Puisque mon cœur est mort* becomes tué, confusing the son the narrator addresses and the surrogate son she kills. The narrator defines herself through her grief as a mother – and as the mother of a son no less – but she is the one who takes away the life of her son’s double. Bey thus avoids reproducing the symbolic image of the mother.

The fact that it is Hakim she kills instead of her son's killer, and that the son was killed in Hakim’s place, implies how everyone has the potential to lose a loved one. The text in fact suggests that solidarity can be based on the potential loss of a child, and so on the possibility of grief: 'Il y a aussi des mères qui s’identifient à moi. Celles qui, tout comme moi il y a peu, ont un sursaut de cœur dès qu’on évoque devant elles la mort d’un enfant. Qui imaginent, au moment précis où elles me voient, qu'elles pourraient un jour, à leur tour, être touchées par un malheur semblable à celui qui m'a frappée. Et que cette seule pensée déchaîne, déchire' (p.44). Butler describes something similar in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, arguing that grief is something that everyone across the world has in common, a uniting factor that surpasses national borders because everyone can relate to the notion of loss, whether that be a loss that has already been suffered or the fear of a potential loss of a loved one.13 The narrator was thus already part of the solidarity before she lost her son because she related her potential for grief to those who suffered a loss. In this case the potential grief she feared is realised, just as it could be for any number of these women.

Butler’s sense of union through grief is not limited to mothers, but is more universal: 'Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a "we," for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous "we" of us all'.14 I propose that the solidarity between mothers in *Puisque mon cœur est mort* can similarly be read as a hint towards the possibility of a wider solidarity based on any grief. This is suggested, for example, when the narrator says: 'Il y a celles que le spectacle de la douleur d'une

---

14 Ibid.
autre replonge immédiatement dans une douleur ancienne, jamais vraiment cicatrisée. Et bien souvent, c'est l'occasion pour elles de pleurer à nouveau leurs morts : époux, parents, frère ou sœur, enfants...' (p.44). Just as Butler describes, these women relate to the loss of the narrator on a personal level, linking their own personal grief to hers. Equally, the narrator is sympathetic towards these women: 'Je dois t'avouer que moi-même, je me suis laissé convaincre par l'indéniable compassion de ces sœurs en détresse' (p.44). That they relate to the narrator and that she in turn relates to them suggests the same sense of solidarity among these women as is felt between the mothers – one that is also able to bypass traditional hierarchies because of its focus on the particularity of grief.

Bey arguably wants the text to elicit one of the reactions she describes in the above quotations from the reader (which is to say: fear of potential grief, or reawakening of grief). At the start of the text, the narrator dedicates a chapter to the pleureuses, the women who were traditionally paid to mourn at funerals. This is a way of recouping female history, as well as criticising the loss of traditions such as the pleureuses because of the rise of Islamism. More than this though, I want to equate the pleureuses with the text itself. The narrator says that despite the fact that their grief is not real, she still wants them to surround her: 'Peu m'importe qu'elles soient considérées comme des menteuses, qu'elles soient comparées à des aboyeuses, des chiennes hurlant à la mort! Peu m'importe qu'elles soient en mission commandée, et qu'en comédiennes confirmées, elles jouent sur le registre de la souffrance de l'autre' (p.18). Arguably the text does just this: it acts as a pleureuse for the grief felt about the 1990s, a fictional lamentation that acts out the suffering of others, just as this quotation claims the pleureuses do. The narrator goes on to say: 'Peut-être, peut-être que grâce à ce chœur de femmes qui de leurs chants fouaillent au plus profond de la blessure, tailladent à vif dans la plaie, peut-être que ce cri, ce hurlement de bête blessée à mort qui ne cesse de vibrer dans mon ventre et de se heurter aux parois du silence aurait pu se frayer un chemin et fuser pour bousculer l'ordre du temps, déranger les étoiles avant de se fracasser contre l'indifférence du monde' (p.18). I agree with Alison Rice's optimistic reading of this section of the text in Polygraphies, where she argues: 'Even if the indifference of the world wins out at the close of this quotation, Bey's writing in this passage communicates an optimistic message that joint efforts can achieve great things, opening up the possibility that collaborative ventures can go so far as to disrupt time and shake up the stars'. What I want to add to Rice's reading is that the sense of collaboration she isolates is linked to the fictional grief of the

15 Rice, Polygraphies, p.191.
pleureuses, suggesting the fictional text can, in the same way, act as a point of collaboration between women.

As Rice notes, the passage does end with the indifference of the world, something that, I think, suggests the limitations of any solidarity in grief. The link to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo highlights how the solidarity is ongoing because it does not achieve its goal – the mothers in Argentina have been protesting every Thursday since the amnesty was enacted, but the majority have not found out exactly what happened to their children, or gained justice for their murders. In the passage quoted earlier, Bey underlines this by focusing on the direction of their movement, which she characterises as contre-temps, a movement backwards in time – an implicit inability to move forward and onwards. This backwards circularity is echoed in the structure of the text. Both the prologue and the epilogue are, unlike the rest of the text, italicised, linking them together visually. Furthermore, the first line of the text – 'J'entends, j'entends des pas' (p.11) – is repeated almost word for word in the last line: 'J'entends, j'entends le bruit de leurs pas' (p.254). The cyclical structure of the text suggests both how the mother is unable to move on because of the amnesty, and how the lack of justice results in a continuation of the cycle of violence. These implications are linked to the solidarity between mothers, since the only phrase that is not italicised in either the prologue or epilogue evokes the mother – 'Ya M'ma, ya Yemma!' (p.12); 'Ya M'ma! Ya Yemma!' (p.254) – stressing how the protagonist figuratively returns back to the beginning in a way that echoes the literal backwards circling of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Yet the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have not achieved nothing. Their continued protests may not be making any progress towards their stated goal of finding their children, but they have had an impact in Argentina and on the whole world. They are still often in the international press and have stopped what happened to their children being forgotten, both in Argentina and globally. By encouraging us to empathise with them they keep what happened in our global collective consciousness. Just like Bey’s fictional rendering of them suggests, they appear damaged by their past and unable to move forward, but they nonetheless ask us to empathise with their plight, and thus to remember along with them. I want to argue that Puisque mon cœur est mort does something similar. Bey's emphasis on the possible pitfalls of dwelling on the past notwithstanding, in breaking the silence imposed by the amnesty she reminds us of the violence of the 1990s, and, in asking us to empathise with the situation of the mother, maintains the memory of what happened in the collective consciousness.
All this is not to say that fiction is a means to overcome the amnesty, something implied when the narrator talks about alternative solutions for getting past the violence as a nation:

Chez nous, pas de Commissions comme en Afrique du Sud. Chez nous, la réconciliation se passe très bien de la justice. Pas de confrontations, ni de débats publics.

Pas non plus de tribunaux populaires, comme ceux qu'au Rwanda on appelle les *gaçaça*. Nous avions bien, dans les villages, les assemblées des sages, les *djemaa*, qui, dans des temps pas très éloignés, étaient chargés de trancher lors des litiges. Mais qui donc aurait l'idée saugrenue d'y faire appel ?

Tu vois, je me suis documentée. Toutes mes lectures sont à présent orientées vers le même but : interroger l'histoire et rechercher dans les livres ce qui pourrait m'apporter la certitude que je ne me fourvoie pas.

C'est sans doute pourquoi ces lignes de John Milton m'ont sauté aux yeux alors que je relisais *Paradise Lost* : « *For never can true reconcilement grow / Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep.* »

« Jamais une vraie réconciliation ne peut naître / Là où les blessures d'une mortelle haine ont pénétré si profondément. »

Ce sont des paroles qui me confortent dans l'idée que j'ai choisi la meilleure des solutions. (pp.164-65)

The evocation of South Africa and Rwanda stresses the international links between griefs on a national level: Algeria is not the only country to have gone through a traumatic period of violence.\(^{16}\) These other nations provide alternative models to the Algerian amnesty, and Bey suggests that these models could be translated to the Algerian situation because she places them next to a linguistic translation. Unlike the earlier partial translation of Eric Clapton's song, the English is translated in its entirety, and accurately, suggesting that just as the translation of literature is possible, so is the translation of a model of attempted reconciliation from another culture. The evocation of the South African model in particular again attacks the silence brought about by the Algerian amnesty, since in South Africa amnesty was implemented for certain crimes under apartheid, but there was still an attempt to uncover the systematic abuses and violence that

---

\(^{16}\) For a discussion of nations as sites of trauma see Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Carleton: Melbourne University Press, 2005).
had taken place.\textsuperscript{17} Bey's move from historical investigations to a literary quotation then suggests that it is only in fiction that the narrator can find something that relates to her situation directly, again implying how fiction is the only option open to Bey in terms of exploring the violence of the 1990s. Nonetheless, the limitation of fiction in overcoming the amnesty is suggested by the fact that the narrator considers the \textit{meilleure des solutions} to be the murder of her son's killer. The narrator searches for certainty about this course of action through her reading, but she does not find it in history, only in fiction. Although the amnesty triggers her desire for revenge, fiction justifies it and encourages her on her path of violence – violence that is implicitly condemned at the end of the text because of the accidental murder of Hakim.

The text does, though, undeniably combat the silence brought about by the amnesty. In this sense, \textit{Puisque mon cœur est mort} acts as a memorial, which is to say a space where grief can be centred and where it is focused. This is suggested by the fact that the narrator specifically says: 'je n'écris pas pour me lamenter' (p.20). Bey signals that the text is not some attempt at catharsis, of moving through the grieving process. Rather it is stuck in the past. What is perhaps most important about the structure is that, although in the prologue we are not told about the violence directly, on reading the epilogue, the reader is reminded of this beginning and understands that it is describing the same event, encircling the text in violence – a violence that is implicitly linked to the violence of the 1990s through the death of Hakim, since in accidentally killing him, the mother fulfils the original aim of the Islamists. The cyclical nature of the text is coupled with the portrayal of the narrator's project of writing to her son as timeless: 'Je t'écris depuis... depuis... je ne sais pas... je ne veux pas savoir, je ne veux pas de dates. Toute dimension du temps n'a plus aucun sens pour toi, pour moi, pour tout ce qui nous relie désormais. Quelle utilité pourrait bien avoir le décompte des jours, des mois, des années ?' (p.19). \textit{Puisque mon cœur est mort}, along with the narrator's writing, does not move forward, but is located in a specific moment in the past, and it focuses grief towards that moment: the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{17} The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa itself has its critics, however. In the words of South African artist and director William Kentridge: 'The brief of the commission is to examine human rights abuses that occurred in South Africa over the past thirty-five years. There are two parts to this process. Victims and survivors come to the Commission to recount their stories of what happened to them or members of their family (many of those involved did not survive their story and it is left to mothers and brothers to give evidence). The second part of the process is the amnesty hearings in which perpetrators of these abuses may give evidence of what they have done. Their inducement? A full confession can bring amnesty and immunity from prosecution or civil procedures for the crimes committed. Therein lies the central irony of the Commission. As people give more and more evidence of the things they have done they get closer and closer to amnesty and it gets more and more intolerable that these people should be given amnesty. | The Commission itself is theatre' (William Kentridge, 'Director's Note', in \textit{Ubu and the Truth Commission} (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), pp.iii-xv (p.viii)).
As I mentioned earlier, this results in a different reading model to that examined in the last chapter. The reader is of course still implicated in the text, but she is not encouraged to focus on this aspect of reading in the same way. In *Puisque mon cœur est mort*, the text is separated from the reader because it is located in the past, encircled in a violent moment of history. The separation of the text from the reader's present does two things. First, it cuts the text off from the reader's present: her reading of the text will still be affected by her present circumstances because of the event of reading, and will still intrude on her understanding of the present in terms of her comprehension of the harmful consequences of the amnesty, but its primary goal is to affect her understanding of the past and gives her a site to focus her grief about that past. Second, it highlights how the reader's own grief is cut off from the narrator's, and forces her to acknowledge the particularity of the narrator's grief. According to critics such as Benedict Anderson, memorials (in his argument in the form of monuments) are single locations that focus national mourning (as well as victory) in order to create a feeling of national belonging. For Bey, *Puisque mon cœur est mort* acts as a single location that focuses *international* mourning towards the victims of the violence of the 1990s, but in a way that recognises the individuality of the grieving process in order to avoid recreating traditional hierarchies.

The narrator consequently acts as the reader's *pleureuse*: she expresses a fictional grief that encourages the reader's grief to erupt into the world, but in a way that invites the reader to make a connection between her own grief and that of the narrator, thereby focusing her grief towards the text-as-memorial. Because of the particularity of the narrator's mourning process, the reader cannot overwrite the mourning experience of the narrator with a homogenising view of grief – she can relate to the narrator in terms of their shared possibility of grief, but the particularity stressed by the narrative means the reader cannot negate the difference between herself and the narrator. Of course, a solidarity that focuses on the particular in order to do away with traditional hierarchies could be applied to many fictional works examined in this thesis, and indeed beyond. What I want to emphasise about *Puisque mon cœur est mort* in particular is that the solidarity the reader is invited to join is an already politicised solidity: a solidarity in mourning in spite of the forced forgetting of amnesty. This does not mean that the transition to a real-life politicisation would necessarily remain egalitarian – turning a politicised form of solidarity into a global political action and maintaining equality while doing so is, after all, out of the scope.

---

of the text. Yet what the text does do is provide an example of how the private, the individual, and the particular can be mobilised to create a female collective that bypasses traditional hierarchies and homogenising categories.

**Bodily Remembrance: Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites***

Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* is, unlike *Puisque mon cœur est mort*, not so much about mourning as repression. *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* takes place during the violence of the 1990s. In the first half of the text, in which she is kidnapped by Islamists, repeatedly raped, and finally released when she falls pregnant, the protagonist is referred to as Mlle Kosra; in the second half of the text, set five years later, she lives in France, has forced herself to forget her earlier trauma, and is referred to by her married name Mme Amor – all of which echoes the forced repression of the amnesty. Marouane’s text does not talk directly about the amnesty, as Bey’s does, but it was published in September 2001, so after the amnesty was enacted, and the structure of the text, as I will explore in a moment, is reminiscent of the forced forgetting of amnesty. This text therefore deals with the same issues as *Puisque mon cœur est mort*, and similarly ends in violence: the protagonist rapes and murders her husband.

Both Siobhan McIlvanney and Gill Rye have read the text in terms of repression.19 I want to build on these readings by historicising this repression and reading it not as the unconscious repression described by Trauma Theory (that is, a compulsive forgetting of which the individual is unaware), but a forced repression brought about by the amnesty, just like the forced forgetting that the narrator fights against in *Puisque mon cœur est mort*.20 The forced nature of the repression in the text is suggested because the repression is a conscious one. The first half of the text, which signals the end of the protagonist’s life as Mlle Kosra, ends: ‘Alors l’oubli lui parut sinon possible, du moins nécessaire. Cinq années durant […] il lui fut doux de le pratiquer’.21 As well as the change in name that I mentioned above, the attempt at effacement is also suggested by the

---


fact that the two halves are called 'Livre premier' and 'Livre deuxième' – they are not chapters, but completely separate books (and indeed the chapters restart at one in the second livre). Nonetheless, the repression is signalled to be false since there is reference to Mme Amor in the first book, and to Mlle Kosra in the second. What is more, the past does intrude on the narrative in the second half before the miscarriage that the text claims triggers the remembering, such as when the adopted parents of the little girl who was conceived during the rapes come to Paris and want to meet her (a request she refuses). In actual fact, the protagonist does not unconsciously repress the trauma in her past, she actively attempts to efface it.

That Marouane figures this as a repression (rather than simply a recovery of historical experiences that have been effaced by the amnesty) is suggested by the fact that when the protagonist's trauma resurfaces, it does so indirectly. Various theorists of trauma have discussed how the repressed trauma reappears in altered forms. The text states that her memories resurface after a graphically described self-inflicted miscarriage. The resurgence of memory is experienced through the body in the first instance; the stillbirth of the foetus is reminiscent of the birth of the child conceived through rape. This is not her first miscarriage, and these miscarriages can be read as a bodily rejection of the forced forgetting. They signal an unwillingness on the part of the body to move past the trauma of having given up the little girl that was conceived during the rapes in the first half of the text, by continuously symbolically giving up the babies through miscarriages. Importantly though, the final miscarriage is self-induced: 'Elle se donne des gifles, puis des coups de poing, dans le torse, au ventre, une onde de douleur laboure ses entrailles' (p.187). This further suggests the artificial nature of the repression, since just as she forces herself to forget, she also forces herself to reproduce the bodily trauma of giving up a baby.

Similarly, the rape of her husband can be seen as a displacement of her trauma from the earlier rapes at the hand of Islamists. In some ways, the text can be seen to fall into the category of what Jacinda Read characterises as a 'rape-revenge' narrative, a structure found across diverse genres in which a woman who has been raped exacts revenge on those who assaulted her. In Le Châtiment des hypocrites, the protagonist's husband is certainly one of the hypocrites of the title – he runs a hotel and courts an Islamist clientele, and in order to do this takes on Islamist ideologies,

---


23 This is compatible with Freud's idea that repressed affects can be experienced in bodily terms.

such as enforcing a subservient position on the protagonist, all the while continuing to take part in activities such as drinking, which are against Islamic principles. Nonetheless, he is not one of the rapists who causes her original trauma – he is only linked to them through their shared hypocrisy. The title itself reminds us of this by putting 'hypocrites' in the plural. Because the amnesty denies her justice against the perpetrators, what we might characterise as justice (in the sense of an eye for an eye) is consequently exacted against the one hypocrite she can reach: the protagonist's husband acts as a metonym for all the hypocrites. The displacement of the revenge part of the rape-revenge narrative implies a repression-like structure where the trauma resurfaces in a different way. Added to this, the narrator does not explore the memories after she remembers Mlle Kosra, nor does she move forward and achieve catharsis: textually the structure is one of repression, since the trauma is not simply effaced and then rediscovered, but is transferred.

The inability to move on is reinforced through the fact that the text keeps returning to the moment that represents the displaced trauma: the partially self-induced miscarriage. The introduction begins by evoking the return of the repressed memories that will happen later in the text:

Cinq années de mariage plus tard, Rachid Amor parut à sa femme dans la peau d'un autre.
Juste avant ses noces, Fatima Amor vivait à Alger, où elle était née. [...] Mlle Kosra, comme on l'appelait à son travail, s'en accommodait. [...] Mlle Kosra entendait tout simplement mener une vie sans histoires. Et elle mena une vie sans histoires jusqu'au moment où tout chamboula.

Ce jour de canicule exceptionnelle sous le ciel parisien, barbotant dans une mare de sang, Mme Amor se remémore enfin Mlle Kosra. (p.9)

The jour de canicule exceptionnelle that the introduction refers to is also referred to at the end of the first livre when it is stressed that she forcibly forgets Mlle Kosra 'jusqu'à ce matin de canicule exceptionnelle sous le ciel parisien, [...] pataugeant dans une mare de sang' (p.92) – although it is not until the end of the second livre that we find out that this day she refers to is the day of the miscarriage. The link is made clear through repetition: the last part of the long quotation above is repeated word for word after the miscarriage, but in a different tense ('Mme Amor se remémore enfin Mlle Kosra' (p.189)) and the chapter that describes the miscarriage ends with 'revenons à ce jour de canicule, et à cette abominable mare de sang' (p.189). The text continually cycles back to the same point.
Moreover, *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* suggests a similar structural cycle to *Puisque mon cœur est mort*. Outside the two *livres* there is a short introduction and a substantial epilogue – although the text does not refer to these sections in these terms, leaving them unnamed. The formatting of the text links these two sections together, since the introduction and epilogue are in a different typeface to the two *livres* (but the same typeface as each other), suggesting a cycling back to the beginning. Nonetheless, the cycle in *le Châtiment des hypocrites* is slightly different to that in *Puisque mon cœur est mort* since the miscarriage and subsequent clean-up (when she burns the foetus in the chimney and cleans up the blood) are described in the last few chapters of the second *livre*, leaving the epilogue to pick up the story from there: how her husband discovers that she has lost the baby and wants to send her back to her family in Algeria, and how she subsequently rapes and murders him. In one sense, the text begins with the displacement of the trauma, and ends with the displacement of the revenge, suggesting the same cycle of violence created by the forced forgetting that we saw a moment ago in *Puisque mon cœur est mort*. This fixes the text in the past in a similar manner and suggests the same kind of relationship with the reader in terms of the separation that creates of the text a site of memorial.

Having said this, the revenge does, I think, result in a catharsis at the end of the text, if not for the protagonist, at least for the reader. For the protagonist the conclusion to the text is not a forward movement since the rape and killing of her husband is another form of cycling back to the trauma of her kidnapping – a return to the traumatic past by displacing it, just like the miscarriage. Despite this, for the reader, the text moves past the cycle, and comes to a narrative conclusion (as opposed to *Puisque mon cœur est mort* which concludes by returning to the beginning), the rape and murder of the husband:

```
Prenant peur qu’à son réveil il constatât ce viol, qu’il me réprimandât de l’avoir souillé, et afin d’effacer toute trace de cette profanation, j’ai fait sauter les menottes, et l’ai trainé comme un sac jusqu’à la salle de bains.

Je l’ai allongé dans la baignoire, et j’ai laissé couler l’eau chaude jusqu’à ce qu’elle l’immergeât. Puis dans l’eau, j’ai plongé le chauffe-eau électrique à la tige entortillée, que j’ai immédiatement branché dans la prise du sèche-cheveux.

[... she then leaves and goes to a bar]

À mon retour, l’aube pointait, et mon mari était plus que purifié. Il était cuit. Irréversiblement cuit. Lorsque je l’ai découpé, pas une goutte de sang n’est venue poisser le parquet qu’il venait de briquer’ (pp.218-19).
```
I agree with McIlvanney when she argues in relation to this ending: 'the monstrously surreal events [...] carried out by the female protagonist are [...] translated through narrative excess and hyperbole, the almost cartoonesque representations of extreme violence rendering them more palatable for the reader'. I want to add that what McIlvanney characterises as palatability is in fact a means to give the reader permission to distance the brutality of what the protagonist does from real-life violence. In fact, the rape and murder also take place in the epilogue after the switch of typeface and person, and so the reader is reminded of the fictionality of the text only a dozen or so pages before she reads the violent conclusion. The violence of the ending mitigates any sense of catharsis by reminding the reader of the continuation of the cycle of brutality, but the reader (or at least this reader) nevertheless has a sense of catharsis not available to the protagonist (who is still cycling back to her traumatic kidnapping) because the text serves some kind of justice – something we are completely denied in Bey's *Puisque mon cœur est mort*.

While the two *livres* are narrated in the third person, the epilogue is narrated in the first person. In the first *livre* the protagonist is a victim of Islamists, in the second she is a victim of the imposition of patriarchal norms and traditions by her husband, and she is symbolically objectified through the third person, presented as an Other that the reader looks in upon. As she takes her revenge in the epilogue, however, she expresses her agency. This is stressed from the two uses of *je* in the first sentence of the epilogue – 'Lorsque je me suis réveillée, complètement réveillée que je pouvais ouvrir les yeux sans craindre la lumière, bouger sans gémir, rien n’était comme avant' (p.201). Rye argues that the use of the first person at the end of the text mends 'the dissociation between Mme Amor and Mlle Kosra, and, in that optic, represents survival', although she notes that this survival is rooted in madness and violence. I concur with Rye that the first person signals a survival of the protagonist's subjectivity, but in the scene at the bar after the murder of her husband, the protagonist tells the barman first that she is Fatie Kosra, and then that she is Cathie Cassure, the name Rachid suggested she use earlier in the novel in order to blend in more effectively in France. The protagonist's subjectivity thus remains fragmented in the epilogue, and so I propose that the switch to the first person is predominantly an expression of agency: an attempt by a woman who has been swept up in the horrors of a national tragedy to take charge of her own destiny. In fact, Read notes in relation to the 'rape-revenge cycle' that a female avenger

---

25 McIlvanney, 'Rebel Without a Cause?', p.150.
26 Rye, *Narratives of Mothering*, p.70.
involves some level of female empowerment, since the avenger becomes the agent of her own vengeance, rather than relying on a father or brother to take revenge on her behalf.\(^{27}\) Marouane's protagonist might displace her revenge, but she is the agent of revenge. Although the denouement is to some extent nothing but a desperate grasp for some kind of agency on the part of the protagonist, and although it is not presented as something to be emulated since, as Rye claims, the protagonist's actions are based in madness and violence, there is nonetheless something to be said for the fact Marouane does not mediate the narrator's vengeance through men: the narrator takes charge of her own revenge, and thus Marouane creates a specifically female response to the violence wrought against women in the 1990s.

The protagonist's agency is expressed in a way that creates another example of the tension I have been discussing. On the one hand, the murder of a husband by his wife rejects the symbolic role of Algerian women in the home. On the other, the protagonist does not straightforwardly reject the traditional role of women, since she drugs and rapes her husband in order to conceive a child, to become a mother: 'Renoncer à rapatrier Fatima Kosra, s'engager à la régulariser. Lui faire un autre bébé, en réparation de celui éteint dans la cheminée' (pp.216-17). Earlier in the text, this motherhood is linked to a traditional patriarchal view of the family, when the protagonist thinks to herself (when she is planning to seduce her husband in order to conceive again): 'L'enfant serait un garçon, indéniablement, les hommes vigoureux, c'est scientifiquement prouvé, n'engendrent que des mâles – dire que certains font la gueule quand il leur vient une fille, glousse-t-elle. Ils seraient trois, donc, un père, un fils, une mère' (p.198). The desire for a boy stresses patriarchal filiation, while the faux-science stresses the hyper-masculinity inherent in patriarchy (where virility is measured through the production of a male lineage), and, of particular note, when the narrator describes her vision of a family to herself, the mother is placed after the son, underlining the inferior position of the mother within the family. Thus the protagonist is not simply victimised, she reproduces the patriarchal culture that places her in the auxiliary position – something stressed by the *glousse-t-elle* that immediately precedes the evocation of the patriarchal family structure, signalling that it is her opinion.

The rape and murder are triggered in part by her husband's insistence that she return to her family in Algeria. The murder not only rejects him, it rejects a return to Algeria. Although this suggests that the text is predominantly concerned with the rejection of Algerian patriarchal norms, the text rejects the notion that it is *only* Algerian women who are victims of patriarchy by

implying that patriarchy is more universal, for example, through a fantasy of the protagonist's friend Lola Marsa (with whom she stays after she is released by her kidnappers):

Lola Marsa's desire to expose her body is about transgression, as she rejects the socially (and legally) acceptable ways of publically exposing one's breasts. Her desire to transgress societal norms is textually linked to how she is defined by Algerian society, as la fille du fell (a shortened version of fellagha, a name for anti-colonial fighters during the War of Independence), suggesting a desire to transgress the traditional representation of women. This transgression is linked to patriarchy on an international level because of the repetition of Paris and London at the start of the passage. Furthermore, Lola Marsa's fantasy becomes the protagonist's reality. After murdering her husband, the protagonist goes to a bar where she exposes her breasts to the barman: 'Comme il n'avait de cesse de me gratifier de son sourire carnassier, reluquant les coutures épaisse qui labouraient mon crâne, j'ai déboutonné la chemise puis sorti mes seins, l'un après l'autre, le défiant du regard de les toucher' (p.219). The exposure of the female body is only acceptable in certain circumstances, and so by repeating a fantasy that highlights the transgressiveness of the female form in a number of cultures, the protagonist implies that there is some kind of shared female experience across these cultures because of the policing and control of the female body by patriarchal societies.
The female body is stressed throughout the text and in particular during the miscarriage at the end, which Marouane describes with reference to menstruation – 'La moiteur qui n'a cessé de lui brûler l'entrejambe est un liquide rouge et visqueux qui exhale une odeur de menstrues' (p.187) – and female genitals when she describes how the protagonist tries to stop the miscarriage: 'Elle serre les cuisses sur sa main qui obstrue la fente de son sexe. Les spasmes redoublent. Elle écra les cuisses, ferme le poing, l'introduit avec force dans son vagin, où il ne tient pas. L'instant d'après, fixant le fœtus déchu sur le parquet souillé, elle barbote dans une mare de sang' (p.188). There are not many other women in the text, but then neither are there men – in fact there are little in the way of peripheral characters, the only two that recur are Lola Marsa and the protagonist's husband. One of the other women who is mentioned is the protagonist's mother, and the emphasis on the female body is linked to her as well: 'Pour avoir déchiré le vagin de sa mère jusqu'à l'anus, la légende dit qu'elle aurait dû naître au moins trois mois plus tôt' (p.44). There is no female lineage here as we saw in the previous chapter in *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*, but there is a bodily commonality.

The commonality foregrounds the shared vulnerability of female bodies. In *Precarious Life*, Butler expands the idea of a commonality through mourning to suggest that we all have the potential for solidarity through shared bodily vulnerability: 'The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instruments of all these as well'. In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the bodily experience of the protagonist is stressed to be one of rape and torture, for example, she is described standing in front of the mirror 'comptant les empreintes sur son corps et les phalanges manquantes à son pied' (p.34). The text grounds any commonality in the body of a woman who has been raped and tortured, reminding the female reader of her vulnerability to the same. The vulnerability bypasses cultural parameters since race, age or sexuality do not enter into the shared vulnerability – it is not only Algerian women who are vulnerable to violence, it is all bodies. I stress here all bodies, female and male. Although there is an emphasis on specifically female bodies in the text, more general bodily experiences are also described. For example, when the protagonist is kidnapped she describes that in the van 'une

---

odeur d’urine et d’excrément se propagea’ (p.25), while the rape and murder of the protagonist’s husband at the end of the text reminds the reader that men are subject to becoming victims of the same kind of violence that women are. This reminder is important because, as Sontag points out (in relation to photographs) there is often a voyeuristic desire to witness the suffering of others: ‘the possible satisfaction of knowing, This is not happening to me, I’m not ill, I’m not dying, I’m not trapped in a war’. I want to argue that the emphasis on the commonality of the body encourages the reader not to approach the text as a voyeur. Moreover, Sontag claims, in relation to why people ignore events happening in foreign countries, that ‘Wherever people feel safe [...] they will be indifferent’, and so the fact that the murder of the husband takes place in France reminds the reader outside Algeria that violence can happen anywhere. Just as I argued the Madres de Plaza de Mayo ask us to empathise with them in order to aid our remembering of their tragedy, Marouane evokes a bodily commonality that invites us to empathise with the protagonist, and thus to remember her trauma even when she cannot.

Vulnerability does not, though, equate to victimisation. The ongoing debates about the burqa in France discussed in Chapter 1 is just one example of how ‘Western’ feminists continue to cast so-called ‘Third-World’ women as victims that need to be saved by their supposedly more liberated ‘First-World’ sisters. Discourses of victimisation do not lead to constructive interactions because it others the women cast as victims by denying that they have agency. Le Châtiment des hypocrites does not deny that the protagonist was a victim of horrific violence, but it mitigates the reader’s ability to further victimise her: first, through the use of the first person to express agency in the epilogue that disturbs any objectification of the protagonist; and, second, because the rape of the female body is only evoked, not depicted. The kidnapping is described, but then the text moves to the protagonist’s release: ‘Six ou sept mois plus tard, libérée des griffes de ses ravisseurs (sur cette partie de l’histoire, relevant du miracle, s’il en est, Mme Amor resterait peu loquace), profanée, mutilée, l’utérus plein à craquer, […] elle trouva refuge dans une espèce d’hospice […] aménagée dans l’urgence pour accueillir et abriter les femmes et leurs traumatismes’ (pp.26-27).

The trauma inflicted on her body is foregrounded, but the details of the rapes are not discussed. Although this is strongly suggested in the bracketed section to be linked to the forced repression (since it refers to Mme Amor rather than Mlle Kosra as she is presented in the rest of this first

31 Ibid., p.100.
32 This is discussed in Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, pp.22-33.
livre), it also focuses the reader’s attention on the aftermath of the violence rather than allowing her to watch it voyeuristically.

The bodily commonality suggested in *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* is also important to my conceptualisation of the text as site of memorial. Since the War of Independence, the statue of the female martyr has become a symbol for all Algerian women, as suggested by the fact that for a number of years on International Women's Day, flowers were laid at her feet—celebration of women in Algeria was reduced to celebration of one symbolic female martyr who stood in for all women. *Puisque mon cœur est mort* does not risk reproducing this model because the narrator is not physically victimised herself, and so is not a symbol of the violence done against women. Neither does a series of testimonials, such as Belloula’s *Algérie, le massacre des innocents*, where a multitude of voices of victims are heard, creating a polyphony of experiences that does not homogenise the suffering. In contrast, a textual memorial to women from the 1990s that focuses on only one voice, as *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* does, risks becoming a new version of the statue of the female martyr, a symbol into which all women's experiences are subsumed and homogenised. The bodily commonality helps in bypassing this focus on the singular individual, because it reminds the reader of the interchangeability of bodies while focusing on one individual body. The reader is thus reminded that multiple bodies and traumas make up what we call a national tragedy, but that each of these bodies was and is, like the protagonist, an individual whose suffering manifests itself in a way particular to her.

Just as I argued in relation to *Puisque mon cœur est mort*, although the violent ending to *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* suggests the limitations of fiction in respect to overcoming the amnesty, the text nonetheless acts as a public space of memorial that is otherwise unavailable in Algeria. *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* is thus likewise separated from the reader because it is located in the past, meaning her reading is affected by her present circumstances because of the event of reading, and will intrude on her understanding of the present in terms of her comprehension of the harmful effects of the amnesty, but its primary goal is to affect her understanding of the past and gives her a site to focus her grief about that past. In this sense, both texts invite memorialising modes of reading. Yet both *Puisque mon cœur est mort* and *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* encourage the reader to undertake this reading with a focus on her, or her loved ones, potential to be subject to the same kind of violence—a focus that Butler argues

---

33 Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities', p.163.
compels us ‘to take stock of our interdependence’. Ultimately, I want to argue that if the texts manage to evoke a sense of this interdependency in the reader, it is sparked by the reader’s recognition that her particularity is relatable to the particularity of the protagonists. For the attentive reader, this is a reminder that each reader undertakes a different reading (based on their own particularities), and this multitude of readings stops the text-as-memorial from becoming a fixed and rigid site of public mourning like the statue of the female martyr.

34 Butler, Precarious Life, p.27.
CHAPTER 4

Domestic Bliss?
Bey’s Bleu blanc vert and
Djebar’s Nulle part dans la maison de mon père

The fictional(ised) women I have examined so far all act in ways that do not conform to Algerian societal norms in one respect or another, in part because they are caught up in extraordinary circumstances: the War of Independence or the violence of the 1990s. I now turn my attention to texts that do not talk about women doing extraordinary things, but rather foreground the everyday (defined as everything that happens outside of extraordinary events: work, family life, leisure activities, and so on).¹ Bey’s Bleu blanc vert deals with the everyday life of the fictional couple, Lilas and Ali, over a period of thirty years; Djebar’s Nulle part dans la maison de mon père describes the everyday events of the author’s childhood and adolescence in colonial Algeria. Both suggest that for Algerian women the everyday is coded as the space of the home and the domestic.² In Chapter 1, I explored how the domestic has been represented within masculinist historical discourses as a homogeneous site of resistance to colonial rule that has remained unchanged since pre-colonial times. This chapter explores how Bey and Djebar undermine this masculinist representation by reconfiguring the domestic as a heterogeneous and historicised space – and how, in doing so, they fight against the marginalisation of the domestic by valorising it as a space that is worthy of literary attention.

¹ I am using here the idea of the everyday as laid out in Henri Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, trans. John Moore, Second ed., vol. 1: Introduction (London: Verso, 1991). As Highmore concisely summarises: ‘It is repetition that is crucial to Lefebvre’s meaning of the term “everyday life”: the daily chores as well as those routinized pleasures that are meant to compensate for the drudgery. Even that which is “out of the ordinary”, for example a camping trip, is part of everyday life, because it is part of the cycle of work and leisure’ (Ben Highmore, Everyday Life and Cultural Theory (London: Routledge, 2002), p.128). I am not foregrounding his work, however, since Lefebvre’s representation of women and their relationship to the everyday is somewhat problematic (see Laurie Langbauer, ‘Cultural Studies and the Politics of the Everyday’, Diacritics 22, no. 1 (1992), 47-65).

CHAPTER 4

A History of Domesticity: Bey's *Bleu blanc vert*

*Bleu blanc vert* tells the story of Lilas and Ali over the thirty years immediately following independence (1962 to 1992), thus spanning the time period between the two events which I mentioned above. The narrative alternates between their first-person perspectives, echoing the separation of male and female spaces that I will discuss in more detail in a moment: Lilas's chapters are entitled 'Elle', Ali's 'Lui'. As much as the text is about their lives, it is also about the history of Algeria during those thirty years. For example, the text describes events of what I have called 'official' history such as the institution of the Family Code, as well as events that have been ignored within post-independence FLN discourses such as the coup d'état that displaced Ben Bella as leader, and the riots of 1988. The interaction between history and fiction in this text provides another manifestation of the space I am calling the history/fiction *entre-deux*, one that allows Bey to subvert the symbolic atemporal masculinist conceptualisation of the domestic space twofold: it foregrounds the historical progression of domesticity and inserts female agency into the domestic space.

Ali and Lilas grow up in the same apartment building, where they continue to live after they get married (and until the very end of the text, when they move to a house). The building is a domestic space in the basic sense that it is the protagonists' home. In addition to this, Bey stresses that it is a space where domestic chores are carried out – and specifically carried out by women. For example, early in the text, Ali describes his mother's daily routine:

*Elle fait le ménage. Pour les femmes, le travail commence très tôt le matin. Dès que les hommes sortent. D'abord, elles envoient les enfants à l'école. [...] Ensuite elles sont tranquilles. Parce que les enfants ne sont pas là pour les embêter. Elles en profitent. Comme ça, quand les hommes reviennent, tout est propre. C'est très important la propreté. Ma mère essuie le par-terre tous les jours. Quand elle a tout fini, elle va au marché. Il y a des femmes qui ne sortent pas. Même pas pour faire le marché. [...] Mais ma mère est obligée de faire les courses parce que mon père est occupé toute la journée. [...] Et après, c'est l'heure de la cuisine. À partir de onze heures, toutes les femmes sont dans leur cuisine. Et toutes les odeurs s'échappent pour venir se réfugier dans les escaliers.*

---

3 Mokeddem does something similar in *L'Interdite* (1993), alternating the chapters between 'Sultana' and 'Vincent', the names of the two protagonists and lovers in that text.
Ali’s mother’s daily life is made up of domestic work, all of which takes place in the space of the home, with the exception of the trip to the market (something Ali claims is not something all women do, stressing the confinement of women to the domestic space). Ali’s mother is presented here as one example of what women do more generally – when describing the daily routines he talks about women in the plural – and this is, somewhat significantly, characterised as travail. In a book about capitalism on a global scale, Maria Mies claims: ‘With the help of the state and its legal machinery women have been shut up in the isolated nuclear family, whereby their work there was made socially invisible, and was hence defined – by Marxist and non-Marxist theoreticians – as “non-productive”. It appeared under the form of love, care, emotionality, motherhood and wifehood’. By presenting women’s domestic chores as travail, Bey recasts them as ‘productive’.

In the long quotation above, it is not just the individual apartments that are domestic spaces: the smell of the food permeates the whole building, and, since cooking is a domestic chore, when the smell permeates the spaces outside the apartment, the domesticity that the smell of cooking symbolically represents inhabits the entire building along with it. The idea that the whole building is a domestic space is reinforced elsewhere, for example when Ali says:

Des fois, j’ai l’impression que notre immeuble, c’est comme un grand meuble, une commode, avec plein de tiroirs. Et dans chaque tiroir, il y a plein de vies. Quand on ouvre, ça fait beaucoup de bruit et beaucoup d’histoires. Des histoires qui concernent les femmes surtout. Le jour, on dirait un monde où il n’y a que des femmes. Parce que les hommes ne sont jamais à la maison. Sauf ceux qui ne travaillent pas. Mais même s’ils ne travaillent pas, les hommes ne restent pas à la maison toute la journée. Ils se retrouvent dans les cafés. Entre eux. Les femmes ne vont pas dans les cafés. Quand les hommes ne sont pas là, elles se retrouvent. Chez l’une ou chez l’autre. (p.41)

The commode is a domestic piece of furniture (unlike tables or chairs which are found outside the home, in cafes for example), and so the whole building is imagined as a domestic space. The majority of the text takes place within the space of the building, suggesting that the history Bey is writing is that of this particular domestic space. As we saw in Chapter 1 in relation to the many women who undertook domestic chores during the War of Independence, the histoires qui concernent les femmes that Ali talks about above have been marginalised, largely because the vast

---

majority concern domestic activities. Of course, this is cyclical. Women traditionally carry out certain functions, and these functions are dismissed as unimportant because they are carried out by women, which means when women continue to carry them out their contributions are dismissed as insignificant. Bey's focus on the domestic space rehabilitates the domestic as a space worthy of literary attention and therefore of note (and in this sense she can be seen to be doing something similar to Amrane-Minne, but in the fictional realm).

Although many of the anecdotes Ali describes are about his participation in the wider world, much of his narrative is also concerned with the domestic space. In the first instance this is to do with the fact that he is a child, and so inhabits this space along with women. As he grows older though, it can be seen to a certain extent as a way of breaking down the dichotomy between the outside and inside, and also a way of showing that the domestic space is of importance to men too. On the flip side, Lilas enters the traditionally male spaces of school and university (thanks to the education policies of the newly-formed state), although her chapters are generally much more focused on the home and other female spaces. For example, Ali's first chapter is about school, while Lilas's first chapter is about her experiences in the building. Lilas – unlike her mother and mother-in-law – does work outside the home as a psychologist, but her work is still confined to female spaces since she likens the health centre where she works to the hammam (the baths where women traditionally congregate and the one space outside the home they inhabit). In spite of this, when their daughter is first born, and she (rather than Ali) quits her job and stays at home to look after the baby, she does not confine herself to the domestic space, but takes her daughter on long exploratory walks in the male space of the city: at the point when she would appear to conform most rigidly to gender norms, she is spatially at her most transgressive. Bey thus suggests that the traditional division of space affects the experiences of the two protagonists and how they see the world, while nonetheless implying that the relationship between the spaces is somewhat more fluid than the rigid traditional norms might allow.

Equally, the history of the domestic space (coded female) is not completely separated from the external history (coded male). Historical events are experienced from within the domestic space of the building, such as when Ali describes the riots of 1988: 'Et c'est de notre balcon que nous avons vu s'élever, un peu partout dans la ville, des nuages de fumée noire' (p.256). On the one hand, the domestic is here a space of refuge from the external events and so is separated from the outside world. On the other, although Lilas and Ali do not participate in the riots of 1988, they are witness to them: they are not excluded from history because they are in the
domestic space, they just experience it differently from those participating in the riots. It is important to recognise that women do have different historical experiences to men because they are excluded by convention from outside spaces and certain activities. That Lilas and Ali experience the riots (and other major historical events) from within the domestic space suggests that this space is a part of the history of the nation.

In addition to this, Bey pulls the external events of history into the fictional domestic space of the building. For example, the first time we meet Ali he talks about how at school the teacher tells the class that they can no longer use red pen as this creates red, white and blue on the page which evokes the French flag, and instead they should use green to represent Algerian nationalism (an incident that inspires the title of the book). The incident is portrayed in a way that undermines any rigid sense of nationalism because Ali uses a black pen, but is told off by the teacher. Nonetheless, he repeats these nationalist concerns when he returns home: 'Notre immeuble est peint en blanc, mais le dessous des balcons est bleu. [...] Mais quelquefois il y a des femmes qui mettent à sécher des vêtements rouges sur les balcons de l'immeuble. Il y en a même qui ont des rideaux rouges [...]. Mais ce serait plus simple de repeindre l'immeuble en vert. Ou juste le dessous des balcons. Être Algérien, ça se mérite' (p.20). It is the domestic activity of washing clothes that leads to the offensive colours, aligning what has happened at school not only with the domestic space of the building, but directly with domestic activity. Despite the obvious ridiculing of rigid forms of nationalism that the focus on colours implies, this first chapter starts a pattern that is repeated throughout the text: namely, to repeat my main point, that history and political concerns external to the building are pulled into the fictional domestic space. It is my contention that it is for this reason that the text is between history and fiction: not only does the history ground the fiction in a specific time period (as it does in historical fiction), but the fiction is written in such a way as to act upon the history, to relocate it within the domestic sphere.

To some extent the ensuing history/fiction entre-deux in Bleu blanc vert is employed in ways I have already explored that represent Bey's wider concerns. First, Bey uses fiction to fill in the gaps left by traditional history: earlier-mentioned events that have been effaced such as Ben Bella and the coup d'état, but also the everyday of history, what happens between the 'historical' events. Second, she questions the validity of accepting only one dominant historical representation by representing history from both Lilas's and Ali's points of view. More than this though, the focus on external history temporalises the domestic space. By pulling external history into the domestic space, Bey is able to subvert notions of the atemporal domestic space of
masculinist historical constructions by showing that the domestic is a part of history, not outside history. The temporalisation is reinforced by the fact that the building is marked by history (for example, bullet holes from an attack by the OAS before independence are still visible), and changes with time: at the beginning of independence it is empty because the French families have left; by the time Alya is born it has become run down; eventually the community comes together and (after futile efforts asking for help from the government) they take it upon themselves to clean up the building. History affects the domestic space, and changes it.\(^6\)

Non-Algerian influences on the domestic space further undermine the notion of a static space that has remained the same since pre-colonial times. For example, Lilas describes how people fashion their domestic spaces after those they see in Egyptian soap operas: ‘L’identification et le mimétisme. Beaucoup de jeunes filles ont adopté le parler égyptien, et de plus en plus les intérieurs des maisons ressemblent à s’y méprendre aux décors des séries diffusées toute l’année par la télévision algérienne’ (p.156). One of these influences is French culture. The domestic as site of masculinist Algerian nationalist resistance ignores any influence of French culture in particular, but when Lilas is buying furniture to furnish the new ‘maison coloniale’ (p.266) that the couple buy at the end of the text, she talks about the change in fashion, how the vieilleries are now very expensive: ‘Après la vague de coopérants français qui ont acquis de très belles pièces au moment où personne n’en voulait, [l’antiquaire] rencontre de plus en plus de connaisseurs algériens’ (p.269). That the physical space is architecturally colonial and that they choose French furniture suggests that the domestic has been influenced by colonialism – indeed, French influence is also acknowledged more directly in other ways, predominantly in terms of language and the literary, since both protagonists were educated in French, read French literature, and struggle with Arabisation.\(^7\) I want to nonetheless stress that although the home is marked by its history as a colonial house, their ownership of it, and presence inside it, marks it as Algerian – they colonise the symbol of the former colony and the domestic becomes a space of resistance to colonial rule.

I agree with Corbin Treacy when he argues that Bleu blanc vert is a ‘national’ novel in that it displays pride in the War of Independence, and, while recognising the important influence of French culture on Algeria because of colonisation (in particular in relation to the French language), does not over-idealise Algeria’s current relationship with France. Although Lilas and Ali do visit

---

\(^6\) The linking of space and time in a feminist context is discussed in Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p.2.

\(^7\) For a discussion of how the text explores the problems of Arabisation for those of Lilas’s and Ali’s generation who were educated in French see Corbin Treacy, ‘Contested Cartographies: Maïssa Bey’s Bleu, blanc, vert’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, no. 3 (2013), 402-15 (p.403-10).
Paris at one point, as Treacy notes, they encounter racism and so 'Bey’s novel seems to suggest that the proper response to the 'othering' Ali and Lilas encounter in France is to forget France and look towards Algeria'. To Treacy’s analysis, I add that there is little mention of French history outside the decolonisation process. The Algerian history is evoked as if for an Algerian audience who themselves are intimately familiar with the events – for example, Ali refers to the events of 1988 without evoking the year, but only the date, '5 octobre' (p.254). Global events such as the moon landing are covered in the same way, but French history is given no particular foregrounding. Bey's domestic space may change with time, and may therefore have been influenced by colonialism, but, by implicitly rejecting the intertwining of French and Algerian history after 1962, Bey presents it in the post-independence period as a specifically Algerian space that rejects any further interference from the former colonial power.

The rejection of the former coloniser is important because, as Highmore points out, one of the things colonialism did (and by extension I would argue Orientalism) was represent the everyday lives of colonial subjects as exotic. Delacroix’s painting Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement which I discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to Djebar’s collection of short stories of the same name is an example of this: the women are represented in their everyday living space, the harem, but represented to a French audience as exotic. Rejecting the former coloniser mitigates the risk of Bey’s recuperation of the female everyday being dismissed as a way of explicating to a French audience the seemingly exotic domestic life of the Algerian Other. Bey further avoids this by focusing on multiple individuals, demonstrating the uniqueness of each person’s experience depending on his or her position with society. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Mohanty argues that cross-cultural feminism needs to be aware of the specific micropolitics of different groups of women, so as not to subsume the particular into the universal. In Lilas’s case the Algerianness of the text means that she cannot be subsumed into any homogenising feminist cause, because she has concerns personal to her. Equally, any attempt at homogenising Algerian experiences (which is what Algerian masculinist historical constructions do) is undermined by the fact that Lilas’s history is juxtaposed with Ali’s.

The focus on Lilas’s individual experiences consequently inserts female agency into a temporalised domestic space, but by undertaking this recoding of the domestic space, Bey nonetheless upholds the traditional positioning of women in the domestic space – in other words,

---

8 Ibid., p.412.
9 Highmore, Everyday Life, p.16.
10 Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, p.223.
Lilas’s resistance from within creates the same tension I have discussed throughout the thesis. Ali’s mother provides a striking example of this tension. Unlike the other fictional(ised) women I have discussed thus far, Ali’s mother not only represents the traditional woman but embraces this role and does not resist patriarchy in any way. For example, when Ali talks about how the women visit each other during the day, he says that his father ‘ne veut pas qu’elle « fréquente ». […] Ma mère pourrait sortir quand il n’est pas là. Comme les autres. Il ne saurait rien. Mais elle dit qu’elle n’est pas comme ça. Et qu’elle est bien chez elle’ (p.42). Furthermore, when her husband leaves her she simply substitutes her eldest son as patriarch and begins to treat him in the same deferential manner. Nevertheless, when her husband took to the hills during the war and was later arrested, she supported her family, got a job and became financially independent (although this reverts after Independence). Ali’s mother did not fight during the war, nor was she involved in the war effort to the same extent as Zoulikha from *La Femme sans sépulture* or the narrator’s mother from *La Jeune Fille et la Mère*. Her contribution to the war effort was predominantly within the domestic space. In some respects Ali’s mother is the least radical woman in the text, as she does not fight against her traditional role in any respect and most unproblematically inhabits the symbolic role as a bastion of tradition. The text thus revalorises the part women played in the struggle by showing that even for a woman who most closely resembles the symbolic role, the contribution was concrete and actual. Yet even though this undermines the way women have traditionally been represented, it does so by continuing to locate her, and thus women like her, in the domestic space.

The tension highlights how temporalisation of the domestic does not equate to the creation of some kind of utopian space of female resistance. This is further suggested in other ways. First, men continue to control the space. Ali himself (when a child) questions the preferential treatment of the patriarch: ‘Je ne sais pas trop ce que ça veut dire, socialistes. Mon père dit que ça veut dire qu’on partage tout également. […] Mais quand [ma mère] sert les repas, il y a toujours plus de viande et de fruits pour mon père que pour nous, mon frère, elle et moi’ (p.17). Second, the women of the building impose the symbolic position as bastions of tradition on each other by policing each other’s actions. As Lilas complains: ‘nos choix et notre vie ne regardent que nous. Mais tous se sentent concernés. Les parents, les voisines, et mêmes les collègues. La vie de chacun est l’affaire de tous‘ (p.166) [my italics]. *Voisines* is feminine here, suggesting it is the

---

11 Bey’s focus on women’s domestic roles during the War of Independence can be seen as part of the same project of valorisation of the overlooked contribution of women to the war effort that, in Chapter 1, I argued Amrane-Minne undertakes in her historical investigations.
female collective in the building that imposes societal norms. The domestic space is not an idealised vision of individual or collective female resistance. Accordingly, Lilas is given agency over her actions, but the agency is always brought into question because of the patriarchal nature of her relationship with Ali. Lilas decides who she marries, how many children she has, when she has this child (thanks to the pill), and what she studies at university. Nonetheless, she herself describes her sense of choice as an illusion: 'Je me suis engagée. De façon officielle. Sans que personne ne m'y ait contrainte. Mon avenir se dessine de plus en plus nettement. J'avance sur une route balisée avec l'illusion d'en avoir tracé l'itinéraire' (pp.127-8) [my italics]. In fact, her relative freedom in comparison to her mother is implied to be due to the natural progression of women's rights rather than any particular progressiveness on her part – Lilas is more emancipated than her mother, whose husband was chosen for her, but her mother was in turn more emancipated than her own mother, who, when visiting other villages with her husband, would wait for him while staring at a tree. Moreover, it becomes more evident as the text progresses that Ali's wishes override Lilas's, something with which she is complicit: 'Ce qui m'étonne, c'est que je cède très facilement, trop facilement peut-être, à toutes ses demandes' (p.94). Once their daughter is born and she quits her job (again something she chooses that is in line with Ali's wishes) she describes her life as follows:

Ali dit que
Ali pense que
Ali me demande de
Ali voudrait que
Ali envisage de
Ali a décidé que
Ali refuse de
Ali insiste pour
Ma vie devrait se résumer à ça. Un ensemble de phrases ayant le même sujet. Avec des verbes exprimant des volontés, des opinions. Volontés et opinions auxquelles je me dois d'adhérer ou d'obéir. (p.204)

Although Lilas gains some subjectivity and associated agency through her first person expression, the fact that Ali is here the subject of all the verbs suggests that she can only gain so much agency within the domestic space because of the prevailing patriarchy. It is, however, for this very reason
that Lilas’s position is directly relatable to the every-day lived reality of Algerian women: the agency Lilas gains from having a voice and expressing the frustration at her position is a form of agency that can be readily gained in everyday life where the norms of patriarchy are rife.\textsuperscript{12}

Nonetheless, Bey stresses that Lilas’s agency is fictional, and that it should not be over-idealised. In the above example, the playfulness of the literary allows the male subjectivity to take precedence. Although in that example this is a way of accentuating the injustice of the situation, it demonstrates how the playfulness of fiction also leaves it open to being manipulated by others with different agendas. Lilas herself as an adult, for example, finds a love note she had written to Ali some years before, and comes to the realisation that reading romance novels as a child filled her head with unrealistic romantic notions about relationships: ‘Il me semble lire des phrases sorties tout droit des romans à l’eau de rose que je dévorais quand j’avais douze ans, l’été de l’Indépendance. Et pour la première fois, je m’aperçois que je ne suis pas sortie indemne de mes premières lectures’ (p.110). This is in spite of the fact that Lilas is an avid reader throughout the text, and is aware from an early age that the romance novels that she reads are not an accurate description of the realities of romance:


The text is itself a love story – one that problematises the romance by showing how she becomes disillusioned and unhappy in her own marriage, but nonetheless a story that describes a romance between two people. In this passage there is already a blurring between her own position as an orphan and the position of the women in the novels she reads that hints at the fact that she is a fictional romantic heroine. The text presents the reader with a certain type of fiction that it

\textsuperscript{12} In an interview about the text, Bey says that many people, both male and female, have told her since the publication of the book that they can relate to the characters because they lived the same experiences. See Lardjam, ‘Entretien avec Maïssa Bey’.
separates from *la vraie vie*, but then implies that the text itself is a part of this fictional convention by likening the female protagonist to those in romance novels. This in turn underscores another tension: although the text undermines the conventions of the romance novel, it does so by presenting the reader with a romance novel. The nature of fiction — that is, its tendency to represent in less direct ways than non-fiction, to create ties that are not expected to correspond directly with reality, but that can be read tangentially in this way — is used by Bey to exhibit a self-consciousness across the whole text that spotlights (to the attentive reader) the tensions in Lilas’s position, and mitigates the potential of the female agency expressed within the domestic space.

Any relationship the text has to the real world comes about through the personal act of reading. I agree with Carlson when she argues that throughout the text Lilas’s own reading of fiction is a form of resistance: first, to colonial oppression when, as a child, she enters the apartments that have been abandoned by her former French neighbours in order to find books to read, both literally and figuratively inhabits the space of the former coloniser; second, to patriarchal oppression, such as when she reads about menstruation in her brother’s medical dictionary and so transgresses into her brother’s masculine space. Reading in both these cases is very private and personal. For this reason, I want to argue that Bey suggests, through Lilas, that personal engagements such as Lilas’s reading can be political – although just as I earlier argued that domestic history differs from external history, a disengagement from external political concerns results in a different kind of political engagement.

The domestic is the site of the personal, and the difference in political engagements is exemplified through the domestic. On the one hand, towards the end of *Bleu blanc vert*, Lilas becomes preoccupied with the new house and ignores the external political reality of the early 1990s: while Ali describes the state of the nation, she talks only about the house and their family. Additionally, neither Lilas nor Ali vote in the 1991 elections in which the Islamists win, instead going to the beach and driving back via the new house. The couple’s focus on the house, and the domestic space it represents, thus leads to a harmful disengagement from external politics. On the other hand, in Lilas’s sections Bey continues to undermine the fixed idea of nationalism that Ali talks about directly, for example, when Lilas says that she chose the house because of a palm tree in the garden: ‘J’ai toujours été subjuguée par l’élégance de cet arbre [...]’. Surtout depuis que je

---


14 This is linked to the notion of the personal as political. The evolution of this idea within feminist movements is discussed in Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, pp.28-30.
sais qu'il symbolise la vie et la fécondité dans toutes les civilisations, et ce depuis des temps très reculés' (p.266). The tree is described as an ancient symbol that crosses national borders, suggesting the intertwining of history on an international level that, again, points to a plurality to the domestic space that Lilas is so focused on. The domestic is a personal symbol of resistance to monoculturalism (just like Lilas’s reading is a very personal and private form of resistance to colonial and patriarchal oppressions). The domestic thus acts as a distraction from external politics, but this does not result in a disengagement from all politics: it gives way to a more insular form of resistance, but one that is just as important – and for those with little access to external politics, perhaps a more attainable form of resistance.

This personal engagement is, however, not entirely isolated from others. In the final chapter, Lilas is alone with Ali, their daughter, and his mother in their new house, and Lilas talks about the external political problems and what hope lies in their future: 'Dans d'autres maisons et peut-être au même instant, d'autres hommes et d'autres femmes se posent sans doute la même question' (p.284). Although they are insulated from the world to a certain extent, their concerns still align with others, suggesting a connectedness between individual personal engagements – and this is linked specifically to other houses, other domestic spaces. Indeed, it is almost immediately after this that, in the last lines of the text, for the first time within the text Lilas speaks directly to Ali:

Ali sursaute au son de ma voix.
- Personne, j'en suis sûre, personne ne peut assassiner l'espoir. Cette phrase est un non-sens. Connais-tu Julio Cortázar, le romancier argentin ? Je viens, cet après-midi même, de relever ces mots dans un de ses livres. C'était là, comme un signe. « L'espoir appartient à la vie. C'est la vie même qui se défend. » (p.284)

Throughout the text, the personal concerns of Lilas and Ali have been kept separate: all their interactions are reported by one or the other. In this last line of the text, Lilas reaches out using fiction. In structuring the end of her text in this way, Bey suggests that fiction is an attempt to open up a dialogue with others. On the one hand, Ali does not reply in the text, so this attempt is left hanging, signalling the possible limitations of fiction in this respect. On the other, this also in some ways invites the reader to carry on the dialogue, to reply in Ali’s place. I consequently propose that the text provides the reader with Lilas’s model of resistance through reading that she
can emulate, and then invites the reader to dialogue with *Bleu blanc vert* in order to make the kind of connection with Lilas that the text implies is made between Lilas and other individuals in other domestic spaces.

Yet just as she does not overidealise Lilas's agency, Bey does not overemphasise reading as a form of resistance. When Lilas is at home with their daughter, she reads voraciously, something of which Ali is critical because: 'Les livres peuvent parfois être dangereux. Ils éloignent de la vraie vie' (p.195). In relation to this, Carlson argues that Lilas's dissatisfaction with her life 'motivate[s] her to turn to books for a sense of fulfilment and validation', and that Ali's criticism of her reading suggests that he perceives Lilas's reading as a threat to their relationship and therefore to the traditional female role she has taken on in the home.\(^{15}\) While Carlson captures the sense of resistance to the patriarchy imposed by Ali that reading can bring for Lilas, she fails to acknowledge the important message highlighted by Ali's criticism: that fiction can cut the reader off from engaging with reality. When Ali makes this claim, it is in relation to romance novels, the reading of which, as I mentioned a moment ago, Lilas herself earlier suggested were potentially harmful to her because they filled her head with unrealistic romantic notions about relationships. Just like the domestic space itself, Bey figures reading both as a form of resistance as Carlson suggests, but also as a potential distraction, such as when Lilas reads fiction to occupy herself during the student strikes, in which Ali convinced her not to participate: 'Durant ces quinze jours de grève que j'ai passés à la maison, je n'ai fait que lire. Des romans, bien sûr' (p.97). It is here that the notion of the *entre-deux* again comes into play. Lilas describes how reality pulls her back from disengagement through fiction:

> Heureusement que j'ai des livres. C'est ma seule consolation pour les jours trop sombres. Quand j'ouvre les pages, c'est comme si je m'embarquais sur un tapis volant. Très haut, très loin. Mais quelquefois le débarquement est difficile. Parce qu'il y a les autres. Mes frères. Ma mère. La famille. Tous ceux qui restent en bas, qui font de grands signes et m'appellent pour que je revienne. Pour que je n'aille pas trop loin sans eux. (p.66)

This suggests why history is important in *Bleu blanc vert* (as well as in all the fictional texts I study across the thesis): the evocation of real-life history keeps the reader in touch with the political reality, in the same way that Lilas is brought back to reality by her family. Bey creates a

\(^{15}\) Carlson, ‘From Orality to Reading’, pp.277-78.
temporalised domestic space through fiction, into which she inserts a model for female agency, but reminds the reader that her readings of both need to remain grounded in reality.

The Individual and the Domestic: Djebar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*

Djebar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* also validates the domestic space as one worthy of literary attention. In much of Djebar's writing the domestic space is foregrounded. This is not surprising since she is for the most part concerned with women's experiences. In Djebar's texts, just like in *Bleu blanc vert* (and indeed in all the texts studied), the external space is a male space, while the internal space of the domestic is a female space – although this space is controlled by the patriarch. The women in Djebar's texts often enter the outside spaces, either as a form of transgression, or as a passage between the female space of the home and that of the hammam.

Like much in Djebar's œuvre, the domestic space is not represented in any straightforward or fixed way, but fluctuates between being a space of oppression and a site of potential liberation as the location of the female community and oral tradition. This general pattern is repeated in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*: as the title suggests, the domestic space of the home is ruled by the patriarch, but, as I will now argue, the text nonetheless recuperates the domestic as a possible site of resistance through Djebar's focus on the female collective and sensuality in the space of the home, troubling the symbolic representation of mothers in particular that I discussed in Chapter 1.

*Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is Djebar's most autobiographical work to date, although it is still presented as a *roman*, placing it between fiction and her personal history (the implications of which I will discuss in detail later in the chapter). It is structured largely chronologically beginning with the author's childhood memories and moving through her adolescence, but this chronology is sometimes disturbed – the text often uses events that happened to Djebar as an adult as a point of entry to her childhood memories, and at various points refers forward to later events and backward to previous ones. The chronology ends approximately a year before the War of Independence broke out, so Djebar writes about a different historical period to Bey: colonial Algeria. *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is split

---

16 A notable exception is *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (1995) which is concerned with the violence of the 1990s, and from which women are strikingly absent.

17 See, for example, *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*, in which the harem in Delacroix's painting (after which the collection of short stories is named) is represented by Djebar as both a space of oppression, and one in which the women have some kind of liberty in terms of their relationship to each other and their own bodies (since they are not veiled).
into three parts, which roughly correspond to three periods of the narrator’s childhood and adolescence: her early childhood, her time boarding at an internat, and her time at university in Algiers before the war broke out. The first part is the one that I will predominantly focus on here, since it is in this part that the domestic space of the childhood home is explored. Nonetheless, the second part is also of interest as a reworking of the domestic space, since the all-girl internat is described as ‘un lieu fermé, un « harem » nouvelle manière’, creating of it a different kind of domestic space (and another all-female space). The third part is largely concerned with the outside space of Algiers, and Djebar’s suicide attempt, and although it does not deal with any domestic space in particular, it acts as an important point of comparison, since it signals Djebar’s separation from the domestic space and the community of women that inhabits it because of her education.

As I argued in relation to Bleu blanc vert, the very fact that Nulle part dans la maison de mon père focuses on the everyday experiences of women suggests that they are worthy of being represented in literature. Moreover, some incidents are brought into the domestic space in the same way as in Bleu blanc vert. For example, Djebar-as-narrator describes how, during a dinner with her family, her father (a schoolteacher) tells a story about a confrontation he had with a pied-noir parent of one of his students. Djebar repeats the fact that her father told this story in the kitchen during a family dinner – ‘ce repas familial’ (p.45); ‘la scène du dîner, dans la cuisine’ (p.46) – even punctuating the father’s explanation with: ‘continua mon père à ce dîner familial’ (p.44) [my italics]. After he tells the story he then leaves the kitchen and leaves the mother ‘Rangeant sa cuisine’ (p.46). The possessive determiner stresses that it is her kitchen, not the kitchen here, suggesting the link of the female to the domestic space. The resistance to colonial rule implicit in the story the father tells is therefore relocated to a space that represents female domesticity. In one of the quotations above, Djebar refers to this as a scène, evoking theatricality. The reader is thus reminded of the fictional aspects of the text that mean the story may or may not have really taken place in this space – Djebar-as-author is in control of the construction and chooses for Djebar-as-narrator to set the story within the domestic space of the kitchen. Djebar, just as Bey does, uses the playfulness allowed by fiction in order to relocate external politics and colonial resistance to the space of the home.

18 Assia Djebar, Nulle part dans la maison de mon père (Paris: Fayard, 2007), p.52. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.
Again as in *Bleu blanc vert*, the domestic space in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is drawn as having been influenced by colonialism. In the above anecdote, Djebar-as-narrator talks about the set-up of the table where the father tells his story, about how they eat 'dans la cuisine [...] pas sur une table basse comme chez les autres familles indigènes, non, à la manière européenne, sur une table haute, et cela même quand ma grand-mère paternelle, qui vivait avec nous, dînait comme nous' (p.44). On the one hand, the presence at the table of the paternal grandmother is stressed, suggesting that the older norms that she represents have evolved, undermining the atemporality of the symbolic domestic space of masculinist nationalism. The aspect of the colonial culture they embrace is neither emancipating nor oppressive, it is just different – although Djebar nonetheless ties the image to her father's story of resistance to colonial culture, dismissing any criticism that she may be upholding colonial values by embracing European traditions. On the other hand, this particular change is something specific to their family, and is described as European, maintaining the division between the two cultures. If Djebar were to insist that colonial culture changed all domestic spaces in the same way, this could result in changing one rigid (symbolic) notion of the domestic for another. Instead she stresses the variety and individuality of domestic spaces: the domestic spaces in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* may have in common that they are inhabited by women, but they also share with these women a sense of individuality and particularity that stops them from being cast as rigid symbols of an overly simplistic traditionalism.

Colonialism not only influences the domestic space: the narrator's education under the French system influences her relationship to the domestic. Djebar evokes this directly in an italicised section that she calls *Intermède*. She discusses *La colonie* and how it is split into two, the colonial culture and 'ce qui reste d'avant' (p.35), saying: 'Les enfants des deux bords ne vivront pas dans la maison de leurs pères!' (p.35). This suggests an evolution, that colonisation has changed the *maisons de leurs pères* and so the next generation will no longer live in the same way, but it also evokes the title and how her own education under the French colonial system has alienated her from the domestic space, meaning she and others like her have no place within the *maison de leurs pères*. In fact, unlike Lilas who continually returns to the domestic space, Djebar-as-narrator moves further away from the domestic space as the text progresses. Although the *internat* is described as a new kind of harem, she boards there and so her education entails a movement out of the domestic space of the home. In the third section of the text Djebar moves even further from the domestic and into the male spaces of the street, cinemas and cafes, where she is able to pass
as a French woman and so move freely because of her sophisticated use of the French language gained from her education in French. A distinction consequently needs to be made here between the evolution of the domestic space and the evolution of Djebar-as-narrator away from the domestic space. Although Djebar undermines the idea of a domestic space untouched by colonialism, she does nonetheless impute a certain stasis to the space, and in particular to the lives of women in the space. For example, her friend Messaouda says to her: ‘Enfermées comme internes durant l’année scolaire, puis, l’été, séquestrées comme nos mères : rien ne change pour nous de toute l’année, hélas!’ (p.169). The domestic space is seen to have changed, but the speed at which it has done so is not as rapid as the evolution of Djebar-as-narrator. While Bleu blanc vert charts the evolution of the domestic space over a period of thirty years, Nulle part dans la maison de mon père charts the separation of Djebar from a slowly evolving domestic space and the female collective it houses.

The separation in fact begins to be felt in the first section of the text. As suggested above, where it is stressed that it is *her* kitchen, the mother acts as a representative of the domestic space, and early in the text Djebar-as-narrator describes how even as a young child her education begins to separate her from her mother. Djebar-as-narrator describes the first book she reads, and how it makes her cry. Her mother, who reads little Arabic and no French, immediately comes in to see what is wrong and initially cannot understand why she would be crying at a book. This is not a complete separation from the mother, since Djebar describes how ‘Après m’avoir contemplée en pleureuse – le livre de bibliothèque encore ouvert sous mes yeux –, ma mère, en rejoignant sa cuisine, concevait sans doute comme un pont fragile entre la sensiblerie qu’excitaient en moi ces histoires occidentales et la beauté secrète, sans égale, pour elle, des vers andalous qu’elle fredonnait, tout émue’ (p.21). Djebar-as-narrator remains connected to her mother through their mutual emotional response to art. Nonetheless, as Hiddleston argues in an article about the representation of the mother in the text: ‘the scene finishes with a reflection on the mother’s lack of identification with her daughter’s reading experience. Unable to read in French, the mother seems mystified by the effect of the book, and though she is in turn moved by the ancient, Andalousian verses she hums to herself, the link between the daughter’s and the mother’s affective experiences is presented as fragile’.19 To this I add that the fragility of the link between the daughter and her mother also suggests a fragility in the link between the daughter and the

---

domestic space her mother represents, since the fact that the kitchen is the realm of the mother is again stressed here, underlining the mother's position as a representative of the domestic space.

Throughout the anecdote, Djebar-as-narrator juxtaposes her reading with the domestic as represented by her mother. She reads as her mother performs domestic tasks in the kitchen, and when her mother comes to see what is wrong, Djebar-as-narrator rejects her mother's pleas to come and eat her dinner in the kitchen, choosing to continue reading instead. Yet the reading itself also takes place within the domestic space — the anecdote begins with a description (in the third person) of the young girl returning home with the book: ‘elle est arrivée en coup de vent dans cet appartement du village, avec, à la main, un roman emprunté à la bibliothèque scolaire. Sans embrasser sa mère dans la cuisine, elle a foncé dans la chambre parentale ; elle s'est jetée à plat ventre sur ce lit qui lui semble immense (en face, dans le haut miroir ancien, elle peut s'entrevoir, tout au fond, en une autre fillette)’ (p.19). The domestic as represented by the mother is bypassed, and again here the image of the mother in the kitchen is stressed. Nonetheless, the focus on furniture, the bed and the mirror, highlights that the act of reading takes place within the domestic space of the home.

I want to stress that talking about Djebar's mother as a representative of tradition is not the same as claiming that she inhabits the symbolic role of the mother typical in masculinist history. As Hiddleston concisely argues: 'Djebar is at pains not to use her memories of intimacy as conduits to a discovery of origin or smooth communion, but she also refuses to reject the mother as the symbol of a tradition no longer pertinent either to postcolonial experience or to an emancipated "feminist" generation'.20 I, like Hiddleston in this quotation, want to contrast the symbolic idea of the mother that I discussed in Chapter 1, who is deployed as a means to gain access to an idealised past, with the mother as portrayed here, who is a symbol of a female tradition to which she belongs, and to which Djebar herself has a somewhat troubled connection.21

To demonstrate how Djebar problematises her relationship to the collective, and how this correlates to her relationship with her mother, I want to examine in detail one specific memory that Djebar describes, when she accompanies her mother to a friend's house. Within each of three parts I talked about above, there are chapters, and each of these chapters is broken up into small

---

20 Ibid., p.25.
sections. The following is the majority of the second section of the first chapter, which follows on from the first scene of the book where Djebar accompanies her mother through the streets:

La mère et sa fillette. Ombre fluette, je transporterai ce duo au-dedans de moi, tant de décennies plus tard : le passage du vestibule à la lumière ensoleillée des premières rues – pas celles du centre-ville, non, le trajet codé, toujours en lisière, le long des ruines romaines – devient ma première aventure. [...] 

Nous arrivons enfin à la demeure de la famille alliée. Accueil de voix joyeuses, bruyantes, dès le vestibule. Les hôtesses embrassent ma mère [...].

[...] Des jeunes filles, des parentes, me soulèvent, moi, la petite, et m'embrassent avec exubérance.

A la suite de ma mère, je dois aller m'incliner devant une ou deux aïeules, l'une presque aveugle, l'autre accroupie sur un tapis, un chapelet dans sa main tremblotante.

[...] Soudain, des fillettes m'entraînent avec autorité vers un long vestibule obscur ; je dois partager leurs jeux... L'une fait gesticuler des poupées faites de baguettes de bois peint, des Guarahouz, l'autre, accroupie sans façon, désire rivaliser avec moi au jeu des osselets.

J'aurais préféré rester là-bas, près de l'oranger amer, ou m'asseoir au bord du bassin tout près de ma mère, pour écouter les bavardages précieux de ses amies.

Une jeune fille m'enlace avec des rires, des baisers qui m'étouffent ; une autre, accroupie à même le carrelage et sans façon, caresse ma robe courte ou ma jupe écossaise.

– Elle est habillée comme une petite Française ! s'exclame-t-elle, ironique ou envieuse, en direction de ma mère qui sourit, ne dit rien.

Puis, après un moment :

– J'aimerais bien, soupire la jeune parente, échanger sa jupe contre mon séroual !

Elle a un regard de dédain vers son pantalon bouffant à la turque, tout de satin fleuri.

« Si ma mère n’était pas là, ai-je secrètement pensé, j’accepterais volontiers l’échange ! »

Une autre, à son tour, déclare haut devant l’auditoire « qu’il paraît que son père, au village... ». Je me tais, je me sens soudain étrangère, étrangère à cause de ces menus commérages.

– Mais oui, insiste une troisième sur un ton excité, son père lui achète, dit-on, des poupées... pas comme celles que nous fabriquons nous-mêmes avec des chiffons et des baguettes de bois, non... (elle rêve, nostalgique) De vraies poupées comme chez les Français !

Ma mère se lève, s'éloigne vers un autre groupe ; ce n'est là, pour elle, que bavardage.

Moi, silencieuse dans ce patio bruissant des voix de ces femmes de tous âges qui ne sortent qu'ensevelies de la tête jusqu'aux pieds, soudain alarmée par cette remarque, je me sens « la fille de mon père ».
The passage begins with the evocation of the mother and daughter in a stand-alone sentence, uniting them as they travel through the outside space. Djebar-as-narrator is initially welcomed and embraced by the women, but no sooner is she physically separated from the mother by the other girls than the comments begin about her French dress and dolls that mark her apart from the collective. She wants to be part of this collective, to sit with the other women, but by the end of the passage, she has moved from being affiliated with her mother and the domestic space of the women her mother is so much at ease in, to describing herself as her father’s daughter. This affiliation with the father is not an entry into the masculine space: first, when she is in the masculine space outside at the beginning of the passage she is linked to her mother; second, the women are concerned with the items that mark her as feminine – her skirt/dress and her dolls – and the gendered items suggest, as much as they mark her as different, that she belongs in the female space. In Bleu blanc vert, Lilas may have felt at times smothered by the domesticity of the building, but this is directly linked to the fact that she fits in there and has trouble breaking away from the space. In contrast, Djebar-as-narrator lives in an earlier time period and so problematises her relationship to both the space and the women who inhabit it because the influence of French culture introduced by the father (the most important of which is her later education in the French school system), and the relative emancipation it affords her, means that even in the early stages of her childhood she inhabits the space without fully belonging. Her mother does not, therefore, act as some kind of conduit through which Djebar gains entry to the female collective (which would emulate the discourses I discuss in Chapter 1), and their physical separation once they are in the group of women stresses this fact. If when walking through the street holding hands their physical connection, as Mortimer suggests, means that ‘the mother keeps her anchored to the world of women’, then, I think, their physical separation when they are within the collective implies Djebar’s singular position within it.

There are two things I want to clarify in terms of Djebar’s representation of her relationship to the collective. First, although Djebar acknowledges the significant influence of France on Algeria, the personal agency she expresses in Nulle part dans la maison de mon père is nevertheless presented as specifically Algerian: its emancipating potential is separated from the

---

French feminist movement. Djebar-as-narrator bumps into a friend of European origin (her parents were Italian), Mag, with whom she was very close at school in Paris, a meeting that she says happens 'avant ou peu après les soubresauts de 1968...' (p.136). She then suggests that because of the Algerian war there is 'une invisible frontière' (p.137) between them. In addition to this, over the two pages that she describes this encounter, she mentions 1968 twice, as well as 1962 and the War of Independence. Since 1968 evokes (among other things) the French feminist movement, the separation between them that occurred because of the Algerian War (after which Mag moved from Algeria to Lyon) implicitly also separates the French feminist movement from Algerian women. This suggests that Djebar is rejecting the (unproblematic) inclusion of Algerian women in the French feminist movement.

Second, just because Djebar sets herself aside from the collective, the other women do not form a homogenous group – they simply have a common link to a traditionalism that she is separated from because of her education. The individuality of women within the collective is implied through the representation of the mother, whose uniqueness is stressed. For example, she is described as being 'pleinément consciente d’être l’« épouse du maître arabe », certes, mais aussi la « dame de la cité ancienne », qui gardait sa simplicité de bourgeoise au milieu de tant de ruraux des deux bords’ (pp.89-90). First she is defined in terms of her husband in a traditional manner, but this definition itself stresses her unique position in the community and sets her aside from the female collective that symbolically represents the traditional values that define her in this manner. Second she is defined as a woman with an identity separate from the female collective of ruraux – and the idea that these women make up their own collective separate from the women in the city is itself a means to stress the heterogeneity of the female collective (or perhaps ‘female collectives' would be more apt). In particular, this individuality is underlined through the mother’s relationship with the father, which is described as being different from the other women in her community, a spouse ‘au sens où l’entendaient les voisines européennes’ (p.89) – although simultaneously the narrative stresses that 'elle vivait cloitrée, comme les autres femmes « indigènes »' (p.89) suggesting that this is not simply an adoption of French norms, but an influencing of the space where she lives cloitrée itself.

It is emphasised that the relationship between the mother and father takes place within the domestic space. The last chapter of the first section of the text is called 'La chambre parentale', and Djebar begins the chapter by describing the room:
A mes yeux d'enfant, dans le village colonial, la chambre et ses meubles en acajou massif, d'un élégant style 1920, chambre à coucher complète avec un lit large et bas aux hauts encadrements de tête et de pied, aux deux tablettes de nuit et à l'imposante armoire aux trois immenses miroirs, faisaient partie intégrante de mes premiers rêves encore informes, souvent fantastiques, où luisaient indéfiniment les boules de cuivre ornant les quatre coins du lit, celles-là mêmes que les miroirs, en face, reflétaient lorsque, dans mon petit lit à côté, je me réveillais juste avant l'aube et que ma mère, se dressant lentement, sortait pieds nus de la chambre pour ne pas nous troubler, mon père, à l'autre bout du grand lit, et moi. (p.95)

Djebbar here focuses on describing the furniture found in the home. The everyday routine of the family is emphasised at the end of the passage: the image of her waking and her mother getting up every day. In addition to this the colonial nature of the interior is highlighted. Djebbar-as-narrator highlights here that she lived in a village colonial (and this has been mentioned a number of times previously) and she describes the 1920s style of the room, suggesting that interior decorating is affected by the time period (although the period of her childhood she describes took place in the 1930s, so the interior is not entirely up-to-date). Thus, in a similar way to Bey, Djebbar temporalises the domestic space, showing that it is not unchanged since pre-colonial times, since it is fashioned in a style that was popular during colonial times (and most probably influenced by European fashions of the time).

What, in my opinion, is perhaps most important about this chapter is that the bedroom, and thus the domestic space it is a part of, is cast as a space of female pleasure. In this chapter about her parents’ room Djebbar-as-narrator claims that later in life a memory returned to her of her parents having sex while she was in the room as a baby: ‘le fait d'avoir perçu le long chant de jouissance des sens (voix femelle, me dis-je avec certitude)’ (p.97). She focuses here on the female voice, suggesting through the image of the chant that pleasure is a form of female self-expression. Later in the text, and in particular during her suicide attempt, Djebbar-as-narrator repeats over and over that if her father finds out about her fiancé Tariq (who represents her own self-expression through desire since she chooses him as a suitor, rather than her father) she will kill herself, something she links to a patriarchal ban on female desire: ‘« Si ton père sait quoi ? Les baisers que tu acceptes avec, à peine, l'ombre de l'ombre d'un début de désir ? »’ (p.355). The domestic where her mother’s pleasure is expressed is thus recuperated as a site of resistance to a patriarchy represented by the father that denies female self-expression in terms of desire (although this is nuanced by the fact that the father is, of course, linked to the mother’s desire). Moreover, Djebbar
suggests that how to express oneself through desire can be transmitted from mother to daughter:
'Lentement ensuite, durant les longues années de ma première vie conjugale, j’expérimentai sans le savoir, mais indissolublement, une transmission de femme à femme : ma mère, jadis jeune épouse de dix-neuf ou vingt ans, m’avait ainsi délégué, à son insu, la plénitude sereine du plaisir amoureux' (p.98). Djebar thus places herself as part of a female lineage based in the domestic space and united by desire.

Another way that Djebar inserts female expression into the domestic space is through the use of the first person. The 'I' that she uses inhabits the childhood home, and so inserts subjectivity into this space. The relationship of the 'I' of the text to Djebar the author's subjectivity is, however, problematised. The text is presented as an autobiographical text, signalled for example by the use of the author's real first name – 'dans cette classe de collège, j’oublie que, pour mes camarades, je suis différente, avec le nom si long de mon père et ce prénom de Fatima qui m’ennoblissait chez les miens mais m’amoidrit là, en territoire des « Autres »' (p.103). In fact, as a number of critics have noted, Djebar now describes in Nulle part dans la maison de mon père in the first person incidents that she had earlier attributed to fictional or fictionalised characters in her earlier texts (if sometimes in slightly altered forms), such as her suicide attempt, which was fictionalised to various extents in a number of her texts – for example, it is described autobiographically in L’Amour, la Fantasia, but in Les Nuits de Strasbourg as having been experienced by the fictional protagonist.23 There is therefore a parallel with Mokeddem’s œuvre, which I discuss in the next chapter, and which also moves from fictional exposition of the author’s life to autobiography. However, unlike Mokeddem’s La Transe des insoumis, which presents itself as a straightforward autobiography (although a very literary and stylised one), Nulle part dans la maison de mon père is marked paratextually as a roman, implying fictionality. On a basic level, as in the other texts I have discussed so far, Nulle part dans la maison de mon père blurs the line between fact and fiction in order to question the boundaries between the two. In this case, Djebar asks where the truth of memories begins and ends, alluded to from the first line of the first chapter: 'Une fillette surgit : elle a deux ans et demi, peut-être trois. L’enfance serait-elle tunnel de songes, étincelant, là-bas, sur une scène de théâtre où tout se rejoue, mais pour toi seule à l’œil

23 This and other examples of these retellings, as well as a detailed discussion of Djebar’s movement towards a more straightforwardly autobiographical voice, can be found in Mortimer, ‘Writing the Personal’. A number of other critics also discuss the autobiographical elements in Djebar’s œuvre. In relation to Nulle part dans la maison de mon père see also Rice, Polygraphies, pp.33-34. For a discussion of this in Djebar’s earlier work see, for example, Trudy Agar-Mendousse, Violence et créativité : de l’écriture algérienne au féminin (Paris: Harmattan, 2006), pp.19-102. More generally, for a summary of current debates relating to notions of home in relation to Francophone women’s autobiography, see Edwards and Hogarth, ‘Introduction’.
exorbité ?’ (p.13). The *peut-être* of the first sentence immediately introduces a sense of doubt to the accuracy of the memories. The *songes* are then linked to fictionality through the idea of theatre, using a metafictional marker to stress the divide that is being blurred. In this sense, the *entre-deux* between fiction and autobiography acts in a similar way to that I have already described in earlier chapters, to problematise the relationship between fact and fiction.24

In addition to this, I want to argue that Djebar validates the domestic through the use of this fiction/autobiography *entre-deux*. Novels have, as suggested by Marangoly George, been marked as belonging to the ‘feminine’ consumer and the domestic in Western culture: ‘Over the last two centuries, the novel in the west has been read as having as its focus: love, courtship, seduction, female subjectivity, the home and domesticity’.25 Djebar problematises her relationship to the French literary tradition, suggesting through the evocation of translated Arabic poetry that she holds a singular position within it – just as her French education separates her from the female collective, her Algerianness sets her apart from others in the French literary tradition. Nonetheless, she does place herself within the French literary tradition – something she highlights in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* by evoking French literature, such as that by Baudelaire. Using the novel form is consequently to some extent a recuperation of the domestic, because it places her first person expression in the domestic space of the novel. Be that as it may, she is also part of the Algerian literary tradition (which is both French and Arabic language) George goes on to argue about novels: ‘With the advent of colonial fiction, however, this literary genre's implication in events of nation and empire can no longer be ignored. In fact, imperial literature can be read as the imagining of one's (domestic) ideology in an expanded space’.26 Algerian nationalism (and indeed some other anti-colonial nationalist movements) responded to colonial literature in kind, and novels have been used as an important tool to express and define nationalism. I want to argue, then, that the use of the novel form recuperates the domestic, but that it is, in fact, for more personal reasons than a general analysis of genres might allow.

In *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, Djebar talks about her first novel, *La Soif*, published in 1957: ‘se mettre soudain à écrire, sans doute trop jeune, pendant la guerre d’Algérie – l’autre, celle de mes vingt ans – et qui plus est, pas des essais nationalistes, pas de profession de foi lyrique ou polémique (c’était ce genre de témoignage que l’on attendait de moi !), écrire donc des romans,

24 Since the text is autobiographical it can also be linked to identity formation. For a more general discussion of ‘un espace identitaire de l’”entre-deux”’ in relation to both Maghrebian and *beur* women’s writing see the chapter ‘L’identité par rapport à l’autre’ in Segarra, *Leur pesant de poudre*, pp.151-64.
26 Ibid.
qui semblaient gratuits'. At the end of this small section, Djebar talks about how during this time 'la littérature algérienne fleurissait à l'ombre d'un quatuor d'aînés: Feraoun, Mammeri, Dib et Kateb... She thus emphasises the importance of nationalist literature, that it is not necessarily the genre of novel itself that is seen as anti-nationalist, but rather that only novels that were seen as dealing with the nationalist cause (which La Soif was not) were valued. In Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria, Hiddleston describes this first novel as 'a tentative study of the processes by which a young woman achieves self-awareness and a sense of her position in relation to others' in which 'reflection on the war of independence is surprisingly absent' and notes that 'Djebar later disowned La Soif as a result of criticisms levelled by the Algerian intelligentsia, who accused her of ignoring the reality of contemporary Algeria, though more recently she has explained her creation as "une sorte de rêve", an account of her intimate and personal preoccupations at the time'. The criticism surrounding the text seemingly stems therefore from its lack of interaction with external politics. One of the main points I want to make in this chapter is that the personal can be itself a form of political engagement, and consequently that a text such as this can be read in terms of a political engagement (although not necessarily one linked directly to the nationalist movement).

As women are seen as inhabiting only the space of the domestic, describing their everyday experiences (that is to say those that are not extraordinary like the experiences I explored in the previous two chapters) is itself a form of recuperating the domestic. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, because women are symbolically cast within the domestic, their concerns are also symbolically cast as domestic. I want to argue that a focus on any aspect of women's everyday experiences is a way of recuperating the domestic, not just in the sense of the home, but in the sense of all the roles and spaces that women occupy (including reproduction and thus sexuality). Because of this recuperation, it is possible to argue that the personal is political, because the expression of the personal becomes a form of resistance to the marginalisation of women's experiences. Later in Ces voix qui m'assiègent, which was published in 1999, Djebar talks about how she finally feels she can respond to a poet who in 1976 on Algerian radio 'attaquait encore avec hargne le non-engagement politique (et le succès éditorial) de mon premier roman publié... en 1957'! It is not a stretch to assume that these same concerns would preoccupy her a decade

---

27 Djebar, Ces voix qui m'assiègent, p.18.
28 Ibid.
29 Hiddleston, Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria, p.23.
30 Hiddleston notes that in Roman Maghrébin 'Abdelkebir Khatibi also recuperates the novel by arguing that it charts a young Algerian woman’s discovery of her body' (Ibid., p.188 n.2).
31 Djebar, Ces voix qui m'assiègent, p.87.
later when she published _Nulle part dans la maison de mon père_. Therefore, coupling the personal '
I' with the novel form is (for Djebar) a recuperation of the female everyday and a form of resistance to the rejection of personal concerns for which her first novel was criticised.

Djebar represents the autobiographical 'I' as being traditionally seen as taboo for Algerian women. Placing this 'I' in the domestic space of the novel is consequently what makes the domestic a site of resistance. I do not agree with critics who argue that, for women, the use of 'I' is on its own oppositional – Chaulet-Achour, for example, claims that 'toute femme qui écrit son « je » devient messagère interdite de ce qu'une société patriarcale veut cacher jalousement'.

Marangoly George – expanding on an argument by Chandra Talpade Mohanty that being a woman or non-white does not automatically place someone in a position of resistance – challenges the notion 'I write, therefore I resist'.

I want to argue along similar lines to George, but narrowing the phrase slightly, challenging instead the notion _I write 'I', therefore I resist_. In the texts I have examined, I have argued that the use of the first person expresses the agency of the female subject and this undermines the objectification of women. Although I want to argue that this also applies to the texts studied in this chapter, I do not want to suggest that this applies universally. For example, in relation to _L'Algérienne_, which I examined in Chapter 2, the first person is used as a sign of authenticity, and yet, as we saw, this presumed authenticity in fact upheld colonial power structures by placing the actual author (Nivat) in a position of power in terms of representation over her subject (Ighilahriz). That said, in _Nulle part dans la maison de mon père_, I want to argue that the 'I' is oppositional for Djebar because it is placed in the domestic space of the novel. In _L'Amour, la fantasia_ Djebar talks about the use of the first person as transgressive for a woman in Algerian culture, suggesting that the use of 'I' is radical in _her particular situation_: 'Comment dire « je », puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective?'

The female collective resides in the domestic space. Writing about Algerian domestic concerns (the space of women) within the space of a novel that is coded as domestic locates the 'I' within the space of the collective, which is where she herself says that 'I' is radical. Consequently, the 'I' is oppositional because it is placed in the domestic space of the novel.

---

34 Djebar, _L'Amour, la Fantasia_, p.223. For a detailed analysis see Rice, _Polygraphies_, pp.135-6.
In the case of *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, the label of fictionality is also presented, not only as a way of manipulating the way the text is read and the positioning of the 'I', but as something that is necessary because of the nature of writing. At the end of the 'Postface' Djebar writes:

La vie – même quand elle n’est pas de chair, mais réduite à des mots mobiles – la vie que vous osez ou croyez ressusciter, vous, l’espace d’une seconde, métamorphosée en Dieu-le-père et en Dieu-la-mère à la fois, auteure donc, pleine de la semence ou de la douleur de la gestation, puis de son accomplissement – oui, la vie du Texte résiste, se rebiffe, se rebelle : au terme de votre entreprise, vous voici en train de devenir, au cœur de cette mise en œuvre, lecteur (lectrice) aussi, par humilité ou dévouement à ce mélange, à ce magma : un livre, un parmi des milliers, des millions que le temps réduira ensuite en poussière ou à une architecture arachnéenne faite de multiples silences, symphonie d’un rêve évanoui, mais obsédant. (p.406)

Here she implies that her life, once confined to the written word, takes on a life of its own, and she herself becomes a reader. I agree with Chikhi’s assessment that throughout Djebar’s œuvre ‘sa relation au monde a été façonnée et renouvelée au fil du temps par sa bibliothèque’. I want to argue that by highlighting the influence of reading on her, Djebar also reminds the reader that different readers are affected differently by a text. In the example I gave earlier, when she starts to cry when reading, it is the response that she has as a reader that is spotlighted. Her mother's lack of understanding not only highlights their separation, it also underlines how different people respond differently to texts. This reminds the attentive reader that, with each reader comes a different reading, that although the written fixes the past in a potentially problematic manner, in the same way that I discussed in the previous two chapters the text is not a completely static entity from the point of view of the reader. The above passage spotlights this interaction because when Djebar joins the reader as a reader at the end of the text she invites the reader to recognise the multitude of possible readings the text allows: the reader is encouraged not to colonise the text with her own reading, but to ‘other’ it along with Djebar.

This othering of the text is important in terms of how the reader is encouraged to interact with the 'I'. Just as the text is separated from the reader, so is the agency implied by the 'I'. I want to argue that Djebar does this because she does not speak to the collective as Bey does, but about

---

35 Beïda Chikhi, 'Une visite dans l’atelier itinérant d’Assia Djebar', *L’Esprit créateur* 48, no. 4 (2008), 117-28 (p.123). Chikhi also discusses the influence of other art forms on the author as represented throughout her œuvre.
the collective – she acts as a *porte-parole*. Within *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, Djebar sets herself up as a – somewhat unwilling – *porte-parole* for women. The text describes how on a French holiday day during her time at school, pork is served to the European girls but the Muslim girls, who cannot eat pork for religious reasons, are excluded from this. The Muslim girls therefore decide as a group not to eat and to demand to see the headmistress. Djebar-as-narrator is nominated as spokesperson, but when the headmistress asks her what food they would like as a replacement, she realises that they have not discussed this as a group. Accordingly, she makes the choice herself, asking for vol-au-vent. Her individuality is alluded to here, as although she has been nominated as spokesperson, it is her choice of dish that she puts forward (which itself underlines the impossibility of always speaking for the collective, because the collective will is not always obvious or known). I want to argue that this role of spokesperson is linked here to the domestic through food. The preparation of food is (as suggested by her mother's continual placement in the kitchen) a female domestic concern. Her first experience as a *porte-parole* is to choose food that will be prepared for a group of girls, something that implicitly links her role as spokesperson to the domestic space of women. Djebar explicitly links this incident to her wider project: ‘Grâce à Dieu, je n'eus plus, ensuite, à intervenir comme «*porte-parole* » pour des questions qui me paraissaient seulement d'ordre symbolique’ (p.165). Her more general role as spokesperson is therefore explicitly linked to this earlier domestic concern.

Since Djebar separates her text from her, it is, I think, the text that becomes the *porte-parole*. The text acts as a *porte-parole* for female agency, and since I have argued that the textual space is a domestic space, this is an expression of agency from within the domestic space. In this sense Djebar's personal history becomes a way of speaking for women whose agency has been ignored by the historical record. As in the case of Bey, the implied fictionality stops the agency, and indeed the domestic space where it is located, from being over-idealised, something that is necessary because of the prevailing patriarchy. Towards the end of the text, Djebar repeats the title and says: 'Pourquoi, mais pourquoi faut-il que je me retrouve, moi et toutes les autres, «nulle part dans la maison de mon père » ?' (p.391). The quotation suggests that because the father, the patriarch, controls the home, women (implied by the use of the feminine plural of *tout*) are excluded from this space. Again as with Bey, this is where the *entre-deux* helps in our conceptualisation of the tension. Marking the text as a *roman* stops the casting of the domestic as a space of resistance from becoming over-idealised, while the inclusion of real personal history grounds the text in reality, and clearly marks the link to the everyday reality of women.
The relationship of the agency expressed in the texts to the lived reality of women is consequently different in *Bleu blanc vert* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*. Lilas in *Bleu blanc vert* does not so much speak for other women, as provide a model of individual agency for other women who read the text. In contrast, Djebar suggests that her text is a *porte-parole* for the agency that already exists, and was expressed through history, within the collective. In some respects, this can be seen as a difference in audience. Djebar is writing about a colonial space where French culture influences Algerian culture, and she is aware of her international audience (and indeed the women for whom she speaks, the female collective of her mother’s generation, themselves most probably do not speak or read French to the extent needed to actively engage with her text) and, as a result, writes to demonstrate the agency of Algerian women in a way that subverts discourses that deny them this agency. In contrast, Bey writes about a post-independence Algerian space that belongs to Algeria alone and presents her text in a way that suggests that she writes first and foremost for an Algerian audience. Of course, there is not a strict separation between the two approaches. Although the construction of each text seems to suggest one approach to a greater extent than the other, *Bleu blanc vert* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* certainly overlap in these respects – in both texts there is a sense that female agency already exists, but also that the text can provide an individual example of agency for others to follow.

If, as I have argued, this agency is a means of resisting from within the domestic space of the text, providing an example of agency is a way of inviting the reader to herself join in this resistance – something akin to de Certeau’s argument that reading is one of a number of ‘tactics’, which is to say ways of reappropriating the everyday from those people and structures that impose conformity.\(^\text{36}\) Neither Bey nor Djebar over-idealise reading – for Lilas reading is a potential distraction from reality, while for Djebar-as-narrator it separates her from her mother and the domestic this latter represents. Nonetheless, in both these texts, I think, the emphasis on reading is in fact a way of encouraging the reader to engage with what Attridge calls the singularity of the texts: the manner in which a literary work invites its readers to experience its uniqueness through the event of reading.\(^\text{37}\) In *Bleu blanc vert* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, any interaction with the singularity also invites the reader to join in the reimagining of the domestic, a reimagining that casts off the masculinist notion of an atemporal and homogenous domestic

---


space. The texts resist masculinist historical constructions by undermining the homogenous atemporal domestic space of masculinist history, and by inserting agency into the domestic space, but it is the readings within the texts that invite the reader to engage in her own personal political engagement and to join in with this process. In other words, the authors recast the domestic as a site of individual resistance that rejects the homogeneity of masculinist history, and, while doing so, they encourage the reader to partake in her own personal politicisation of the domestic in order that she do the same.
The novels studied in the previous three chapters all draw attention to their own fictionality in one way or another. I have repeatedly touched on how this overt fictionality tempers the agency that the authors create for the women in their novels, and this chapter examines one more text that broadly fits into this model (Mosteghanemi’s Chaos of the Senses), as well as one that does not (Mokeddem’s La Transe des insoumis). Chaos of the Senses is the second book of a trilogy originally written in Arabic.¹ Rather than simply continuing the fictional story of the first text in the trilogy, however, Chaos of the Senses figures the earlier text, Memory in the Flesh as possibly having itself been written by the narrator of Chaos of the Senses. Mokeddem’s La Transe des insoumis is an autobiographical text which revisits and rewrites episodes of the author’s life and childhood that she had written about in her earlier fictional works. Both texts therefore reconfigure the earlier texts, and assuming that reality has already been reconfigured through fiction in the earlier works, Chaos of the Senses and La Transe des insoumis are therefore reconfiguring the reconfigured. This chapter compares the two different reconfigurations – the first being the reconfiguration of fiction within fiction and the second of fiction within autobiographical writing – with the eventual aim of seeing how the differences affect the political implications of the texts.

**Fiction within Fiction: Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s Memory in the Flesh and Chaos of the Senses**

Chaos of the Senses is the second book of a trilogy (at the time of writing, only two books of the trilogy have been published in English – The Last Bed will be released in the UK in December 2015). As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the first book in the trilogy, Memory in the Flesh, originally published in 1993, was the first Arabic-language novel written by a female Algerian author to be

---

¹ I will be studying this text in English translation. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it was into English rather than French that Mosteghanemi’s work was first translated and in English that Mosteghanemi originally gained an international readership. Secondly, as Holt argues, Mosteghanemi writes in Arabic to make a statement about the language of expression for Algerian writers, and there is a potential effacement of this in the French translation. For a full discussion of the obscuration of the linguistic problem in the French translation see Elizabeth M. Holt, “In a Language That Was Not His Own”: On Ahlām Mustaghānamī’s Dhākirat al-jasad and its French Translation Mémoires de la chair’, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008), 123-40.
published. *Memory in the Flesh* is written from the point of view of the painter Khaled,² who fought during the War of Independence, when he was injured in battle and his arm was amputated. The majority of the novel is set in France, where Khaled exiled himself because of post-independence corruption and where he meets Ahlam, a young novelist and the now grown-up daughter of his friend and commander in the ALN (Armée de libération nationale – the armed wing of the FLN).³ After their initial encounter at one of his art exhibitions, they arrange a series of secret meetings and phone conversations, and after reading her novel, he falls in love with her. Aside from one kiss, their relationship is not physical, but emotional – she admits at the end of the text that at the time of the meetings she did love him. Nonetheless, throughout the narrative Khaled stresses his physical desire for Ahlam. Their relationship is complicated when Khaled lends Ahlam a volume of poems written by his friend Ziad, a Palestinian poet. He later introduces Ahlam to Ziad, with whom – in Khaled’s mind at least – she has fallen in love through reading his poetry. At the end of the text, Ziad is killed and Khaled returns to Algeria for the first time in many years to attend the wedding of Ahlam, whose marriage to a high ranking Algerian official has been arranged by her uncle.

*Chaos of the Senses* continues the story of the now-married Ahlam, who narrates the text. Although Ahlam refers back to her interactions with Khaled, *Chaos of the Senses* is in fact a new love story, with a different lover and a different love triangle (although with striking similarities, the implications of which I discuss in a moment). The narrative begins with a fictional short story written by the narrator about a love affair between a man and a woman. The line between the fiction she has written and her life is blurred when she goes to the cinema in search of the fictional man she has created, and finds him – although she does not interact with him at this point, and identifies him only by the cologne he is wearing. She then goes to a cafe, again to look for him, and, believing she has found him, she begins an affair with the man she meets there – a photographer called Khaled, who lost the use of his arm when he was shot during the 1988 riots. As the text progresses, she continues to write her fictional story, allowing it to inform and dictate aspects of her life, while also using her life to inform the development of her fictional story. A key moment of their affair is when Khaled lends her a book, and she falls in love with him because of

² There is an inconsistency between the two texts in the transliteration of the name Khaled. In *Memory of the Flesh* it is Khalid (p.180), while in *Chaos of the Senses* it is Khaled (p.110). This is a problem with a number of names, including that of the author (Mosteghanemi is transliterated in a number of ways, such as Mustaghānāmī) but (aside from direct quotations) I will use the spellings as they appear in: Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Chaos of the Senses*, trans. Baria Ahmar (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2007). Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.

³ Khaled predominantly refers to her by the nickname he gave her as a baby, Hayat. However, I will refer to her as Ahlam as it evokes the link to the later text and also to the author.
the notations she believes he has made in the margins. At the end of the text, the narrator discovers that Khaled is neither the owner of the cologne she recognised, nor of the book (and so not the author of the notations) since the apartment where he is staying, and where they have been meeting, is the apartment of a friend, whose possessions Khaled has been using. Ahlam realises that she is in love with this friend, a journalist whose death at the hands of Islamists is the trigger for this revelation. The text ends with Ahlam laying the notebook in which she has been writing the fictional story at the journalist's grave and suspending her writing activity – although in the last paragraph it is hinted that she is on the verge of buying another notebook, and thus that she will begin writing again sometime soon.

The relationship of *Chaos of the Senses* to *Memory in the Flesh* is represented in the text in as ambiguous a way as the relationship between the fictional story and the narrator's life. In an article that discusses the representation of women across Mosteghanemi's œuvre, Ellen McLarney argues that *Memory in the Flesh* is presented as having been written by the narrator of *Chaos of the Senses*, which means that in the second text of the trilogy Ahlam 'shapes, rather than being shaped'. I acknowledge that this is presented as one possibility in the text, but I want to argue that an alternate possibility is also left open, suggesting a more complex interaction between the two texts than McLarney allows for. In *Memory in the Flesh*, Khaled is compelled to tell the story of his relationship with Ahlam because he discovers she has written a novel about their relationship. *Chaos of the Senses* makes it clear that the narrator wrote a book about her involvement with Khaled prior to the start of the text, but does not makes it clear whether the book written by Ahlam in *Chaos of the Senses* was *Memory in the Flesh*, or whether it was the book described in *Memory in the Flesh* as having been published by Ahlam about her relationship with Khaled prior to the start of *Memory in the Flesh* (in this latter possibility, *Memory in the Flesh* is authored by Khaled in response to the book written by Ahlam that she refers to in *Chaos of the Senses*). Where my reading therefore differs from McLarney's is in its focus on the implications of the ambiguity over whether the narrator of *Chaos of the Senses* is the object of desire in *Memory in the Flesh* or whether she is also its author.

A distinction needs to be made between the different levels of fiction operating in *Chaos of the Senses*. Both texts are works of fiction written by Mosteghanemi, and for the sake of clarity I will refer to this as the first level of removal from reality (although the relationship of fiction to

---

reality, as I have discussed throughout the thesis, is more complex than this). Within *Chaos of the Senses* the fictional story written by Ahlam creates a second level of removal from reality: fiction within fiction. If we accept the possibility that *Memory in the Flesh* was written by the fictional Ahlam, we accept its reconfiguration from the first level to the second level. This is one of two possibilities. If Ahlam did not write *Memory in the Flesh* it remains at the first level, as a work of fiction written by Mosteghanemi rather than by her character (although of course, she writes through her character). The ambiguity over whether Ahlam is or is not the author of *Memory in the Flesh* means that the reader is forced to confront both levels at the same time, and thus the complex relationship of reality to fiction, where the lines are not always clearly drawn. Similar to the texts I have discussed in the previous chapters, in *Chaos of the Senses* this is not a breakdown of the line between reality and fiction. For example, when her lover compares Ahlam to the woman in her novel, the narrator responds: 'Isn't that why you're here today? So that you can claim to have cracked open a beautiful illusion and obtained the woman herself instead of her books, instead of questions that have no answers?' (p.173). In *Chaos of the Senses*, fiction is therefore presented as a multi-layered illusion where any absolute truth is always just outside both the reader's and the characters' grasps.

The two levels of fiction go hand in hand with two levels of reconfiguration. *Chaos of the Senses* rewrites the love-triangle from *Memory in the Flesh*: in both texts the woman has a relationship with a man named Khaled who has lost the use of one arm, and both women fall in love with someone else through reading something they have written. Yet in *Chaos of the Senses*, this love-triangle is presented from the female perspective. This type of rewriting can be seen as similar to the insertion of agency that I have talked about throughout the thesis: *Chaos of the Senses* reconfigures Ahlam from an object to a subject. What sets *Chaos of the Senses* apart from the other texts is the reconfiguration that takes place within the text itself, a reconfiguration that the characters themselves undertake. The narrator's lover tells her his name is Khaled and compares himself to the Khaled she has written about because he has lost the use of his arm – although the fact that this is a reconfiguration is underlined by the fact that his arm was not amputated, but rendered useless, setting him apart from the Khaled of *Memory in the Flesh*. In making this comparison, Khaled of *Chaos of the Senses* also likens the narrator to Ahlam in *Memory in the Flesh*: 'It frightened me to stumble upon a hero so much like myself. We shared a common city, common concerns and disappointments, and the same handicap and tastes as well. You were the only thing we didn't share – you were his lover' (p.172). Thus he actively
reconfigures himself and the narrator as taking part in a new version of the same love story. The characters are self-conscious reconfigurers of the earlier text who cast themselves in the roles, but are also reconfigured by the text as living the same love-triangle.

Two possibilities are therefore presented to the reader in terms of the mechanism of reconfiguration that is at play. If Memory in the Flesh is Khaled's narrative, Chaos of the Senses is a straightforward reconfiguration of a masculinist vision of a woman as an object. In the alternative, if Ahlam was the author of Memory in the Flesh, Chaos of the Senses reconfigures the earlier text as the creation of the very woman it objectifies, casting the earlier text in a new light, since the objectified woman was in fact in control of the narrative the whole time. Again, the ambiguity allows both possibilities to exist at once, and allows the reader to enjoy the best of both worlds since she is not forced to choose between a reconfiguration of Ahlam or a reconfiguration of Memory in the Flesh, but can embrace both at the same time. More than this though, I want to suggest that the ambiguity allows Mosteghanemi to draw attention to her own position as the female author of Memory in the Flesh, while still maintaining her authority over it. The possibility that Ahlam was the author of Memory in the Flesh reminds us that the text was always a female-authored work – a link that was always plain to see, since the author used the same first name she writes under (Ahlam Mosteghanemi), but something that perhaps needs stressing since when it was first published Mosteghanemi was accused of not having written the text because the male perspective she writes from is so convincing.\footnote{Ellen McLarney, 'Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānamī', p.24.} Simultaneously, Mosteghanemi does not distance herself from the work by fully placing it in the hands of her female creation – Ahlam did not necessarily write it, because Mosteghanemi did. The ambiguity, which flags up the complex layering of fiction, reminds the reader of the author's place as creator of both texts.

That Mosteghanemi stresses the female authorship of Memory in the Flesh through reconfiguration arguably draws the reader's attention to aspects of the earlier text that were always there to see, but were perhaps more easily overlooked. For this reason, I want to pause on Memory in the Flesh for a moment, in order to examine how, despite objectifying the female character, it nonetheless challenges the masculinist norms of the male-authored Algerian literary tradition at that point in time. To do this, I want first to put the text in context. As I mentioned very briefly in Chapter 1, In 1985, Mosteghanemi published Algérie: femme et écritures, a chronological study of the representation of women in Algerian literature from 1952 to 1980.\footnote{Mosteghanemi, Algérie: femme et écritures, p.14.}
text was adapted from her doctoral thesis, which she completed in France in 1980 (and which is why her analysis cuts off at that point). She studies texts in both French and Arabic: forty-seven novels, thirty of which are in French (five of which were written by women); and twenty-two volumes of poetry, ten in Arabic (one by a woman) and twelve in French (four by women). Again as I mentioned in Chapter 1, she argues that, apart from a couple of examples by the women writers (namely Djebbar and Lemsine), women in Algerian literature during this period were represented in one of the following categories: 'la mère, la femme étrangère, la femme militante, la femme-objet et la femme-symbole'. Mosteghanemi maintains that the figure of the female spouse or lover is absent from Algerian literature because the emphasis on women as anti-colonial symbols that I discussed in Chapter 1 resulted in 'la tendance quasi-générale due aux circonstances de l’occupation coloniale à sacraliser le corps de la femme algérienne'. She argues that this means the position of wife or lover in male authored Algerian literature at that time was usually filled by the femme-étrangère – who herself usually acted as a symbol of the former colonial power to be 'conquered' by an Algerian man. Consequently, her choice to cast an Algerian female character in a love story offers a radical departure from earlier male-authored works.

Mosteghanemi does not focus on the Algerian lover to the exclusion of the mother and the femme étrangère. She incorporates these roles, but allows the lover to take precedence over them. Khaled continuously evokes his dead mother and describes how he once thought of Ahlam as his mother's replacement: 'How could I once have seen a resemblance to my mother in you? How could I have imagined you wearing her dress, kneading dough with those long polished nails, making bread the taste of which I have missed for years?' (p.7). This is a specific rejection of the lover as a displacement of the mother: women are not relegated to only one role, and when another woman enters the narrative the other is not displaced but fills a different role. Similarly, Khaled's love affair with Ahlam is juxtaposed with his affair with his French lover Catherine, who fills the position of femme étrangère. This relationship does not comply with the norm that Mosteghanemi pinpointed since he does not 'conquer' Catherine, they remain independent, with their own apartments, and there is no sense that one has more power in the relationship than the other. Khaled loses interest in Catherine when he falls in love with Ahlam, but the two romances still play out alongside each other and he continues to see Catherine until the last chapter. His romance with Catherine is physical and not emotional, very different from the romance with

7 Ibid., p.16.
8 Ibid., p.78.
Ahlam, which is not consummated but is very emotionally charged. Thus Mosteghanemi does not simply recast the Algerian woman into the role of femme étrangère, but also makes the two romances very different. Nonetheless, although the mother and the femme étrangère are present in the background, and so are not erased, Khaled's focus, and therefore that of the text, is on the Algerian lover.

Although the representation of Ahlam as an Algerian lover is radical, she is objectified by Khaled. As Stampfl argues: 'Rather than exploring and trying to understand her as a woman, Khalid conflates Ahlam with his homeland and bodily desires. By becoming obsessed with her, Khalid allegorizes Ahlam and transforms her body into a blank canvas that represents Algeria'.9 For example, he is complicit in her objectification as a bargaining tool to gain her uncle more power by giving the union his blessing: 'Si Sharif knew he was doing a deal, selling, with this marriage, the name of his brother, one of our greatest martyrs, in exchange for some big position and other fixes. [...] He needed the blessing of the only friend and comrade-in-arms of Si Tahir [Ahlam's father]. He needed me and nobody else to bless your rape' (pp.178-9). On one level the notion of rape is the condemnation of the objectification of women. On another, she acts as a symbol of the nation, and this is also the 'rape' of the nation by the corrupt pouvoir that Khaled left Algeria to escape. I want to nonetheless highlight that, despite his claim in the quotation above, Khaled justifies his decision to give the marriage his blessing by arguing to himself that this union, or another, would take place with or without his blessing. In this way his unreliability as a narrator is underlined at the moment of objectification. Moreover, although Khaled conceptualises Ahlam as a symbol of the nation, of Constantine (his hometown), and more generally of the Arab world, he does so in a very self-conscious manner, for example: 'You were, in the end, nothing but my homeland. All roads led to you' (p.159); 'I turned you from a woman into a city' (p.184); 'I felt you were a part of that city [Granada] as well. Were you all Arab cities and was every Arab memory you?' (p.143).10 The self-consciousness draws attention to the process of rendering her a symbol, rather than simply accepting the images as natural and normal representations. As McLarney suggests, Mosteghanemi draws on the male authors she discusses in Algérie: femme et écritures to create 'the métonymie [sic] dénudée of the mode of discourse developed in Algerian literature', which allows her to highlight the flaws in the male voice in Algerian literature and implicitly

---

9 Tanja Stampfl, 'The (Im)possibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh', College Literature 37, no. 1 (2010), 129-58 (p.138).
10 Other women writers have emulated the objectification of women by linking a particular woman to a city, such as Bouraoui, La Voyeuse interdite.
criticise the masculine perspective.\textsuperscript{11} I believe that the reconfiguration of \textit{Memory in the Flesh} by \textit{Chaos of the Senses} intensifies the reader’s attention to the fact that Mosteghanemini is resisting the discourse from within because it stresses the female authorship of the work.

What is perhaps more significant still in \textit{Memory in the Flesh} is that despite being presented as \textit{femme symbole} and \textit{femme objet}, Ahlam is given agency in the text – albeit very limited agency – since she rejects Khaled and chooses to go along with the marriage her uncle has arranged for her. Moreover, through their conversations, she is given a voice with which to express this agency, as well as to express her love for Khaled, and to reply to his conceptualisation of her as symbol of the nation:

"Why him? How can you drag your father’s name into the mud like that? You are not just a woman, you are the nation. Aren’t you concerned about what history will one day write?"

"You’re the only person," you said, bitterly for the first time, "who thinks history sits like some recording angel registering our little victories, our books, our defeats. History doesn’t write anymore, my friend. It erases." (p.181)

Despite criticising the current regime in Algeria throughout the text, and stressing that it is because of the corruption that he remains in France, Khaled continues to romanticise the past. Ahlam is not a symbol of the nation as it is now, but a symbol of his nostalgic vision of the past. He refers to her by the nickname he gave her as a child during the war, Hayat, and represents her as the same atemporal symbol that Bey, according to my earlier analysis, undermines in \textit{Bleu blanc vert}: ‘Time passed and you were still like the waters of Granada, transparent like nostalgia’ (p.143).

When Ahlam is confronted by his portrayal of her as a symbol of the nation in the long quotation above, she condemns his view on how history is written and therefore implies that the nostalgic historical representation on which he bases his objectification of her is not reliable. \textit{Chaos of the Senses} continues in this vein by exposing the reader to Ahlam’s subjectivity, making it much harder to objectify her in the earlier text.

Although the narrator of \textit{Chaos of the Senses} is no more \textit{materially} emancipated than her earlier incarnation (just like the female protagonist of \textit{Memory in the Flesh}, the narrator of \textit{Chaos of the Senses} married an important military man at the behest of her uncle, leaving her in a loveless marriage in a society which marginalises her as a woman), \textit{Chaos of the Senses} expands on

\textsuperscript{11} McLarney, ‘Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānami’, p.26.
the agency that Ahlam is granted through her dialogue in *Memory in the Flesh*. The story is told from her first-person point of view, which endows her with subjectivity, and of particular importance is the fact that her desire is foregrounded. In *Memory in the Flesh*, although Ahlam expresses her love for Khaled (something which places her in what Mosteghanemi characterises in *Algérie: femme et écritures* as the somewhat radical position of the Algerian lover), her physical desire is expressed only through one kiss. In *Chaos of the Senses*, her bodily desire is expressed. She is not only at the centre of a love triangle, but is a desiring and sexually active woman. Thus the reconfiguration of the love triangle that I discussed earlier is done in such a way as to grant her agency over her desire and her body.

The narrator places her desiring body within a female lineage of resistance. The narrator describes how Jamila Bouhired disguised herself in European dress and planted a bomb in the Milk Bar café: "There I was, forty years later, the legitimate heir of Jamila Bu Hrayd, passing by that same café, disguised in garments of piety. Once more, women have discovered that pious garments might conceal a passionate woman within, hiding under her abaya a body booby-trapped with desire" (p.100). McLarney argues that this acts as a satirisation of the overcommemoration of the War of Independence. As I have discussed throughout the thesis, the only legitimate form of female resistance has been that of heroines such as Bouhired, and evoking her certainly draws attention to this fact. Again though, I want to nuance McLarney's reading and add that Mosteghanemi is also using the overcommemoration to her advantage by deploying what is regarded as a legitimate image of female resistance in order to link Ahlam's desiring body to the glorified resistance of Bouhired. Desire is thus cast as the narrator's form of resistance.

This imagery recasts the only category of woman in Algerian literature identified by Mosteghanemi in *Algérie: femme et écritures* that I have not yet touched on, the *femme militante*. Mosteghanemi notes that, again aside from texts by women, the *femme militante* was represented only 'à condition qu'elle n'échappe pas à l'autorité des mâles!' In *Chaos of the Senses*, Mosteghanemi defies this literary convention and casts Bouhired as an agent of her own

---

12 The text transliterates 'Bouhired' as 'Bu Hrayd'. Since 'Bouhired' in more commonly used in English and French texts and is how I have referred to the historical woman in earlier chapters I have maintained this spelling for clarity, except in the direct quotation.

13 McLarney, *Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānamī*, pp.41-42.

14 Mosteghanemi, *Algérie: femme et écritures*, p.150. It is important to emphasise that her point pertains to women's representation in literature. As I discussed in the first chapter, this is very different to the reality of women's actual participation in the war. This disconnect between fictional representation and reality is highlighted very effectively in relation to the specific example of Portecorvo's *Bataille d'Alger* in Amran-Minne, 'Women at War: The Representation of Women in *The Battle of Algiers*'.

148
destiny (rather than having her destiny decided for her by men). Mosteghanemi then links this resistance to her narrator, who is going of her own accord to meet her lover, defying the patriarchal assumption that her body belongs to men by choosing her own outlet for desire. The *femme militante* is given agency that defies masculinist historical representations, and then reconfigured during the violence of the 1990s as a desiring woman.

In contrast to, say, *La Femme sans sépulture*, the creation of a female lineage of resistance in *Chaos of the Senses* is not linked to some kind of female collective in the present. The narrator's mother annoys her and her co-wife, who features little in the text, and does not appear to like her. Moreover, she rejects the community of women when she visits the baths with her mother. As in Djebbar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, the baths are presented as a female community: 'The bath was the only place where [her mother] could meet all the women of the city. She could gossip and tell them what was happening to her, and show off some of her new purchases of jewelry and clothing, never seen by a man' (p.135). In direct contrast to her mother, the narrator says she 'refused to mix with or count [her]self as one of those women' (p.137), something that she suggests may be because she is a writer: 'was it because from the beginning, I was just born to be a figure of ink and paper, diluted by all that water and steam?' (p.136). On the one hand, this implies that writing is a solitary endeavour, that it does not mix well with the space of the female community. On the other, since the locus of her resistance is her desire, her rejection of this female collective is linked to the fact that she sees them substituting female desire for the baths and bathing: 'Was femininity unclean? Or did these women, who lived and died without ever being totally naked in front of a man, have some sort of lascivious relationship with those huge amounts of water?' (p.137). The narrator's desire is mediated through the written word, since she falls in love by reading the annotations made in a book. Her desire is linked to the ink and paper that she says cannot exist in these baths, and so the real-life female community is excluded from her resistance, since her resistance through desire takes place through the written word. The focus on the idea that ink and paper cannot exist in the baths among the real community of women is also a reminder that the fictional resistance is just that, and that there is a disconnect between it and the real-life political situation of women in Algeria.

That being said, the real-life political situation does intrude on the fictional in the form of violence. Even though the narrator is only concerned with making her fictional love affair a reality, violence (and the history in which it is located) has a way of bursting through. This is made clear when the narrator, although aware of the danger surrounding her because of the violence of the
1990s, nonetheless asks her driver to take her anywhere in the city, in the hope that fate will lead her to the fictional man about whom she wrote in her short story. The driver takes her to a bridge where he is subsequently shot by an Islamist. The bridge is part of the romantic illusion that her fiction is becoming real, but with the death of the driver the violence intrudes into this fictional world. In the same way as I have described in the previous chapters, the fictional focuses on the singular, the individual and the protagonist's place outside the discourses which try to define her, but the constant interruption of history (in this case by way of violence) into the narrative reminds the reader that she is defined according to the position that women inhabit historically.

The fiction is, though, in some ways the cause of the driver's death. The narrator is aware of this: ‘His death was so strange and so painful. He dies for an imaginary hero, a character of my pen’ (p.66). She then goes on to say: ‘Was the death of Ahmad a crime of fate? Or was it a crime of literature? And how responsible was I for his death?’ (p.67). The narrator's fictional text acts as a catalyst for violence in the same way that in the 1990s the lives of real-life fiction writers were endangered by the literature they wrote – indeed the journalist whom the narrator realises she loves was killed by Islamists because of his activities as a journalist, which further suggests the potential dangers of writing. Moreover, in *Chaos of the Senses* and in *Memory in the Flesh*, fiction, and art in general, mediates the characters’ relationships to their reality. Both Khaleds fall in love with their respective authors because they read a novel she has written, and both women fall in love with the third member of the love triangle because they read a book of poetry (either moved by the poetry itself or the notations in the margins). *Chaos of the Senses* therefore opens up questions of how fiction can influence people's interactions with their own reality, of the sort I discussed in the previous chapter. As in the previous chapter, reading becomes a form of engagement with the Other, but the case of mistaken identity that the narrator's reading results in means that this engagement is not idealised. In fact, the narrator is misled through her reading, suggesting the pitfalls of taking writing, and fiction, at face value. Fiction in *Chaos of the Senses* is shown to influence reality, but this influence is potentially misleading, and, in the case of the driver, dangerous.

Despite the dangers, writing is portrayed as a compulsion. In a flashback to a conversation the narrator had with her brother, they discuss the merits of writing:

"I don't understand how you're able to continue writing as if nothing has happened! [...] Stop and look at the ruins around you. What you're writing makes no difference."
"But I'm a writer," I answered as if apologizing.

He yelled at me.

"That's exactly why you should shut up, or kill yourself. [...]"

Her brother later becomes a fundamentalist and is strongly implied to be involved in terrorist activity, and potentially linked to the death of the narrator’s driver. That he tells her to stop writing or kill herself evokes the threats against writers during the 1990s, and did stop the narrator writing for a two year period prior to the start of the text. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, the violent death of the journalist whom the narrator realises is the man with whom she had inadvertently fallen in love, is the catalyst for her to suspend her writing activities at the end of the text. Mosteghanemi thus implies that the idealised vision of fiction advocated by critics such as Derrida that I talked about in the introduction (and with which I aligned myself), whereby an author of fiction can say anything without being held accountable, is not possible in a situation such as the violence of the 1990s.

The text nonetheless ends with the hint that the narrator will begin writing again soon:

For two weeks now, I've been acting like an illiterate woman, avoiding questions lest they bring on the symptoms of writing.

It had been the beginning of a school year, as I remember.

It had been a sky renewing itself between two seasons and a writer renewing her ink between two books.

Just like today, the same shop owner had been busy arranging all the newly arrived school supplies, spreading all the notebooks and pens in front of me.

Just like one year ago, now he stopped for a moment and turned toward me, putting down his load of new notebooks on the table that separated us. He hurriedly asked me what I wanted.

I was on the point of requesting some envelopes and some stamps when... (p.224)

Although the text does not explicitly state that she buys a new notebook, this is strongly hinted at. The narrator replays the same scene as when she bought the notebook in which she began writing the fictional love story at the beginning of the text: 'The salesman was separating them [the notebooks] in front of me as he arranged them in preparation for the school year' (p.11). Moreover, the idea of starting over is stressed in the passage. What is perhaps most significant in this passage is, though, that writing is described in terms of a sickness, suggesting something that
is uncontrollable, a compulsion. The desire to write and represent is not easily overcome, despite the threat of violence. In this sense, writing is an act of resistance in and of itself, it is a political act, since she is compelled to continue to write despite the violence it can invite. Yet the ending is not the triumphant victory of the writer over the violence. Her implied buying of the notebook is replaced with an ellipsis, which, I think, signifies the ongoing silencing of writers more generally: the text holds no illusions about its own power to stop the violence.

**Nomadic Rewriting: Malika Mokeddem's N'zid, La Transe des insoumis and La Désirante**

Mokeddem's autobiographical text *La Transe des insoumis* provides a different model of reconfiguring the reconfigured to *Chaos of the Senses*: Mokeddem reconfigures her earlier fictional texts by stressing their autobiographical nature. *La Transe des insoumis* begins with an 'Avertissement', where she explains that she has already written about the events of her childhood described in the text in her first novel, *Les Hommes qui marchent* (1990): 'Les chapitres portant en tête Là-bas reprennent des tranches de vie de l'enfance et de l'adolescence en Algérie. Déjà relatées dans *Les Hommes qui marchent*, je m'attache ici à revisiter les thèmes essentiels de cet axe focal, de cette tangente du lit, de tous les lits, de leurs liens'.15 As Green analyses in detail, comparing *La Transe des insoumis* with *Les Hommes qui marchent* reveals that this does not entail a straightforward transposition of the 'elle' of the earlier text into the first person: an incident when a crowd attacks her and her sister for not wearing the veil, for example, precipitates a turn towards her family and the nation in the earlier text, but a turn away from them in the later one.16 What I think is most significant, then, about Mokeddem's statement at the start of *La Transe des insoumis* is that it specifically draws attention to her rewriting and thus highlights her evolving autobiographical expression. Part of my argument here will be that the resulting implication of a fluid subjectivity undermines the traditional Western masculinist notion of a fixed and unified identity.17

In *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti envisages subjectivity in a similar way to that evoked by Mokeddem's rewriting. Braidotti conceptualises a nomadic subjectivity, a figuratively

---


16 This, along with an analysis of similar examples, is discussed in detail in Mary Jean Green, 'Reworking Autobiography: Malika Mokeddem's Double Life', *The French Review* 81, no. 3 (2008), 530-41 (p.538).

17 For a discussion of the challenging of unitary subjectivity in autobiographical writing by feminist critics, female authors, and authors from other marginalised groups, see Edwards, *Shifting Subjects*, especially pp.11-23.
deterritorialised identity that is in constant motion, a *becoming* rather than a *being*.\(^\text{18}\) The importance of nomadism to Mokeddem's works is suggested not only by the title of her first novel but also through her characters' histories and their wanderings in and between Algeria and France. Consequently, it is my intention to read the rewriting across Mokeddem's œuvre as a nomadic subjectivity similar to that described by Braidotti. I have chosen Braidotti's feminist perspective over other nomadic theories because it is compatible with one of the major themes in Mokeddem's texts: Mokeddem's preoccupation with the oppression of women in her native Algeria. However, while Braidotti envisions only a *figurative* deterritorialisation of the subject, I will argue that Mokeddem's *La Transe des insoumis* couples this with a *physical* nomadism that moves between Algeria and France.

It is my contention that the fictional *N'zid*, Mokeddem's last text published before *La Transe des insoumis*, establishes the geography of this physical nomadism. In *N'zid*, the amnesiac female protagonist undertakes a journey across the Mediterranean Sea in search of her identity and, later, her missing lover. I would suggest that Mokeddem bases her protagonist's identity quest at sea for two reasons. Firstly, since patriarchy and phallogocentrism are the societal norm in both France and Algeria, female subjectivity is more easily explored outside these two spaces. Secondly, the Mediterranean Sea is the space between France and Algeria, linking as well as separating them. Homi Bhabha reminds us that any notion of purity of culture is a fallacy and that 'we should remember that it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture'.\(^\text{19}\) Between-ness in this sense does not imply a space where two (or more) homogenous cultures, languages or identities are hybridised, but expresses the plurality inherent in all cultural identities and practices. It is a space of interaction with the Other where cultures are formed and developed. The Mediterranean Sea is a physical incarnation of this between-ness, a space where the Franco-Algerian protagonist's cultural between-ness is not stifled by rigid conceptions of culture. For this reason, critics such as Florence Martin have argued that in *N'zid*, Mokeddem 'réinvente le concept du nomadisme au féminin'.\(^\text{20}\) I want to further this idea by arguing that because of this reinvention, *N'zid* can be seen as a prototype for what I will term Mokeddem's feminist nomadic practice.

---

\(^{19}\) Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.56.  
While nomadism is an important theme in Mokeddem's earlier works, \textit{N'zid} signals a shift in her œuvre. The text tells the story of an initially unnamed amnesiac whose quest to regain her memory is mapped onto her journey at sea. At the end the protagonist succeeds in regaining her memory but decides to continue her journey. As noted by Robert Elbaz, this suggests that while the wandering of Mokeddem's earlier protagonists is 'un mal qui doit être résolu au bout de la quête identitaire, même si ce moment est différé à jamais', in \textit{N'zid} the protagonist finds her identity in 'errance'.\footnote{Robert Elbaz, '\textit{N'zid} ou la mémoire cutanée de Malika Mokeddem', in \textit{Malika Mokeddem}, ed. Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt, Robert Elbaz, and Najib Redouane (Paris: Harmattan, 2003), pp.251-71 (pp.252-3).} In other words, in \textit{N'zid} the identity quest itself is integrated into the protagonist's identity, suggesting Braidotti's continual \textit{becoming} of the self. The protagonist finds her subjectivity in 'errance' in the literal sense of continuing her journey, but also in the figurative sense of a fluid, roaming identity in a constant state of becoming.

The new sense of an identity formed in 'errance' is accompanied by the relocation of the desert nomadism of Mokeddem's ancestors to the sea. This is indicated, for example, when the protagonist says in a flashback about Jamil, the lover for whom she is searching: 'Maintenant la mer est son autre désert'.\footnote{Malika Mokeddem, \textit{N'zid} (Paris: Seuil, 2001), p.163. Subsequent references to this text will follow quotations.} Mokeddem implies that this geographical displacement of nomadism is not something she wants to be limited to \textit{N'zid} alone. During one of the protagonist's flashbacks, Jamil talks about nomads and quotes two phrases which he attributes to them, which Mokeddem indicates in footnotes are from \textit{Les Hommes qui marchent} (for the sake of clarity I have included the footnotes directly below the quotation):

\begin{quote}
Chez moi, avant, les nomades disaient qu'ils n'étaient pas des palmiers pour avoir besoin de racines, qu'eux ils avaient des "jambes pour marcher et une immense mémoire" ! Ils disaient qu'ils devaient quitter, partir, trahir pour pouvoir revenir, pour pouvoir aimer... Ils disaient que les déserts étaient "de grands larges au bord desquels l'immobilité était une hérésie".
\end{quote}

2. \textit{Ibid}.
(p.162)

The footnotes establish a metatextual link to the earlier work. Furthermore, before Jamil speaks his voice is described as follows: 'Sa voix devient la mer' (p.161). When Jamil recites these
quotations from *Les Hommes qui marchent*, his voice represents the sea, and so the desert nomadism (represented by the quotations) is placed in the sea (represented by his voice). This reframes the quotations and brings them into the nomadic geography of *N’zid*, beginning the process of rewriting that Mokeddem expands upon in *La Transe des insoumis*.

Orlando rightly refers to *La Transe des insoumis* as an 'exemplary nomadic' text, and I want to argue that it is this literary nomadism that allows Mokeddem to delve into her own life for the first time in the first person. Mokeddem creates a nomadic literary space by alternating the chapter titles for the majority of the text between ‘Là-bas’ and ‘Ici’, referring to her native Algeria and her home in France respectively, mirroring the fictional nomadic journey of *N’zid*. A critic might argue that the movement back and forth in *La Transe des insoumis* is in one sense quite fixed. This seems at odds with the complete fluidity of the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari to which Braidotti’s, and therefore my, interpretations are indebted. However, as Christopher Miller argues of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology: 'what if anything does this project of nomadology have to do with real and "actual" nomads? "Nothing" would be a compelling answer: the only nomads to deal with would be Deleuze and Guattari themselves and their intellectual fellow travellers'. I want to argue that Mokeddem’s nomadism is rooted in the nomadism of her real-life ancestors, an actual movement between different locations, which could and would retrace the same paths, and which is opposed with the forced sedentarisation to which nomadic peoples were subjected that settled them into one location alone. Consequently, while Mokeddem’s nomadic identity can be linked to a theoretical nomadic identity that surpasses all boundaries, it is grounded in real-life nomadism in a way that so-called nomadology is not: the *movement* between the locations is the key to her narrative nomadism, rather than the locations between which this nomadism takes place.

The nomadism in *La Transe des insoumis* creates a narrative space where Mokeddem’s nomadic subjectivity can develop openly. In *La Transe des insoumis*, Mokeddem writes about her body of work, and so brings her earlier texts into the nomadic narrative space, imitating what she did in *N’zid*. Evans argues that 'by alluding to her fictional characters at the moment of writing *La

---

Transe des insoumis, she makes them part of her ongoing life narrative. What Evans touches on here is the idea that Mokeddem does not only reconfigure the texts, she also pulls them into her 'ongoing life narrative' that I have characterised in terms of Braidotti's becoming of self. In my reading, Mokeddem uses the fictional N’zid as a tool to develop a nomadic space into which she pulls her earlier text, a process that she recreates in her autobiographical writing. In this respect, N’zid is a prototype because it establishes a fictional model for the nomadic space.

Mokeddem's use of fiction as a tool of exploration is itself cultivated in N’zid. Since she has lost her memory, Nora – as the protagonist of N’zid later discovers her own name to be – creates multiple identities of various ethnic backgrounds, a process she calls 'les jeux du « je »' (p.57). In the first of her 'jeux du je' all she can remember about herself is her nickname, 'Ghoula', which means ogress: 'En arabe, ça signifie « ogresse »' (p.49). Consequently, she creates a story that she is from Lebanon. This episode is immediately juxtaposed with another fiction, her claim to be Eva Poulos of Greek origin. The fluid movement from one identity to another is mapped onto the physical space of the Mediterranean Sea, travelling from Lebanon to Greece. Put differently: Nora utilises fiction to explore a subjectivity that is both figuratively and physically deterritorialised. I contend that this is an intentional practice because fiction is not just used to fill in the details about her identity that she is yet to uncover; rather, the invention of multiple identities implies that fiction is actively deployed as a tool to explore a fluid and changing subjectivity. The figurative deterritorialisation of the subject – mapped onto the physical deterritorialisation – makes it a nomadic practice. This nomadic practice, I want to argue, is a specifically feminist one. Braidotti’s nomadic subjects challenge patriarchal norms through the 'progressive metamorphoses of the subject away from the program set up in the phallogocentric format'. In N'zid the continual becoming of Nora’s subjectivity challenges the unitary subjectivity of phallogocentric norms (what Braidotti calls the 'phallogocentric format'), and for this reason N’zid may usefully be viewed as a prototype for a feminist nomadic practice.

The feminist nature of the nomadic practice is further suggested by the emphasis on Nora’s female body. Braidotti argues for ‘a new form of materialism that develops the notion of the corporeal by emphasising the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject’, continuing on to suggest:

---

27 Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects, p.12.
28 Ibid., p.24.
A nomadic vision of the body defines it as multifunctional and complex, as a transformer of flows and energies, affects, desires, and imaginings. [...] In contrast to the oppositions created by a dualistic mode of social constructivism, a nomadic body is a threshold of transformations. [...] The body is a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others. In other words, feminist emphasis on embodiment goes hand in hand with a radical rejection of essentialism. In feminist theory one speaks as a woman, although the subject "woman" is not a monolithic essence, defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, determined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, and sexual preference. One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically antiessentialist position.29

In N’zid, before Nora has an emotional or intellectual memory of Jamil, her body remembers his caressing hers: 'Paupières encore closes, [...] elle sent un corps contre le sien, sent une main descendre lentement du cou vers la poitrine [...]. Une habitude de la chair, brutalement sevrée, plutôt qu'un souvenir' (p.40). Since Nora's first memory of Jamil is of the interaction of her body with his, her body is presented as the first point of contact between the self and the other, suggesting it is a threshold between the two. Nora's lack of memory at the start of the text means that she does not know what ethnicity she is, how old she is, or any other particulars relating to her identity (and neither does the reader), but from the first sentence of the text – 'Elle bascule' (p.11) – we know that she is female. The femaleness acts as the base of the nomadic model, which is built up as the text progresses through the addition of further layers of identity that define Nora's subjectivity (such as Algerianness). Nora's subjectivity is continually becoming, but her female embodiment implies a specific interaction with the world (both in terms of biology and how her body is socially determined) that implies this subjectivity is a female one, something that challenges patriarchal norms (Luce Irigaray, for example, claims that for women: 'Presque rien, dans la société actuelle, ne leur permet d’être sujets sexués féminins').30

The move I am suggesting from Braidotti's model to Mokeddem's could be problematic if I were suggesting Mokeddem's acts as a general model, since the multiple possibilities of embodiment of Braidotti's nomadic subjects would become fixed in one particular version of a female body – something that could return us to an essentialist mode of thinking. The prototype I am suggesting Mokeddem uses is not, however, universally applicable, it is particular to

29 Ibid., p.25.
Mokeddem: she creates a nomadic subjectivity based on a specific body (Nora's) that stands in for her body in a way that creates a model for her and her alone.

By creating a fiction around what little she can remember about herself, Nora echoes what Mokeddem herself is doing. In *La Transe des insoumis*, Mokeddem describes how she translated the death of her own great-grandmother into a murder in *Le Siècle des sauterelles* (1992), and how, while she attributes her real-life insomnia to this trauma, in the text the protagonist is rendered mute, 'transposant l'émotion de l'enfance en exigences de fiction' (p.165). In both cases the fictionalisation is linked to Nora's and Mokeddem's actual subjectivities: Nora incorporates her nickname, 'Ghoula', into her 'jeux du je' and Mokeddem fictionalises her real-life childhood emotions. In *N'zid* the reader is aware that the fictionalisation is taking place as it happens, which paves the way for Mokeddem to explain that she has been doing the same throughout her œuvre. By explicitly stating in *La Transe des insoumis* that the earlier texts are a part of her exploration of self, Mokeddem not only pulls them into her narrative nomadic space, she also incorporates them into the nomadic practice established by Nora.

Mokeddem explicitly invites the reader to read *La Transe des insoumis* in light of *N'zid*. Near the end of *La Transe des insoumis* Mokeddem explains the importance of *N'zid* to her autobiographical writing: 'L'écriture de *N'zid* m'a été salutaire. Elle m'a effacée de la terre, de toute terre, de tout désamour, blessure, pour me livrer aux seules pulsations de la mer, de ma Méditerranée. Je m'y suis gorgée de sa respiration, de son entre-deux' (pp.232-33). The importance of *N'zid* is also hinted at from the start of the text. The first chapter begins:


Je me tourne, me retourne dans le lit. […] J'écoute le silence de la maison dans le raffut de la tramontane. (p.15)

The *Tramontane* is a cold north wind that blows in the Mediterranean, and is also the name of the boat on which Nora travels in *N'zid*. The two paragraphs that precede this reference stress the bodily separation Mokeddem feels from her lover (who has left her): their relationship is defined
in this first instance, not by an emotional attachment, but by a bodily one, their *dix-sept ans de corps*, and she describes the scene in terms of bodily sensations (smell and hearing), and their separation in terms of an amputation. Her loss is experienced through her female body, in the same way Nora’s loss is in *N’zid*, and the earlier fictional text is implicitly linked to the bodily desire of *La Transe des insoumis* when the *Tramontane* is evoked, cementing the role of *N’zid* as a prototype for Mokeddem’s exploration of her own subjectivity.

The fact that Mokeddem uses fiction as a space where she can express her subjectivity without consequences in order to create a model for an ‘I’ that is unambiguously autobiographical (which is to say an ‘I’ that is fluid and changing, but is firmly linked to the author’s own subjectivity), is further suggested by the fact that, a decade after the publication of *N’zid*, she feels the need to return to the fictional model in *La Désirante* in order to reconfigure it. In *La Désirante*, Shamsa, like Nora in *N’zid*, undertakes a journey across the sea to retrace the steps of her missing lover. *La Désirante* shares with *N’zid* themes of disappearance and desire, as well as common motifs, such as the linking of the desert to the sea (‘*je resterai une nomade des mers*’) and the repeated evocation of Ulysses (whose quest across the sea echoes those of the two protagonists). The protagonists, however, take different trajectories: in *N’zid*, Nora begins at sea and ends in France, but does not travel to the Maghreb, and although she expresses her intention to continue her sea journey at the end of the text, she states that she is not yet ready to return to Algeria; in *La Désirante*, Shamsa begins in France and ends in the Maghreb before returning to the sea. I want to suggest that *La Désirante* can be read as continuing the nomadic journey of *N’zid* but reconfiguring its geography, a reconfiguration that reinstates the previously excluded Algeria and completes the model for a nomadic identity that moves between France and Algeria.

The prototype for Mokeddem’s nomadic practice excluded Algeria. *N’zid* ends with Nora saying that she plans to continue her journey to Ireland, the birthplace of her father, which suggests she plans to continue to map her newly-remembered identity – figuratively deterritorialised when she embraces the fluidity of her part-French, part-Algerian and part-Irish subjectivity – onto the physical geography. Nonetheless, Nora says that she cannot return to the desert until peace is restored in Algeria: ‘*Je me rendrai au désert lorsque le silence sera revenu là*’ (p.214). The violence of the 1990s – evoked in the text through the death of Jamil, who is killed by Islamists – leads Mokeddem to exclude Algeria temporarily from the fictional model she creates

---

for her feminist nomadic practice. In contrast, *La Transe des insoumis* does include Algeria in its nomadism: the text in fact ends with her return to Algeria to visit her dying father. In *La Transe des insoumis*, Mokeddem attributes this real-life return partly to the publication of *N’zid* (and of course partly to the cessation of violence), since it is when she is marketing *N’zid* that she is encouraged by those she meets to go back to Algeria: 'C’est en signant les envois de presse de *N’zid*, en mars 2001, que j’ai rencontré les libraires algériens réunis à Paris : « Il faut venir en Algérie. Vous y avez beaucoup de lecteurs. Nous avons besoin de nos écrivains pour la bataille du livre. »' (p.233). In this way, *N’zid* not only provides the literary model for Mokeddem’s later autobiographical exploration of self, it also acts as a real-life catalyst for her return to Algeria. The return to Algeria in *La Transe des insoumis* happens after the publication of *N’zid* in 2001, by which time the majority of the violence had subsided, so the literary (and literal) return is a fulfilment of the promise at the end of *N’zid* to return to Algeria with the end of the violence. Despite having made this return in her autobiography, Mokeddem nonetheless appears to feel the need to return to fiction to reinstate Algeria into her nomadic practice. I want to suggest that this is because she is remaking the nomadic model that she left incomplete in *N’zid*.

In both *N’zid* and *La Désirante*, the lover acts as a catalyst for the protagonist to connect with her Algerian roots: in *N’zid*, Nora feels that the Algerian Jamil reconnects her to the Algerian side of her identity from which she became alienated when her Algerian mother abandoned her in France; in *La Désirante*, the French Léo’s love for the desert helps Algerian Shamsa to connect to her heritage, since she was abandoned as a baby and knows only that she came from the desert. Of course, conceptualising men as conduits in the creation of the female subject may be seen to problematise my feminist interpretation. I would argue against this on various grounds. First, it is my contention that Mokeddem’s nomadic practice can still be called feminist because the exploration of the subjectivity of any woman transgresses patriarchal norms regardless of how that subjectivity is created. Second, Léo and Jamil are juxtaposed with the violent chauvinism of the Islamists as well as that of French colonialism, so their inclusion can be seen as an attempt to undermine oppressive patriarchal norms by including a non-oppressive masculinity in the nomadic space. Third, in both cases the focus on the woman as one half of a couple can be seen as a reinstatement of the female lover to literature, in the same way as I argued in relation to Mosteghanemi’s texts.

---

32 This idea of a battle is evocative of a number of other texts which evoke writing as a weapon, such as Marouane’s *La Jeune fille et la mère* discussed in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER 5

In N’zid the lover is found dead, but in La Désirante – published a decade later when the violence in Algeria had largely subsided – he is found alive, ensuring that Shamsa’s link to Algeria remains intact. It is Shamsa’s physical return to the Maghreb that leads to the recovery of Léo, as it is there that she finds the clue leading to the discovery of his whereabouts. Since Léo is a symbol of her newfound connection to the desert, the fact that Shamsa’s physical journey to the Maghreb returns Léo to her suggests that La Désirante reconfigures the nomadic geography of the earlier text to include the previously excluded Algeria. This is not to say that Mokeddem avoided Algeria in the texts written between N’zid and La Désirante – as I mentioned above, she includes Algeria in the narrative nomadism she creates in La Transe des insoumis; I propose instead that La Désirante reconfigures the fictional nomadic space of N’zid that acted as a model for the subsequent autobiographical one.

Nevertheless, the reunion of the lovers does not take place until Shamsa has left the space of the Maghreb. Arguably this is because she feels she does not belong in the Maghreb, where she is subjected to sexist remarks, and criticism of her relationship with Léo (whom she also refers to in the text, as she does below, by his nickname, Lou, a multiple naming that suggests a fluid subjectivity for him also):

Les rumeurs de la ville, ses saveurs, ses odeurs dont tu te délectes, Lou, me rendent tout à coup plus étrangère ici, sans toi, que n’importe où ailleurs.

J’ai souvent envié ton ignorance de la langue arabe qui te préserve des remarques désobligeantes, misogynes ou racistes des rues du Maghreb. Toutes les discriminations dont se plaignent, souvent à raison, les originaires du Sud sont sans commune mesure avec celles qui prévalent chez eux et culminent dans l’antisémitisme. Tout cela est entretenu par des régimes qui, jouant avec machiavélisme sur la fibre nationaliste, imputent toujours à « la main de l’étranger » les conséquences de leurs propres désastres. C’est dire s’ils s’indignent du sacrilège « d’une fille de chez nous en couple avec un mécréant ». Après quelques reparties cinglantes, j’ai fini par adopter une attitude autrement plus efficace : je t’enlace, me serre contre toi. Ça leur coupe la jactance.

Lou, ton corps est mon continent et ton amour son plus bel horizon. (pp.177-78)

The Maghreb is here represented as a hostile environment for women, but their relationship acts as a defence to this hostility to the point that once she is separated from Léo she feels like an étrangère, despite it being her region of origin. Shamsa develops a form of resistance to the remarks that involves an overt display of her bodily connection to Léo’s, stressing her desire for
him. That Léo's body is figured geographically, as a continent, suggests that this resistance involves a symbolic exile to their own geographical space. In other words, their desire is still not acceptable within the space of the Maghreb, and so it can only be expressed within a region of its own. Shamsa chooses exile, rather than fit into sexist norms.

One of the reasons their relationship must be symbolically removed from the Maghreb is that Shamsa's relationship with Léo breaks the taboo, dating back to colonial times, against relationships between Algerian women and French men (a taboo I evoked in Chapter 2 in relation to La Femme sans sépulture and Donadey's argument about the unspeakable nature of female desire for the male oppressor). The transgressive nature of their relationship is evoked a number of times, such as when, after Shamsa arrives in Tunisia looking for Léo, one of Léo’s kidnappers refers to her as a harki: 'Parce que vendue aux Occidentaux, tu fais le harki de la meute ?' (p.186).

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the harkis were Algerians who fought for the French during the War of Independence, something usually regarded as a betrayal of Algeria. Linking Shamsa to the harkis likens her relationship with Léo to this betrayal, suggesting that her desire continues to be perceived as a transgression. Equally, they cannot be reunited in France, where the nicknames Léo's father gives Shamsa – 'la fille du soleil'; 'la fille du désert' (p.14) – make it clear that she is the Other. The lovers can therefore only be reunited outside both spaces, in the sea, the space inbetween the two geographical regions. The Mediterranean Sea acts as a bridge that unites the two cultures – a space where neither part of Shamsa's part-French, part-Algerian subjectivity (which itself straddles the colonial divide) need be repressed.

The kidnapper's use of the word vendue suggests the other reason that Shamsa leaves the Maghreb and returns to the sea: it paints her as an object to be sold, implying a patriarchal objectification of women. Shamsa's desire for Léo, like Nora's for Jamil, is a bodily one: 'Je sens la montée du désir que j'ai de toi. Ce besoin ardent de ta peau, de ton corps' (p.219). The fact that Shamsa talks about Léo in terms of the relationship of her body to his suggests that her body acts as the threshold between the self and the other. Shamsa's experiences of Léo are negotiated by her specifically female body, which results in a subjectivity where the female component is emphasised. As I argued in relation to Nora, her subjectivity is thus more easily developed outside patriarchal society.

The development of Shamsa's nomadic subjectivity is stifled in Europe also. When she is questioned by a policeman in relation to Léo's disappearance, she sarcastically claims that her seven brothers are Islamists. Since the reader knows that she was abandoned as a child and has no
knowledge of her family, this overt fictionalisation imitates the overt fictionalisation in *N’zid* and throughout Mokeddem’s œuvre. In fact, since Shamsa is an orphan raised by French nuns, her link to her Algerian ancestors is also inherently fictional: ‘C’était ça l’image de mes origines, un mirage. Juste un mirage’ (p.95). No sooner has Shamsa invented these brothers, Léo’s father stops her and corrects what she has said: ‘Régis tend le bras vers moi, pose une main sur la mienne et corrige calmement mon propos’ (p.45). In this way, the patriarchal figure suppresses the feminist nomadic practice of fictionalisation – and the stifling of the fictionalisation is here accompanied by the stifling of her hand with his, again suggesting a link between the body and the creation of nomadic subjectivity. In contrast to this incident with Régis, when Shamsa travels with Léo across the Mediterranean, she relishes the ambiguity of her appearance that leads people to question whether she is ‘Brésilienne ? Une fille des îles ?’ (p.157). Shamsa’s return to the sea to be reunited with Léo suggests, therefore, not only that it bridges the colonial divide, but also, since phallogocentrism is the societal norm in both the Maghreb and Europe, that the inbetween space of the sea is the only place where the female subject can thrive – something that can be linked to feminist thinkers such as Irigaray who represent water as a feminine element.\(^{33}\) *La Désirante* reinstates Algeria into the fictional nomadic space established in *N’zid*, and reconfigures the fictional model of the earlier text.

I am suggesting that since Mokeddem returns to the fictional realm in order to reconfigure the space of her nomadic practice, fiction is, for her, a tool of exploration. Viewed in this light, the reconfiguration of the earlier fiction in *La Transe des insoumis* does not question the nature of fiction itself in the same way that Mosteghanemi questions the relationship between reality and fiction through her reconfigurations. Mokeddem reconfigures the earlier texts not to create ambiguity but to bring them into her nomadic practice so that she can reveal (some of) her fictional writings as her own experiences. Hers is a progression from hiding behind fiction to retelling the same stories in the first person. Mokeddem therefore uses reconfiguration in a very different way from that previously discussed: to draw the earlier texts into the nomadic practice established in *N’zid*. The metafictional elements in *N’zid* act as a catalyst for her to reveal in *La Transe des insoumis* that (some of) her earlier works had been an exploration of her first person subjectivity hidden behind the mask of fiction. Having written herself as other women, often symbolically standing in for the position of women in Algeria in general, she finds her first-person voice, a way to express her subjectivity, and in this sense finds her own agency.

\(^{33}\) See, for example, Luce Irigaray, *Amante marine: De Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
Fiction as a political act

I hope it has become clear that although Mosteghanemi and Mokeddem both highlight their reconfigurations through rewriting, the two authors are engaged in very different projects. I argued in the Introduction that because the writer of fiction is not subject to the same external yardstick of truth as the historian, she has a freedom to invent and create. Mokeddem uses this creativeness as a tool of exploration in order to establish a model for a nomadic becoming of self that she can use in her autobiographical writing. For Mosteghanemi fictional exploration is not the means to an end, but the end in and of itself. In this sense Mosteghanemi’s reconfigurations act in a similar way to the fictionality of the other texts examined across the thesis. Ahlam steps out of the traditional roles assigned to her by masculine Algerian literary productions by becoming a lover, but the agency she gains from doing this is situated within the confines of a patriarchal society and is tempered by the overt blurring of fiction and reality. Mokeddem too challenges totalising narratives, especially that of the masculinist conception of a fixed and unchanging identity. Yet unlike the other authors I have studied, she definitively steps out of the role of object assigned to women in Algerian history by using an overtly autobiographical ‘I’.

In my analysis, Mokeddem’s rejection of the traditional role of women is not as politically radical as it may at first seem when comparing it to texts that employ the history/fiction entre-deux to challenge historical representations from within. Mokeddem’s La Transe des insoumis is a very personal exploration of history – even the collective history is viewed through the prism of the individual – and her rewriting is an individualistic exploration of her newfound nomadic subjectivity. For Mokeddem the entre-deux is not a blurring of history and fiction, but a space that is linked to the geographical inbetween of the sea. Contrary to Martin, who argues in relation to N’zid that this space ‘n’est pas un refuge’, I want to argue that the space is a means for Mokeddem and her protagonists to escape the oppression they feel in both Algeria and France: a refuge where she can express herself in the first person. The exile she chooses results in a model for a literary space where she alone can explore her own becoming of self, not a more general space of emancipation for women. This is not to say that her feminist nomadic practice could not be emulated, but the very personal nature of the practice makes it more or less exclusionary to others. In contrast, Mosteghanemi’s narrator is individualistic in terms of her writing, but the

34 Martin, ‘On ne naît pas francophone, nomade et méditerranéenne’, p.177.
structure of the text and the ambiguity created by the history/fiction entre-deux suggests a wider questioning of the nature of representation and its relationship to reality that has a less immediate, but potentially longer-lasting and more profound, effect on the place of Algerian women in the collective consciousness.

For both authors the act of writing is, nonetheless, a political one: a response to the violence of the 1990s. The violence of the 1990s interrupts the narrative of Chaos of the Senses, and Mokeddem describes in La Transe des insoumis the harassment she received because of her earlier writing, such as abusive phone calls. In this respect Mosteghanemi and Mokeddem are similar to Bey, Djebar and Marouane: they all feel compelled to write in response to the violence against writers in order to condemn it. Under this threat of violence, writing itself becomes a political act.

As Mosteghanemi makes clear in Chaos of the Senses, it is not only fiction writing that constituted a political act – there were many journalists like the man Ahlam falls in love with who also wrote in spite of the danger to their lives. In La Désirante, Shamsa was also a journalist before she left Algeria, and she describes how she visited a man in prison who had been detained by the authorities for being an Islamist. She does so at the behest of his mother who has not been allowed any contact with him and does not know whether he is alive or dead, and whom Shamsa describes as ‘une de ces « femmes frappées par une disparition »’ (p.89) – evoking the Mothers of the Disappeared that I talked about in Chapter 3 in relation to Puisque mon cœur est mort. Shamsa explains that she was only able to visit him because she was a journalist: ‘On m’avait tellement signifié que c’était là une autorisation tout à fait exceptionnelle que j’appréhendais qu’elle ne me fût retirée au dernier moment. Elle ne m’avait été accordée que parce que les journalistes faisaient tout un scandale autour de disparitions’ (p.95). Here Mokeddem suggests, like Bey does in Puisque mon cœur est mort or Marouane does in Le Châtiment des hypocrites (see Chapter 3), that there are limitations on the ability of the writer to provide real-world aid. Shamsa is able to comfort the mother with the knowledge that her son is alive, but the exceptionality of the prison visit is stressed, implying that she is limited to helping only this one man and his mother, and in a very limited way. Nonetheless, her position as a journalist allows her to bypass the silence of the government, symbolising how writing more generally has the potential to do the same. Both La Désirante and Chaos of the Senses convey to the reader that any act of writing (fiction or non-

35 They write about the violence of the 1990s to varying degrees in the texts I have focused on, but all of them have written at least one text as a direct response to the violence.
fiction) in the face of censorship (be this censorship by Islamists or the government) is a political act.

Yet there is one political act for Mosteghanemi that can only be expressed because she writes fiction: for her, writing fiction in Arabic is a political act. In her acceptance speech for the Naguib Mahfouz prize she said that the prize provides 'moral support to Algerian writers writing in Arabic who confront unarmed the onslaufhts of Francophony and its diverse temptations, while they stand patriotically against the dubious and divisive tendencies to which Algeria is exposed'. Even a cursory reading of Memory in the Flesh and Chaos of the Senses suggests that this is not a rejection of the importance of the influence of French culture on Algerian culture, since Mosteghanemi creates intertextual links with numerous works of French literature, poetry and art. Rather, there is a vague sense that her writing in Arabic is an attempt to communicate directly with the Algerian reader, as Khaled says in Memory in the Flesh in relation to an interview with an Algerian journalist about his art exhibition: 'I had wanted to do that interview so I could finally talk at length to the only person who really mattered to me, the Algerian reader' (p.118). The commitment to Arabic as the language of Algeria is, in fact, somewhat mitigated by the two dedications that precede the start of the text:

To the memory of Malek Haddad, son of Constantine, who swore after the independence of Algeria not to write in a language that was not his. The blank page assassinated him. He died by the might of his silence to become a martyr of the Arabic language and the first ever writer to die silent, grieving, and passionate on its behalf.

And to the memory of my father, who may find someone there who knows Arabic to read him this book, his book.

Malek Haddad was an Algerian writer who championed the use of Arabic in Algerian literature, although, as Mosteghanemi’s dedication suggests, he himself did not feel able to write in Arabic and so stopped writing altogether. Malek Haddad was an Algerian writer who championed the use of Arabic in Algerian literature, although, as Mosteghanemi’s dedication suggests, he himself did not feel able to write in Arabic and so stopped writing altogether. Mosteghanemi’s father was a poet, but he could not read

---

36 Her speech and its ramifications on her writing are discussed in Shaden M. Tageldin, 'Which Qalam for Algeria?: Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djebar’s L’Amour, la fantasia and Mustaghânami’s Dhâkirat al-Jasad’, Comparative Literature Studies 46, no. 3 (2009), 467-97.

37 Ironically, Haddad’s desire for a perfect form of Algerian self-expression that links one language to national identity echoes European ideas about language as a vehicle for national culture: see Harrison, Postcolonial Criticism, pp.108-9.
Arabic. This reminds the reader that many Algerians educated under the colonial system (like Djebar), or in the immediate post-independence period before Arabisation (like Bey’s protagonists in *Bleu blanc vert*), did not learn to read in Arabic, only in French, and that her text does not therefore speak to all Algerians. Nonetheless, Tageldin notes that during the violence of the 1990s, while condemning the murder of Francophone writers, Mosteghanemi argued that the fight for an Algerian identity should be created through writing in Arabic. The language in which Mosteghanemi writes conveys this point.

Although this point can only be made by writing fiction in Arabic, Mosteghanemi’s political intervention conveys an opinion about the state of Algerian literature, and is not about the specific function of fiction. This kind of political engagement can be correlated to Mokeddem’s use of ‘I’. As I argued in the last chapter, the use of ‘I’ on its own does not equate to resistance (it depends on who uses ‘I’ and what is being said), but for Mokeddem in *La Transe des insoumis* I think it does because its usage is part of her project to carve out her own space of resistance to patriarchal oppression. This political intervention is something she can only do in literature, since the nomadic model she creates is a literary model, but it is not the nature of literature that creates the political act, it is her use of a literary model as a tool that allows her to express the oppositional ‘I’. Mosteghanemi’s use of Arabic and Mokeddem’s use of ‘I’ are political interventions that do not mobilise any specific function of literature (or fiction). Rather, they employ language and literary techniques as tools through which they take political stances.

I do not want to deny the importance of these political impulses, but they are often tied to a particular context and historical moment. This is certainly true in relation to the content of the texts I study not only in this chapter, but across the thesis. For example, earlier in this chapter I suggested that the subjectivity of the female protagonists of Mokeddem's fiction is linked to the men who connect them to the Algerian parts of their identity. From a Western feminist perspective this is potentially problematic as I am suggesting that the women are using men as conduits. Moreover, this could be seen as exclusionary because the creation of nomadic identity takes place through heterosexual relationships. In spite of all this, when taken in the context of the history of Algerian literature and culture, the portrayal of female bodily desire and the placing of the Algerian woman in the position of the lover is, as I discussed in relation to *Memory in the Flesh* and *Chaos of the Senses*, a political act. In other words, a political act in one circumstance is not

---

39 Tageldin, ‘Which Qalam for Algeria?’, pp.467-68.
always a political act under different conditions: the texts may not retain their political relevance to the present once those circumstances are past.

I contend that Mokeddem's text is a personal political engagement in response to a specific context. *Chaos of the Senses* is also a political response to a specific context, but the fictionality of the text raises more universal questions about the relationship between reality and representation. As I have suggested before, the positioning of a text in the history/fiction *entre-deux* by an author forces the reader to question the nature of historical representation. *Chaos of the Senses*, because of the agency given to the narrator, can additionally be viewed as a political intervention on behalf of women. The blurring of the line between fiction and reality is consequently itself a political intervention, since it questions the traditional representation of Algerian women. In this sense, the political intervention reaches further than that of Mokeddem, and remains relevant to the present of the reader, because it is not specific to a particular historical moment, but comments on the way that history has been, and continues to be, written and rewritten.

Finally, the problem I see with Mokeddem's *La Transe des insoumis* is that Mokeddem's emancipated nomadic subject is far removed from the political reality of Algerian women, since the author, like her fictional creation Shamsa, chooses (literary) exile rather than conform to patriarchal norms. The freedom Mokeddem creates for herself within her nomadic model consequently runs the risk of negating the real-life struggles of women when Mokeddem is, as I discussed in the Introduction, inevitably held up as an example of all Algerian women. Conversely, Mosteghanemi's Ahlam is given agency within a context that is more relevant to the lived reality of Algerian women and so the agency is a more realistic political tool for women. The effect fiction has on the reality within the text in *Chaos of the Senses* is arguably an articulation of the hope that the fictional text can influence real-life, that this portrayal of agency can help shape the way women are represented in the collective consciousness. Yet as I have repeated throughout this chapter this agency is tempered by the fictionality of the text. Mosteghanemi rewrites the role of women, but she undermines this rewriting through overt fictionality; she recognises her place as a 'representative', while also negating it; she questions the historical representation of women, and creates female agency within that role, but she does so by mediating it through fiction, which speaks to the possible intangibility of this agency outside the fictional.
Conclusion

Each of the fictional texts I have studied was chosen because it engages with what I have been calling masculinist conceptions of Algerian history (which is to say, historical narratives that marginalise or exclude women's historical experiences), while also overtly signalling its fictionality to the reader in one way or another. Thinking of these texts in terms of the entre-deux has been a way of highlighting the common preoccupation with history that they all share (which I have argued is because of the overcommemoration of the past in post-independence Algeria), as well as exploring how the authors negotiate the tensions inherent in portraying women in their traditional positions. Reading the texts alongside one another has revealed a desire by this group of Algerian female authors to insert female agency into the historical record. In order to do this all of the writers engage with the masculinist discourses outlined in Chapter 1 by remaking the traditional roles of women, but their fictional(ised) protagonists often suffer for their transgressions: some are killed, others driven to madness or violence, and yet others exiled. The texts taken together therefore suggest that Algerian women still cannot transgress cultural norms without severe consequences. It is for this reason, I think, that the authors as a group (with the exception of Mokeddem, who chooses exile for her characters and her literary self) write women who desperately grasp at a way to express some form of agency within these roles. The fictional agency is, with the possible exception of Lilas in Bleu blanc vert and to a lesser extent Ahlam in Chaos of the Senses, not a realistic model for women in real life. The history/fiction entre-deux is a framework of analysis that stresses the textual subversions of masculinist historical representations, while recognising the limitations of fiction in terms of any real-world engagement.

My conceptualisation of the history/fiction entre-deux has been of multiple spaces that are created in different ways and to different extents in the texts I have studied. Djebar’s La Femme sans sépulture, Marouane’s la Jeune Fille et la Mère and Bey's Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... provided us with examples of real-life hero(in)es between history and fiction. We saw that the history/fiction entre-deux in La Femme sans sépulture and Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... is an overt one: Djebar openly claimed that the text blurs the line between history and fiction. We saw that the history/fiction entre-deux in La Femme sans sépulture and Entendez-vous dans les montagnes... is an overt one: Djebar openly claimed that the text blurs the line between history and fiction within the text; Bey signals this blurring through the framing of the third-person narrative with real historical documents about her father. La Jeune Fille et la Mère provided a
similar, but less overt, example of this type of *entre-deux*, whereby the author's mother was fictionalised, but to learn this we had to turn to an extra-textual source, namely an interview. In all three cases, the history/fiction *entre-deux* acts as a means to flag up the gap between the represented and the representation. This kind of intervention in the historical record is a means to fill in the blanks of history by representing hero(in)es, without adding to what I termed in Chapter 1 the 'official' discourse, and its overcommemoration of heroes of the War of Independence. This chapter also set out an ideal reading model for this type of history/fiction *entre-deux*, as suggested by Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* – an interaction of the text with the reader's present, which stops the past from being overcommemorated.

The next chapter moved to a different formation of the history/fiction *entre-deux*, and another mode of reading, brought about by a different period of history: the violence of the 1990s. In the case of Bey's *Puisque mon cœur est mort* and Marouane's *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the past in question has not been overcommemorated by the state, but forcibly erased because of the amnesty barring any critical investigation into the violence. The texts characterise their combating of this erasure as something that is necessary because the protagonists are not able to move on from the trauma of the past – and it is because of this imposition of the repressed past on the present of the protagonists that the texts are between history and fiction. Although Bey's text hints at the possibility of an international solidarity between mothers based on mourning, the violent end to the text implies the problems related to basing such solidarity on a continual return to the past. Similarly, although there is a desperate grab for some kind of agency at the end of Marouane's text, the violent way that this is expressed (the rape and murder of the protagonist's husband) suggests the limitations of the fictional to create a space where the past can be laid to rest. The texts, I argued, thus act as memorials for a past that cannot be commemorated in a non-fictional context.

Bey's *Bleu blanc vert* and Djebar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* provided us with two more examples of the history/fiction *entre-deux* – examples that differed from those in the previous two chapters, but also from each other. Bey uses fiction as a tool to invent and play with images and language in a way that pulls real-life history into the fictional domestic space in order to temporalise it; Djebar uses the blurring of genres (fiction and autobiography) to express an 'I' that is oppositional because it is expressed from within the domestic space of the novel. Both texts revalorise the domestic as a space worthy of literary attention, and insert the everyday lives of women into the historical record along with it. This revalorisation involves bringing external
political concerns into the domestic space, suggesting a specific type of engagement with politics: the personal as political. I argued that fictionality is used by both authors to ensure that the potential of this personal engagement to affect the real-world is not overemphasised. Nonetheless, the texts provided us with yet another reading model: how a reader’s individual interaction with a text can trigger a personal political engagement (although, again, the potential of this engagement is not overemphasised, as reading is figured as a potential distraction from reality).

The final chapter gave us two more examples of the potential that reading, and indeed writing, holds to influence our perceptions of reality. Both Mosteghanemi and Mokeddem reconfigure the reader’s perception of their earlier fictional texts by referring to them in a later work – but while Mosteghanemi distances her earlier text further from reality by stressing its fictionality, Mokeddem brings hers closer to reality by demonstrating their connection to her actual subjectivity. Fiction in *Chaos of the Senses* influences the protagonist's reality, as well as the reader’s understanding of *Memory in the Flesh*, but as in all the other texts examined, Mosteghanemi tempers the female agency she creates for her protagonist by overtly mediating it through fiction, signalling to the reader the possible intangibility of this agency outside the fictional. Mokeddem’s *La Transe des insoumis* then provided us with an example unlike any of the others. As with the other texts examined, Mokeddem’s *N’zid* and *La Désirante* challenge masculinist narratives, but they do so in order to create a model for the author’s personal expression of self in her autobiographical writing. In contrast to Djebar’s personal 'I', which sets her up as a spokesperson for the collective rather than sever her connection to it, Mokeddem's 'I' exists in exile: in the nomadic inbetween space. While Djebar uses fiction to separate her subjectivity from the 'I' on the page, Mokeddem uses fiction to create a model of nomadic subjectivity that she uses to align her real-life subjectivity with her literary 'I'.

I argued in this final chapter that Mokeddem’s use of a straightforwardly autobiographical 'I' is a political act, but a very personal one. Although her 'I' can be emulated, it exists in exile in the nomadic literary space, and is consequently far removed from the political reality of Algerian women. Despite the tempering of the female agency in the works by the other authors, I have argued that the very act of representing this agency is in and of itself also a political act. Samia Mehrez, in her book about Egyptian women writers, argues that the act of challenging the dominant discourse is an engagement with a specific political ideology and so texts that do this are
of a political nature – in responding to a political ideology they become political.¹ To put it in terms of my corpus: the texts all insert female agency into the historical record in order to disrupt what I characterised in the introduction as the FLN's totalising historical narrative of the history of Algeria, and in doing so they can be classified as politically engaged by virtue of the fact that they challenge what (as we saw in Chapter 1) is still the dominant political ideology.

Yet just as fictional texts have a different relationship to truth than non-fictional texts do, they also have a different relationship to the political. If the text cannot be relied upon to tell any one truth, the political message is often itself ambiguous and multiple – political ideologies are another type of referent that is suspended in fiction, just as historical truths are (as I argued in the Introduction). I want to therefore draw a distinction between the political engagement of a text and its prospective political impact. In the case of Mokeddem's *La Transe des insoumis*, writing 'I' is a political engagement because it is an unambiguous attack on the sidelining of female subjectivity; it promises to have a political impact because the 'I' disrupts phallogocentric norms. The destabilisation of masculinist historical discourses in the fictional texts by Bey, Djebar, Marouane and Mosteghanemi means they all constitute a political engagement in their negotiations with the dominant discourse, but there is an ambivalence to this engagement, since, as we have seen, the texts uphold masculinist representations as much as they subvert them. Any one political stance is mitigated by the overt fictionality of the texts, but they may still entice the reader to, say, express her own agency in a way that challenges patriarchal norms because the texts have challenged her perceptions of certain masculinist discourses.

The power of fiction to encourage people to make political changes is exemplified by the events surrounding the release of Rachid Bouchareb's 2006 film *Indigènes*.² The film, about Algerians who fought for the French during the Second World War was, prior to its general release, screened privately for President Chirac and his wife. At the end of the film, a short text tells the spectator that Algerian soldiers who fought for the French had, for a number of years, not been paid a pension equal to that of their former comrades-in-arms of French nationality. After the private showing, Chirac (apparently at the behest of his wife) changed the law so that they would be paid the same. For anyone interested in the impact of works of fiction, as Rosello points out, this episode is problematic in many ways, not least because it involves an autocratic decision on the part of the President, based on what has been portrayed in a rather sexist manner as the

---

¹ Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction*, p.7.
emotional (or feminine) outburst of his wife. Nonetheless, it is an example of how the fictional can create a political result. Of course, to have a political impact on this scale relies on the personal response being by someone in a position to make political decisions, and in fact Rosello asks: 'Is it not a most depoliticized reading of the event to suggest that the fate of veterans depended on the president's wife's visceral appreciation of what critics described as a not-so-good film? The political result of this film can only be applauded but can its political power be just as equally embraced?' I do not attempt to answer these questions, but suggest that the whole incident, and Rosello's reading of it, flags up that the political impact of this film, just as I have claimed about the texts I have studied, is not within the film itself. Any political effect that arises from fiction comes from the personal reaction of the spectator or reader.

Of course, the engagement the text might spark in the reader depends on the context – for the Western academic this might be through criticism; whereas for the Algerian woman reading in her home like Lilas in Bleu blanc vert, perhaps the text has the power to suggest models of agency for resistance to patriarchal norms. What all the texts studied here have in common, in any case, is that the destabilisation of masculinist history through fictional mechanisms has the potential to result in a personal political engagement on the part of the reader, even if this engagement is not one always anticipated, or even necessarily desired, by the author. Hiddleston claims at the end of Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria that Djebar's texts are 'not supposed to suggest strategies, policies or promises of future hope, but to tease out the subtle interaction between historical development and philosophical inquiry in the francophone intellectual's perception of Algeria, in the wake of the ravages the country has suffered'. In many ways, as we have seen over and over throughout this thesis, a similar sentiment could be applied to most of the works studied here: strategies are developed but stepped away from, future hope hinted at and then quashed. Arguably this is because the authors recognise what Harrison pinpoints when he argues that texts cannot force us to read them in any one way, that 'the text alone cannot impose a particular mode of reading on the reader or critic'. Yet this does not mean that particular strategies of reading cannot be applied to the texts. The entre-deux is one of these strategies, a means to engage with the texts in a way that questions structures of power and representation. The texts in and of themselves may not be able to create real-world female solidarity or effect political change, but

---


4 Hiddleston, Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria, p.185.

through our critical discourse, and indeed our teaching, we can encourage reading modes that engage with the singularity of the texts in order to spark personal political engagements that inch towards these political goals.
Bibliography

———. 'Algeria: Authorities shut down TV channel'.
Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. 'Historia de las madres'.
Bénichou-Aboukler, Berthe. La Kohéna, Reine Berbère. Alger: Soubiron, 1933.


Faulkner, Rita. 'Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land'. World Literature Today 70, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 847-55.


Horváth, Miléna. 'La médiation par l'écriture : entre-deux et interculturalité chez Assia Djebar'. *Dalhousie French Studies* 68 (Fall 2004): 37-44.


Longo, Schahrazède. 'Violence et rebellion chez trois romancières de l'Algérie contemporaine (Maïssa Bey, Malika Mokeddem et Leïla Marouane)'. University of Iowa, 2009.


Manis, Jerome G. 'What Should Biographers Tell?: The Ethics of Telling Lives'. *Biography* 17, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 386-95.


McLarney, Ellen. 'Unlocking the Female in Ahlām Mustaghānamī'. *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, no. 1 (2002): 24-44.


———. 'Festival de la biographie 2009 : Je dois tout à ton oubli'. Télémiroir (2009),
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu-AuNhLYl [accessed 08/04/10].


Mortimer, Mildred. 'Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls: Algeria's Women Combatants Depicted by
Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Louisette Ighilahriz, and Assia Djebar'. Research in African
Literatures 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 101-17.
———. 'Writing the Personal: The Evolution of Assia Djebar's Autobiographical Project from
L'Amour, La Fantasia to Nulle part dans la maison de mon père'. Journal of Women's


Murdoch, H. Adlai. 'Woman, Postcoloniality, Otherness: Djebar's Discourses of Histoire and

O'Riley, Michael F. 'Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djebar's La Femme sans
———. Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization: Assia Djebar's New Novels. Oxford: Peter Lang,
2007.

Orlando, Valérie. Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the
———. 'To Be Singularly Nomadic or a Territorialized National: At the Crossroads of Francophone

Ouedghiri, Meryem. 'Writing Women's Bodies on the Palimpsest of Islamic History: Fatima


Parlement français. 'Article 4 : Loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la
Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés'.
http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000444898&fastPos =2&fastReqId=1734713212&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte [accessed 22/06/12].


Prochaska, David. 'That Was Then, This Is Now: The Battle of Algiers and After'. Radical History


Royle, Nicholas. 'A Phantom Review'. *Textual Practice* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 386-98.


Stampfl, Tanja. 'The (Im)possibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh'. *College Literature* 37, no. 1 (2010): 129-58.


Van Deventer, Rachel. 'L'Agentivité et la naissance de la femme-sujet dans la littérature algérienne contemporaine'. Université d’Ottawa, 2010.


