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The Nightmare of Actual Identity": Franco-Algerian Literature after Liberation"

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**“THE NIGHTMARE OF ACTUAL IDENTITY”:
Franco-Algerian Literature after Liberation**

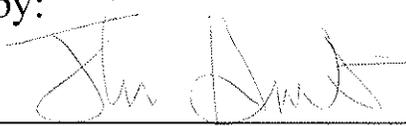
by

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A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council
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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the issues of postcolonial Algerian identity expressed in literature, and the difficulty of defining an Algerian identity independent of French influence. I analyze and contextualize three novels (*Le Polygone étoilé* by Kateb Yacine, *L'Amour, la fantasia* by Assia Djebar, and *Le Village de l'allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller*) representative of their respective periods.

I explore the evolution of expressions of identity through post-liberation Algeria. The years immediately following decolonization are marked by the effort to return to a precolonial blank slate, an effort that Yacine cautions against. The 1980s and 1990s are most concerned with re-inserting Algeria into the Western historical discourse, and the most recent literature moves beyond decolonization to discuss the current Islamist challenge and immigration. Among the pertinent issues are language, oral vs. written traditions, the often blatant absence of Algerians and women from the accounts in the French colonial archives, and, of course, the Self/Other binary. I have found that these representative authors and texts use asynchronic time, fragmented narrative, re-written history, and expressions of violence in an attempt to cope with the colonial period and decolonization. I show that these authors provide a commentary on those who have tried to erase their French side, but with little success. Ultimately, though in different ways, each author writes that Algerians must accept their French past and move beyond it, rather than fighting their collective history.

Introduction

Algeria is an intersection between the Occident and the Orient, and has been for centuries. Their search for identity is emblematic of that of the Islamic world, and can therefore be studied as a way to contextualize other places with similar questions. It is beginning to be present on the international stage as a decolonized people overcoming a troubled imperial past and emerging as an individual and modern nation.

Since liberation in 1962, Algeria has yet to define a national identity independent of French influence.¹ Three periods emerge in these fifty odd years: decolonization during and after the war with France; postcolonialism lasting until the 1990s and civil war from 1992 to 1997; and what I term *post-postcolonialism*, emerging in contemporary Algeria. In the postcolonial world, self-definition and national identity separate from the former colonial power (though with continuing influence from the colonizer) is crucial, traits that are expressed in the postcolonial literary discourse.

As we move into a new century the problems raised by mixed post-colonial identities are becoming more prominent in the consciousness of previously colonized peoples, whose cultures integrate diverse aspects of history and colonialism in different artistic and literary forms. This leads us to new understanding of Francophone discourse, post-colonial cultures and their relevance to identity formation.²

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon, 1962).

James Ciment, *Algeria: The Fundamentalist Challenge* (New York: Facts on File, 1997).

James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, prejudice and race in colonial Algeria* (New York: Tauris, 1995).

Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Algeria: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1994).

Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria, 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity* (New York: Verso, 2003).

Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001).

² Kamal Salhi, ed., *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures*, (Oxford: Lexington, 2003), xi.

Whether it is in the fragmentation of literary style showing the difficulty of coping with the violence of decolonization; asynchrony demonstrating the lack of linear time in the colonial and postcolonial conditions; or attempts to rewrite historical discourse dominated by the West, postcolonial cultural production provides a glimpse into the process of identity formation of a people. With literacy rates rising after independence, a new Algerian literature was born: postcolonial literature. It acted as a medium for expressing the sadness and pain that came with liberty, gained at great cost to the Algerian people, and attempted to find a new identity separate from France, but not from the entire Francophone world. By analyzing representative texts from each of these post-independence periods, I show how the notions of identity expressed in literature have changed. Incorporating postcolonial studies, including the theories of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, as a *point de départ*, I critique the three texts, using the context in recent social and political history as a means to understanding their import in postcolonial discourse. I also apply the theory of the psychoanalytic theorist Fethi Benslama, who introduces a new postcolonial Algerian identity theory, to the literary texts to see if the developments he explores translate to the written work and the historical realities that they reflect, and if the changes he sees are also apparent through literature.

Postcolonial studies is an interdisciplinary subject that studies the worldwide impact of the European colonial period. It attempts to illustrate the systems of colonial and imperial power, to reintroduce voices that have been lost, and to imagine the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial identity, national belonging, and globalization. One of its main concerns, pioneered by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, is the nature of

representation. It examines how Western representations of third world countries and peoples serve the political and economic interests of the West. Critics point out the problems surrounding the “objectification” of the perception of westerners, when in fact the unbalanced power relations prohibits any objectivity. According to Said, the West has constructed the third world as the “Other” to the Western “Self.”³⁴ This becomes a binary opposition in which the “positive” side are representations of the West. These stereotypes are present in the anthropological, historical, and literary discourses, as well as the mass media.

Postcolonial studies also examines the ways in which education, language, and literature were used in colonialism. Educating the colonized in the language, history, culture, and literature of the colonizer can lead to double consciousness and divided loyalties. It allows the colonizer to rule by consent rather than force or violence. Such issues have spurred reflection on the hybrid nature of culture, which, some argue, may never be pure.⁵ This concept is manifested in Algeria first by the colonial education and the use of the French language, and second by the continuing, inescapable presence of French influence.

* * *

Post-independence, profound political and social changes have had a radical effect on identity in Algeria. On July 1, 1962, roughly six million Algerians voted in the

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Vintage, 1979).

⁴ Much has happened in the field of postcolonial studies since Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, but for the purposes of this thesis I will consider only Said.

⁵ Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2003).

Neil Lazarus, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

referendum on Independence. After nearly eight years of savage guerrilla warfare with France, the vote was nearly unanimous, and July 5, the 132nd anniversary of the French entry into Algeria, was announced as the national independence day. However, in the nearly fifty years since independence, the national inspirations (such as Arabization, complete economic and political independence from France, and peace) of Algeria *sans* France are largely unfulfilled.⁶

In the first twenty years following independence, society and politics in Algeria underwent radical changes. An increasingly authoritarian socialist voice infiltrated the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), the political party instrumental in the movement for independence. Collectivization of agriculture, industrialization, and urbanization changed traditional Algerian demography, and educational reform increased literacy from under 10% in 1962 to 57.4% by 1990.⁷ Many tried to erase their “Frenchness” by “Arabization,” movements such as teaching Arabic, and not French, in schools. Others, like the contemporary novelist and former French teacher Maïssa Bey, have embraced the French history in Algeria, and recognized it as a formative influence on their contemporary culture; Algeria, on this view, becomes a sort of Franco-Arab hybrid.

In the 1980s, 57% of Algerians were under the age of nineteen.⁸ This younger generation could not relate to the general obsession of their elders with the war with France, resulting in a political crisis. In October 1988, children and young people rioted

⁶ David Prochaska, “The Return of the Repressed: War, Trauma, Memory in Algeria and Beyond,” in *Algeria & France 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. Patricia Lorcin (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2006), 266.

Stora, 238-241.

⁷ Metz, 116-118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

against rising prices, and acknowledged their dissatisfaction with the single party system and denial of democratic rights. In the late 1980s, Islamist *intégristes* opposed the mostly secular government, in the hopes of turning Algeria into an Islamist state. The Islamist party, le Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), won the first round of elections and came to power in 1990, which displeased the army.⁹ The army deposed the president, Chadli Bendjedid, and banned the FIS, claiming that it was protecting democracy.¹⁰ This political upheaval led to civil war between the Islamist groups and the Algerian security forces that lasted until 1997, with a death toll around 100,000. Since the end of this period of insurgency, most of the main guerrilla groups have disbanded, taking advantage of amnesty offered by the government. The political and social climate in Algeria has since calmed, though Islamist extremist groups have continued small isolated attacks.

Traces of these events, and others, appear in the literary discourse of their periods, sometimes explicitly and other times more subtly. The rise of Islam in politics and increasing Islamic fundamentalism, Arabization of language, the beginnings of the feminist movement, to name a few, are recurring themes in the literature of the time. However, rather than an historical account providing facts and figures, the literature is the commentary of contemporary Algerians and their experience of these events.

Representative of the first period, “Decolonization,” is *Le Polygone étoilé* by Kateb Yacine, marked by circular and asynchronic time indicative from the problem of memory, published in 1966. Yacine writes of his profound psychological complex and his interior exile brought about by his traumatic relationship with his mother. It follows

⁹ Stora, 195-203.

¹⁰ Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War: 1990-1998* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 1-2.

the journey of several young Algerians who emigrate to France in search of work; instead of finding a new and different place, they find that France is much the same as their home in Algeria: full of North Africans looking for work, just in a different *paysage*. It is marked by inconsistent style, prose narrative often morphing into verse or theatre. Three contradictions manifest themselves in the text: the aspirations of the colonizer, the aspirations of the colonized, and how personal identity functions as it crosses between the two, ending with the individual equally alienated both in Algeria and in France.

Yacine's prose has been significantly less analyzed by critics than has his theatre. Of his novels, *Nedjma* (1956) is the most popular; this work has made Yacine known "as the most eloquent spokesman of Algerianness."¹¹ After writing *Nedjma* and *Le Polygone étoilé* in French, he ceased to use French as a means of expression and turned entirely to the vernacular Algerian dialect, not classical Arabic. The chorus is an element present in parts of *Polygone* and marks his theatrical compositions. It shows his lack of trust in literature because it destroys the typical narrative voice. The insertion of theatre and the chorus in his "novels" gives them the energy of speech and song that often are not present in prose literature.¹²

L'Amour, la fantasia by Assia Djebar was published in 1985, just before the civil war, and is a representative text of classic postcolonial Algerian literature. Throughout the novel, the female characters must decide to embrace or reject their supposed identity, particularly dealing with language: French versus Arabic and oral versus written literary tradition. Djebar tries to "rewrite" Algerian history from a non-European voice. As

¹¹ Biodun Jeyifo, ed., *Modern African Drama* (New York: Norton, 2002), 509.

¹² *Ibid.*, 506-523.

Algerians themselves were only marginally present in the French version of this historical discourse, she makes them present in their own history, especially women who were hardly ever mentioned. She forcibly re-inserts them into the written historical discourse, using fiction to fill in the silences. Her other novels focus much more strictly on the feminine condition in pre- and postcolonial Algeria. Djébar is one of the best-known Algerian authors, and is particularly popular as the subject of feminist criticism and theory.¹³ I believe that the success of her work may be ascribed to her presence on the international stage, having been educated in Paris and now teaching in the United States, and to the accessibility of her work to many groups (i.e. feminism, postcolonial studies, etc.).

Finally, published in 2008, is *Le Village de l'allemand, ou le journal des frères Schiller*. Its author Boualem Sansal, a former government official, was exiled from the government after he began writing. He offers a glimpse of Algerian identity from a non-ethnocentric perspective, following the journals of two brothers on a search to find the real identity of their father. As the older brother travels around Europe and North Africa searching for traces of his ex-Nazi father, the younger brother experiences France from the perspective of North African immigrants in a community rife with racial and religious tension; the text is an asynchronous intertwining of their journals. This text is more focused on identity related to space, rather than the Self/Other relationship present in Yacine's

¹³ Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds* (Hanover, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

Nada Elia, *Trances, Dances, and Vociferations: Agency and Resistance in African Women's Narratives* (New York: Garland, 2001).

Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism*.

Priscilla Ringrose, *Assia Djébar: In Dialogue with Feminisms* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

text. The discussion of identity's relationship to space allows the reader to understand the effects of immigration and cultural migration on identity, whose fluid nature permits radical changes in space. Sansal explores how the space one is in can cause one to adapt and evolve one's identity to meet with social norms, and the impact this has on the larger community. As Sansal only began writing in 1999, very little has been published about him, and only this last novel that he has written has been translated into English.

I have chosen these particular novels because they are eloquent discussions of the feelings of Algerian identity after the French were gone. They are not commentaries on the Islamist challenge or another more specific facet of contemporary Algeria, but they discuss the many faces and parts of identity. At the time of the liberation movement, Yacine demonstrates the extent of Self/Other conflict through the story of young Algerians who travel to France in search of work. Djébar makes clear the lack of history from the Algerian perspective, and the significant absence of Algerians themselves from the French historical discourse. Most recently, Sansal treats the issue of rootedness and fluidity in relation to migration and changing identities. The three novels are a means to chart the changes in Algerian identity since liberation. As reflections of their contemporary conditions, they show the evolution of Algerian identity.

* * *

Each of Algeria's three post-independence eras has different issues of identity. Nations and their inhabitants are not stable or static entities. Ideologies, social practices, all human constructs are constantly changing, including self-perception and self-image

and on many levels.¹⁴ This idea of the changing self occurs in the individual, but more importantly to an entire society, to a nation of people. Naturally, during the decolonization, Algerians fighting against France wanted the Maghreb for *maghrébins*. They had been forced to conform to French standards and cultural practices for one hundred and thirty years, and were trying to free themselves from the imperial yoke. In the post-colonial era, from the 1960s through the 1980s, they were trying to imagine an identity without France. Now, many have accepted that France is always already there in their culture, and that there is no absolute “Algerian-ness.” Today the question is what defines Algerian identity, whether it is Said’s idea of Orientalism, Benslama’s national theo-idiomatism plus martyrdom discussed below, or something else entirely.

This, in turn, raises the question of identity construction as such. Algeria was in pursuit of the emancipation of the non-European. After the quite jarring and violent events necessary for emancipation, Algerians were left with “the nightmare of actual identity,” of trying to forge a new identity for a nation outside the sphere of European influence.¹⁵ Fethi Benslama, a francophone Tunisian psychoanalyst, has studied the psychological implications of colonization and decolonization on the general Algerian psyche. He argues that Algeria wanted “to be the exemplary representative” for other anti-colonial movements and Arab nationalist movements.¹⁶ Benslama writes that he goes against the mainstream of postcolonial studies of identity. He states that scholars

¹⁴ Bourdieu, *The Algerians*.

Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*.

Salhi, *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures*.

¹⁵ Fethi Benslama and Salah Khellaf. “Identity as a Cause,” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 30, No. 3, *Dissident Algeria* (Autumn 1999): 37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

have proposed two main identity theories: the resurgence of God and Islam, and the right of Islamic nations to self-determination of values and morality. But he believes that these identity theories are outdated and largely untrue, though each has a degree of merit. He sees the need for a fourth category to the “national-theo-idiomatism” (“*Islam my religion, Arabic my language, Algeria my homeland*” – God, language, and soil) that has governed Algerian identity theory in the last forty years: *martyrs*.¹⁷ Blood. He contends that identity is defined by the capacity of a body to be destroyed or cleansed, through blood. Benslama’s theory certainly translates to an Islamic martyrdom with an obvious religious motive, but many more have sacrificed themselves for the land and the Algerian people, for those whose blood they share. Not for Europeans. For the Algerian Self, not the French Other. It is a reversal of the classical colonial delineation of discrete entities: European Self and colonial Other, of colonizer and colonized. Here Benslama writes of an Algerian Self, related by blood, of Algerians who have died and are still dying for the Algerian “body”: cleansing it of impurities, of those who do not also share a desire for Algerian-ness. Take, for example, *les harkis*, those Algerians who fought on the French side during the war for independence. Many were killed during the war, and those that did not die were exiled to France, living in the *banlieues* of Paris and Marseilles. They *had* to leave for ideological reasons: they did not want Algeria for Algerians.

This thesis will test Benslama’s assertions to see if post-postcolonial identity actually works in the way he proposes. A great amount of study and criticism have emerged around the period of independence and decolonization from historians and

¹⁷ Benslama and Khellaf, 44.

critics such as Benjamin Stora and Frantz Fanon, and around the period before the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, during which time women's issues were especially pertinent. But the post-postcolonial is a relatively new development. Works from this period do not yet have the benefit of years of analysis and absorption into common literary discourse. But this lack of historical perspective makes studying it of the utmost interest; studying the present sense of identity in the present is instrumental to seeing where future developments will go. Though technology permits an extremely fluid and dynamic medium for expressing identity, literature remains among the key views into common consciousness when one wants to get a sense of a people. Writers like Yacine, Djébar, and Sansal provide important evidence for the development of Algerian identity, immortalized in the literary discourse.

I wish to prove that literary discourse is an accurate measure of identity and explore what these three novels show about the evolution of postcolonial Algerian identity. Considering the great changes that have occurred since decolonization, the Algerian people have certainly transformed, and I believe that charting the differences in these novels will be a gateway to perceiving the Algerian identity as it is today.

The Self/Other Binary and Education in *Le Polygone étoilé*

In the years immediately following decolonization, the space left empty by the French made the colonizer/colonized divide very sharp indeed. Kateb Yacine points out this rift, but also comments on the ultimate interweaving of the two cultures, and that part of the collective Algerian history could not be completely erased. An understanding of *Polygone* is greatly expanded by studying the influence of the French on the Algerian education system, allowing the reader to understand how far French influence went in colonial Algeria and the ways Algerians tried to undo the French system after independence.

Self/Other

The common colonial theme of the colonizer Self and the colonized Other is highly present in *Le Polygone étoilé*. At the beginning of the novel, Yacine writes from the position of the French: “les gardiens” are the French, saying “on,” speaking of the Algerians, “les Barbares,” “ils.”¹⁸ He writes “Les français” or “qu’Ils” where the *L* and the *I* should not be capitalized, emphasizing the difference between the Self and the Other, and specifying which “ils” he is talking about.¹⁹ Later, when he re-assumes the position of the Algerian, a great sense of anguish characterizes his representation of the colonizer, calling them pigs, in *their* wagons and *their* cabins.²⁰ When Lakhdar and the narrator arrive in Marseille, he immediately looks for other people like him, hiding in the

¹⁸ Kateb Yacine, *Le Polygone étoilé* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

identity from which he left, distancing himself from the Colonizer. However, so many Maghrébins have gone to France that the new arrivals ask “Où ou non avons-nous traversé la mer?” There are so many Africans in Marseille that they have the impression that they are still in Africa, Marseille being described as no more than a corridor of the Casbah.²¹ Though they expected to find a world of opportunity and of plenty in the land of the Colonizer, they find another Maghreb.

So far, the Self/Other dichotomy does not translate at all to the landscape or feel of the countries. The Colonized Other perceives no noticeable difference between the port city of Marseille and Algeria, and as an enormous percentage of the population there is African, be they Maghrébin or sub-Saharan African, the Colonized feels right at home. Finding no work in Marseille, Lakhdar, the narrator, and the nameless man from Oran (l’Oranais, as he is called) move away from the coast to Arles, “encore l’Orient. Sauf l’opulence du paysage.”²² The Orient and the Occident are merged, at least to the narrator’s perception, an interesting sort of inversion of the French colonial attitude. The French claimed to make their colonies parts of France, offering many of the Colonized French citizenship, in a way bringing the Occident to the Orient. The narrator, however, sees the opposite.

Yacine uses several metaphors for the Self/Other relationship, the most pertinent of which is that of the lovers. “Les amants,” at the beginning of the novel, are in a tumultuous relationship, fraught with violence and unhappiness, expressed in such

²¹ Yacine, 47-48.

²² Ibid., 51.

exclamations as “Adieu! Que je ne te retrouve plus ou l’un de nous finira écrasé.”²³ Already suggesting the violence present in Yacine’s writing, *les amants* fight, but are stuck together, at least temporarily. The previous forced marriage described at the end of the text is also symptomatic of the Colonizer/Colonized, Self/Other relationship. It is discovered that Nedjma, an embodiment of Algeria, was previously in a forced marriage presumably with France, but could not express if she shared “cet amour malheureux” or if her heart belonged to another. Not only is she in a forced marriage with France, but she was the product of “une ancienne liaison avec une Française, disparue sans laisser de trace.”²⁴ Because Algeria was not only in this troubled, forced marriage with France but also the illegitimate product of France, it could not express its dismay at the relationship until, of course, the beginning of the revolution against France in 1954.

Langue

One of the major elements of a national identity is language, as stated by many postcolonial theorists and by Benslama. The colonizer used language as a means of controlling the colonized. By encouraging or forcing the colonized to use the colonizer’s language, the colonized was distanced from their common history and from their ancestors, to a degree making them more easily controlled or more “malleable.”²⁵ As the Arabization projects in Algeria were only in their early stages in 1966, the use of Arabic seemed an exciting, rebellious, and authentic practice. Part of President Boumedienne’s

²³ Yacine, 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 156.

²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979).

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Hanover, NH: Heinemann, 1986).

program was a forced Arabization movement which included making Arabic, not French, the primary language of instruction in Algeria's schools, colleges, and universities, since "only by rejecting the language of the colonizer in favor of their own mother tongue could Algerians be truly free from colonial domination."²⁶ Arabization of education was the first step of a much larger aim of making Arabic the primary language of Algerian public life.²⁷ The Arabization of education began as early as 1962 when the teaching of Arabic became mandatory in all programs at all levels. However, such an abrupt change was impossible, so "Algerianization" was accompanied by the gradual introduction of Arabic as the language of instruction in all subjects in all schools, and in vocational training centers. It began with seven hours per week of instruction in Arabic, and by 1964, the first grade level was entirely Arabized. By the end of Boumedienne's presidency, Arabic was the primary language of instruction for most students.²⁸

Despite the fact that Arabic was strongly taught at the lower levels, in middle schools and higher up in the system, French prevailed. Algerianization of teaching staff in middle and high schools did not progress as quickly as in primary schools, but it rose to around 80 percent by 1978. Arabization of higher education presented major problems, especially by subject. A lack of scientific books and articles in Arabic curbed any study of the sciences in Arabic, but the authorities refused to recognize this. The sciences had to be taught in French.²⁹ A dual system gradually came to the fore, with a bilingual track

²⁶ J.N.C. Hill, *Identity in Algerian Politics: The Legacy of Colonial Rule* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 94.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁸ Yacine, 94.

²⁹ Mahfoud Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 222, 229.

and an Arabic track (where French was taught as a foreign language). The best teachers taught in French, so those on the bilingual track received a better education. Bilingualism contributed greatly to the career success of graduates.³⁰ Francophone teachers and the learning materials they used, especially in the sciences, were higher quality, and so were the students they produced. Employers were eager to hire these students because of their connections with French and other foreign businesses and companies.³¹ And as proficiency in French was associated with privilege, employers believed that prospective employees with French language skill would be greater social alliances.³² The initial speed of Arabization of the education was eventually slowed because the demand for Arabic-language teachers had continually outstripped supply, leading to the appointments of less able and qualified teachers.³³

Nedjma, the embodiment of Algeria, speaks and is heard by no one, recognized by no one. “Quand elle parlait, ils ne l’entendaient pas. Les mots tombés de sa bouche rendaient un son de profanation, de sacrilège.”³⁴ While this resonates with feminism, Yacine’s point is more related to the Colonizer/Colonized dichotomy as it relates to language. The “ils” to which he is referring are the French, not hearing Algeria and the Arabic language. For Yacine, Arabic is the language of his Algerian ancestors, of his father, mother, grand-parents, “les premières harmonies des muses coulaient pour moi

³⁰ Bennoune, 222.

³¹ Hill, 98-99.

³² John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2005), 225.

³³ Hill, 98-99.

³⁴ Yacine, 160.

naturellement, de source maternelle.”³⁵ Departing from the language of the colonizer, he feels a much greater connection with his country and people when using Arabic. “Alors s’élève une voix singulière”...“interlocuteur privilégié des Ancêtres,” Yacine writes in the preface.³⁶ He finds that Arabic is the means by which Algeria will unite; a common, non-Western tongue, not understood by the French, will allow the population to join together in a common purpose: to expel the Colonizer from their conquered territory, from the Algerian homeland.

Violence

At the time of Algeria’s struggle for independence, Frantz Fanon wrote that a violent decolonization was the only way to effectively begin to repair the psyche so damaged by colonialism, and inherent in violence is blood, which we see today in Benslama’s concept of martyrdom as part of postcolonial identity.³⁷ Violence is one of the main themes of *Le Polygone étoilé*, whether seen in crime, torture, or rebellion. A poem near the beginning of the text, even before Lakhdar leaves Algeria, speaks of blood, death, exile, and the “patrimoine vendu” to the French.

La patrimoine, the homeland, is something that cannot be sold.³⁸ In the Algerian war, those that sided with the French were shunned and exiled after Algeria prevailed. Known as *les harkis*, they went to France, not permitted to return to the homeland, not even to see their families. “Ceux qui ne combattent pas sont morts, sont prisonniers,

³⁵ Yacine, 179.

³⁶ Ibid., I.

³⁷ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove, 1965).
Benslama, 46.

³⁸ Yacine, 34-35.

s'exilent, sont bannis...tout se confond dans la grisaille des aliénés."³⁹ Those who did not support the Algerian nationalist cause were sanctioned, and severely. Before independence, they worked for others, not even knowing for what purpose or to what end they were working, "à la connaissance de ce pas qui a cessé depuis longtemps d'être le nôtre."⁴⁰ At the behest of the French after the invasion, the Algerians protected

villes et ports, nous fournissons les guides des populations nouvelles, ayant charrié le bois, les pierres, le blé, et résisté sans chef à l'invasion : nous demeurons dans les abîmes, protégés par la clairvoyance de nos mules. Tout ennemi qui pénètre en ces terres se heurte à nos coalitions, ainsi qu'à nos parfaites interprétations de la géographie. Nous observons les lois sans les connaître.⁴¹

After they had destroyed their crops and livelihoods lest they fall into the hands of the French invaders, the Algerians were forced to play host to their new and alien sovereigns while they themselves were essentially living in holes.

Like the *patrimoine vendu*, the actual earth, their labor and manpower had been so long exploited by the French that they had to fight back to begin the process of regaining their self-sufficiency and honour in their national identity. Yacine describes the merchant's war against the flies, although considering the rat infestation he should be fighting rats instead of flies. He considers the merchant's relatively boring work and his isolation as a cause of his increasing violence. As a parallel with the French colonial attitude, the French may have grown too comfortable with their position in Europe, and sought to expand elsewhere in the global scene, with Algeria as a viable option. A war against the rats and the flies parallels a cultural altercation with non-Westerners, as they

³⁹ Yacine, 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

are considered vermin, like non-Westerners from an imperial perspective. The narrator says that the merchant was made “pour la répression, à cause de son métier statique et de son isolement.” Yacine appears to suggest that those who repress are often isolated and static in nature. Moreover, the merchant made a habit of questioning people and holding them “prisoner.”⁴² Though this instance is described in a light and humorous tone, the fact remains that the merchant was a bit of a tyrant. Apparently, Yacine believes that repressors, like an imperial power, are borne from isolation, a static position, and involves holding prisoners and questioning them.

While it seems a bit far-fetched considering the Industrial Revolution and growing communication networks during the era of colonization, the questioning and holding of prisoners seems to strike the proper chord. Torture was prevalent during the war for independence, and is graphically represented in several near-contemporary films, like *La battaglia di Algeri* by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966), *Le Petit soldat* by Jean Luc Godard (1960), and Alain Resnais’s *Muriel ou Le temps d’un retour* (1963). It is a recurring theme in this text, referenced here in the episode with the merchant, but also earlier, “encore un Algérien à la torture,” though this instance describes merely a disagreement between the construction site manager and a worker.⁴³ However, considering the history of torture in Algeria at the hands of the French, it is a strong point. Torture does not have to be the most violent act, but in other less intense situations as well. In a point echoed half a century later by Boualem Sansal in *Le Village de*

⁴² Yacine, 83-84.

⁴³ Ibid., 55.

l'allemand, Yacine writes, “on ne meurent pas qu’une fois. La torture est plus fine.”⁴⁴ Like Benslama and his martyrs, this statement suggests that one dies more than once, especially if for a cause greater than oneself.

So in the Algerian war, those who died died physically and also in the context of martyrdom, as part of a larger movement and for a bigger reason. Torture fits easily into the category of martyrdom, shedding blood in a national movement to connect a nation of people to the earth. Before the war began, the Algerian people were “silent” in their suffering, but began to fight back and speak out for their cause: “Un Algérien / prolétarien / qui souffre et qui dit rien. / *Mais maintenant, on va dire quelque chose !*”⁴⁵ Once the Algerian intellectual class began to rise up, the peasants joined the movement. “Une fois gagnés à la cause, leurs yeux s’ouvrirent sur l’étendue de l’esclavage, et ils voudront revenir aux libertés fondamentales.”⁴⁶ After an initial spark of discontent at the Algerian condition and the signs of an uprising, gaining supporters was not a problem. Returning to “fundamental freedoms” was the driving force of the movement. As Frantz Fanon writes, “the whole of humanity has erupted violently, tumultuously onto the state of history, taking its own destiny in its hands.”⁴⁷ The revolt against oppression took hold all over the world in the mid-twentieth century, some more violently than others, but the point is that the common man took over his own fate, no longer leaving it to the West.

⁴⁴ Yacine, 74.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁷ Fanon, 1.

Les Racines

A more concise way to describe Benslama's national-theo-idiomatism plus martyrdom is *roots*, encompassing land, religion, ancestors, language, culture, common consciousness, etc. The verse on pages 172-175 speaks particularly of ancestors, war, and death.

Toute guerre est un héritage
Et seuls nos pères décapités
Se disputent le ciel
Tandis que leurs lignées
Pour les voir se confondent
Jusqu'à ne plus connaître leur emblème⁴⁸

This passage certainly refers to martyrdom and the spilled blood acting as a link between the population and the land, but also to the ancestors and what they gave up for the future generations. But it also speaks to the connectedness of humankind. That the lines were mixed up and that *les pères* forgot their side's emblem reminds the reader that no matter what the disagreements and wars were about in life, in death everyone is the same; national causes no longer matter. Sansal will take a different position on this matter.

Interestingly, though perhaps predictably, the young narrator and his companions are easily called away by the "cri de la sirène" from the "séductions algéroises."⁴⁹ Full of hope and optimism, they go away to the land of opportunity (France) without giving much thought to the implication of leaving their *patrie*. However, France does not turn out to be what they thought, and after many misadventures and failed jobs, they come to realize the value of roots: "après le rêve, tu chantais ton origine orientale."⁵⁰ The greatness of the *métropole* is here called a dream, a product of the Algerian imagination.

⁴⁸ Yacine, 173.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20.

They are told this before departing, and finally come to realize it. They look for work all over France with little luck, but they find hospitality in other Maghrébin immigrants, the first step towards understanding the strength of their roots. But like Shelley's description of an idea as an ember, growing increasingly dim as one attempts to describe it through language, "notre statut, de mémoire d'Algérien, fut toujours provisoire, et chaque fois qu'on le définit il devient un peu plus vague."⁵¹ Perhaps the continued attempts to define and rationalize national identity are what actually harms it, making it less bright and strong through language.

Discontinuity

Symptomatic of the extreme disillusionment of the Algerian people after the war, discontinuity of time, structure, and language are key in the composition of *Le Polygone étoilé*. About halfway through the text, Yacine flashes back to the Golden Age of the Maghreb in the Middle Ages. After briefly describing "l'apothéose du monde arabe," Yacine turns to Ibn Khaldun, an official of the great kings of that time, who leaves a cryptic remark in one of his texts: "Tout ce qui est arabe est voué à la ruine..."⁵² Considering that *Polygone* was published four years after Algeria gained independence from France, Yacine's outlook is very bleak indeed. Though, when taking into account the previous one hundred and thirty years of exploitation by the French, his pessimism may be justified. Algeria had fallen to France, finally let go after eight years of vicious fighting against colonialism, and after independence still seeming to be a puppet of

⁵¹ Yacine, 133.

⁵² Ibid., 80-81.

western influence. The strong French influence damaging the Algerian psyche is easily seen in the education system. The French claimed that one of their main goals in colonizing Algeria was a *mission civilatrice*, civilizing mission: bringing enlightenment and progress to North Africa.⁵³ This principle was a flimsy façade that was appealing to the French opinion in the *métropole*, but in practice, especially regarding the education system, *la mission civilatrice* may even be perceived as the opposite of civilizing. Indeed, many believe that the illiteracy rate was even higher after 132 years of colonization than before the French arrived in Algeria: “The literacy rate never reached its precolonization level during the entire 132 years of colonization.”⁵⁴

Education had always been greatly important in Algeria and Muslim societies in general because a believer must be able to read and write the language of the Koran. Therefore, public education had always been a prime occupation of the clergy. Even the commonest of people were interested in education for their religion.⁵⁵ French military conquest nearly completely demolished the tribal education system, hence interrupting its natural development and advancement. The French seized the *habous* estates and funds for education, and any tribal schools that remained fell under the financial and ideological influence and control of the incipient bourgeoisie.⁵⁶ One result of colonial implantation was the rapid dismantling of the existing educational system, causing the spread of illiteracy, which worsened as the forced illiteracy of one generation disabled the next.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hill, 14.

⁵⁴ Habiba Deming, “Language and Politics: A New Revisionism” in Patricia M.E. Lorcin, ed., *Algeria and France: 1800-2000* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2006), 182.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, 48.

⁵⁶ Rachid Tlemcani, *State and Revolution in Algeria* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), 51.

⁵⁷ Ruedy, 103.

Ultimately, tribal Koranic schools became a secret activity of the Muslim Reformist Movement (the *Nadha*) that was principally devoted to propagating an Islamic culture, purified of superstitions and maraboutism.⁵⁸

Since, according to Algerians, education was a device that primarily existed to pass on the knowledge of a religious heritage to the next generation, a Muslim boy attending a French school, even a secular school, could only be viewed as a move toward a total departure from Islam and a step away from the community of his forefathers.⁵⁹ Some sons of Algerian notables were allowed to attend French schools at the secondary and university levels, but this was generally known to be a ploy to keep them embroiled in the system, a sort of ideological brain washing.⁶⁰ The disguise of the *mission civilatrice* may easily be seen through when one regards statistics. In 1870, forty years after *la mission* began, fewer than five percent of Algerian children were attending school.⁶¹ According to Alistair Horne, one of France's greatest gifts to Algeria was education, but, ironically, that education advanced the colonized at the expense of the French taxpayer, and that no matter how much they appeared to try, there were never enough schools, teachers, or funds to adequately implement their idealistic ideas.⁶²

After 1870, the *colons*, the French on the ground in Algeria, dismantled this system of education and invited Algerians to attend French schools, most of which were still operated by the clergy. For reasons that have already been discussed, few accepted. But in 1883, just a few years after Jules Ferry reformed the French education system, the

⁵⁸ Tlemcani, 51.

⁵⁹ Ruedy, 103

⁶⁰ Ibid., 103

⁶¹ Ibid., 104

⁶² Horne, 61

métropole tried to apply the same compulsory education in Algeria. This resulted in crisis. The *colons*, who now controlled Algerian finances, managed largely to avoid implementing this law, arguing lack of funds, among other things.⁶³ According to the *colons*, the education system had always been too costly.⁶⁴ Until World War I, the *colons* worked to limit both the quality and the content of Algerian education. They insisted that education be vocationally oriented, focused on the agricultural labor market to avoid academic subjects that might tend to politicize the natives. In short, they implemented a practical, not theoretical, education.⁶⁵ In the point of view of the *colons*, educated Algerians would too often desert farm work and find better jobs in the industrial sector, or even emigrate to France, so state education had to be modified to meet the needs of agrarian capitalism, keeping as many people as possible fit only for this area of work and for no others.⁶⁶ The following decade saw the establishment of an institutionalized education system that was compulsory, free, and secular for Algerians, just like Ferry's French system.⁶⁷ By 1890, the climate began to change considerably. Algerian families were realizing that France was not going to leave, and that if their children were to maintain or improve their standard of living, they would have to learn to function in the world France had created. Thus, enrollment in schools began to increase.⁶⁸ On 6 June 1917, school attendance was made compulsory for all Algerian children who lived within three kilometers of a school. However, very few peasant children benefited from this

⁶³ Ruedy, 104

⁶⁴ Tlemcani, 56.

⁶⁵ Ruedy, 104.

⁶⁶ Tlemcani, 56.

⁶⁷ Lorein, 9.

⁶⁸ Ruedy, 105.

decree, though the educational opportunities of many city-dwelling children were augmented.⁶⁹ By 1919, Muslim resistance to French education had disappeared, for all practical purposes, and had been replaced by a growing demand for the construction and improvement of schools.⁷⁰

Due to a continuing, albeit slight, increase in enrollment (12% in 1919), Algerian children were taught in special schools or separate classes attached to European schools, both of which were characterized by very high student-teacher ratios, physical overcrowding, and lowered academic standards. Financial difficulties related to the education system, the cause of constant complaint for the *colons*, were justified with the growing number of Algerians in the classroom. These problems in funding, in addition to ideological reasons, inhibited rapid development of education.⁷¹

There were and are different perceptions of the principles and applications of education in Algeria. Albert Camus, the well-known writer and political activist, believed that the way to be rid of poverty in Algeria was through education and the assimilation of Algerians. He advocated especially the education of the Kabyles, a Berber people who inhabited the northeastern portion of Algeria. Writing during the movement for independence, Camus claimed that they quickly realized how instrumental schools were in emancipation.⁷² However, long before Camus expressed his opinion on educating the Kabyles, the French did so, but for very different reasons. The French believed that the Kabyles would be more receptive to Christianity and European culture due to their

⁶⁹ Tlemcani, 57.

⁷⁰ Ruedy, 126

⁷¹ Ruedy, 126

⁷² Le Sueur, 91.

appearance of weak adherence to Islam within their own social organization, when compared to the more “Arab” Algerians. Therefore, French authorities decided that Kabyle children would be educated primarily in French, while other Algerian children outside Kabylia would be taught in classical Arabic. This resulted in the fact that the Kabyles were the best educated in the French language of all Algerian Muslims.^{73,74} However, soon thereafter, Arabic began to be taught as a foreign language in all schools,⁷⁵ French becoming the dominant language of instruction.⁷⁶

After a couple of generations of this Francophone education system, even Muslim educators came to believe that French values and institutions ensured genuine progress. But, as seen in the discriminatory education policy between the Kabyles and other Algerians, French education further fragmented the colonized because of restricted accessibility and its “assimilationist nature.”⁷⁷ By the time of the movement for independence, very few Algerian teachers and even fewer French educators had sufficient knowledge of literary Arabic to teach in it or about it.⁷⁸

From the outset, the French used nationalism to justify and legitimize colonization. Algerians, and other colonized peoples, were introduced to nationalism through schools and universities set up by the colonizers. From this progressive

⁷³ Martin Stone, *The Agony of Algeria* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 216-217.

⁷⁴ This point regarding the education of the Kabyles is a topic of contention, however. Patricia Lorcin contends that the French educational policy in Kabylia was not nearly as aggressive as the number of French-educated Kabyles in the twentieth century seem to imply. She believes that this appearance is related to the economic dislocation in Kabylia, and the realization of the Kabyle people that acquiring a French education was a way to escape their economic problems, than with educational policies imposed by the French (Lorcin 1995, 12).

⁷⁵ Philip C. Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2000), 8.

⁷⁶ Ruedy, 104.

⁷⁷ Naylor, 8.

⁷⁸ Ruedy, 104.

nationalist base, small groups of local nationalists and “nation-statists” emerged: men and a few women who had received a French education and perhaps spend some time in the *métropole*.⁷⁹ Since the beginning of the French education system in Algeria, a great effort was sustained to produce a native Algerian intellectual class that could serve as a mediator between the colonizer and the colonized, and between the different social classes of the colonized, though it was largely unsuccessful.⁸⁰ This opinion was that held by the authorities in France, but the *colons*, as with other facets of the colonial institution, had a different view. They viewed it as a potential threat to the colony’s social and political stability. According to the colonial bourgeoisie, the curriculum had fuelled patriotism and nationalistic sentiment. However, strange as they found it, instead of education causing unrest, the contrary was generally true. Denial of education often caused unrest and instability in Algeria.⁸¹ It is for this reason that education was made compulsory. “In Algeria, the educational system had always been the fulcrum of political struggle between the colonial bourgeoisie and state authorities on the one hand, and between the colonial bourgeoisie and the Algerian people on the other.”⁸² Education was always a point of contention between the involved parties, especially regarding making education compulsory or non-compulsory, and regarding the content of the curriculum.

But the French invaders of the education system were not the only enemies to Algeria at the beginning of their colonization. There were also dangerous enemies from within; already Algerians were turning against each other. Another flashback takes place

⁷⁹ Hill, 12-13.

⁸⁰ Tlemcani, 57.

⁸¹ Hill, 13-14.

⁸² Tlemcani, 56.

in 1847 in Tangier, when an Algerian emperor who is technically an ally against the French invaders instead opposes the great military opponent of the French, Abdelkader. As it turns out, the emperor Abderrahmane acts only for himself and his own interest, which in this case means supporting the French. This episode foreshadows the position that some Algerians take in the war for independence, the *harkis* fighting on the side of the French. The episode is only a page long, but is an effective way of showing that even from the beginning of the French occupation of Algeria, some Algerians betrayed their heritage and roots out of fear, without regard for the vision of a free Algeria for future generations. Here Yacine puts emigration from Algeria into context, stating that it effectively amounts to being a traitor to Algeria and its history as a people.⁸³ Even a passive act, i.e. emigrating from Algeria, amounts to treason in such a situation because they are supporting the enemy, no matter what their reasoning is for leaving.

The image of Abdelkader and his rebellion returns shortly thereafter in a mixture of theatre and poetry discussing the war being waged against him. Yacine presents the war from the perspective of several French military men (the colonizer Self), even public rumors and “la censure,” and frames it awkwardly with several lines spoken by Mustapha, one of the travelling companions of the narrator.⁸⁴ This scene is made even stranger because the French that are “speaking” are actually dead, as though their ghosts were interacting and telling of the early years occupying Algeria:

Jean Xavier : C’est pas la première fois. J’étais en Algérie, dans la 7^e compagnie de discipline. J’ai tué un gendarme. On m’a exécuté à Bad El Oued, sur la place publique, le 26 février 1840. Un cigare, S.V.P. !

⁸³ Yacine, 105-106.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 113-130.

Rumeur publique : Il est mort courageusement. Son cigare terminé, il refusa de se laisser bander les yeux. Arrivé face au peloton, il ordonna lui-même le feu.⁸⁵

I believe that Yacine uses such a bizarre structure for this segment of the text because it forces the reader to question what is going on and draws their attention to the change in style and setting. One could not read it and not wonder about Yacine's reasoning. Were he to present the same scene in the present tense, the lack of historical perspective would make it less potent as a narrative device, but because he changes to the past tense the reader is jarred. He chooses to embody rumors and censure, almost like the chorus in an ancient Greek play, again causing the reader to question Yacine's narrative choices. This is a striking example of the use of non-traditional novel structure to treat a terrible event. Passages like this serve a dual purpose. The fragmentation in the narrative (by inserting theatre and poetic verse) is a modernist and postmodernist device that sometimes effaces the importance of individual voices. In Greek drama, the chorus served as the collective voice of the people. Together, both the modernist/postmodernist and the classical devices melt the voices into a collective: one voice of the people with no voice more important than the other. The French invasion and occupation of Algeria and the violent decolonization was so damaging to the communal Algerian psyche that it cannot be recounted in a traditional manner, exemplified in this particularly jarring part of the text.

Then, nameless French officers are commanded by their colonel to “coupez du blé, coupez de l'orge, en un mot, pacifiez!”⁸⁶ Then,

Les officiers :

⁸⁵ Yacine, 115.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 123.

I : Un rêveur, un socialiste !
II : Un langage de politicien.
III : Lamorcière, voilà un chef.
IV : Je l'ai vu prendre Constantine.
V : Une hache à la main.
I : J'y étais. A sept heures du matin...
II : Et nous avons du sang jusqu'au genoux.
III : Vive Lamorcière ! A bas le maréchal !
*Volée de cloches. Les officiers tournent en rond, au centre de la scène...*⁸⁷

Literally nameless, differentiated only by Roman numerals, the generic, generalized French officers are emblems of repression in colonial Algeria. But again, the verb tenses are not consistent and the structure is clearly not that of novel written in uninterrupted prose. Before returning to prose, the segment ends with two pages of verse, all very short phrases, marking the discontinuity of the colonial and postcolonial experience.

Along with the discontinuous structure of the narrative as a whole, from time to time in the text the language itself is broken and discontinuous. For example, when the group of *émigrés* is looking for work, several lines of dialogue change from standard French, and appear to be written in “dialect” and abbreviated forms of words. It is the informal, spoken French of *les banlieues*, corrupted from the traditional and formal language. Instead of “ils cherchent,” it is written “i cherchent.” Rather than “*Ils disent ferraille, histoire de trafiquer le salaire des Nord Africains,*” it is “*I disent ferraille, histoire de trafiquer le salaire des Nord-Af.*” Several lines down there is “j’ sais” and “Y a qu’ des...”⁸⁸ This exchange occurs between the Algerians and a Frenchman who uses

⁸⁷ Yacine, 124.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

more corrupt French than do the Algerians. This makes the language more real, and consequentially the entire exchange.

In *Polygone*, Yacine demonstrates the rift between the Colonizer and Colonized symptomatic of the period in which he was writing. Just after the French were made to depart Algeria, Algerians were concerned with re-establishing an identity with as little French influence as possible. Street signs in French would disappear overnight, replaced with Algerian names, for example. While the goal was to efface “French-ness,” it would be nearly impossible to do so, a fact that Yacine recognizes in *Polygone*. When the young men are in France, they feel as though they have not left Algeria because they are surrounded by *Maghrébins* and the circumstances are largely the same. Yacine is commenting on the interconnectedness of the cultures; Algeria cannot escape French influence, even in their decolonization.

Rewriting History in *L'Amour, la fantasia*

In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Assia Djébar comments on space, between real and imaginary, and public and private. She mixes the personal story of a nameless *narratrice* and Algeria's colonial history beginning in 1830. An active feminist voice "re-writes" the Algerian into France's imperialism, particularly the Algerian woman. "For Algerian women writers, foregrounding women's visibility in the war often means claiming a legitimate space for women – including themselves – outside the private sphere at the same time that it gives them the opportunity of dealing fictionally with a violent past," remarks Anne Donadey in a study of Djébar and Leïla Sebbar, another Algerian woman writer.⁸⁹

Violence

Centering on the history of conquest and violence between France and Algeria, Djébar tries to build and root a dislocated Algerian identity through violence to her French sources. She does this by isolating the French documents and forcibly inserting Algerian voices into the discourse. "Le mot lui-même...deviendra l'arme par excellence.... Toute une pyramide d'écrits amoncelés en apophyse superfétatoire occultera la violence initiale."⁹⁰ Language is the weapon, the vehicle of violence. The French used it to efface the Algerians and their history, but now Djébar turns it against the French to reclaim her people's history.

⁸⁹ Donadey, 1-2.

⁹⁰ Assia Djébar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985), 67.

She uses the language of the former colonizer to expose acts of violence that the “Frenchmen had unconsciously let slip through and that bear witness to the violence used against the Algerians.”⁹¹ One particularly striking example is an officer’s letter to a friend that casually describes a woman’s foot that had been hacked off to steal her silver anklet. Djébar focuses on the gruesome act when the officer thought nothing of it at all. Details like this one do not line up with the typical description of the colonial war as a “manly sport.” These details are events that defined the lives of the repressed and provide depth to the rest of the text. “Soudain les mots de la lettre entière ne peuvent sécher, du fait de cette incise: indécence de ces lambeaux de chair que la description n’a pu taire.”⁹² Foregrounding details such as these, she pulls traces of Algerians like this one from the discourse of the colonizer, thereby turning his violence against him.

In *War’s Other Voices*, Miriam Cooke argues that “war, the organization of violence another person, demands to be written. Violence, so that it does not become chaotic and bestial, must be ordered into a narrative sequence.”⁹³ Djébar does exactly that. She breaks the idea of chronology and linear history into pieces, into a “cyclical fictionalized narrative.” The text takes the shape of a piece of music with different movements, each both building upon and contrasting with the preceding movements. Her text thereby relates itself to the Algerian oral tradition, to be discussed in this chapter, which is more akin to a piece of music than to a written history. This process of translating war to narrative is a profound practice, allowing Algerian writers to process

⁹¹ Donadey, 48.

⁹² Djébar, 82-83.

⁹³ Donadey, 49.

the painful colonial period and decolonization, and also transforming history by bringing their history to the fore, undoing, to a degree, the history the colonizing Other wrote for them.

Violence during colonization is echoed by violence during the struggle for independence, especially regarding women. Djébar presents parallel scenes, taking place near the beginning of Algeria's colonial period to emphasize this point. In Fromentin's story, Fatma and Mériem, nineteenth-century prostitutes, are directly compared to another prostitute, Khadidja, who was imprisoned and tortured by the French for financially supporting the mujahidin. Fatma and Mériem's half-naked bodies remind the reader of Khadidja and another, Zohra, being stripped naked by the French. Still others were forced to give up their jewelry, well hidden beneath their robes, in 1845.⁹⁴ "The violent colonial encounter between Algeria and France inscribes itself as a wound whose traces remain on the body and memory of Algerian women, from the beginnings of the French conquest to the final war of liberation." The conquest of Algeria and the consequences for women may now be examined in relation to the 1962 victory, "as Algerian history becomes a history of continuous resistance."⁹⁵

Autobiography vs. History

The unnamed *narratrice* returns to a double past, the individual past and collective Algerian past, the personal story in counterpoint to the collective history, a history effaced by the French colonizer. Djébar intercuts scenes from her own life and from

⁹⁴ Djébar, 235-237, 225, 136-144.

⁹⁵ Donadey, 59-60.

Algeria's past, from oral and written history. She places colonial documents in new contexts to put together the pieces of the colonial encounter, "underscoring its violence and, still more explicitly this time, the stake of representations within it."⁹⁶

This text is an exploration of the intersection of war, history (*l'Histoire*), and personal story (*les histoires*) with the feminist aim of re-writing women into history. She intertwines autobiography and history, women's testimonies constantly in dialogue with accounts taken from the French colonial archives.⁹⁷ The new "proie"⁹⁸ of the West and all its military might, Algeria enters the Western discourse, a discourse that Djébar "deconstructs/reconstructs as fiction."⁹⁹ When the French began their colonization of Algeria, they expressed their experience in a Western, imperial frame of reference. Thus, they created stories at the same time they created history, because History cannot be expressed objectively. It follows, then, that when viewed as a unit History is very close to fiction.

It is important to note that the text is not an autobiography as one normally defines it. Saying "I" and individualism cannot be automatically ascribed to autobiography. *L'Amour, la fantasia* undoes any such association

not only because the referent of the first-person pronoun is frequently unclear, and is evidently not always Djébar, but more importantly in that its textual treatment of selfhood appears only obliquely 'self-expressive' and does not support an understanding of the individual as self-centered, as autonomous, or as by definition a potential agent of imperialism.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 129.

⁹⁷ Donadey, 43-44.

⁹⁸ Djébar, 67.

⁹⁹ Donadey, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Harrison, 131.

Even if one approached this text as autobiographical, it is doubtful that the reader will come away from the text feeling as though he or she has a grasp of many biographical facts. In this sense, the word “autobiography” is slightly misleading, and must be demystified before understanding the way in which the text is autobiographical.

Comprehension of the “fictitious” nature of history is incredibly important for Algerians and all colonized people whose histories have been twisted to fit the Western historical discourse. By bringing this distortion to the fore, writers are able to use fiction as a medium to reconstruct their country’s past, rewriting an already rewritten history. Djébar aims to add voices to History that were silenced, unable to express themselves due to a lack of writing and language: “Or l’ennemi revient sur l’arrière. Sa guerre à lui apparaît muette, sans écriture, sans temps de l’écriture.”¹⁰¹ Here the narrator speaks from the position of the French Self looking at the Algerian Other, who is here called the enemy. It is a prime example of history rewritten by the French, completely subjective, calling Algeria the enemy, suggesting the French point of view incapable of understanding or expressing the Algerian standpoint or frame of reference.

Rewriting history, Djébar works to represent the Algerian perspective, simultaneously exposing the difficulty of an endeavor such as this. She must see through the surface of the colonial archives, either their silences and omissions or verbosity, to try to interpret what actually happened particularly the direct relationships with Algerians. Donadey writes:

¹⁰¹ Djébar, 82-83.

The Frenchmen's writings served to erase and/or distort the Algerian people by (mis)representing and colonizing them. As a writer, Djébar feels that she must reappropriate this discourse, rewrite it, and subvert it by decentering its perspective...She "overreads" the colonial archives, reading Algerian men and women back into history, and then *overwrites* their presence by writing over colonial documents....¹⁰²

The first historical chapter is set in 1830, adapted from the very first written documents of Algiers' fall to the French. The loss of the self-attributed to being colonized is symbolized in the text by the complete absence of pre-1830 material, neither autobiographical nor historical. Slight echoes of the distant past are heard in epigraphs of Saint Augustine and Ibn Khaldun, but it is otherwise completely lacking. This reflects the painstaking efforts of French Orientalist historians to make 1830 the beginning of Algeria's history. With the arrival of the French in Algeria, the traditional educational system was gradually phased out in favor of a European-style education in French. Indeed, many history textbooks in Algeria during the colonial period began, "Our ancestors, the Gauls..."¹⁰³ Algerians were folded into the French system through their schooling, creating for them a confused and hybrid identity that caused lasting psychological effects. Djébar's text is a "postcolonial response to the overdetermination of colonial historiography."¹⁰⁴ It is impossible to "restart" Algeria with a pure history, *sans la France* and French colonial influence, so this acts as a mechanism to allow today's Algerians to come to terms with the violent and unjust colonial past, which they must do before they can assess their present or future identities.

¹⁰² Donadey, 46.

¹⁰³ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 61.

¹⁰⁴ Donadey, 47.

The writer must unearth her people's history like a "spelaeologist":

La mémoire exhumée de ce double ossuaire m'habite et m'anime, même s'il me semble ouvrir, pour des aveugles, un registre obituaire, aux alentours de ces cavernes oubliées.¹⁰⁵

Djebar speaks directly to the reader here in the section entitled, "Femmes, enfants, bœufs couchés dans les grottes...."¹⁰⁶ It is a startlingly violent and graphic chapter that describes the slaughter of 1500 members of the Ouled Riah tribe hiding in caves by the French. The soldiers lit fires at the openings of the cave, with the smoke panicking the animals who trampled many of those hiding, the rest asphyxiated. In her reconstruction of this event, she uses a variety of sources, including an anonymous soldier's letter, a Spanish officer's eyewitness account, and Colonel Pélissier's official report.¹⁰⁷ His report of the event is too detailed and graphic for the French archives, and caused an uproar in Paris, but his account is the closest French account to giving a voice to Algeria, which he neither desires to succeed in nor achieves. Nevertheless, he gives more depth than the usual "plate sobriété du compte-rendu."¹⁰⁸ Not all of the French disapproved of his gruesome detail. In fact, Lieutenant Colonel Canrobert remarked,

'Pélissier made only one mistake: as he had a talent for writing, and was aware of this, he gave in his report an eloquent and realistic – much too realistic – description of the Arabs' suffering....' 'Words can travel,' remarks Djebar, who goes on: 'Yes, I am moved by an impulse that nags me like an earache: the impulse to thank Pélissier for his report which unleashed a political storm in Paris, but which allows me to reach out

¹⁰⁵ Djebar, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 94-115.

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Djebar, 16.

today to our own dead and weave a pattern of French words around them.¹⁰⁹

Her literary reworking of original documents, mainly French, gives them a new emotional weight. “Overreading French documents, Djébar’s narrator wonders who will bear witness to what nineteenth-century Algerians, and especially women, thought and felt – who will account for the Algerian memory.”¹¹⁰ Algerians are made invisible in the French reports, just as their guerrilla tactics make them invisible to the French in a battle situation.¹¹¹ “Without their own records, Algerians are erased from a history written from their enemy’s perspective.”¹¹² Without the autobiographical touch, historical material such as the story of the Ouled Riah would be simply informative to the reader, but the personal presentation of it lets Djébar and the reader explore how they are products of the colonial history, both benefiting from and being wounded by it.

Langue

Just before the revolution, the French claimed that the education of the female population would avoid the “brutal techniques” of demographic control, like those seen in China.¹¹³ Many more girls were enrolled in schools with the Arabization movement, but there was still rampant social discrimination based on sex. Parents favored sons over daughters, and many parents forced their daughters to stop attending school after age 13, the age at which school attendance was no longer required by law. Many women were prohibited

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, 129.

¹¹⁰ Donadey, 48.

¹¹¹ Djébar, 82-83.

¹¹² Donadey, 48.

¹¹³ Le Sueur, 58.

by their parents and husbands from working outside the home, parents and husbands who deemed an education worthless for a woman, particularly one who did not work. By 1977, 83 percent of boys were in school, compared to 58 percent of girls.¹¹⁴ The Islamist extremist movement did nothing to advance the position of women in the education system. “Co-education did little to subvert the strict segregation of the sexes at universities; the resumption of single-sex education is a cornerstone of the Islamist political platform.”¹¹⁵ The *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS, Islamic Salvation Front), a banned religious extremist political party, planned to segregate the sexes in schools and in higher education.¹¹⁶

Faced with the realization that she could only effectively compose such a text, one that reconstructs Algerian history, in the language of the former oppressor, Djébar remarks, “l’autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme fiction, du moins tant que l’oubli des morts charriés par l’écriture n’opère pas son anesthésie.” She continues to say that while she believed she was going on a journey through herself, she was only veiling herself, erasing herself, in a different way. She wanted every word to help define herself and her fellow Algerian women, but is trapped in the language of the former colonizer, falling into anonymity of *les aïeules*.¹¹⁷ The language of the French Other that has absorbed her since her childhood has clung to her unsolicited. To overcome this, she uses the means of expression available only to women: the language of the body.

¹¹⁴ Bennoune, 224, 228.

¹¹⁵ Stone, 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹¹⁷ Djébar, 302.

La quatrième langue, pour toutes, jeunes ou vieilles, cloîtrées ou à demi émancipées, demeure celle du corps....le corps qui, dans les transes, les danses ou les vociférations, par accès d'espoir ou de désespoir, s'insurge, cherche en analphabète la destination, sur quel rivage, de son message d'amour.¹¹⁸

Like many feminists, her writing supports sensual and instinctive knowledge, of a history passed down through the oral tradition and the body, one not found in the traditional historical discourse.¹¹⁹ She is, of course, all too familiar with the atrocities the French committed (circumstances that partially explain the most unfortunate circumstances in postcolonial Algeria), but she cannot dismiss French, the language that gave her a voice and allowed her to escape stifling Islamic fundamentalism, a belief set that dictates the invisibility of women. In one of the first “movements,” the mother of one of the characters is able to express love and affection for her husband once she learns French, but the vocabulary simply was not available for her in Arabic. She could only refer to her husband as the Arabic equivalent of *lui*, but in French she could call him *mon mari*. For this woman and others, French was a way to liberate their voice, opportunities that did not exist in Arabic.¹²⁰ Though at the same time, French was another way to silence women.

Djebar's dilemma is not unique: bilingualism is a common issue for the educated postcolonial, which often leads to a greater familiarity with the language of the former colonizer than with the native language. Many radical postcolonial intellectuals have

¹¹⁸ Djebar, 254-255.

¹¹⁹ Elia, 1-2.

¹²⁰ Djebar, 54-58.

ceased to write in the language of the imperial power. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ argues that the imposition of European languages over the rest of the world leads to the destruction of the colonized's culture:

But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.¹²¹

Arabization was not without opponents. The student movement began to stir up disaccord with the Algerian education system in 1977 (even though their union UNEA was dissolved in 1971). Their demands revolved around the lack of qualified faculty, inconsistencies in pedagogy, and working and living conditions at universities. In addition, the students made demands regarding high schools, generally of an ideological stance. These demands include “student participation in the curriculum implementing the 1971 reform, teaching of popular dialects, generalization of Arabization, and freedom of speech.” By the early 1980s, Algerian universities had become the “fulcrum for cultural and ideological struggles that have shaped Algeria.”¹²²

In December of 1979, the University of Algiers was on strike. Arabic-speaking students protested the better job opportunities available to their French-speaking peers. In response to this strike, Chadli Benjedid (president of Algeria from 1979 to 1992), created more jobs reserved exclusively for Arabic speakers and accelerated the Arabization of the education system and other public services. He also appointed Arabic speakers to key

¹²¹ Elia, 18.

¹²² Tlemcani, 194.

government positions, and replaced many French place names with Arabic ones. Contrary to his intentions, Benjedid's actions created further unrest among the Berber minority. Immediately after announcing the acceleration of the Arabization process, his government was confronted by widespread protests in Tizi Ouzou and parts of Algiers.¹²³ His efforts gave the population more opportunities to debate what it meant to be Algerian.¹²⁴

In the literary world, Rachid Boudjedra stopped writing in French in the 1980s to revitalize Arabic literature. The Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jalloun, the 1987 winner of the Prix Goncourt, *francophonie's* most prestigious award, disagrees with this approach to the use of French by the former colonized. He essentially suggests that they accept that the colonial past happened and that they write in French because of it, but to move on and make the best of it, not to make a big issue by complaining, ““oh la la, we write in French because we've been colonized.””¹²⁵

Between these polar views, there is another approach to the postcolonial bilingualism question. It is “a conscious problematizing of the use of the former oppressor's language, a realization that greater familiarity with the dominant discourse always-already implies some degree of alienation from one's culture but not necessarily with an acceptance of the hegemonic discourse.”¹²⁶ Using this language becomes a subversive practice, destabilizing it and breaking its exclusivity. Djébar occupies this position, feeling indebted to French for her personal emancipation, but still maintaining

¹²³ Hill, 98-99.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹²⁵ Elia, 19.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 19.

an awareness of the French language's position in the erasure of Algeria, and specifically Algerian women. She moves between gratitude to French, the language that allowed her to avoid the harem, and nostalgia for conversational Arabic, linking her to the women whose oral histories she inscribed in *L'Amour, la fantasia*.

Algerian women, hidden in the home, were mostly invisible to French soldiers, and because of *la voile* they were more or less invisible to their own men. "Qui le dira, qui l'écrira?"¹²⁷ Forced into silence for years they plead for someone to speak on their behalf, a supplication that Djébar takes up. She searches the colonial archives for any mention of Algerian women throughout the French occupation of her country, and when she finds only silences, missing pieces, she forcibly re-inserts their untold stories into the written historical discourse through fiction. In historical accounts or reports in the Colonial Archives of events where women were definitely present but not mentioned in the account, Djébar imagines what happened to the women and inserts it into the reworked account. With the "fantasia," she imagines voices of her ancestors, telling of "two ambiguous relationships, one between the French and Algerian peoples and languages and the other between Algerian women and men."¹²⁸ Women, who were already "absent" from Algerian history because of the veil, are effaced from history twice. They were not recognized to begin with, and were obviously left out of colonial discourse. This parallels the concept that martyrs die twice, a concept further explored in *Le Village de l'allemand*, but suggested here. Hence, Djébar insists that women are "doubly present, once from the outside (Djébar centers on the accounts about women in

¹²⁷ Djébar, 16.

¹²⁸ Donadey, 48.

the French narratives) and once from the inside (she insists on female voices and lineage in her autobiographical passages and enters in a dialogue with her female relatives).”¹²⁹ Bringing women to the foreground in the context of the colonial period, Djébar insists on the necessity of mediating all other written discourse by acknowledging the impossibility of completely restoring women’s voices, or the impossibility of evading the colonial past.

In addition to the many French historical documents she uses to construct the text, Djébar uses the Algerian oral tradition as a source of history. The oral tradition was a large part of early Islam, with stories of Muhammad and others passed down orally, not recorded in writing until much later. Additionally, as a woman, she has access to a wealth of knowledge transmitted by the foremothers, *les aieules*. In the case of knowledge of one’s ancestors, the oral tradition is viewed to be more accurate than written history, for the plain and simple reason that Algerian written historical discourse from the colonial period is almost non-existent. For example, in reference to an ancestor, the narrator states, “Au-delà d’Oudja, sa trace disparaît dans les archives – comme si ‘archives’ signifiait empreinte de la réalité!”¹³⁰ Here the narrator also comments on the notion of “archives” as a complete account of history, the “imprint of reality,” when obviously the French historical record leaves out the Algerian side of things and history as a discourse is not a reflection of reality or “truth.” In recognition of this, Djébar inscribes this text in the female oral tradition that inspires her, even though the means of expression is the written medium. “The oral tradition is part of Arabic memory, which, with its lapses and accidents, its erosions and traces, is ‘champ profond pour un labourage romanesque’ as

¹²⁹ Donadey, 48.

¹³⁰ Djébar, 251.

she pointed out in ‘Le romancier dans la cité arabe.’”¹³¹ The oral tradition fills gaps and silences in memory, especially written memory, and is thus immensely important in recovering the past, particularly since the written historical discourse makes a habit of distortion and omission.

Often the oral tradition and written historical discourse do not align, and provide contradictory information. For example, in one of the 19th century sections, some of the narrator’s family are taken hostage then exiled, but the French written documentation and the Algerian oral account contradict each other on the number of people taken. One says eight, while the other says forty-eight, including a pregnant woman. Djébar clearly chooses to follow the source telling of the pregnant woman, whose story she recreates several chapters later, filling in the silences in the historical discourse with fiction. This dialogue exists on multiple levels, as a dialogue between women of the past and women of the present, between history and fiction, and written and oral traditions. The narrator writes:

Je t’imagine, toi, l’inconnue, dont on parle encore de conteuse à conteuse, au cours de ce siècle qui aboutit à mes années d’enfance. ... Je te recrée, toi, l’invisible, tandis que tu vas voyager avec les autres. ... Ton masque à toi, ô aïeules d’aïeule la première expatriée, est plus lourd encore que cet acier romanesque ! Je te ressuscite, au cours de cette traversée que n’évoquera nulle lettre de guerrier français...¹³²

¹³¹ Donadey, 50.

¹³² Djébar, 267.

Here she is violent to the French documentation. “She overrides/overwrites its authority with the oral historical tradition of her family,”¹³³ violently giving precedence to the oral tradition and forcibly making a space for woman in the historical discourse.

L’Amour, la fantasia is a dialogical representation of the original violence done to the Algerians and their history, and though Djébar brings the stories of her wronged ancestors back into the discourse; her examples, like the pregnant ancestor, do not speak in their own voices after years of silence. The narrator addresses this pregnant ancestor, and others like her, in the second person “in an attempt to render her present within the text, to place the past in dialogue with the present while at the same time insisting on the use of mediation necessary in the overwriting process. The use of the second-person pronoun thus bears witness to the violence of historical erasure in the colonial context.”¹³⁴ A “witness” that cannot speak for himself or herself must be represented by another, in this case, Djébar. The use of the second person pronoun reinforces the fact that the witness cannot speak, making the reader seek to understand why this is so. Here, the reason that they cannot express themselves is violence caused by the colonial past.

John Erickson, in an analysis of contemporary Muslim fiction, studies Djébar’s approach to displacement of master discourses. He finds that *L’Amour, la fantasia* is made up of a “multiplicity of equally valid narratives.” Djébar is undoubtedly influenced by the modern and postmodern technique of fragmented narrative, but she rejects the idea of placing all narrative on the same level precisely by including “nonhegemonic” voices like this pregnant ancestor. Because it is a non-Western (“nonhegemonic”) voice using

¹³³ Donadey, 50.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 51.

the technique of fragmentation, it is part of the postcolonial discourse. Thus, this text employs distinctly postcolonial, rather than postmodern, “tactics of opposition.”¹³⁵

Algerian women’s struggle for liberation of their voice and gaze today is of the utmost importance in nation building and the construction of a postcolonial Algerian identity. Texts like this one that rewrite women into history shows their importance to Algeria’s national history of resistance, and shows their position as legitimate. Around the time of Algeria’s liberation, Frantz Fanon only considered women’s empowerment in its relation to national liberation and not as a movement in and of itself,¹³⁶ but Djébar argues that women’s emancipation is much more than a function of national liberation and must be realized on their own terms.

¹³⁵ Donadey, 51.

¹³⁶ Fanon, 35-64.

Space and Identity in *Le Village de l'allemand*

The most recent of the three novels is different than the other two novels in its treatment of post-liberation Algeria. Sansal does not comment directly on the colonial period or the decolonization, but on the current environment in Algeria and for immigrants, especially regarding Islamist extremism. He uses similar narrative devices as Yacine and Djébar, such as fragmented time and structure and varying language, but he achieves something quite different: a non-ethnocentric treatment of identity. His text is more easily applied to the larger Muslim world and to many immigrant communities. I believe that this is indicative of the new generation of Algerian author that does not comment as directly on the Algerian war.

Structure

Like *Polygone* and *Fantasia*, *Le Village de l'allemand* does not have a simple, linear narrative structure. Rather, it is a non-linear, non-chronological composition comprised of the personal journals of two brothers. Like the fragmentation in *Polygone* and *Fantasia*, this is a common modern and postmodern characteristic, but places itself in the postcolonial discourse in the same ways as the other two novels. Because the voices are “non-hegemonic,” they are part of the postcolonial discourse. The younger brother’s (Malrich) account centers on his reading of his brother’s journal, and a series of violent events in *la cité*, the suburb he lives in, while the older brother’s (Rachel) journal revolves around his discovery of their father’s identity.

One possible function of this unconventional structure is as a coping mechanism for the issues of post-independence Algeria. It suggests that one cannot come to terms with such a violent history in a traditional manner. Conventional novels and the ideology that accompanies them are not, it seems, suitable or effective for dealing with a bloody history fraught with wars and rebellions. Malrich writes, “Ce sont des histoires d’hier mais, en même temps, la vie c’est toujours pareil et donc ce drame unique peut se reproduire.”¹³⁷ Sansal assumes the voice of Malrich here, and translates this notion of cyclical time to the structure of the book.

The linear progression of events is not as important as the collective, shared consciousness that transcends the all too common belief that time is a constant. The voice alternates between Malrich and Rachel, and the presented parts of their journals are not strictly chronological. Sansal emphasizes parallelisms in experience and history over linear time. If three people can live the same journey, experience the same hardships, sense the same emotions at different times, it seems possible that existence, especially a troubled existence, transcends linear time.

Though the brothers struggle with the same questions and issues regarding their identities and their father’s identity, their means of expression are worlds apart, reflecting the differences in their education, childhood, and living environment. Malrich’s writing is conversational, even stream-of-consciousness at times: “Là, dans son journal, Rachel est cool, sympa, rigolo. Humain, quoi,”¹³⁸ writing in the same tone as he uses to speak to his

¹³⁷ Boualem Sansal, *Le Village de l’allemand, ou le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

friends. Rachel, on the other hand, writes in poetic and beautiful French, represented even in a different typeface than the excerpts of Malrich's journal:

A cet instant, quelque chose crie en nous, il ne peut en être autrement ou alors rien n'existe, ni Dieu, ni homme, ni vérité. Comment ne pas réagir, ne serait-ce que par un imperceptible désarroi au cœur, devant le regard halluciné d'un enfant malingre qui grelotte de froid dans la solitude d'un camp de la mort, d'une femme nue qui se cache le pubis pendant qu'on la conduit au four crématoire, *une femme qui a perdu son nom et ses cheveux, et jusqu'à la force de se souvenir, les yeux vides et le sein froid comme une grenouille en hiver*, d'un homme qui s'accroche à une dignité détruite depuis longtemps pendant qu'on lui arrache les derniers lambeaux de son humanité, *un homme qui meurt pour un oui ou pour un non*.¹³⁹

Malrich acknowledges this disjunction in tone and style at the beginning of his journal:

J'ai eu du mal à lire le journal de Rachel. Son français n'est pas le mien. Et le dictionnaire ne m'aidait pas, il me renvoyait d'une page à l'autre. Un vrai piège, chaque mot est une histoire en soi imbriquée dans une autre. Comment se souvenir de tout? Je me suis rappelé ce que disait M. Vincent : L'instruction c'est comme le serrage de boulons, trop c'est trop, pas assez c'est pas assez. J'ai quand même beaucoup appris et plus j'apprenais, plus j'en voulais.¹⁴⁰

However, as the account progresses, Malrich's writing (and understanding) improves, both from absorbing the beautiful language of his brother, and from his own deeply profound experiences, in the end even more profound than those of his brother, rendering his language just as powerful and poetic:

Les choses ne devraient pas être ainsi, je leur en voulais de vivre dans le silence, de l'entretenir à tout prix, comme un feu sacré, un rempart qu'ils consolident contre eux-mêmes, et de faire comme si la vérité, la vie étaient des biens à cacher, à taire, et de laisser pousser les enfants dans le mensonge, la dissimulation, l'ignorance, l'oubli. J'en paie le prix. Papa nous a rien dit et à son tour Rachel ne m'a rien dit, et les autorités ne nous ont rien appris, elles ont détruit nos volontés. Nous voilà démunis, misérables et fragiles, et déjà prêts à toutes les concessions, à tous les silences, à toutes les lâchetés.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Sansal, 98-99.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 186-187.

His mastery of the language of the colonizer allows Sansal to write in beautifully poetic French, expressed in the journal of Rachel and later Malrich, as well as in contemporary slang, initially used by Malrich. For example, in the passage above, Rachel uses a multitude of tenses, modifiers, parallel structures, long sentences, and more obscure vocabulary words. The earlier Malrich passage is comprised of short sentences, simple sentence structures, and unvaried tenses. But later, after his considerable maturation, he writes much more in the style of his brother.

Parallels

In keeping with the non-linear structure, parallelisms govern *Le Village de l'allemand* on several different levels, namely those of histories and experiences. Father and sons grapple with the same issues: integrating into a new society, religious conflict, extremism, race-based judgments, and death, among others.

In different fashions, each of the Schiller men radically alters their identities. First, and most extreme, is Hans, the father, who transforms from a Nazi chemist to a bearded Muslim and *cheikh du village* in the Algerian hills miles away from the Mediterranean. He was called Hans Schiller, but upon the assumption of his Algerian identity, he was renamed Hassan Hans dit Si Mourad, the name carved on his headstone. The elder son, Rachel, was initially perturbed by the fact that his father's headstone was marked with his Algerian name, and not the name given to him by his parents. In reading Rachel's journal, Malrich theorizes that the Algerian state decided to lay him to rest under an Algerian name instead because the German (and European in general) press

would have been incensed if a European had been a victim of “génocide, de crimes contre l’humanité, de torture, de pillage systématique, et je ne sais quoi de plus.”¹⁴² Rachel writes of the discovery of his father’s change of identity early on. The son did not even know that his father converted to Islam at the moment of Algerian independence, even before his birth. Speaking of his discovery, he takes the point of view of the Algerian villagers. He writes,

On avait trouvé étrange et même inconvenant qu’un Allemand, un chrétien, ait conçu l’idée de venir vivre parmi eux mais comme il avait participé à la guerre de libération, qu’il portait le titre prestigieux d’ancien moudjahid et qu’il était de nationalité algérienne, on se félicita de cet honneur... A la mort du vieux sacheur, le village lui octroya naturellement le titre du cheikh. C’était une confirmation, on disait déjà le cheikh Hassan, on venait le consulter, l’écouter, il avait une solution pour tout, on s’émerveillait des changements que ses idées imprimaient au fonctionnement du village.¹⁴³

In reading his father’s papers, Rachel learns that Colonel Boumediene, who later becomes president of Algeria, took Hans/Hassan on as a logistics and arms consultant.¹⁴⁴

Everyone wanted “son allemand, son expert en fusée, en carburant solide, en armes chimiques et atomiques, en médecine et génie militaires, en chiffage et décryptage, en propagande, en œuvres d’art, en gestion des minorités.”¹⁴⁵ After World War II, Nazis became commodities, even in the United States. For example, Werhner von Braun, who “had worked for twelve years in the deepest secrecy” for the Third Reich,¹⁴⁶ became indispensable to NASA as a rocket engineer. He worked successfully in the United States for the rest of his life. Apparently his previous life as a Nazi did not keep

¹⁴² Sansal, 45.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴⁶ Michael J. Neufeld, *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 201.

him from adapting his identity to the conditions presented to him, even required for his continued well-being. Von Braun's new life in America indicates that personal identity is fluid and may be manipulated to conform to a different cultural identity; therefore personal identity does not equate with communal or cultural identity but may move between different communities and cultures like osmosis.

Like von Braun's importance to NASA, similarly Hans/Hassan was an important part for Boumediene in the war for Algerian independence. His effective assimilation may be ascribed to his usefulness to the Algerian military, skills developed for and by the Nazis. Despite his start in Algeria as a military operative, and his undoubtedly bloodier career in Nazi Germany, later Hans/Hassan effectively disappears into the hills: "l'anonymat est garanti quand tous portent la djellaba et un keffieh sur la tête."¹⁴⁷ This gives credence to the idea that in identity, surfaces and appearances really are all that counts. True or not, in this case at least, one's appearance of assimilation and identification with the native population certainly diminishes or softens any opposition. It seems likely that Muslim states were attractive for (commoditized) Nazis because the dress would allow one to physically conceal one's natural physical features, with keffiehs and other head coverings, beards, etc. Sansal defines this anonymity as "grandiose et définitif."¹⁴⁸ Theoretically, in such an isolated place, having adopted a Muslim persona, one would be less likely to be found, or at least not sought out. In an interview, Sansal comments,

¹⁴⁷ Sansal, 203.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 54.

There is a real-life background to the story: at the beginning of the 1980s, I was working as an engineer for the Algerian Ministry for Industry. On one of my work-related journeys, I stumbled upon a small village near Setif which seemed very exotic to me. In the next town I told some friends about it. Then someone suddenly said, "oh, you mean the village with the German". I was told that this was a very particular German figure, as the man was a former SS officer, an old Nazi with a dark past. I have to say this was a big shock for me. I had very romantic, idealistic notions of the Algerian war of independence. To discover that a Nazi was involved was very disturbing.¹⁴⁹

Apparently the locals knew of him and admired him, as Sansal explains in another interview. However, as Sansal remarks later in the same interview, Algerians know very little of the Holocaust and the implications of National Socialism and fascism. They likely would not have realized what being “a former SS officer, an old Nazi with a dark past” encompasses.¹⁵⁰ As Sansal says, the locals who spoke to him regarded the German as “a hero in the region: as a kind of saint who had done a lot for the village and its inhabitants. I sensed that my interlocutors felt real admiration when they talked about the man’s Nazi past...He was ‘somebody,’ in effect.”¹⁵¹

In the text, Hans/Hassan is reported to be a very kind man and a good leader by all who knew him in Algeria. Sansal also states that he was not interested in telling yet another story of an old war criminal, but rather the impact of such events on younger generations.¹⁵² What’s more, “le père n’est jamais sorti de son village...” making it even

¹⁴⁹ Martina Sabra, “There are Parallels between Islamism and National Socialism,” *Qantara*, http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-310/_nr-655/i.html (accessed 10 February 2010)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Grégoire Leménager, “A Thin Line Separating Islamism from Nazism? An Interview with Algerian Novelist Boualem Sansal,” *World Politics Review*, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/2308/a-thin-line-separating-islamism-from-nazism-an-interview-with-algerian-novelist-boualem-sansal> (accessed 12 February 2010)

¹⁵² Sabra, http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-310/_nr-655/i.html

less likely for him to be discovered. "...C'était bizarre mais les histoires de famille c'est toujours bizarre, on ne les connaît pas, donc on ne fait pas attention."¹⁵³ Ninety-one percent of the population lives on the coast, only twelve percent of Algeria's landmass, so with only nine percent living in the interior of the country, it was very unlikely for him to be found out.¹⁵⁴

Like his father, Rachel undergoes a change of identity: of his name, discrimination based on his appearance, emigration, and finally an assumption and re-living, in effect, of his father's actions in life. His given name is Rachid Helmut Schiller, and by contracting his two first names comes "Rachel," the half-European and half-Algerian name that stuck.¹⁵⁵ Though he is half-Algerian, his German features are the most prominent. As Malrich writes, "Il faut dire que dans la cité, il ne passait pas, le pauvre, avec son physique de suédois.... La cité n'aime pas ça, les réussites individuelles, ça crée des jalousies, ça fait des vagues, ça réveille des montagnes de frustrations."¹⁵⁶ The predominantly North African *banlieue* in which they live does not take kindly to one who distinguishes himself from the group. Often, Maghrébins are overlooked or discriminated against by the European French population, so one that looks more European has an edge over the others. As expressed on multiple other occasions of the book, the *banlieue* is an incredibly insular community, almost like another country, with spiritual leaders acting as unofficial political leaders. It is a community that rises and falls together, so one, like Rachel, that breaks from this tendency is not appreciated. The *cité* is in France where

¹⁵³ Sansal, 16.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. State Department, "Background Note: Algeria," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/8005.htm>, (accessed 14 March 2010).

¹⁵⁵ Sansal, 15.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

there are certainly more blond-haired and blue-eyed people than in the Maghreb, so in Algeria, he appears as even more of a stranger. Upon his arrival at the airport in Algiers, he immediately senses the difference in treatment: “Avec mon look d'étranger intégral, je ne passais pas inaperçu. Le temps de me le dire, j'étais entouré de types louvoyants qui me parlaient sans remuer les lèvres, en admirant qui le ciel, qui la terre : « Hé, m'sieur !... taxi ?... pas cher... prix d'ami ».”¹⁵⁷ Though he is their countryman by blood and birth, his appearance gives an entirely different impression. He is not viewed as or treated like a countryman.

Certainly his father must have had similar experiences before his transformation, and was perhaps even violently received if an Algerian thought he was a French *colon*. Both men are judged by the surface, the appearance they give, and not by the depths of their actions, experiences, and intentions. Sticking out like a sore thumb in Algeria, he is clearly the Other to the Algerian Self.

Conversely, during his voyage in Germany, he passed “inaperçu, passager parmi les passagers, Allemand parmi les Allemands. Si on me repère, c'est parce que comme tout bon Français à l'étranger, je me fais remarquer. On est comme ça, on râle quand ça traîne chez les autres.”¹⁵⁸ Read in the context of the novel as a whole, this is a perfect example of the multiplicity of identities, that one can be at the same time of many heritages, hail from many places. He says that he is a German among Germans, but that like any good Frenchman abroad he makes himself known. Already, he identifies himself as German and French, and when he uses a possessive (“mon”) with Algeria, he claims

¹⁵⁷ Sansal, 28-29.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 57.

its history as his own as well. The multiplicity of languages he speaks extends his many identities: “Mon petit arabe des banlieues françaises ne m’aidait en rien. J’ai mélangé ce que je possédais, français, anglais, allemand, mon petit arabe, mon petit berbère, et ainsi, très vite, un pont s’est établi, on se comprenait parfaitement.”¹⁵⁹ Here, though, it is undeniable that his language is French. Though he presents himself as a polyglot, the text is proof that he is a master of eloquent, persuasive French, leading one to believe that the French in him is his strongest identity. The multiplicity of Rachel’s identities raises a pertinent question: how can one claim to be of many nationalities at once? While Rachel calls himself French, through the course of the text he comes to identify himself much more with the Algerian and, to a lesser degree, German in him. Today people change location so often that it becomes difficult to explain our roots. Other times people may use their heritage, however far off, to differentiate themselves from others. Does our place of birth and childhood define our nationality? Hans/Hassan sent Rachel to France in 1970, when he was seven years old, to live with Tonton Ali, one of Hans/Hassan’s close friends from the war for independence, and when he was twenty-five, he officially became a French citizen.¹⁶⁰ And, as despised as he was by *la cité*, he really was a personal success story: an engineer in a big company, with a nice home and a beautiful wife. Parallel to his father, this existence is a façade for a troubled and complicated identity. He strives to leave *la cité* and surpass all others of his acquaintance to escape the stereotypes held by the standard Frenchman against North Africans. His father disguises himself as an Algerian, and Rachel disguises himself as a European, his success outweighing the

¹⁵⁹ Sansal, 36.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

slight North African look about him. Despite the façade of success and European-ness, due to a confusion about his identity, he loses touch with his life in the present and loses himself in a past that is not his own.

Pèlerinage

Rachel's journey around Europe, around the Mediterranean, and North Africa was, obviously, spurred by his parents' death and his curiosity as to their names, and therefore himself. When he returns to Aïn Deb, the villagers recognized him immediately, saying "C'est Rachid, le fils du cheikh Hassan!" addressing him "comme à un vieux tonton qui revient de la ville."¹⁶¹ It is as though he is a little lost lamb who finally returned to his mother. His return to his childhood home, to his roots, initially helped his state of mind: "Parce que j'avais accompli le pèlerinage et que j'ai été fraternellement reçu, très vite j'ai senti la paix revenir dans mon cœur."¹⁶² His voyage was not a vacation, but a pilgrimage (*pèlerinage*) to his parents' graves and their home, like a Jew making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or a Muslim to Mecca, the sites of their spiritual homes. Rachel's pilgrimage acted as a return to himself, but also as a return to something much greater than the self: a return to his religion, heritage, and identity. He was able to recalibrate his identity, as it were, because he re-related to his parents and the homeland. The notion that Rachel rediscovered his greater identity by returning to the homeland fits perfectly with Benslama's identity theory. The fourth element of Algerian identity, martyrdom, encompasses the traditional three elements, God (Islam), language (Arabic), and soil

¹⁶¹ Sansal, 36.

¹⁶² Ibid., 39.

(Algeria), and adds to them the importance of blood. It is important to note that the language instrumental in Algerian identity is Arabic, not French. French, the language of the colonizer, shows a dependency on the West that Algerians do not wish to have, which is why Arabization was so important despite the problems it encountered. In returning to Aïn Deb, he is in closer contact with his religion, attempts to use Arabic as a means of communication with his countrymen, is physically in the homeland, but he also is literally affected by blood and martyrdom: his martyred parents whose graves he has come to visit. According to Benslama, “blood is...the link insofar as it offers the possibility for a transubstantiation of the four causes, each one within the others.”¹⁶³ Blood, martyrdom, is what brings Rachel back to his roots and connects him to his countrymen in a way that transcends time and place.

At the same time, his father’s murder begs the question: can an outsider ever really be a martyr? First, Hans/Hassan is essentially considered an “insider” for all intents and purposes. Having aided in the liberation of Algeria from the French, having taken an Algerian wife (the daughter of the *cheikh*, no less), converting to Islam, becoming the village leader, and assuming the physical appearance of an Algerian, it seems safe to consider him an Algerian. Because of the fluid nature of human identity, he must have considered himself Algerian, and obviously his community accepted him to the highest degree. It follows, then, that Hans/Hassan could actually be considered a martyr, dying for a cause at the very heart of a nation’s identity. From a different point of view, the text may be viewed as a commentary on the unsustainable ideal of purity that martyrdom has

¹⁶³ Benslama, 46.

hitherto required. Previously, only the purest individual with “ultimate insider status” could be a martyr, but today identity, lineage, even human existence in its broadest sense, is so helplessly muddled and confused that no one has such a pure status. If so, even individuals like Hans/Hassan may be considered martyrs simply because of what he stood for.

Initially, Rachel’s voyage helps his identity, but then his travels change him for the worse. When he travels to Aïn Deb, he finds a case full of his father’s old letters, journals, and assignments, which he studies upon his return to France. It is essentially a case of family secrets; “toutes les familles en ont de pareils,” as Malrich says, a very general assumption that most families have the proverbial “skeleton in the closet.”¹⁶⁴ When he begins to realize the gravity of these discoveries on his conception of his father’s identity, he questions his own identity because he feels so intensely connected to his parents, as though they define his identity. “J’étais perdu, je me cherche moi-même...Ma propre humanité était en jeu.”¹⁶⁵ His father’s “new” identity throws his own identity into question, hovering in the balance between damnation and salvation.

Searching for accounts of his father, Rachel travels to Germany, his father’s birthplace, hoping to find some sort of absolution for his father’s past, but in fact discovers the opposite. Early on he tries to fool himself into thinking that his father was just a simple soldier following orders, his *devoir*, but soon realizes that no one could possibly be innocent in such a situation; everyone involved has blood on their hands. Later in the novel, after he has completed most of his journey, he asks, “Mon Dieu, qui

¹⁶⁴ Sansal, 45.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

me dira qui est mon père?”¹⁶⁶ The question consumes his entire being. He becomes so obsessed with his father’s past (which he equates with his present) that he loses all sense of himself, and thereby loses his wife, his work, and his home. Rachel effectively loses himself in the search for himself. He transcends time and re-lives his father’s wrongdoings. “Et puisque j’avais enfourché les pensées de papa et mis mon pas dans le sien...”¹⁶⁷ The two existences are dependent on each other because of blood and because Rachel literally follows in his father’s footsteps, his path from Germany to Algeria, and in his mind the actions themselves. He hates what he learns about his father, first for the actions themselves, but more importantly for the impact they have on him. He feels betrayed by his father for not having told his children of his past: “Je considérais ce pays et ses habitants avec des yeux d’homme blessé, menacé dans son être par leur propre histoire. Mon regard a dû bien les intriguer.”¹⁶⁸ Here he finds an interesting and new quasi-identity where he assumes the position of the men, women, and children who suffered at his father’s hand. He feels injured as though the Holocaust had happened to him, much as the proponents of Algerian independence felt about France, but at the same time he feels culpable. Because his father did not repent and redeem his sins, Rachel feels that he must assume the responsibility for his father’s actions, that he is guilty by association. He comes to believe that the child is responsible for the sins of the parents: “...j’y pensais sans cesse. Je suis le fils de mon père...je suis le fils de mon père...”¹⁶⁹ Since he cannot escape his heritage, his blood, he thinks that his father’s sins are flowing

¹⁶⁶ Sansal, 165.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 214.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 113-114.

in his veins. He misses the *tabula rasa* argument and believes that his father's wrongdoings transcend time and place and now reside in him. According to Muslim theology, Allah forgives the sin of Adam and Eve, so that all others are born into a state of submission to Allah. "Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray – later his Lord brought him close, accepted his repentance, and guided him."¹⁷⁰ Only through true repentance can a Muslim return to a sinless state. It follows, then, that Rachel and Malrich do not inherit their father's sins, neither are they pure.

While "erring" in Europe, he follows "les traces de mon père" literally from place to place his father worked or lived, but as he continues his journey, he finds more traces of his father in himself, traces that grow as he spends more time in his father's identity. But this assumption of his father's identity breaks him ("Tout en moi était cassé"), his spirit and his sense of self as Rachel.¹⁷¹ He visits many death camps on his journey, but he visits Auschwitz after everything else (again interrupting linear time), just before he returns to France. There he interviews Holocaust survivors to find out if any of them remember his father, and he promises to beg for pardon before the Krema (crematorium). It was there that his victims lay (C'est là où sont les corps des victimes – I think it sounds better in French), "là où mon père leur a enlevé la vie."¹⁷² It is at Auschwitz that Rachel must have decided to commit suicide, sharing the same fate as the victims of the Holocaust, as Malrich writes "c'est là, à un moment très précis comme on le verra, qu'il a décidé de se suicider, de se gazer en vérité, dès son retour à Paris."¹⁷³ When he commits

¹⁷⁰ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an*, 20: 121-122 (New York: Oxford, 2005), 201.

¹⁷¹ Sansal, 145.

¹⁷² Ibid., 191-195.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 192.

suicide, he again assumes another identity, but not that of his father; he takes the position of the Victim of the Holocaust and transcends a linear chronology, taking part in an event that occurred fifty odd years earlier. He physically assumes their identity, shaving his head and wearing striped pajamas resembling the uniforms of death camp prisoners, and shares their fate creating a gas chamber from his car.¹⁷⁴ When Malrich is beginning to try to understand Rachel's life and death, he speaks with the Com'Dad, one of the leaders of *la cité*, who says "...il a eu la seule attitude digne pour un homme : il a cherché à savoir. Que ce soit pour les crimes d'hier ou d'aujourd'hui, c'est la première étape : on doit d'abord comprendre."¹⁷⁵ He indeed tries to understand what happened and why, but he allows himself to be consumed by the truth. He does not learn from it and move on, but lets it destroy him, a reaction very different from that of his brother. If he were to move on, he would accept these events as history, albeit personal history, and talk about them to his peers, at home and abroad to ensure that everyone knows of the horrors that occurred, and prevent them from ever repeating. While Sansal does not condemn Rachel's decision to martyr himself, he shows a far better solution exemplified by Malrich, the younger brother.

Terre

Upon his arrival in Aïn Deb, Rachel writes, "Mon Dieu, dire que je suis né ici, si loin de tout! Aïn Deb, la *Source de l'âne*, n'est sur aucune carte. On ne peut même pas croire qu'on puisse tomber dessus par hasard, il n'est pas de raison au monde qui expliquerait la

¹⁷⁴ Sansal, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 82.

présence d'un homme dans les parages."¹⁷⁶ Considering the extreme isolation of Aïn Deb, qualified here in Rachel's journal, it is indeed quite bizarre that there was a massacre in such a place. The "centre of gravity" of the Islamist movement was located in the east of the country, based generally in urban areas including Sétif, the city nearest the small village of Aïn Deb, though most of the violence took place in and around Algiers.¹⁷⁷ Why then, was a village "niché dans une vallée étroite prise entre quatre collines pelées" a victim of a presumably Islamist attack? The fundamentalists targeted several groups, including governmental employees, intellectuals, and journalists, but local, civilian officials suffered the most casualties.¹⁷⁸ *Cheikhs* fall under this category. Hans/Hassan may have been targeted by the Islamists as a local official, but also because of his Nazi, non-Algerian, non-Muslim past. Further, this would explain why the Algerian government marked his grave with his Algerian name, and not his given name. Were it made public that a former German citizen had been killed in an Islamist attack, it may have become an international incident that would have been made even more complicated with the discovery that he was a Nazi chemist, certainly guilty of war crimes.

Aïn Deb was a tranquil village, removed from the *malheurs* of the rest of the country, until the Islamists quickly ruptured their peaceful reality. Rachel comments on the eerie atmosphere of the valley: "On est aussitôt pris de malaise, on se sent petit, perdu, condamné. En maints endroits, il n'y a point de frontière entre le ciel et la terre, le vide et l'ocre sont partout où l'œil se pose."¹⁷⁹ The recent tragedy has left a mark on the

¹⁷⁶ Sansal, 32.

¹⁷⁷ Roberts, 128-129.

¹⁷⁸ Ciment, 177.

¹⁷⁹ Sansal, 33.

feeling of the village, a feeling that something is not right, but also the *terre* predicts, in a way, what happened and offers a “snapshot” of Algerian identity. Feeling small and lost in the face of violent movements, and that the entire world is against you, is not a new experience. The landscape seems like a trap, with no space between the barren, arid earth and the sky in all directions.

Malrich

Malrich is the most constant of the three Schiller men, though he undergoes an immense maturation process. Born Malek Ulrich Schiller, the contraction of his first names gives us “Malrich.” He leaves Aïn Deb at age 8 in 1985, and also lives with Tonton Ali.¹⁸⁰ Rachel has his completely apathetic brother naturalized, and when he moves the papers through, he says “Bienvenue parmi nous.”¹⁸¹ Akin to his apathy regarding his citizenship, he is generally shortsighted, does not understand the meaning of responsibility, and is ignorant. When he is in the early stages of investigating Rachel’s journal and his father’s work for the Nazis, he writes:

Papa était ingénieur chimiste, pas bourreau. Il travaillait au laboratoire, loin du camp, il préparait des mixtures, point. Il ne savait pas ce que les autres en feraient, il n’avait pas à le savoir, les chambres à gaz étaient l’affaire des *Sonderkommandos*, les commandos du gaz, les *Einsatzgruppen*, pas du laboratoire. La responsabilité de papa s’arrêtait au quai de livraison, elle n’allait pas plus loin.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Sansal, 15.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸² Ibid., 115.

Is Albert Einstein guilty of crimes against humanity for working on the atomic bomb, an invention which eventually killed hundreds of thousands at Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Who is responsible, the soldier who fired the gun, the person who invented the gun, or the government that is perpetuating the war? Malrich's father worked on the chemistry behind the gas chambers, but he did not directly kill those in death camps. Because his father did not "pull the trigger," Malrich decides for the time being that his father is relatively innocent.

However, after more reading and searching, he comes to ask himself who he himself is as a result of asking who his father is. Like his brother, now that he has been bitten, he can no longer sleep. He is constantly plagued by the question of identity and relative identity. Because he was (physically) distanced from his father and did not have a relationship with him, and similarly with his brother by age, ambition, and station, he has many questions: "Mon pauvre Rachel, qui es-tu, qui est notre père? Qui suis-je?". In contrast to his brother, however, Malrich immediately upon posing the questions sees the error his brother made when he asked. He writes, "J'ai voulu savoir à mon tour. Rachel a commis une erreur, il s'est focalisé sur sa douleur, elle l'a détruit."¹⁸³ Malrich perceives that his brother's search for Truth destroyed him, and that he will not go to the same end. Rather, he uses the Truth to better the future, and not dwell on and mourn for the past.

As he embarks on his journey of self-discovery (though discovering the identities of his brother and father), he separates himself from his worried friends. His extensive reading and searching for his identity equates with an intense maturation process, seeing

¹⁸³ Sansal, 119.

past the banal and shallow happenings and topics that consume his friends in *la cité*. Instead of seeing the growth and increasing violence of Islamist extremism in a vacuum and only how it affects his life and his community (as his friends do), he considers it on a much broader spectrum: how extremism affects the whole Islamic world at home and abroad, and more importantly how other extremist movements affect other populations and generations, such as the Holocaust and Nazism. Riots and theocratic changes of regime (the new Imam) in the *banlieue* impact his daily life, but allow him to relate to a more global past, present, and future, like radical changes in Rachel and his father's lives.¹⁸⁴ "On avait le problème, pas la solution": he knows that radical Islamism must be curbed but does not know how.¹⁸⁵ His brother found the problem of the truth, but did not figure out he could do something productive with his knowledge of the truth. His brother realizes that he can know the truth and make something good out of it, but does not yet know what.

When he can no longer keep his friends in the dark, he opens up to them, discussing his worries about the effect of Islamism on the community, but does not bring his worries about his father's and his own identity into the conversation as he does not want blacken his father's name. When they do ask him about his father's German past, he answers that of course he was not a Nazi, that "il avait émigré en Algérie, il était avec les combattants de la liberté pour libérer ton bled... et il est mort en martyr". He does lie, but that is not the important part. Malrich qualifies his father's Algerian identity with the fact that he both fought for Algeria against the French, and most importantly, that he died a

¹⁸⁴ Sansal, 121-123, 125.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 130.

martyr.¹⁸⁶ For a young man who has had very little dramatic change in his life or values, this *bouleversement* of his entire universe and self-image frightens him: “J’avais peur, je me doutais que rien ne serait comme avant, ni moi ni la cité. Il me faudrait peut-être aller vivre ailleurs, comme un vrai émigré sans passé ni avenir.”¹⁸⁷ The only solution that he sees thus far is to uproot himself from all that he knows and to live in a vacuum far from anyone of his acquaintance. His idea of the situation of an *émigré* presented here is quite interesting, having no past and no future. As an *émigré* himself, though in different circumstances than his brother, Malrich has passed his life in France with other immigrants, among them *harkis*. Completely contrary to Hans/Hassan’s position, they are Algerians that leave Algeria because they “betrayed” their roots, whereas Hans/Hassan came to Algeria and adopted and fought for Algerian roots.

Parallels with his brother are more present than before in his preparation to travel to Aïn Deb. He must go jump through the same hoops (dual citizenship, transportation), but he uses his closer connections to *la cité* to facilitate an easier process.¹⁸⁸ His moment of greatest similarity to his brother occurs the night before his departure, where he lies awake all night, almost hallucinating that he is condemned to death, then being accosted by “*heil*”-ing Germans, losing all spatial awareness, forgetting even why there is a suitcase in the middle of his bedroom. In his temporary madness, he experiences exactly what he knows his brother must have felt for so many months: fear and confusion.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Sansal, 130-131.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-139.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

But then, the similarities with his brother diminish as his identification with Jews in the death camps increases. Upon arriving in Algiers, all of the passengers were made to wait on the tarmac for more than an hour in the pouring rain. Green-uniform-sporting special agents then separated the group, allowing all but the young men to go on their way. The remaining group was left in the rain a bit longer, then taken to an empty airplane hangar, their passports and possessions confiscated, like those taken to concentration camps were. After being submitted to questioning, Malrich and several others were allowed to go, but another group was taken away by truck. Through all this, Malrich assumes a dual-consciousness. His present is in the airplane hangar in Algiers, but also in the “tri” of death camps: the young from the old, the healthy from the sick, men from women. Sharing a consciousness with a prisoner in a death camp, he tells himself that those who were not “released” were just thrown in prison, not tortured, killed, or deported; he is in a sort of denial about their fate, refusing to believe the worst. Stripped of personal possessions, Malrich feels that he could have a serial number tattooed on his arm at any moment. He is living in the past and the present, across countries, languages, religions, ideologies, and time.¹⁹⁰ This transcendence indicates that identity and history, no matter what the formula, is not absolute and may be surpassed by collective and individual memory and by *histoires*. In *Fantasia*, Assia Djebar re-writes history using fiction to emphasize that no History is objective and all-encompassing, and that identity may be modified by a re-examination of history. Here, Sansal indicates the

¹⁹⁰ Sansal, 171-174, 177.

fluid nature of identity and history through Malrich, who lives in the present and in the past, as himself and as a Jew in a death camp.

As soon as he had been re-accepted into his place of birth, in Aïn Deb, “Subitement, je me suis senti heureux. Tout cela est si innocent, éternel à souhait, qu’on oublie tout, ses malheurs et ceux du monde”... “Cette nuit-là, j’ai dormi comme un enfant. Cela faisait longtemps.”¹⁹¹ Just like his brother, his reconnection with his roots gave him a feeling of peace and comfort with himself. He falls in love with *l’Orient*, a connection with Hans/Hassan and Rachel; he feels the same sense of welcome and enchantment with the people and beauty of the culture and land around him. “Jamais, nous n’avons été aussi proches.”¹⁹² After he reconnects with his roots in Aïn Deb, he is able to transcend time (his present) and place (being physically in France), human constructs we take for granted, and connects with his dead father and brother on a deeper level than physical experience. More than anything, journals, accounts of witnesses and friends, it is the place, *la terre* that connects the Schiller men. The blood spilled by martyrs in death camps, during the war for independence in Algeria, in Aïn Deb, and in *la cité*, is the factor that really joins people.

Martyrdom

Among the most obvious and important elements in *Village* is the Holocaust, as it translates to other historical instances with great ease. With Nazism comes the Holocaust, and, moving to Algeria, the parallel is drawn with Islamic extremism, *djihad* and related

¹⁹¹ Sansal, 183.

¹⁹² Ibid., 207, 223.

genocides, and with Benslama's theory that martyrdom is essential to identity and the break with the colonizer.

Before Rachel can contemplate martyrdom, he must understand the meaning of death as related to a national cause, be it gaining independence from a colonial power or meaningless death in genocides. It is often said that all humans are equal in death, but Rachel completely re-evaluates this generally accepted societal notion. Writing of the Holocaust, he states, "devant la mort nous ne sommes pas égaux," that "one dies of a simple draft but another, not necessarily bigger, taller, or cleverer, can survive an earthquake." The very concept of genocide erases any equality in dying. He says that "il revient à la machine d'égaliser notre rapport à la mort."¹⁹³ Since we are human, and not machines, any time a human imposes death on another human, be it genocide, martyrdom, or murder, equality in dying cannot exist. "Un homme qui meurt pour un oui ou pour un non" is not someone who is equal in dying because their death is commanded by another human being, not by an impartial machine.¹⁹⁴ However, the dehumanization process that occurred at the entrance of the death camps, paralleled by Malrich's experience at the airport in Algiers, raises the question, "lorsqu'ils entraînent dans le camp, étaient-ils encore des hommes?"¹⁹⁵ In situations of extreme violence, dehumanization is common because it would be otherwise unbearable to perpetuate such crimes against fellow human beings. By convincing oneself that persons against whom one commits such atrocities are not human, through religious or racial prejudices, the crimes

¹⁹³ Sansal, 151. My translation.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 159.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 235.

themselves become “justified” in the eyes of the perpetrator. In his psychological devolution from the confrontation of so many horrible events, from the Holocaust to religious extremist terrorist attacks, Rachel can no longer distinguish between living and dying, for himself or for the victims of such events: “Vivre et mourir se confondaient.”¹⁹⁶ Life in a death camp must have been worse than death, an idea that destroys Rachel’s conception of and differentiation between the two.

After a point, suicide becomes “la seule façon pour lui de concilier l’inconciliable” for Rachel. Since he cannot find equilibrium between life and death, he imposes death on himself, controlling everything himself, not allowing anyone else impose death on him.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, he feels that he must pay a sort of penance for his father’s crimes, his rationale being that “je ferai justice moi-même” as no one else would.¹⁹⁸ When he says that a victim always dies twice, he means that in addition to them physically dying, when their story is not told, when the truth is lost, they lose any grace to be had in death. He tries to give them back the truth by adding symbolism to his suicide. Through his suicide, Rachel becomes a sort of martyr, his spilled blood strengthening his identity, just as Benslama states that martyrdom, the spilling of blood, is key to building a strong national (postcolonial) identity.

¹⁹⁶ Sansal, 35.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 82-84.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 215-253.

Patrimoine

With the high levels of migration in the contemporary world, it has become almost commonplace to claim multiple nationalities as part of one's heritage. The Schiller brothers were born of an Algerian mother and a German father, raised in France by "Uncle" Ali, and they claim to be part Algerian, French, and German, even though they have lived in France for most of their conscious lives.¹⁹⁹ Rachel writes, "quand je lui ai dit que j'étais allemand, français et algérien, et que ça ne me gênait nulle part, il a ouvert la bouche. De quelle couleur parle-t-on à un caméléon sans le vexer?"²⁰⁰ While Rachel embraces and acknowledges his triple identity, he realizes that it may pose a problem for some people to understand and relate to, especially considering the historical issues between the three countries. Early on, though he demonstrates that he values a European identity more than an Algerian identity. He naturalizes Malrich and himself in France, and he says when he is applying for an Algerian passport, "Dieu, que ça doit être humiliant et dangereux d'être algérien à plein temps," showing a sort of European elitist attitude he must have adopted during his early adulthood in France, as he almost certainly dealt with French prejudice towards *émigrés* from the Maghreb.²⁰¹ Before his return to the homeland, he does not feel like an Algerian, but that he is *au courant des développements en Algérie* just like *les actualités* that one sees on the news, and not as a real part of him.²⁰² Yet, he feels a sense of shame because of what he does not know about or feel

¹⁹⁹ Sansal, 15.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 62.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 17, 27.

²⁰² Ibid., 19.

towards his homeland: “c’est bête comme on ne connaît pas l’histoire de son pays,”²⁰³ and Malrich remarks, “c’est fou le nombre de choses que l’on ne sait pas, que l’on ne voit pas, alors qu’elles font partie de nous, de notre quotidien.”²⁰⁴ Both brothers recognize the serious lack of knowledge of one’s nation’s history and identity in many of today’s youth, especially the children of *émigrés*. However, the lack of historical knowledge does not prevent a great sense of community. Upon the kidnapping and torturous murder of the girl, Nadia, the *cit * is unified in the search for her, and when they discover her terrible fate, everyone shares the pain and sense of loss. Malrich is puzzled by this assumption of pain that even he feels: “c’est une dr le d’impression que de se sentir en sympathie avec des gens que l’on ne connaît pas. De la voir pleurer, nous avons pleur .”²⁰⁵ In his na vet  and ignorance, Malrich does not understand how he can feel such sympathy towards a family he hardly knew, though as he matures he comes to better understand just what a bond a community shares, all stemming from their roots.

The sense of a very organic national heritage and identity is quite German, which throws Hans/Hassan’s departure from his organic roots into sharp relief. His sons, though, must experience the process in reverse. Where Hans/Hassan leaves his roots and eventually develops new ones, his sons must go from rootless to a bizarre state of rootedness. Rachel is completely lost, without roots, and alone, but he says “qu’  son retour d’Alg rie, il  tait un autre homme,” that his pilgrimage changed him.²⁰⁶ The lack of physical and emotional contact with their homeland and parents, effectively their roots,

²⁰³ Sansal, 34.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 84.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 72-74.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 145-147, 41.

left Malrich and Rachel in a sort of psychological limbo, an extreme sense of disconnect with themselves. Through the discovery of their father's identity, however unpleasant, they were able to come to different degrees of comfort with their own identities.

“Generation gaps”

The Schiller men are effectively representations or embodiments of the different generations of postcolonial Algerians. Hans/Hassan lives through the revolution, Rachel commits suicide at the age of thirty-three, and his younger brother is only eighteen at the end of the novel; they have little in common. Hans/Hassan tries to escape his dark past by assuming a completely new identity. He may easily be related to the generation of revolutionaries that fought for independence and inherited the governance of Algeria. They tried to erase the French past, by changing street names from French names to Algerian ones, completely overhauling the education system, and through “Arabization.” They fought for knowledge, rights, and freedom, but ended up trying to erase the French past instead of embracing it as part of their history and moving on.²⁰⁷ As we have seen, Rachel wants above all else to know the truth about where he came from, and is utterly consumed by the search for it. He may be likened to the “first-generation” postcolonials, who wish to understand the French part of them selves, but are also afraid of it. He feels a profound link with his father and earlier generations, and that he must assume responsibility: “ ‘Sommes-nous comptables des crimes de nos pères, des crimes de nos frères et de nos enfants? Le drame est que nous sommes sur une ligne continue, on ne

²⁰⁷ Bennoune, 221-236.

peut en sortir sans la rompre et disparaître.”²⁰⁸ His concept of time and responsibility are broken because of his lack of understanding of himself and his father.

In an interview in the *Nouvel Observateur*, Boualem Sansal discusses the inheritance of sins and responsibility:

Devant ces révélations, se pose la terrible question: sommes-nous comptables des crimes commis par nos parents, d'une manière générale par le peuple auquel nous appartenons? Oui, cette question me hante et je n'ai pas de réponse. Je me dis que nous ne sommes responsables de rien mais en tant qu'héritiers, le problème nous échoit, nous n'y pouvons rien. Je me dis que nous n'avons à faire ni repentance ni excuse mais en tant qu'héritiers le problème nous échoit. Il n'y a pas de réponse mais il y a peut-être une solution: que les enfants des victimes et ceux des coupables se rencontrent et se parlent, autour d'une histoire qu'ils écriront eux-mêmes. Ensemble, de cette façon, ils éviteront peut-être le manichéisme que naturellement les acteurs de la tragédie portent en eux. N'est-ce pas d'ailleurs ce que nous faisons depuis que le monde est monde?²⁰⁹

Here, he admits that he has no answer to whether or not the child is guilty of the sins of the parent, but he does say that responsibility is inherited; the younger generation is responsible for the education of their peers. They must discuss the past and not allow it to be forgotten, so such terrible events do not repeat.

Malrich, representative of the current generation, seems unperturbed by the past until he realizes just how much it affects him. Early on, he does not understand his brother's mad search for truth and responsibility, (“Que voulait-il dire en invoquant le devoir comme seule explication de la marche du monde? Parlait-il pour mon père ou pour lui-même? Ou pour moi? Derrière ce mot, le devoir, on peut tout mettre, entraîner des

²⁰⁸ Sansal, 52.

²⁰⁹ Grégoire Leménager, “La frontière entre islamisme et nazisme est mince,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/20080109/2505/la-frontiere-entre-islamisme-et-nazisme-est-mince> (accessed 12 February 2010).

peuples entiers et les jeter dans l'abîme. Et puis voilà!"²¹⁰). And distressed by the argument over his father's identity, he exclaims, "La manipulation de l'identité de nos parents n'a pas cessé de me turlupiner."²¹¹ Because he has not directly experienced responsibility and loss, he does not see how other people's business can possibly affect him. His ignorance is manifested by his reaction to the Imam, the "Hitler" of *la cité*; he is not absorbed by grief and guilt like Rachel, but by anger, revenge, and retribution, also indicative of their class and education differences. Instead of being ashamed of the violence spurred by the Imam, he promises "de lui couper le sifflet à ce SS qui veut transformer notre cité en camp d'extermination, l'heure était venue."²¹²

However, he matures greatly, and, though at first he did not understand, the counsel of the Com'Dad is what he comes to accept. He is told to reread Rachel's journal, and that he might see what Rachel did not, though he did understand everything: "on n'efface pas le crime par le crime, ni par le suicide," and above all, "nous ne sommes pas responsables ni comptables des crimes de nos parents."²¹³ He is able to go further than Rachel because he vocalizes his sentiments and fears, the "penance" that Sansal deems necessary. Instead of allowing his emotions to ferment and destroy him, he talks to his friends and surrogate family. By drawing parallels with the present to make his friends understand, he himself comes to understand. They ask him questions that make him think more and go beyond Rachel's conclusions. One of his friends asks, "Qu'est-ce que tu proposes, qu'on se suicide comme Rachel?" to which Malrich replies, "On va faire le

²¹⁰ Sansal, 67.

²¹¹ Ibid., 229.

²¹² Ibid., 73.

²¹³ Ibid., 84.

contraire, on va vivre, on va se battre.”²¹⁴ In his opinion, “la vérité est la vérité, elle doit être sue,” and that parents (the older generation) should tell the truth to their children (the younger generation), so that advancement can be made, and mistakes not re-made.²¹⁵

Sansal’s text allows us to understand the difficulties surrounding the multiplicity of identities through national influence in today’s Algeria and even the *banlieues* in France. However, rather than exposing it in plain terms, he makes the multiplicity even more complicated by including immigration, converting religions, and more than two national identities. I believe that his complicated treatment of multiple identities is symptomatic of the continuing struggle to develop a stable Algerian identity. Though, it seems that today, the problem does not lie so much with the French past than with the factions of Islamism, tearing apart the groundwork of Algerian society.

²¹⁴ Sansal, 126-129.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 222-223.

Conclusion

One hundred and thirty years of colonial rule, bilingualism, and radically different social and cultural norms only increase the difficulty in establishing a national identity. Postcolonial Algeria is suffering from an identity crisis. It is more than a simple question of Self/Other, colonized/colonizer, East/West, or Algeria/France. From France's initial foray into Algeria in 1830 to the brutal war of liberation ending in 1962, Algerians were told that they were citizens of France, being taught of "Our ancestors, the Gauls..."²¹⁶, learning French as their first language. Expressing disillusion with the problems of the postcolonial condition, corruption, and *la douleur*, literature serves as a sort of therapy. It explores the current reality to find new possibilities in independence. In these ways, the novels serve as a means to understanding the evolution to the current Algerian identity.

Kateb Yacine showed us the clear distinction between the Colonizer and the Colonized. He demonstrates the rupture between Algeria and France in plain terms. The rupture is indicative of the period in which he was writing. Just after the French were made to leave Algeria, the difference would have been staggering, especially after the highly militarized climate of the war. Battlements were being disassembled, the French military were not all over the place, and Algerians were beginning to build their country back. Arabization was increasing as the FLN tried to erase the traces of the French, such as by changing the names of streets from French to Arabic.²¹⁷ Yacine's own choice to write in the Algerian vernacular after the completion of his novels is emblematic of the

²¹⁶ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 61.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

climate of his country. He ceased using the language of the former colonizer to rejuvenate the discourse in Arabic and Algerian. Like Ngugi choosing to write in Gikuyu rather than English, Yacine chose the language of his ancestors. Certainly his international readership declined, but this way he could increase the number of people he reached at home. The action speaks for itself, and is a much stronger way of emblemizing the Arabization movement than by preaching about the problem of bilingualism in French. Yacine's extensive treatment of the Self/Other binary marks the feeling of the contemporary period in Algeria, and their views on their identity. Algerians were working to define themselves from France, and the division is obvious when viewed from the perspective afforded by *Le Polygone étoilé*.

Two decades after decolonization and *Polygone*, Djébar actively promoted (at the time of this novel) and still promotes the empowerment of Algerian women. She, too, uses the Self/Other binary in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, but she goes beyond the mere expression of it and applies it to the historical discourse. Using historical accounts and facts, she gives her own account of Algeria's colonial history, but she rewrites Algerians, particularly women, into the silences using fiction. The effort she makes to accept that the French were part of Algeria's history and move past it is quite different from Yacine and his period. He and his contemporaries wanted to forget that France was ever a part of Algeria, and somehow return to a precolonial blank slate. Djébar acknowledges that the French were a large part of Algerian history, and uses her acceptance to empower Algerians. By re-telling history from a different perspective, she throws light on the horrors of both the atrocities committed during the colonial period and wars and that of

the lack of justice given to the Algerians by leaving them out of their own history. All of this springs from the Self/Other binary, but it does more than the binary can because she forces Algerians back into a construct made by the French. She disrupts the binary relationship to do justice to Algeria. Similar to Yacine's use of verse to give life to the work, Djébar using the language of the body, of women and the oral tradition, makes the text come alive in the "fantasia," a violent dance giving a voice back to Algeria.

In "post-postcolonialism," the colonial period and decolonization are no longer the main subjects of discussion, but rather the idea that there can never be a new start. Sansal demonstrates indirectly the fact that Algeria can never escape the fact that the French were there, but also the more personal consequences of this idea. We can reinvent ourselves, but since linear time is interrupted by memory, we can never escape the past. Identity is a continuous and circular thing that will not forget or abandon part of itself for convenience's sake. Hans/Hassan, despite changing his appearance and converting to Islam in an Algerian hill town, will always be a former Nazi who contributed to the great suffering inflicted on the Jews in the Holocaust. Rachel and Malrich will always be part Algerian, in spite of the fact that they have spent most of their adult lives in France. They are examples of the hybridity of postcolonial identity in a sort of bizarre fusion of Self and Other. They consider themselves part French because of their educations and location, but they will always feel Algerian because of their childhood memories of Aïn Deb and the nature of the *banlieue* they inhabit in France. Likewise, the former colonized will always be a little bit French because "Frenchness" is part of their collective memory. They did not ask for it, but it happened so they must accept that it is part of themselves.

As these authors have shown, many have tried to erase their French side, but with little success. They all write of returns to Algeria, to the *patrimoine* that solidify the Algerian identity. “Frenchness” is part of the Algerian history, memory, and self, and exists still in the common consciousness, but the Algerian side is now growing much stronger since many have accepted the past and choose to move beyond it, rather than work to efface or forget it. It would be the opposite of what the French historical discourse did to Algerians. Instead of being the silent victims of history, they would try to make the French part silent which would further destroy the Algerian self by removing part of its history, even though they did not wish for it. We are not linear, chronologic beings. *Peut-être que vit-on sans arrêt ou marche en arrière, mais l’on a de la mémoire, des expériences qui se déroulent en parallèle, qui se ressemblent, qui circulent. On ne peut pas dire que nous vivons linéairement quand nous voyons très facilement que ce n’est pas du tout le cas. Les écrivains postcoloniaux l’ont vu, et l’expriment avec une clarté étonnante.*

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