Aesthetics and Aftermath: Algeria 1962-2012

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Corbin McKenzie Treacy

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Adviser: Hakim Abderrezak

May 2014

Acknowledgements

Support for the research and writing of this project came from many sources, for which I am deeply grateful. The University of Minnesota's Department of French and Italian, College of Liberal Arts, Institute for Global Studies, Human Rights Program, Office of Interdisciplinary Initiatives, Center for German and European Studies, and Graduate School each provided assistance in the form of fellowships. Through their generous giving to the University, Mark Hiemenz, Charlie Rounds, and Hella Mears made possible important summer research that allowed me the time and space to pursue particular lines of inquiry and formulate arguments. The American Institute for Maghrib Studies funded my travel to Algeria in the summer of 2012, and I would like to thank Robert Parks and Karim Ouaras, in particular, for their assistance organizing this trip and ensuring it would be productive, and Mehdi Haddadi, Melyssa Hafaf, Fayçal Tiriaki, and the staff of Les Glycines, whose knowledge and guidance on the ground were an invaluable part of my stay.

This dissertation began to take form in 2012, but the ideas that run through it have been percolating for much longer. My ability to make sense of these texts, ask good questions, and put my responses to paper is the direct result of having worked with an incredibly talented and giving constellation of faculty members at a number of institutions. At Pomfret, Neil Batt and Hagop Merjian taught me how to write, while Jim Rees introduced me to the French language. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I was fortunate to have studied with Richard Begam, Alessandra Benedicty, Russ Castronovo, Deborah Jensen, and Aliko Songolo, each of whom contributed to my understanding of what literary texts are and what they do. During two summers of graduate study at Middlebury College, Romuald Fonkoua, Roger Lauverjat, and Elise Salaun taught me new ways to approach francophone texts, echoes of which continue to reverberate in my work.

In less structured, but no less critical ways, many people have shaped my research through generative interactions at conferences, workshops, and in email correspondence. I wish to thank Salim Bachi, Mustapha Benfodil, Patrick Crowley, Kamel Daoud, Muriem Haleh, Jane Hiddleston, Alice Kaplan, Ed McAllister, Malika Rahal, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, and Abdourahman Waberi for their valuable insights and clarifying questions.

Faculty members from many departments at the University of Minnesota have been instrumental in helping me both to expand my thinking and narrow my focus. I would like to thank, in particular, Bruce Braun, Dan and Mária Brewer, Barb Frey, Keya Ganguly, Patricia Lorcin, Nabil Matar, Judith Preckshot, and Eileen Sivert for pointing me in new and unexpected directions, reading my work with sharp eyes, and prodding me to course correct, when needed. To the members of my committee, Hakim Abderrezak, Juliette Cherbuliez, Shaden Tageldin, and Christophe Wall-Romana, I owe you a special debt of gratitude. Your guidance and encouragement have motivated me to work well, hard, and quickly, and I would be still be stuck on the first chapter were it not for your tenacious mentorship.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their considerable patience and understanding during the research and writing phases of this project. Above all, I would like to thank Jen, who tolerated the insanity that accompanies such an endeavor and taught me the importance of laughing at myself during moments of particular stress. You have helped me beyond measure, and your critical and emotional support are what, above all, helped me see this to completion…thank you.

For Dagmar and Francis

Abstract

Much in Algeria has remained unchanged since 1962, when the country won its independence from France: the heroes of the revolution are still in power, social inequality is rife, and transparent democracy remains elusive. My dissertation studies Algerian literary works in French that challenge this condition of abeyance through their form, engagement with the political present, and utopian thinking. I analyze novels and short stories that disclose and disrupt a landscape of what I call "permanent aftermath"—a cycle of sameness in the guise of the new. These texts break out of the limiting temporalities and foundational mythologies that have held the country in a state of suspended animation, and they require new interpretive and critical frameworks for making sense of them. Far from illustrating the uniqueness of the Algerian case, these works describe an architecture of the text-nation-reader dynamic that resonates across European and postcolonial literatures, and I analyze the literary responses to aftermath they provide in dialogue with the broader discursive fields of contemporary Francophone and Postcolonial Studies. This corpus points to the continued relevance of the nation and calls us to read closely the specificity of the national context, particularly in a scholarly climate increasingly eager to replace the nation with a post- or trans-national global logic. They adumbrate alternative nationalisms that work to reignite arrested processes of decolonization in Algeria. Read closely for their artistry and with sensitivity to the connection between writers' social relations and the forms and content of their work, these texts invite us to rethink how we consume, discuss, teach and write about postcolonial literature in the twenty-first century.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In late 2012, the Algerian French-language daily *El Watan* published a political cartoon in which an Algerian man rips off the December 31 page from his calendar and throws it on the floor. Much to his dismay, the new page, like all those that preceded it (strewn about him), reads "1962," prompting the man to exclaim, "Et merde!" The joke turns on the idea that in the fifty years since Algeria won its independence from France, little has changed: the heroes of the revolution are still in power; social inequality is rife; corruption is commonplace; stagnation is everywhere. My dissertation builds on this idea of an Algeria caught in a permanent state of aftermath and argues that contemporary literary works, in various ways and to different ends, challenge this condition of abeyance through a series of specific literary tactics. The works I study offer aesthetic responses to aftermath, using literary forms, political engagements with the present, and utopian thinking to construct subversive temporalities and imaginative counter-realities that break out of the closed-circuit loop of repetition that typifies public life in contemporary Algeria.

First World criticism has often grappled with how to read these works. Postcolonial studies has, since its inception, been the site of animated debates about the proper place of politics in literary study. The term "postcolonial literature" contains within it the central tension of this debate: "postcolonial" implies specific times and places, while "literature" is thought by many to refer to that which is timeless and universal. This tension has given way to an opposition between "formalist," "aesthetic,"

and "purely literary" approaches, and those dubbed "political," "thematic," "ethnographic," or "sociological." As Deepika Bahri has noted, this debate is often cast in terms that have become, through their repetition and increasing banality, "comedic and grotesque, pitting comic book aesthetics wedded to a politics of abstention against boorish ideological vulgarians who see art merely as politics by other means" ("New Aestheticism" 63). Bahri contends that the engagement/abstention binary has rendered sustained analysis of the aesthetics of postcolonial literature "impossible to articulate" without risking "reduction" (64). She argues for a "new aesthetics," one that reads form as not only an expression of style and technique, but rather existing in "a mutually transformative relationship with content" (67). Such an approach builds on the recent work of Neil Lazarus, Timothy Brennan, Ato Quayson, and Nicholas Brown, who have attempted to move beyond these *poesis/polis* polarities, charting new routes through the choppy waters between ethnography and universalizing aestheticism. These critics have found ways of bringing together Marxist critique, materialist dialectics, aesthetics, and postcolonial thought through encounters that eschew the simplicity of the form/content dichotomy and invest literature with a sociopolitical charge rooted in form.

This dissertation analyzes Algerian literary works in French that disrupt the landscape of post-independence aftermath (both political and literary) through specific and intersecting aesthetic moves: (1) leveraging modernist and avant-gardist forms as a response to an increasingly absurdist state-society relationship; (2) disrupting the closed circuitry of the Franco-Algerian memorial relationship through the use of multidirectional literary and historical memory; (3) textualizing historical absences as a response to

successive regimes of invisibility; and (4) responding to the assault on imagination in Algeria through national allegories. As reactions to successive governmental abuses, deceptions, and disappointments, and in the wake of the resulting climate of stagnation and fear, these literary strategies play out the relationship between aesthetics and politics through an enfolding of the one inside the other.

Critical to this interplay between and among historical, political, and economic forces and what have been called "purely literary" (Bonn) or aesthetic concerns are the global material realities (publishing, distribution, critique, reception, and scholarship) that have framed and restrained literary production in Algeria since independence. My project considers aesthetic responses to the dominant topography of aftermath and the various technologies that sustain it (repression, corruption, disappearances, coerced memory, and effacement) against the broader interpretive frameworks of contemporary francophone and postcolonial studies. I argue that the shifting ground of literary studies in France, the UK, and the US has made particular and contradictory demands on Algerian literature. Authors are placed in the paradoxical position of being asked to export in vivid Technicolor the political "realities" of life in Algeria (the horrors of the civil war of the 1990s, violence against women, the ascendency of "radical" Islam), and at the same time, are dismissed by critics as caught in the simplifying calculus of the present, producers of a testimonial literature of negligible artistic value. These demands have not only shaped the terms of the conversation about Algerian literature, they have shaped the very contours of literary output in Algeria, selecting for publication and distribution those who pass the tests thrust upon them and relegating to the margins those who do not. Responses

to the demands of the international market vary, and artists have had to choose whether to reject, embrace, mock, or subvert them. The works I've selected offer provocative responses to the academic and literary conversations that have shaped the fields of francophone and postcolonial studies before, during, and after their publication. These texts invite us to consider the ways in which critical and theoretical traditions might be caught in a similar dynamic of aftermath, reproducing sameness in the guise of the new.

The term "aftermath" refers in its most material sense to the second crop of grass that grows in place of a recently-mowed first growth. In this way, it aptly communicates the notion of continuity through repetition, and captures the *plus ça change* condition of sameness-through-newness so often described in these works. In the context of this metaphor, we might think of texts that disrupt the cycle of growth-cutting-new growth as akin to intrusive (and, to my mind, welcome) weeds or flowers—unexpected deviations from an imposed norm. Far from illustrating the uniqueness of the Algerian case, these novels and short stories describe a particular architecture of the text-nation-reader dynamic, one that resonates across postcolonial literatures. But they also point to the continued relevance of the nation and call us to read closely the particularities of the national context (class, race, and politics) against an academic climate increasingly impatient in its desire to move beyond the nation to some transnational or post-national logic of the global.

The current academic trend of substituting "francophone postcolonial literature" with "*littérature-monde en français*" is one of the externally-imposed interpretive paradigms in which Algerian literature in French has recently found itself and within

which its works are now being read. [1] My approach instead focuses on: (1) the particularity of the national context; (2) the form and poetics of a text and its relationship to the context in which it was created; and (3) the domestic and international structures (political, economic, cultural, and academic) that surround literary production and reception. I depart from recent calls for a post-national approach to literature and read contemporary Algerian fiction as articulating alternative nationalisms that work against Algeria's arrested processes of decolonization and attempt to break out of the confines of permanent aftermath.

"Nationalism" has become something of a bad word in the American academy, evoking as it does memories of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. In its place, a less militant and less overtly-political lexicon has emerged, one that Brennan describes as "reinvigorating the clichés of neoliberalism by substituting the terminology of freedom, entrepreneurship, and individualism for the vocabulary of difference, hybridity, pluralism, or, in its latest avatar, the multitude" (*Wars of Position* 11). This shift away from the anticolonial and Marxist language of the 1950s and 1960s—with its confrontational vocabulary of struggle, class, and engagement—toward a defanged and less menacing jargon reflects the shifting winds of academic discourse in the first world more than the political and literary realities of the third. In other words, the disciplinary concerns of postcolonial studies have mined literary production from the former colonies to reflect its own evolving priorities, with critics "disposed to construe their own specific locations in the social order, their own specific views on to the world, as cultural

[1] See Le Bris.

universals" (Lazarus , *Postcolonial Unconscious* 32). The result is a field of postcolonial studies that Lazarus rightly describes as being largely anti-Marxist, weary of any form of nationalism, celebratory of migrancy, liminality, and multiculturalism, averse to dialecticism, and suspicious of any struggle-based model of politics (21). Throughout this project, I take as a given the necessary incompleteness of the anticolonial project and as a result, attend to the currents in these texts that oppose oppression and domination through a decidedly political rhetoric, one often inspired from anti-colonial forms of nationalism.

The date range included in the project's title (1962-2012) refers less to the publication dates of the works included than to the fifty-year period following independence as a conceptual object of study. The seven novels and short stories that I read here all speak to this period—some overtly, some covertly—and provide instructive coordinates for thinking through the aesthetic and political ramifications of aftermath in Algeria. Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur* was written seven years before the conclusion of the war for independence, but his text nevertheless anticipates the function that absence would assume in post-independence Algeria and serves as a useful model of textualized absence that resonates with the work of more contemporary authors.

My first chapter begins by plotting the contours of the debates that have framed Algerian literary studies since the sub-field emerged in the 1970s. Charles Bonn, perhaps the most prolific scholar of Algerian literature in French, has noted that the birth of Algerian literary study in France coincided with the end of the Algerian War for Independence and the upheaval of May 1968. According to Bonn, this invested Algerian literature with political and sociological import from the moment of its arrival in the halls

of French higher education ("La Réception" 50). The intertwining of politics and literature in the early days of the academic field of Maghrebi literary studies has led Bonn to conclude that the study of Algerian literature—even just reading an Algerian novel—is now considered a "politically engaged act" (56). For Bonn, this fosters a paternalistic approach to Maghrebi texts that reads ethnographically and through the lenses of cultural sensitivity and kindness rather than with the critical acumen that good literature merits (57). His critique of the way in which Maghrebi literature is over-contextualized, over-thematized, and over-politicized remains an important fault line in the field. What troubles me about this line of argument is the faith that scholars like Bonn have (to varying degrees) in the idea that literary critics can ever detach themselves (or the texts they read) from the ideological frameworks that structure them.

To provide a counter-example of the type of literature that Bonn describes, I read Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* as rejecting the limiting terms of the formalist/realist debate he and others impose on Algerian literature. Benfodil writes with an urgency and political conviction forged in the uprisings of 1988 and refined in the "black decade" of the 1990s. Born after the transition to independence, he belongs to what Malika Rahal has termed *la génération '88*, and his writing evinces a pessimism about the legacy of the war for independence and the stagnation that has ensued in its aftermath. The novel combines a multiplicity of languages (French, Tamazight, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic) and registers (at times high-style lyricism, at others, vulgar slang) to reach beyond the confines of Algerian history, and he includes global references (continental philosophy, the occupation of Palestine, 9/11, the war on terror)

as a way of thinking outside the local frames of the present. Importantly, Benfodil deploys a range of genres (mythology, citation, aphorism, the fable, the epic, the *journal intime*) and masters precisely the kind of literary artistry and sophistication so valued by critics of testimonial literature, but in a writing heavily freighted with material, economic, and political concerns. His is a writing deeply influenced by modernist literary aesthetics and at the same time, engaged in a revived nationalism that rejects state-based models of jingoistic flag waving in favor of collective action that more closely resembles its anticolonial antecedents.

My second chapter reads Maïssa Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* and Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* as two texts that reclaim national history from statist discourses and expand the north-south axis of historical memory between France and Algeria to include other histories. In Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*, the protagonist is reading Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*/*The Reader*, with excerpts of his texts included in hers. The novella's gesture to Holocaust memory creates the necessary conditions for an encounter between historical antagonists, a meeting that would have been impossible were it not for the prodding provided by a contemporary German text. In Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand,* Algerian and Holocaust histories are linked through one of the main characters in a somewhat bizarre deployment of what Michael Rothberg has termed "multidirectional memory." Sansal constructs a bold parallel between the rise of Nazism in Europe and the spread of militant forms of Islam in French housing projects (a comparison fraught with problems and mostly an example of what happens when "multidirectional memory" goes awry). And yet his text

shares important similarities with Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* and by attending to Sansal's inclusion of this alternative *literary* reference, we can understand his protagonists' failures to engage in the work of responsible historical comparison.

The third chapter reads the figure of absence in Algerian literature (a recurrent trope) as reflective of and responsive to historical conditions of absence and effacement that have typified the fifty years following independence. Algeria in the 1990s was a place in which, by July 2000, over 6,000 people had been "disappeared" by government forces or kidnapped by FIS/GIA insurgents, and in which press coverage was greatly restricted, limiting the availability of images and information (Stora, *Guerre sans images* 110-12). Responding to this material absence, Abdelkader Djemaï's *Un été de cendres* stages the paradoxical impossibility of representation and the need to represent from within what Assia Djebar termed "le blanc de l'Algérie." When the state prevents images from circulating, art finds itself confronted with the resulting void and must decide how and if to fill it. Benjamin Stora argues that the invisibility of events "provoque l'incapacité de donner un sens au monde" (117); images and description order chaos, and their absence contributes to a crisis of invisibility. I read Djemaï's text in dialogue with an unlikely literary antecedent, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur,* a novel that omits a central scene of rape and torture, leaving in its place a blank page that forces readers to author for themselves the details of what happened. This displacement of violence and the refusal to represent it mimic collective blindness and voluntary amnesia at a time in French history when torture was commonplace (if unacknowledged) in the Algerian "conflict." By putting the burden of authorship on the reader, Robbe-Grillet forces an

uncomfortable encounter with the violence his audience knew to be happening but which they refused to acknowledge. The censorship of the 1990s was an attempt to make the images of violence go away without drawing attention to the ways in which that erasure happens, and texts with absence at their center accuse through imitation those who enforce absence at the collective or national level—in France in the 1950s and in Algeria in the 1990s—and they do this not through what is said, but rather through what is not.

The final chapter analyzes the role of allegory—specifically, *national allegories*—in two texts, Tahar Djaout's *Le Dernier été de la raison* and Kamel Daoud's short story, "La Préface du Nègre," each of which includes a central scene of burning books. Daoud's protagonist is a hired ghostwriter ("nègre") tasked with transcribing the memoirs of an illiterate *ancien moudjahid*, while Djaout's is the last *libraire* in a dystopian Algiers where all the bookstores have been closed and the few remaining books are being burned by fundamentalists. Both men yearn for imagination, fabulation, and creation in a world so saturated with present traumas that these have become dangerous, if not impossible. Writing this impossibility becomes a transgressive act, and allegory, its chosen vehicle, communicating the material realities of contemporary Algeria through a nuanced literary idiom that flatly rejects the labels of "documentary fiction" or "*littérature d'urgence*" with national allegories that imagine possible futures for Algeria beyond the frozen temporalities of crisis.

In each of the works I examine, we encounter what might be called the possibility of other, better worlds. Bahri argues that "the postcolonial novel may recall the world, *a* world, but it is not 'an imitation of particular things,' as Plato would have it in *The*

Republic, but perhaps better understood as a concern with reality 'to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen'" ("New Aestheticism" 67). This should not be taken to mean that we find in these books fantasies of wished-for places that have not yet been, but rather, a "stylizing of the world in miniature" (Bahri, *Native Intelligence* 24) that questions and recasts the assumptions that sustain the present reality. The utopic can here be understood to reside in the "potential drawn from the broken promises of the past rather than from the past as such" (118). In this sense, Algerian authors perform a critical component of ethical intellectual work, a task that Edward Said has characterized as "not only defin[ing] the situation, but also discern[ing] the possibilities for active intervention" (34). Such utopian thinking requires a reader attentive to form and open to the destabilizing effects of poetic invention.

It would be naïve to think that writing and reading are in and of themselves revolutionary acts with boundless subversive potential, particularly in the context of Algerian literature in French, with its self-selecting and limited readership. But it would also be naïve to think that reading and writing are politically neutral acts. If aftermath in Algeria is sustained both internally (by state narratives rooted in the heroic legacy of the liberation struggle, a constant state of crisis, and the singular authority of the regime-*qua*-protector of the nation) and externally (by First World observers inclined to associate a pathology of violence with the very words "Algeria" and "Algérie"), then new narratives are needed, both for Algerian readers and for audiences around the world. Art is doing this work in Algeria today: films, hip-hop, Arabophone literature, blogs, installation art, graffiti, break dancing—each of these authors alternatives to the unsavory options that

currently dominate discussions of Algeria. And Algerian literature in French plays an important role in this process of rewriting. Read closely for its artistry and with a sensitivity to what Raymond Williams calls "the radical and inevitable connection between a writer's real social relations […] and the 'style' or 'forms' or 'content' of his work, now considered not abstractly but as expressions of these relations" (203), this body of literature points to new ways we might consume, discuss, teach, and write about postcolonial literature.

I. Surreality

Introduction

It seems at once odd and fitting to speak of national literatures in 2014. It's often said that we have arrived at a "post-national" moment. Facebook, like Coca-Cola, is everywhere, and the world, we are told, is flat.[2] Nomadism, cosmopolitanism, and migration have become the new and celebrated terms that populate academic research across disciplines. But the nation won't go away. It's still there and still demands our attention. The European Union—that celebrated institution of the post-national age—has been confronted with a series of problems (the Greek economic implosion, an increasingly assertive Russia, illegal immigration) that have once again stoked the fires of provincial populism and cross-border resentment. Revived European nationalisms have replaced the halcyon days of the early 2000s, when the new currency and freedom of mobility spawned a spirit of optimism on the continent. Xenophobic political parties are a reality in Central Europe, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland, and England, and the policing and closing of borders have become profitable political talking points globally, with immigrant populations now the sites of increased surveillance in Europe and North America.

While the reemergence (or renewed visibility) of nationalisms often ushers in attendant acts of antagonism and exclusion, one can also point to nationalist movements

[2] The term is Thomas Friedman's.

in postcolonial spaces that challenge rather than reproduce hegemony. When crowds in Tunis chanted for the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, they did so with Tunisian flags painted on their cheeks. Tahrir Square in Cairo saw the waving of Egyptian flags alongside signs demanding (in multiple languages) Mubarak's departure. In Libya, insurgents used pre-Qaddafi flags as the symbols of a stolen nation they wanted returned. It seems that the nation, faced with its supposed irrelevance, has stood once again to speak, sometimes in the service of racist or reactionary policies, and at others, to reclaim the hope and optimism of revolutions past.

Algeria had its Tahrir moment in 1988, but as author Mustapha Benfodil has pointed out, "when the October 1988 uprising broke out, over twenty years before the ones in Tunis and Egypt, there was no al-Jazeera and there was no Facebook to give it the attention and support it deserved" ("Shuhada" 32). It was the absence of an international audience (and the accompanying pressure and support of the world community) that kept the October uprising from maturing into a force for fundamental and lasting change. As Algeria approached the fiftieth anniversary of independence from France, the legacy and consequences of that event remained contested sites of debate, with more than one commentator arguing that full and finalized independence from France has not yet truly been won.[3] Literary and filmic works, with their thorny and complex relationship to the nation (its languages, identities, and conceptions of self- and national consciousness), expose many of the contradictions and ambivalences embedded within the idea of the nation. Algerian literature, more than simply performing or echoing that nation's

[3] See Benfodil, "Shuhada" 33; Le Sueur 104-5; and Roberts, "The Algerian Exception."

transition out of colonialism, through the anti-colonial struggle, and to post-independence, offers an optic through which we can examine some of the central aesthetic, ideological, and political debates of the past half-century. Looking at Algeria in its specificity allows us to consider its national history alongside its cultural products, with an attention to the particular material conditions of artistic production and reception that play determining roles in how these cultural works are consumed and understood.

Writing the Nation

There has been no shortage of thought produced in the last hundred years on the contingent, imaginary, virtual, and invented nature of the modern nation. Ernest Renan's 1882 essay, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation,* opens up the nation to critical investigation and demystification, while Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* reveals that much of what were previously believed to be the eternal markers of nation*ness* are in fact invented and often mobilized in the service of ideology. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* fundamentally changed the way we discuss national consciousness and the manipulation of myths of national origin. And Réda Bensmaïa argues that "[u]nder today's postmodern conditions, it is not geographical or even political boundaries that determine identities, but rather a plane of consistency that goes beyond the traditional idea of nation and determines its new transcendental configuration" (*Experimental* 8). It is from this "transcendental configuration" that Bensmaïa derives his term "experimental nations," which he attaches to nations that

"writers have had to imagine or explore as if they were territories to rediscover and stake out, step by step, countries to invent and to draw while creating one's language" (8). His description of the writer as a cartographer-explorer evokes a rather nineteenth-century notion of colonial writing, particularly in the context of the Maghreb; but in Bensmaïa's case, his authors are "imagin[ing]" and "explor[ing]" from within. The problem is that nations—imaginary, virtual, or experimental though they might well be—nevertheless produce very real effects. They issue passports and start wars, and in the Algerian context, control much of what gets read and published. Bensmaïa's preliminary remarks on the transcendental configuration of the nation undergird the central thrust of his argument: a critique of the practice of reading Maghrebi texts as sociological or ethnographic documents (a point to which we will return).

Much of the critical work on national literatures has focused on the relationship between texts and the architecture of the state. Acknowledging the imaginary status of the nation, Timothy Brennan articulates the powerful role that literature plays in national construction. Specifically, he points to the novel as that which "historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles" ("The National Longing" 49). Literature, as described by Brennan, "mimics" the structure of the state, thus reversing Bensmaïa's formulation—it is not the novel that imagines the nation, but the nation that prescribes the forms taken by those cultural products that in turn secure the nation's survival and legitimacy. The relationship is reciprocal and functions in a feedback loop of mutual reinforcement.

Looking at early examples of Algerian literature and film from the 1950s and 60s, it is clear that "nation building" was a priority for the FLN regime. The earliest works deal almost exclusively with the war for independence.[4] The funding apparatuses for publication (La société nationale d'édition et de diffusion) and film production (Le centre national du cinéma algérien) dictated the contours and thematic concerns of the emergent cultural imaginary as represented by these works. James McDougall points to the ways in which "the production of 'authentic selfhood' had itself been a bid for, and an instrument of power, one whose failures have been as significant as its achievements" (*History* 224). The adumbration of "authenticity"—what McDougall calls an "invented authenticity"—aimed at forging a 'unicity' that effaced plurality in Algeria. Having successfully ousted the French through a struggle of national liberation, the creation of a unified and coherent national narrative became a state priority. He argues:

> In the political culture of the new state, already under Ben Bella but more markedly after 1965, the reformists' religious *tawhid* ('unicity') served as the model for a political community in which 'diversity of status and opinion is denounced as deviance […] Community is placed under the sign of unicity while society itself unceasingly produces diversity.' While 'national culture' was enthroned as sovereign at the 'center,' the local specificities of culture, language, and history were silenced, their own creative potential suffocated […] The culture of nationalism may have ended up simply as absence, and the rhetoric of authenticity. (223-34)

[4] See Feraoun, Lakhdar-Hamina, Mammeri, Rachedi, Riad, and Yacine.

Implicit or explicit state control of cultural production in Algeria during the post-war years sought to reduce the plurality of voices to a singular voice as narrator of the nation's myths, one that could sustain the young state. This in part explains the choice of many authors to publish in France rather than in Algeria (Gueydan, *ImagiNation* 33). Studies by Jean Déjeux and Charles Bonn show that in the twenty years following independence (1962-1982), 23% of texts produced by Algerian authors and published in France directly address the war for independence, while among those published in Algeria by the SNED, only a small fraction don't (Déjeux 71; Bonn, *La littérature* 119), and as a result, literature published in Algeria becomes the "prisoner of an authoritarian cultural system" (Gueydan 29). The gap between demands for a singular, national culture on the one hand, and on the other, plural representations of post-war life in Algeria placed the artist in an increasingly paradoxical and ambivalent position vis-à-vis the national publishing architecture. During the National Liberation Struggle, the nation was (and, I would argue, remains today) a "rallying cry for freedom" that was also, at the same time, a "particularly powerful sign of the tradition that weigh[ed] down, inescapable as a nightmare, on the mind of the living" (McDougall, *History* 227). What the imposition of authenticity produced, according to McDougall, was an alienation of Algerians

> from their own imaginations of themselves, fixing them into a closed and homogenous destiny, fabricating a new (and dangerous) collective memory of purity and exalted struggle, forgetting diversity with division, complexity with 'collaboration', and producing a society not only

> victimized by colonialism but also 'culturally ransacked by its own voluntary amnesia.' (235)

While established writers like Anouar Benmalek, Rachid Boudjedra, Assia Djebar and Salah Guemriche have produced novels that challenge the stability of those state narratives that efface the plurality and complexity of Algerian history, the Algerian novel was initially a technology for *securing* and *consolidating* heroic narratives in the post-war years. Artists had to make choices about the cultural forms they would use, and Bensmaïa argues that at the moment of independence, they inherited a "catastrophic situation" wherein there were too few writers and artists to meet the needs of the nation at a time when it demanded a new national culture: "not only were 'products' (or producers) lacking, but so was the actual terrain where such products could come into being and take on meaning—the material and objective conditions for the existence of a public, a public sphere" (*Experimental* 12). Absent this public sphere, he argues, authors and filmmakers needed to create in the ashes of colonialism's exit, and to do so, reappropriated its forms (the novel, the fiction film) in acts of artistic "reterritorialization" (13). Bensmaïa takes issue with scholars who criticize these works for recasting inherited European cultural forms, and he dismisses recent scholarly works that punitively accuse "Third World intellectuals" of using "western" theoretical tools. [5] He sees post-independence acts of reappropriation, repurposing, and reterritorialization as inventive and effective strategies of cultural development, and states unequivocally that

---

[5] An endnote lists the voices of critique as belonging to Aijaz Ahmad, Gayatri Spivak, Ramachandra Guha, Arif Dirlik, Angie Chabran, and Stuart Hall (Bensmaïa 199).

> [t]o reproach intellectuals for being subservient to European methods, to say that what they do depends wholly on a problematic that is foreign to them, is automatically to place oneself in a position where it is impossible both to write one's own history and to fight against the history that was written for one. It is as if one had asked the Algerian independence fighters not to use modern weapons because the machine gun, the cannon, and the grenade were invented by the French! (163)

But a potential blind spot in Bensmaïa's analysis is the absence of any discussion of the conditions of publication inside or outside of Algeria in the fifty years following independence. His argument about the need to refashion inherited cultural forms and his reading of the impoverished material conditions for a post-independence cultural sphere would benefit from a look at the divergent pressures exerted on authors who publish in France and Algeria. As Bensmaïa is no doubt aware, the Algerian intellectual was, in many cases, writing for a French publisher, a reality that cannot help but have influenced both form and content, and the repurposing of "western" forms likely reflects outside material pressures as much as local aesthetic ones.

On the question of production, Alexandra Gueydan-Turek provides a needed elaboration on the specificity of the publishing sector in Algeria. She describes the opening of the Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion, in 1965, which allowed Algerian writers the possibility of publishing in their own country (*ImagiNation* 29). The state's involvement, while valuable in promoting the growth of a national literary sphere,

determined the thematic structures of domestically produced literatures and subjected authors to centralized surveillance. Even with the privatization of the SNED in 1982, the government used its intelligence services to police literary production in the years that followed (29). Equally damaging was the control that the SNED exerted over the importation and circulation of foreign books, even (and especially) those produced abroad by other Algerians (30).

One side effect of the publishing climate in Algeria has been a global notion of "Algerian" literature constructed through the prism of texts produced primarily by expatriate or exiled Algerians, published by French *maisons d'édition*, read in France, other European countries, and North America, and commented on and taught primarily in those places. Many of these texts are rarely, if ever, read in Algeria. Assia Djebar's novels, for example, have never been published in Arabic (11), and within Algeria itself

> do not appear as favored as those of other writers, such as Maïssa Bey. This might be due to the confluence of several factors: the quasi-complete absence of a distribution circuit making the cost of imported books prohibitive, and the fact that, contrary to Djebar who publishes only in the Hexagon, Bey copublishes her texts in France (Éditions de l'Aube) and in Algeria (Éditions Barzakh). One can also mention Bey's direct involvement with her local readership, via the promotion of female literacy in Algeria, by the Association "Paroles et Écritures" which she co-founded, and in particular the opening of a library in Sidi Bel-Abbès,

> when Djebar herself has not returned to Algeria in the past decades. (Gueydan-Turek, "Homeland" 99)

In Europe and North America, much of what we consider to be canonical Algerian literature is largely absent in Algeria. There is a separate discursive field of Algerian literary studies in which various international actors and stakeholders (authors, scholars, journalists, publishers, and readers) describe, comment on, promote, and encourage an Algerian literature that is often at something of a remove from Algeria itself.[6] Hadj Miliani explores the complexity of the literary market in Algeria and presents statistics that chart the nation's annual production of literary works, organized by language and genre, and even attempts to quantify the potential readership of French-language literary texts in Algeria (a difficult task, given the government's reluctance to collect or publish data on the population, its use of language, or literary production).[7] His voice brings a much-needed perspective to scholarship on Algerian literature that frequently ignores the material and literary modes of production and reception that frame those texts chosen for study in North America and Europe.

---

[6] Bey is not the only exception. Rachid Boudjedra, who writes novels in both French and Arabic, publishes his work in both France and Algeria, as did the late Tahar Djaout.

[7] In 2002, when Miliani's text was published, he estimated that there was somewhere between 6-8 million Algerians with a level of French-language instruction sufficient to read literary works, but given the absence of reliable statistics on the topic, it is next to impossible to estimate how many people are actually reading novels in French (Miliani 33). Perhaps indicative of the state's unwillingness to air openly the state of publishing in Algeria, Miliani's work was published in Paris, by l'Harmattan.

Language Politics

The distribution of language space in Algeria has remained a contested site of critical debate throughout the past fifty years. The "language question" was a central concern of the newly-independent Algeria and the decades that followed the revolution have seen multiple attempts at policing the language practices of the Algerian people. On language and its centrality to the project of nation building, McDougall observes that

> '[t]he nation' is a contested space, a terrain of conflict between competing claims for hegemony. The resources of meaning-creation are not equally distributed – each would-be spokesman seeks to shape the world through a particular 'legitimate language,' a particular order of words. The emancipatory name is formed and expressed in and bound around with very specific forms of language, words seeking to structure the world, to imagine community, past and present, in a specific, programmatic way. (*History* 226-7)

The status of language as a *constructive* tool for nation-building comes through in McDougall's architectural prose ("shape…formed…bound around…structure"). Meaning creation is intimately related to the language that expresses and constitutes that meaning, and literature has always been a central focus of national efforts to shape the contours of meaning creation in Algeria. Bensmaïa notes that

> [t]he idea of an Algerian literature written in French was a contradiction in the context of decolonization, and it was believed that political independence would soon be followed by cultural and linguistic independence. And yet, since Algerian independence in 1962, the number of works written in French by Maghrebi authors has continued to multiply. (*Experimental* 2)

He later credits French authors with "contribut[ing] to an understanding of the 'new world' […] that has come into being since Algerian independence" (6). His belief in the potential of the French language to create "new worlds" echoes his belief in the utility of recasting European cultural forms to rearticulate and reclaim national space. He argues that the Algerian writer in the aftermath of the revolutionary war found himself in a situation in which it was both "impossible to write" and "impossible not to write" (15). The central question confronting these intellectuals was: How can a nation live in multiple languages (Algerian Arabic, Tamazight, Tuareg, and French) and write in only one? For Bensmaïa, the writer's "hand-to-hand combat with the language(s) of the country is inseparable from another kind of combat, […] the writer's struggle to become increasingly conscious of the status of his or her fabulation" (22). In other words, the language struggle parallels the author's artistic development and contributes to a richer aesthetic product, a quality that Bensmaïa reads as neglected in criticism that turns too quickly to ethnographic and sociological analysis.

Gueydan-Turek writes with even more confidence of the emancipatory power of Algerian literary works written in French, asserting that

> French has become the language with which Algerian writers comment on their own country, and in so doing, create national narratives. The foreignness of the French language has allowed Algerian writers to react to the homogeneous nation-building discourse initially imposed by the Algerian government and to assert a long-suppressed linguistic and ethno-cultural diversity. (*ImagiNation* 1)

But there are problems with this statement. To say that Algerian writers comment on their own country through French negates or ignores the work of many of Algeria's Arabic language authors (to cite but a few: Lakhdar Essaihi, Bachir Ibrahimi, Waciny Larej, Ahlem Mosteghanemi, Moufdi Zakaria, as well as Rachid Boudjedra and Kateb Yacine, who have published in both French and Arabic). Her argument also positions the literary use of French as reacting to the FLN government, contesting its Arabizing policies, and championing "linguistic and ethno-cultural diversity" through the French language, all of which implies an inability of Arabic literary production to challenge the homogenizing project of the regime. Equally problematic is her assertion that French, through its "strangeness," creates space for an alterity that destabilizes "national identity" (4). The presence of French schools in Algeria under colonialism and the language's continued use in many university departments means that for some writers—particularly those educated prior to independence—the status of French as "strange" or "foreign" is not so

clear cut. While it is not the Algerian mother tongue, neither is Modern Standard Arabic (*fushah*), the language of arabophone literature. Both could be described as "foreign" and at the same time, very "domestic" in the complex polyglossia of Algeria. Perhaps most problematic, particularly in light of recent geopolitical events in North Africa, is Gueydan-Turek's assertion that

> [d]'une part, l'utilisation du français permet à l'auteur de donner libre cours à une "stratégie transgressive," et sous couvert de l'étrangeté de la langue coloniale face à la langue maternelle arabe, la subversion linguistique contamine le discours littéraire qui devient à son tour subversif. D'autre part, contrairement à la langue arabe, langue sacrée qui véhicule l'épistémologie de groupe inhérente à l'Islam (l'arabe est la voix de la *umma*), le français est une langue qui promeut le discours individuel. (*ImagiNation* 4)

Arabic is not only a language fully capable of rendering "individual discourse," it has also been (and continues to be) a politically subversive and transgressive language. Arabic played an integral part in the FLN's struggle against the French (as it did in anti-colonial struggles in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere) and it has recently been an effective tool in combating authoritarian regimes across the arabophone world. To construct dichotomies that invest certain languages with inherent political qualities denied to others reproduces the same essentialist thinking that motivated Arabization policies in Algeria aimed at suppressing French, Tamazight and Algerian Arabic.

An author's choice to write in French or Arabic is a complex one, often determined as much by the author's biography and fluency as by political or ideological concerns. Leïla Sebbar does not speak, read, or write Arabic, and therefore only produces work in French. Maïssa Bey has said that "Je suis incapable d'écrire en arabe, parce que j'ai eu une enfance colonisée, une scolarité entièrement en français. L'arabe nous était enseigné comme langue étrangère, au même titre que l'anglais" (Oumahni 5). The French of Bey's education is the byproduct of a colonized childhood, and Arabic is marked as "foreign" in the same way that English is. Rachid Boudjedra describes his linguistic inheritance as "a form of war and hell. As an Algerian, I did not choose French. It chose me, or rather, imposed itself on me through centuries of blood and tears, and through the painful history of the long colonial night" (Apter 106). Gueydan-Turek argues that

> [d]ans le paysage géopolitique cloisonné du XXIème siècle, la langue française semble être le seul élément à pouvoir passer et faire passer les frontières, et ce grâce à ses origines plurielles—le latin, le grec et même l'arabe—et à la dispersion géographique de ceux qui la pratiquent. (*ImagiNation* 330)

But to invest French with the unique ability to cross borders (and citing its plural ancestry and global proliferation as evidence) seems more like an argument against the global spread of English than an attempt to analyze the place of contemporary Algerian literature in French. Assertions like this often privilege literary production outside of Algeria by exiled or expatriate authors credited with constituting, performing, or

embodying the linguistic complexity of the nation, though I wager that it is their proximity to the various arenas of scholarship, publishing, and criticism in Europe and North America as much as their use of palimpsest or more glaringly postmodern literary aesthetics that has drawn the attention and praise of critics.

Politics and Literature

Bonn has noted that the birth of Algerian literary study in France coincided with the end of the Algerian War for Independence and the events of May 1968, a chronology that invested it with a political and sociological dimension from the moment of its institutional arrival in France ("La réception" 50). The intertwining of politics and literature in the early days of the academic field of Maghrebi literary studies has led Bonn to conclude that simply reading an Algerian text is now thought of as a "politically engaged act" (56). But he sees this marriage of politics and literary study as producing negative and deleterious effects, arguing that

> [s]i l'idéologie est inséparable de la production littéraire, surtout dans le contexte éminemment politique de la décolonisation, dans lequel la littérature maghrébine a vu le jour, on voit donc qu'elle inhibe encore souvent les recherches sur les littératures maghrébines au nom de critères qui n'ont rien à voir avec la littérature. Seule une recherche universitaire sérieuse et coordonnée nous permettra de sortir de cette situation de chercheurs de seconde zone qui est encore souvent la nôtre. (57)

What troubles me about this formulation is the faith that Bonn places in the idea that literary scholars can ever fully detach from the ideological frameworks in which they (or their chosen objects of study) operate. He suggests that only a "serious and coordinated" university research climate can avoid the pitfalls of reading literature through the lens of ideology. But doesn't ideology always haunt literature just as it always haunts the literary scholar? Is not literature, like scholarship, a cultural practice that is at once an effect of its societal and ideological milieu and an effect-producing agent within it? Isn't reading and analyzing this relationship the very stuff of literary scholarship? To suggest that the scholar can assume a disinterested posture of critical analysis free from ideology is suspect. Bonn mentions the centering of Maghrebi literary studies in France without stopping to interrogate the ethical or political consequences of locating the literary study of Algerian literature in the metropole. Biodun Jeyifo speaks of an "arrested decolonization" that "has swung the center of gravity of African literary study away from Africa to Europe and America," which in turn grants scholars in the North and West "power over their African colleagues" (40). Bonn's argument fails to account for what it would mean to attempt a reading of the text solely for its artistic qualities, independent of any sociological, political, or ideological context. Are we to assume that Bonn's training, institutional location, and methodological tools do not bring their own attendant political projects with them? Isn't limiting one's reading to the "literariness" of the text in and of itself a highly political move?

Bensmaïa credits *his* project with "bringing to light the originality of the *literary* strategies deployed by postcolonial Maghrebi writers to reappropriate their national cultural heritage, to regain their idioms, and to reconfigure their history, territory, and community" (*Experimental* 7). While still insisting that the study of Algerian novels as "cultural case studies" has resulted in their being "reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard for what makes them literary works *in and of themselves*" (6), Bensmaïa nevertheless links the "literary strategies" of the author to national, historical, and territorial concerns, a gesture Bonn is not willing to make.

The question of the text's relationship to politics, sociology, history, and scholarship is frequently expressed in studies on Algerian literature as a choice between a "postcolonial" or "postmodern" approach. Gueydan-Turek describes the postcolonial approach to literature as doing three things to the author: (1) it turns him into the voice of the people, (2) it positions him foremost as a critic of the alienation that resulted from the Algerian-French historical encounter, and (3) it forces him into an "oppositional" posture (*ImagiNation* 323). Against this optic, she proposes

> une lecture postmoderne pour rendre compte de la manière dont les auteurs algériens élaborent des espaces utopiques, multiculturels et hybrides, tels des exutoires à la réalité nationale morose et au discours identitaire de l'algérianité que le gouvernement algérien continue à promouvoir. (323)

Such a reading strategy, she argues, will allow her to move beyond the "lecture postcoloniale convenue de cette littérature: au-delà de la seule représentation de l'aliénation de post-colonisé vis-à-vis du passé colonial," which will in turn illuminate "la littérature algérienne par et pour elle-même en dehors de tout cadre analytique francocentriste" (7). Given the central thrust of Gueydan-Turek's argument (explaining how French functions as a post-national language that, more than any other, allows Algerians to write their nation), her final remark about avoiding francocentrism seems odd. She here establishes binary poles: on the one hand, the "postcolonial" (political, oppositional, and unable to break free of the colonial carceral and therefore, francocentric), and on the other, the "postmodern" (multicultural, hybrid, and decentering). In the wake of thinkers like Spivak and Bhabha, who combine sensitivities for postmodern thought and an ethical commitment to the study of postcolonial literature, the construction of such an opposition misses much of what both postcolonial studies and postmodern thinking aim to do. And yet the presence of such an oppositional relationship between these terms is fairly common in Algerian literary studies.

Trudy Agar-Mendousse argues that Algerian literature in French has moved from an initial position of "engagement postcolonial contestataire en relation avec l'ancienne puissance coloniale" into a postmodern phase that leaves little room for political engagement (7). She then defines postcolonial literature with a familiar lexicon (combative, oppositional, political) and does the same for postmodern texts (death of the subject, hybridity, multiplicity) (10). Finally, she announces that

> Nous serons cependant amenés à voir dans cette étude comment une écriture autobiographique de violence qui s'interroge sur l'identité algérienne féminine, violentée par les discours idéologiques dominants, permet de rapprocher les deux courants postcolonial et postmoderne pour autoriser la création d'une nouvelle identité décolonisée. Nous voudrions donc revendiquer ici la portée "politique"—au sens le plus large du terme (à comprendre, pouvoir et luttes de pouvoir)—de cette littérature. (11)

Agar-Mendousse, like Bonn and Gueydan-Turek, misreads what a postcolonial approach to literary study does. Anne Donadey describes postcolonial theory as "not [intended] to replace anticolonial, counterhegemonic discourse, but to point to its ambivalences. Postcolonial theory is an interstitial practice rather than a new theory of the colonial" (xxi). She remarks that

> [t]he mark of the postcolonial, then, is the blurring of neat, dichotomous boundaries […] Postcolonial texts tend to foreground the thickness of the investigator focusing on his or her unavoidable presence in mediating the voices of silenced others and ambivalences at the crossroads between resistance and complicity. It is a literature that must, of necessity, account for its own complicity in structures of domination that are imperialist and patriarchal and that often does so with unflinching honesty […] I contend that postcolonial literature positions itself in a to-and-fro movement

> between the oppositional and the complicit; it foregrounds oppositionality within complicity and complicity within oppositionality. (xxv-vi)

Donadey's definition challenges the caricature of Postcolonial Studies as either a blunt weapon against colonialism or the side effect of a European guilty conscience.[8] Critically, postcolonial literature is conscious of its own complicity with (as well as opposition to) structures of domination. It is reflective and self-critical, as Donadey herself attempts to be throughout her text. She begins her work by locating herself as a "Western woman, French citizen, and recently naturalized American working in US academia," and goes on to identify the attendant risks of this subject position, laying out for the reader the questions that she will use to guide her study of Algerian literary texts:

> Will my work repeat, rather than displace, Orientalist modes of thought and stereotypes? Even if it does not, will some of my audience read this book in a way that may reinforce Orientalist parameters? And finally, isn't

[8] Mireille Rosello notes that in France, "Postcolonial theories […] are under suspicion and the few French academics who choose to make use of them are likely to be seen as 'repentants' [the term is Pascal Bruckner's]. The idea that France can be studied through a postcolonial lens is rejected as a reactionary move that forces the observer to look back, to lose track of the present and to become obsessed with the past. Such a position deliberately but implicitly rejects one common working definition of postcolonial studies, which is the ability and the desire to assume that the present and the past are part and parcel of a narrative" (*Reparative* 8). In a similar vein, Charles Sugnet has written about a 2005 round table discussion featuring Stuart Hall, Achille Mbembe, Jonathan Friedman and Jean-Loup Amselle at the "Africa Remix" exhibit at the Centre Pompidou, in which Hall "remarked that the difference between France and other former imperial powers is France's painfully slow and reluctant adoption of a postcolonial theory and critical thinking about race. Hall wondered how the country that produced Foucault, Deleuze and Bourdieu, and did so much of the intellectual work decentering Europe, could have stopped short when it came to race and colonialism. One sign of this is the slow and late appearance of thinkers like Said and Spivak in French translation" (243-4).

> the radical potential of scholarship written in the "west" always already limited by its location in the centers of power? (Donadey xi)

What Agar-Mendousse, Bonn, and Gueydan-Turek term "postcolonial" is in fact closer to the "anticolonial" literatures of the period immediately preceding and concurrent with national liberation struggles (Fanon, for example). The confusion is useful in staging a confrontation (or temporal shift, in Bonn's case) between the postcolonial and the postmodern, but misreads the terms used.

A Literature of Urgency

Such misreadings come into even sharper focus in discussions of Algerian literary production from the 1990s, when Algeria was engaged in a civil war. Gueydan-Turek rightly points out Bonn's error in denying these works a political quality. She observes that

> [s]elon Bonn, l'éclatement de ces œuvres marque leur refus de s'inscrire dans une dynamique de groupe et sanctionne le passage d'une littérature politiquement engagée qui s'inscrit dans l'affrontement postcolonial, à un mode de représentation postmoderne qui interdit toute prise de position politique. (*ImagiNation* 7)

According to Gueydan-Turek, Bonn misses the decidedly political character of these works and their "traitement thématique de la nation" (7). Beyond simply denying these novels a political relevance, he accuses them of trafficking in a reductive and simplifying documentation of violence in order to get published and sold in European bookstores (*Paysages* 16), and he describes these works as being "beaucoup plus documentaires que littéraires" (17). And on this particular point, Bonn and Gueydan-Turek are in agreement. She argues that

> this [documentary] type of literature runs the risk of reproducing and repeating the traumatic events it first intended to cope with. Through primarily descriptive narratives characterized by their lack of literary quality, such works seem to feed into the obsession of the Western colonial unconscious with the ex-colonized's violence […] this literature could be constructed as commodity, or worse, a pseudo-ethnographical artifact, placing the writer among the perpetrators rather than the victims it initially intended to represent. ("Homeland" 86)

She prefers Djebar's use of "aporia" and "absolute silence" to the narrative descriptions of violence common to many works of the period, without accounting for the fact that Djebar wrote *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* in the US and France, while many so-called "documentary texts" were produced in Algeria during the civil war. According to Gueydan-Turek, "Djebar insists that the summoning of other writers and intellectuals be at the heart of the new literary ethos she sets out to establish: rather that writing 'about'

and 'on' Algeria, one has to write 'near it'" ("Homeland" 88). But isn't it easier to write "near" rather than "on" or "about" something when one is in fact rather distant from it? Might the need to describe and represent the suffering of the nation's people spring from the experience of living through it?

The call made by both Bonn and Gueydan-Turek for silence rather than description is particularly troubling given that Algeria in the 1990s was a place in which people were "disappeared" by government actors, kidnapped by FIS/GIA insurgents, and in which press coverage was greatly restricted, limiting the availability of images and information. Stora writes that

> [l]es disparus de cette guerre sont les symboles de cette opacité. L'Association nationale des familles de disparus et diverses organisations de droits de l'homme algériennes ont avancé, en juillet 2000, un chiffre de plus de 6000 personnes. Disparitions d'acteurs ou de témoins gênants, disparitions des corps, disparitions de la mort: ce vide par effacement des traces d'exaction de la guerre laisse planer une menace permanente et invisible sur les vivants, placés dans l'incapacité de comprendre ce qui est arrivé, ou d'accomplir un travail de deuil. La dissimulation des forfaits accomplis et leur invisibilité favorisent l'impunité des responsables et des coupables. (*La guerre invisible* 112)

Texts that are full of bodies challenge this regime of invisibility. Rachid Mokhtari argues that many of these so-called "documentary" works "ont osé faire la critique du régime qui

a généré la violence et des idéologies qui la portent comme un germe naturel, osé exprimer ce qui était jusque-là impossible à dire: la férocité et la turpitude d'un système, sa corruption et ses alliances occultes à l'origine de la tragédie" (18). These are works that "dare to speak" out of an imposed silence. To argue that Djebar's *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* echoes the imposed silence of the nation or comments on the impossibility of representing horror is an argument with merit. But to claim, as both Bonn and Gueydan-Turek do, that Algerian writers who represent the violence of 1990s through realism lack "literary quality" or "formal innovation" belittles their work. Most troublesome is Bonn's assessment of women writers during this period. He argues that

> [l]'éditeur coll[e] à l'actualité en publiant à tout prix des témoignages dont la qualité littéraire ou la nouveauté ne sont pas son souci premier […] La seule référence est bien le contexte politique duquel le texte est présenté comme le reflet fidèle, à travers un quotidien le moins distancié possible. Et lorsque ce quotidien est celui d'une femme, l'autre volet de ce qu'il faut bien appeler un voyeurisme du lecteur occidental est également au rendez-vous. Or les témoignages de femmes, dans une littérature où elles étaient longtemps très minoritaires, se sont soudain multipliés au contact éditorial de l'horreur algérienne. (*Paysages* 16-17)

For Bonn, testimony is equated with bad literature and women are only published to satisfy a western voyeurism by editors who pander to it. Stora describes a different state of affairs during the 1990s:

> De nombreuses femmes algériennes se sont lancées dans l'aventure de l'écriture, à partir du conflit qui déchire leur pays. Leur apport singulier, dans l'organisation et la perception de cette guerre si particulière, se perçoit par la construction d'un imaginaire du déracinement et de l'exil, de l'engagement/participation politique et humanitaire. Leur récit offre, par le biais de l'autobiographie ou du roman, les moyens de pénétrer plus avant dans la tragédie. Tension entre la femme qui écrit et un monde bouleversé: dans un déluge de sang et de haine, elles semblent porter seules une parole lucide et désespérée. De 1992 à 1999, trente-cinq femmes algériennes ont fait paraitre quarante ouvrages, en langue française, à propos des années infernales. [9] (*La Guerre invisible* 100)

While for Bonn these women can merely "testify" or become the objects of western voyeurism or editorial exploitation, Stora's women are active. They offer a perspective that is their own, and engage publicly and politically.[10] Their entry into the national literary arena is the result not of a western hunger for the double voyeurism of tragic narratives and Algerian women's stories, but rather the expression of a need to cry out in the urgency of narration.

---

[9] For examples, see Abdessemed, Assima, Bakhai, Ben Mansour, Bouadna, Gacemi, Kerouani, Khelladi, Marouane, Mokeddem, and Titah.

[10] In addition to literary figures, Stora describes the public visibility in the 1990s of figures like Salmia Ghezali (editor of *La Nation*), Khalida Messaoudi (international human rights activist), and Louisa Hanoune (head of the Algerian Workers Party and presidential candidate in 2004). Their presence in Stora's text counters the tendency in Europe and in North America to view Algerian women of the period solely through the lens of victimhood.

In the early 2000s, Algeria moved from the more violent stages of its civil war to a state of cold (or lukewarm) conflict. Attacks continued, particularly in Kabylia, but President Abdelaziz Bouteflika made (mostly) good on his promise to bring the war to some kind of end. Repression played a big part in bringing about a relative calm, and the insurgency was chased in large part to the remote regions of the Sahara, where it would reconstitute itself as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This new phase in Algerian history brought its own problems, and the symptoms of aftermath in Algeria persisted, if in slightly altered form. Writers and intellectuals have responded in kind, moving from a literature of urgency to more reflective and subtle indictments of Algeria's structural maladies. New idioms, references, and modes of aesthetic engagement were needed, and a group of authors born after independence emerged as an innovative source of new thinking in the country.

The Ubiquity of the Surreal

On February 22, 2014, Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal announced that Bouteflika would be running for a fourth term in office. He had governed for fifteen years already, and having won reelection (the outcome was *joué d'avance*), may well serve as Algeria's head of state for two decades, assuming he lives that long. The President is 76 and recently suffered a stroke, which required him to spend three months in a French hospital. He has not addressed the Algerian people on television since May 2012, and it's unclear if he is able to walk or speak normally. He did appear on television twice following his

stay at *Les Invalides*, and both instances quickly became fodder for comics and commentators on both sides of the Mediterranean. In his first appearance, Bouteflika was filmed in a meeting with the then-Prime Minister of France, Jean-Marc Ayrault, during a ministerial visit to Algeria in December 2013. Official state television, Canal Algérie, broadcast footage of the meeting that showed a visibly fatigued Bouteflika, but one nevertheless engaged in conversation with his French guest. He is shown gesturing throughout the meeting, to the pensive and attentive nods of Ayrault. But according to the French television show "Le Petit Journal," all was not as it seemed. Bouteflika's multiple hand movements (eight, in total) were apparently the work of some creative editing. Canal Algérie had filmed the meeting with different cameras and looped footage from each of the President's *three* hand movements in an effort to "dynamiser Bouteflika" (Barthès). In his second appearance, the President is shown (and for the first time, *heard*) discussing his candidacy for a total of fifteen seconds. "Le Petit Journal" once again exposed the editing team's *trucage*. In the middle of the phrase "Je dépose le dossier de candidature…," the camera angle switches abruptly and the President is shown inexplicably seated in a new position—two takes were apparently needed to paste together a coherent sentence.

Oranais author and columnist at *Le Quotidien d'Oran* Kamel Daoud said of the President's words:

> Dans les trois phrases, deux étaient proches du langage, une était à la frontière du SMS. […] on est l'unique pays au monde où l'argument d'un candidat n'est pas un programme mais la preuve qu'il est vivant. La seule

> nation qui va se contenter de 37 mots pour élire un homme. C'est la campagne électorale la plus courte du monde. 15 secondes. ("Le Bien Portant Imaginaire")

While there is considerable outrage at the prospect of five more years of the status quo, there is little in the way of shock. Algerians have become accustomed to the absurdity of their country's political theatre. Power in Algeria—*le pouvoir*—is known to reside not in the hands of one man, but rather around the meeting tables of any number of secret rooms. The army, the security services (the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité and the Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale), the ministers, the state oil company (Sonatrach), and any number of mysterious oligarchs all have a place at these tables, and no one is ever sure who exactly is pulling the strings. Unlike Ben Ali's Tunisia, Moubarak's Egypt, or Ghadaffi's Libya, Algeria is not governed by the strong hands of one man, but by the invisible ones of many. Bouteflika's poor health will likely matter little to the continuance of things as they are. While Algeria's literature from the past twenty-five years is often described as stuck in a documentary mode, obsessed with reality, and lacking imagination, the history of this same period is rather a case of too little reality and a surfeit of *surreality*.[11] Starting in 1988, a series of events unfolded that cemented the state-society relationship into one of storyteller and skeptical child, shattering the credibility of the state and normalizing mythology as the regime's genre of choice.

---

[11] From Algiers, on Election Day (April 17, 2014), sociologist Malika Rahal posted on Facebook: "La phrase du jour: 'si le ridicule tuait, il ferait un génocide en Algérie.'"

Between October 7 and 20, 1988, tens of thousands of Algerians took to the streets to express their anger at the failed economic and social policies that typified the post-Boumediene era. James Le Sueur writes that

> as an overall result of the fortnight's unrest, an estimated 500 demonstrators […] had been killed, and thousands were injured and arrested. Asked later about these incidents and the military's use of overwhelming force, General [Khaled] Nezzar made no apologies and later described the shootings as accidental, with untrained men firing randomly at the crowds, sometimes 'in the air,' sometimes 'at the ground.'" (*Between Terror* 35)

Benfodil reads the events of October '88 as the reactivation of a willingness on the part of leaders to bend reality to their will, one that began soon after independence, epitomized in President Ahmed Ben Bella's invocation of "a million and a half martyrs"—a fictitious number he "threw out on the fly," but one that would become "etched into marble" ("Shuhada" 28).[12]

The killing of 500 protesters (and the lies propagated to cover up the crackdown) failed to pacify a restive public, and for a brief moment, it looked like Algeria was headed for genuine multiparty democracy, what Le Sueur calls "the short career of the Algerian *glasnost*" (36). New political parties were formed, press censorship eased, and a liberal constitution was ratified by popular referendum in February 1989. Then, on June

[12] Historians generally put the number of Algerian dead during the National Liberation Struggle at closer to 400,000, most of them civilians.

12, 1990, municipal and regional elections were held. The Front Islamique de Salut (FIS)—one of the newly legalized political parties—won 54 percent of the votes cast, routing the Front National de Libération (FLN), who received only 24 percent of the vote in an election with a participation rate of 65 percent. This fundamentally shifted the political landscape of Algeria, which had up until this point only ever been governed by the FLN. Two rounds of national elections were scheduled for 1991, and to thwart a possible FIS victory at the national level, the state doubled the number of constituencies and changed the rules for second round voting. The FIS organized strikes and began openly talking about violence against the state. The government responded by arresting FIS leaders and creating new intelligence agencies, but these moves served only to radicalize more moderate voters (Le Sueur 48). On December 26, 1991, the FIS won 188 of the 231 contested seats in the National Assembly, compared to the FLN's humiliating 15. The army had had enough. The military forced President Chadli to resign, dissolve parliament, and announce the creation of an executive security council, "whose first action was to nullify the results of the December election and to propose the creation of a five-member Haut Comité d'État (HCE)" (51).

To restore some legitimacy to the government, the military invited Mohammed Boudiaf, a nationalist figure from the colonial era and National Liberation Struggle, to return from Morocco after 27 years of exile to chair the HCE and serve as President. To the surprise of many generals, Boudiaf began a dialogue with Islamists, created a new secular party, and vowed to combat corruption. He was killed by his bodyguard on live television on June 29, 1992, and it is widely suspected that "the assassination was part of

a military conspiracy orchestrated by the very men that Boudiaf had rattled with his unification policies and plan to expose corrupt officers" (60). This act of bait-and-switch was the prelude to Algeria's black decade—the *décennie noire*—in which an ever shifting cast of state and Islamist actors engaged in bloody conflict, often with civilians caught in the middle. It is estimated that some 200,000 Algerians died during the war, but as Benfodil points out, "no one has the list. No one has the names. And no government agency has ever been made to turn over an official report on the casualties" ("Shuhada" 30).

A lasting scar of the black decade is the unknown fate of the estimated 18,000 people abducted by "agents of the state," who remain missing today. Their relatives have formed an association, "S.O.S. Disparus," and a website that features a growing database of those who went missing during the 1990s and early 2000s.[13] When Bouteflika was elected President, in 1999, he promised to bring peace. He also brought Algerians forced forgetting, packaged as two pieces of legislation: in 1999, a "Civil Concord" Law, and in 2005, the "Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation." The first pardoned the minor offenses of Islamic prisoners, and the second provided amnesty for FIS-GIA insurgents and insulated the state security services from any prosecution for their role in the abductions, tortures, and killings of the *décennie noire*. Article 46 of the National Reconciliation charter even goes so far as to threaten punishment against anyone "who writes, speaks, or otherwise acts to use or exploit the wounds of the national tragedy to undermine the institutions of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, to weaken the

[13] www.algerie-disparus.org

state, to damage the agents who have served with dignity, or to tarnish the image of Algeria on the world stage" (Ministère de l'Intérieur).

In the span of twenty years, Algerians were fired upon for marching in the street and repeatedly lied to; they saw their votes canceled and their well-liked leader, assassinated; then, after suffering through a bloody civil war—one in which many of their sons and brothers went missing—were told they could not talk about or seek justice for any of the above. The quick succession of these events and their repetition and reformulation in countless smaller ways served to normalize the absurd in Algeria. The surreal became the banal. And this was not unique to Algeria, but rather indicative of a general shift in the post-Cold War, postmodern geopolitical landscape. Terry Eagleton describes a situation in which "reality itself […] now embraced the non-realist, as capitalist society became increasingly dependent in its everyday operations on myth and fantasy, fictional wealth, exoticism and hyperbole, rhetoric, virtual reality and sheer appearance" (*After Theory* 67).

For our purposes, the critical question now becomes: How do literary works respond to a reality grown increasingly surreal? Mustapha Benfodil provides one answer in a manifesto he penned as a way of saying "no!" to Bouteflika's fourth mandate. To the infirm candidate-President, he writes

> y a pas que vous, Monsieur le Président, qui avez des feuilles et un stylo. Nous aussi, nous, c'est à dire l'autre société civile, celle que vous passez votre temps à insulter, à réprimer, à matraquer, oui, voilà, celle qui est à la solde de l'étranger, etc, etc, on a des feuilles et un stylo, et on va l'écrire,

> notre version, notre récit, et, même si on ne connaît personne au Conseil Constitutionnel (que vous avez privatisé), on sait écrire des trucs comme "L'Algérie est un pays libre," "l'Algérien est un citoyen libre," "On emmerde la police politique," "les flics sont payés pour arrêter les Chakib Khellil[14] et leurs parrains, pas les enseignants grévistes, les familles de disparus, les syndicalistes autonomes, les chômeurs en action, les mutilés du service militaire." ("Manifeste")

The fictive quality of the official state narrative is here personified in Bouteflika, *stylo à la main*, inventing convenient truths that satisfy his political needs and those of his increasingly important coterie of supporters. The "trucs" that this *other* Algeria is capable of writing, above in quotes, are themselves fictions, but they are subversive fictions. Aspirational fictions. Fictions more closely aligned with the vision of independent Algeria authored by the nationalist movements of the 1950s. This symbolic act of reclaiming the national pen and taking back the rights of authorship from the state begins to answer the question of how the literary imaginary might begin to confront the ubiquity of the surreal in contemporary Algeria. Benfodil seems to suggest that negative fantasies and fictions must be met with positive ones, and the specific tools of fiction are the very ones needed for any deconstruction of the dominant narrative.

[14] Former Algerian Minister of Energy and Mines, and head of the state oil conglomerate Sonatrach. He is currently wanted on charges of bribery.

Benfodil's fiction, poetry, and plays, like his activist writing, work less to document the crimes of the Algerian state than to counter them with something productive, aesthetic, and, arguably, beautiful. His *œuvre* marks a departure from the documentary fiction of the 1990s—the so-called *littérature d'urgence*—and plots a creative path deeper into the woods of myth, fable, and fantasy, joining other writers of his generation (what sociologist Malika Rahal has termed "la génération '88"[15]) in a new moment in Algerian letters. Less common in works by these authors are the bloodied victims of the civil war or the hybrid émigrés of more explicitly "cosmopolitan" postcolonial literature. Benfodil, along with Kaouther Adimi, Chawki Amari, Kamel Daoud, Adlène Meddi, and Samir Toumi, largely turns away from realism to more experimental forms of writing freed from the dictates of French publishing houses that often prefer formulaic renderings of terrorism, oppressed women, and identity formation.[16] Each of these authors publishes with Éditions Barzakh, the independent Algerian publishing house that prides itself on placing the literary quality of a work above its marketability or conformity to preordained narratives and styles. This group of Algerian writers resists the tendency in postcolonial literature, diagnosed by Timothy Brennan in 1997, wherein young authors

> have entered a genre of third-world metropolitan fiction whose conventions have given their novels the unfortunate feel of ready-mades.

[15] Rahal used the term in a conversation we had in Algiers in the summer of 2012. As of this writing, she has not yet used it in print.

[16] Benfodil reported to me that when he approached a French publisher with the manuscript of *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, he was told, "It's not *Algerian* enough."

> […] They are unable to enter the scene of letters as innovators in the way, for example, that a talented North American novelist without ethnic baggage might be packaged as the rude boy or girl of a new generation. Their "movement" is based on being rather than doing, and so it is not a movement so much as a retrospective categorization. At the same time, the oppressive persistence of the role the public critic implicitly asks them to fill—and rewards them for filling—constructs a discourse that conditions the novels they set out to write. (*At home* 203-4)

Brennan's focus here is on anglophone writing, but his reading is no less valid in a francophone context. The success in Western journals and bookstores of Assia Djebar or Boualem Sansal—talented writers both—hinges largely on their ability to satisfy a preexisting narrative of what Algerian (and indeed, "Arab World") writing should be and do.

Brennan goes on to articulate a "lack of interest in the explicitly modernist or experimental writing of those who are considered not to be political enough—those who do not fit the injunction that the third-world writer embody politics in a readily consumable form" (207), which may explain the relative obscurity of Adimi, Amari, Daoud, Meddi, and Toumi in French, British, and North American academic and literary circles. Against a preference for hybrid and liminal subjects, cosmopolitan migrants, and identity-conflicted heroes, the *génération '88*—and Benfodil perhaps most of all—leverages fiction to rethink the act of perception, expose social norms as historically

constituted, and denounce false totalities in favor of truer ones. These are not the gestures of prototypical postcolonial literature, but rather those of a modernist one.

But, as Tony Pickney points out in his introduction to Raymond Williams's *Politics of Modernism*, "modernism is the most frustratingly unspecific, the most recalcitrantly unperiodizing, of all the major art-historical 'isms' or concepts" (3). Modernism is a prickly business, and to attach the label "modernist" to twenty-first century writers (particularly those from the Global South), is a move not without risk. But Terry Eagleton reminds us that from its inception, modernism

> mixe[d] together fragments of various national cultures. If the traditional world was now in pieces, if every human identity was now a collage, the modernists would pluck an artistic virtue from that historical necessity, scavenging resourcefully among the rubble of clapped-out ideologies in the manner of Baudelaire's ragpickers to fashion some wondrous new creations. (*After Theory* 69)

Algeria has long been a site of "various national cultures," and for an even longer time, home to many diverse regional cultures as well. And contemporary Algeria is, in many respects, in pieces. This "ragpicker" approach to fashioning new narratives is less surprising than one might suspect, particularly given Algerian writers' heavy investment in realism throughout the last decade of the last century. Comparing recent literary production in Algeria to European writing during the interwar years might invite a skeptical reader to criticize me for placing Algerian writers on a punitive timeline—the

belated heirs to the masterworks of European High Modernism. But such a reproach would miss both the very real ways in which modernism has long been integral to colonial and postcolonial writing and how modernist aesthetics have been creatively and innovatively deployed in contemporary postcolonial contexts.

Neil Lazarus has identified a trend in postcolonial writing toward what he calls "disconsolation" in and through literature, a writing "that resists the accommodationism of what has been canonized as modernism and that does what at least some modernist work has done from the outset: namely, says 'no'; refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticizes" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 31). At a moment in Algerian history when writers find themselves confronted with an oligarchy that in more ways than one resembles the former colonizer, it is perhaps not surprising that modernism would emerge once again as a useful arm in the arsenal of protest aesthetics. Or, for that matter, nationalism. Simon Gikandi has documented the extent to which modernism played a critical role in anticolonial nationalisms, noting that while "[n]ationalism has become a dirty word in some circles, […] for the colonized it was a redemptive project that needed an aesthetic dimension in order to fulfil its mandate" (25), and modernism was that dimension. Anticolonial (or postcolonial) literary nationalism often differs from the black-shirt-wearing European variety in important ways. As Lazarus notes that

> in its appearance in works of literature, anticolonial nationalism is seldom narrow, sectarian, or chauvinistic; it seeks instead to open the community up to the globe. The fostering of nationalism is also the fostering of

> internationalism and transcultural solidaristic affiliation. Nor does anticolonial nationalist literary discourse merely reflect or transmit a pregiven 'national consciousness.' One can see […] a forging of the imaginative currency, the symbolic capital, of national(ist) identification and self-understanding. (64-5)

In the face of discredited versions of Algerian nationalist discourse—namely those propagated by the state and vocal actors within the Islamist political community—authors from the *génération '88* are refusing to surrender the nation to these two oppositional readings. At a recent protest on the Rue Didouche Mourad, in the center of Algiers, Mustapha Benfodil walked through a cordon of police officers and attempted to affix to a bulletin board outside the *fac* central a drawing by his young daughter, Leïla. The picture shows a man wearing a green shirt, with a red mouth and red hands. It is clearly the drawing of a child, but on a white sheet of paper, the red and green cannot help but evoke the Algerian flag. Walking through the *gendarmes,* Benfodil sang the Algerian national anthem and was promptly arrested. Writing about the experience, he remarked that he did this as a way to say to *le pouvoir*, "Arrêtez de jouer avec l'avenir de nos enfants!" ("Manifestation"). The security services in force at the protest ripped the picture out of his hands, threatened, apparently, by the subversive potential of a child's drawing. But the picture was not overtly political. There was no text, no obvious indictment of Bouteflika or the regime, and no real reason it should be destroyed, other than the context in which it was shown. It was representational only in the crudest sense, and demanded of

the viewer a willingness to piece together Benfodil's act, his song, and the drawing itself, interrogating the role of art and patriotic music in the political sphere, and the reaction of the uniformed men and women to the intrusion of these into a tense confrontation between the state and society. The message was clear enough—the future does not belong to you and you don't own our past—but the chosen medium was art.[17]

Modernist Nationalism: *L'Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*

The collision of modernist literary aesthetics and nationalism is on full display in Benfodil's *L'Archéologie du chaos (amoureux).* In this, his third novel (following *Zarta!*, in 2000, and *Les bavardages du Seul,* in 2004, all published by Éditions Barzakh), Benfodil harnesses a dizzying constellation of references, multiple narrative voices, and playful uses of language to construct a labyrinthine narrative that is at once an urban novel, a mystery, a political manifesto, and an aesthetic treatise. The story centers on Yacine Nabolci, a withdrawn, bookish intellectual from a lower middle-class family who attends university to study mathematics, falls in with a group of radical students, wages war on the ruling élite (by trying to impregnate their daughters), enters a life of errant wandering, and eventually falls in love. Throughout, the narrative is interrupted by the commentary of Marwan K., another withdrawn, bookish intellectual, who is in the process of writing Yacine's story, the very one we are reading—also entitled *L'Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*—over the course of one sleepless and drug-addled

[17] In an interesting coda to the day's events, several of those arrested were brought in for questioning, and when asked their names, replied with the names of heroes from the National Liberation Struggle.

night in a squalid Algiers apartment. But we never learn how Yacine's tale ends, as Marwan dies from a drug overdose before he can finish the book. Many threads are left dangling, and the remainder of the novel is told in the voice of an alcoholic police detective, Kamel El Afrite, who must piece together the circumstances of Marwan's death (and life), largely relying on the unfinished manuscript of *L'Archéologie* to fill in the blanks. The text is above all a rumination on the role of the writer in a conflicted society. Much of it takes place in Algiers during the late 1990s, but the civil war never occupies center stage. It is always there, but never gets more than occasional mention. The protagonists in both the inner novel and the frame narrative are trying to figure out what it means to be an artist and intellectual in late twentieth-century Algeria, what it means to engage meaningfully with a nation in turmoil, and how to stage a productive collision of aesthetics and politics.

The text's first two pages prepare the reader for what will be a quasi-Joycean experiment in intertextuality. The novel opens on a teenage Yacine and recounts the moment he "vu pour la première fois l'entrejambes d'une femme" (7). The *femme* in question is his seventeen year-old step-mother, Kheïra, and the event is compared to a journey into "le monde merveilleux d'Alice au pays des caprices," "Le Paradis," and the "Sublime Grotte" (likely a reference to the Grotte de Jeita/Nahr al-Kalb, in Beirut). Yacine compares himself to "Peter Pan," and Kheïra, to "Lolita," and he refers to the whole episode as his "Big Bang personnel." In two pages, the narrator's first encounter with a vagina necessitates the invocation of Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, Vladimir Nabokov, religion, Levantine geology, and astrophysics. As if this weren't enough,

Yacine was reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* prior to glimpsing the semi-clothed Kheïra, excerpts from which flash through his head (and onto the page) as he touches her.

This moment of sexual initiation establishes some of the central tropes in the novel: return, birth, lost innocence, and the problematic and inescapable figure of the mother. None of which is lost on Marwan's fabricated narrator, Yacine, who philosophizes retrospectively on the experience, noting:

> Depuis la nuit des temps, le Monde, sorti du vagin d'une femme, dérivait, comme les plaques tectoniques, vers son paradis originel, le Vagin Primordial, fondant, par là même, la généalogie du Grand Retour. C'est d'ailleurs, tout le sens de l'odyssée homérique et ses relents de nostalgie sentimentale, thème largement repris, de Joyce à Kundera. Ulysse, affranchi enfin de la colère des dieux, délaissant les mondes magiques explorés par ses sens et déjouant les pièges luxurieux de l'intrigante Calypso et ses promesses d'immortalité, retourne à Ithaque pour mourir de sa belle mort dans le vagin de Pénélope, Parangon de la Fidélité, qui était à son échelle sa vérité originelle, gardienne de son matériel amoureux et de leur genèse commune. (23)

In the midst of all this metaphysical wool gathering is an important architecture, one that will structure much of what follows: things were good, then something happened, and things got bad, necessitating a return to the good. Much of Yacine's story is one of recuperating a lost optimism. As a three year-old, he suffocated his infant sister, casuing

his mother to die of "chagrin." He carries an infanticide and a matricide on his conscience, though for much of the novel, refuses to admit feeling much of anything.

Given that Yacine is a child of newly independent Algeria, it is hard not to read into his tale a kind of national allegory: a happy childhood is cut short by an act of inter-familial aggression, one which causes a slow slide into depression, madness, anger, frustration, and spiteful resignation. And Yacine's analysis of the Myth of the Eternal Return finds a voice in the "ragpicker" prose described by Eagleton. Homer, Joyce, and Kundera provide the textual antecedents for what is not merely a national allegory, but a commentary on a more totalizing, "deep" narrative structure of redemption and finding one's way back to a lost Paradise. Williams identifies in the work of the modernists and avant-gardists an emphasis on creativity, a "violent rejection of tradition: the insistence on a clean break with the past" (*Politics of Modernism* 52). The narrative voices of Yacine/Marwan/Benfodil seem less ready to dispense with all previous tradition (philosophical, literary, and theological), but there *is* a rejection of the imposed traditions of the war veteran generation that has ruled Algeria since independence. The novel's referents are global, eclectic, and while at times rather elitist (as above), generally inclusive of local and European, "high" and "low" forms of creative production. (The detective Kamel El Afrite compares himself, in one paragraph, to Humphrey Bogart, Jack Palmer, of the FOX series *24*, and Inspector Tahar, a television character from the 1970s and 80s.) A "clean break" is sought, but not one ignorant of what came before, both in Algeria and elsewhere.

The *Grand Retour* cycle that drives much of the narrative functions primarily through a process of destruction and reconstruction. It is a personal process for Marwan/Yacine, but also operates at the level of politics and aesthetics. Yacine, despite his protestations to the contrary, is haunted by the memory of having killed his sister and his mother. A poem he includes in his narration speaks to the traces left by these and other traumas:

> J'ai commis un infanticide.
>
> Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
>
> Et un matricide malgré moi.
>
> Ma mère de sa mort m'ayant puni.
>
> Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
>
> Mon père me battait comme il respirait.
>
> Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
>
> Ma marâtre Kheïra me martyrisait par ses coquetteries démentielles.
>
> Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
>
> J'ai abusé de Cioran, de Schopenhauer, de Nietzche, de Pessoa, du désespoir, du roman noir, du pain nihiliste, et du théâtre de l'absurde.
>
> Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
>
> Comment s'étonner après cela que ce visage de cire, de cyanure, de sel et de fiel fût mon visage?
>
> Un visage diaphane pavé d'intentions vengeresses.
>
> Un visage d'Adonis à l'expression de Frankenstein. (80-1)

Yacine here describes murders, of which he was the perpetrator; sexual abuse, of which he was the victim; physical abuse suffered at the hands of his authoritarian father; and a kind of intellectual abuse of his own making. Before he can become something other than a misanthropic narcissist, he must own this past, and its conversion into verse is the first step. He's an individual confronted with a difficult and painful past, one that must be reconciled with and overcome before he can plot a course to any kind of future. Yacine's realization evinces an aestheticized, personalized accounting of a repressive history, an allegorical manifestation of a tendency of postcolonial writers to "document" and "trope […] the actions and specific instrumentality of the postcolonial state" to "ensure that a counter-memory of what has happened survives, that, in limited cases, the truth is not buried along with the bodies of those murdered" (Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious* 76). By implicating himself as a perpetrator in the traumas of the past, Yacine complicates any facile *us vs. them* dichotomy (with the Algerian people excused from any wrongdoing and the postcolonial state bearing the sole burden of guilt and responsibility for the crimes of the past). A collective and honest stock taking is what is needed, one not limited to binary narratives of guilt or innocence, but rather grounded in truth and reconciliation (a process denied Algeria in the wake of the *décennie noire* in favor of amnesty/amnesia).

Destruction and escapism take highly personalized forms in the text, and addiction plays an important role at each level of narration. Yacine surrounds himself with

> ces tares de junkies qui ne savaient plus où investir leur fabuleux potentiel d'autodestruction, passant leur temps à rechercher désespérément la suprême extase dans l'extrême défense; dans les 'trips' du kif et de la coke. Le crack, le rock et le crac-crac: tel était leur programme politique. (60)

While he is himself uninterested in such corporeal pleasures, Yacine's would-be revolutionary entourage never seems to do much beyond getting high and exchanging slurred monologues of dorm room philosophy. Marwan, on the other hand, smokes so many joints the night he binge-writes *Archéologie* that he dies from what the coroner identifies as "un arrêt cardiaque provoqué par une overdose" (190). His mother, a professor of English literature at the Université d'Alger, is an alcoholic, as is Kamel El Afrite. Self-defeating intoxication is the side effect of a greater *malaise*, and cuts across the many socioeconomic groups represented in the novel. In each instance, it short circuits a process of generative creation: Yacine's friends are unable to mobilize; Marwan dies before he can complete his novel; his mother has stopped writing; and Kamel estranges his family and ostracizes himself at work. More than a public service announcement about the dangers of using, addiction in the novel reflects one treatment

regimen—albeit a negative one—for the symptoms of contemporary Algeria's normalized surreality. If the world has become unreal, these lives suggest, why not take flight from it?

But the novel offers less destructive palliatives as well. Yacine and his friends try on various revolutionary and artistic hats in their attempt to find a meaningful aesthetic-political mode of engagement in the Algeria of the late 1990s, and each iteration of their new intellectual fraternity gets a name. The first formation is baptized the A.G.I.R., the "Avant-Garde Intellectuelle Révolutionnaire." The ever-skeptical Yacine describes this group as being composed of "pseudo alter-Algériens qui se croyaient différents sans pouffer de rire ni rougir simplement parce qu'ils se tatouaient et écoutaient du métal en tapant nerveusement dans le cuivre de leurs cervelles défoncées aux excitants durs, organe central de la Beat-Generation-bureau-d'Alger" (59). These largely superficial markers of alterity and subversion (tattoos, heavy metal) evolve when the group renames itself G 97, also known as "Cogit-Prop: cogitation et propagande" (65). Yacine finds this second group to be naïve in its desire to "changer le système," attributing it to a biological side-effect of age: "c'est biologique, au même titre que l'apparition de la pomme d'Adam ou l'augmentation de la taille de la prostate…on est fatalement utopiste à un moment ou un autre du développement de notre organisme" (65). But at least the G 97 has a "programme politique," albeit a bizarre one of Yacine's own invention: as a way of exacting revenge of the FLN leadership, the young men of G 97 transform themselves into "tombeurs," seducing and impregnating the daughters of the nomenklatura in the

backs of SUVs parked near the private beaches of the *Club des Pins*—playground to Algeria's ruling élite.

When the revolution by insemination begins to work and the first daughter of the regime becomes pregnant, the G 97 finds itself confronted with an ethical quandary. The "tombeur" in question is in love with his conquest and desperately wants to spare her the humiliation of a pregnancy. It falls to Yacine, with his seemingly limitless, encyclopedic knowledge of all things (including, apparently, medicine), to perform the abortion. The experience returns him to the trauma of killing his sister, Camélia, and prompts Yacine to admit for the first time any feelings of guilt or remorse:

> Je me sentais… j'ai envie de dire… j'ai envie de prononcer le mot, le mot fatidique, le mot qui tue, j'ai envie de dire coupable, oui, coupable, je me sentais coupable. Coupable d'un second infanticide. […] Moralité: les révolutions sont des plantes sauvages foncièrement incompatibles, en définitive, avec nos conditions climatiques. Avec nos sols arides et leurs relents de matérialisme urbain. Les révolutions sont des fleurs chimériques qui ne poussent que dans des zones absurdes: là-haut, très haut, au-delà de la stratosphère, dans les cieux éthérés des utopies. Ou profond, très profond, dans les abysses insondables des océans. Ou de notre inconscient poétique. […] Nous étions tous, peu ou prou, les pères de cet enfant qui aurait pu vivre dans les entrailles de cette gamine. Cette gamine qui avait peut-être le FLN dans ses gènes, mais qui n'avait certainement rien à voir avec les chars d'Octobre, et assurément pas la moindre idée des conditions

> métaphysiques et politiques qui avaient présidé à son destin de mère manquée. […] Je me découvrais une conscience. Une conscience humaine en devenir. (99-101)

Confronting the consequences of the inseminary revolution in material form humanizes Yacine. His revolutionary posturing here meets with the realization that a simple attack on the Establishment will not do, particularly if that attack is aimed at the children of the élite. The failure of the "tombeur" maquis provokes in Yacine the fatalist conclusion that revolutions are ephemeral and exist only as ideas, floating in the extremities of the stratosphere or the depths of the ocean. A terrestrial, material revolution becomes inconceivable, and the dying of the utopian dream pushes Yacine into a violent despair, one that manifests itself in a particularly disturbing passage in which he rapes his friend, Sonia.

Guilt and more self-loathing follow, and Yacine goes into urban hiding for three years, isolating himself, cutting off all contact with his friends, sleeping in public parks, and doing odd jobs to survive. At night, he begins the process of putting himself back together, finding other avenues for his still-unsatisfied desire to say "no" to the regime, make some sort of lasting intervention in society, and find an authorial voice:

> Je sortais déambuler la nuit en bravant tous les couvre-feux. J'avais le sentiment souverain qu'Alger m'appartenait. Armé d'un aérosol, je m'appropriai ainsi tous les murs d'Alger. Les murs d'Alger étaient depuis longtemps un prolongement du champ de bataille. Je réclamais ma part de

> démocratie murale en toute légitimité. […] Je bravais inconsidérément le couvre-feu, l'état d'urgence, l'état de siège, rabbi,[18] zebbi,[19] chkoupi,[20] pour accrocher mes graffitis [...] Toute la ville devenait une imprimerie pour mes dazibaos.[21] (119)

The first of many graffiti images to appear in the novel are the words "Manifeste du Chkoupisme," fragments of which unfold throughout the remaining pages. (The manifesto, in its totality, is discovered online—not without some difficulty—by Kamel El Afrite, who suspects correctly that Marwan has authored a similar manifesto. It is reprinted as an appendix in the final pages of the text.) Having found a language in which to write a new political philosophy—chkoupisme—Yacine reunites with his friends, and the group once again decides on a new name: *les Anartistes.*

The *Anartistes* differ from the A.G.I.R. and the G 97 in important ways: rather than plot an assault on the regime or subscribe to a particular political ideology, they use absurdist mockery as their chosen mode of engagement, "sans dogme ni aucune prétention idéologique si ce n'est celle de foutre la merde avec pour seule arme leur expression artistique et leur esthétique radicale" (133). Rather than document the crimes of the regime, the *Anartistes* embark on errands of folly and fantasy in an attempt to

---

[18] God
[19] A vulgar term for penis, commonly used as an insult.
[20] Literally, a form of algae or moss that is found on rocks on the shore. In colloquial use, it is used to describe anything of poor quality, as in the oft-heard "bled chkoupi," or "shitty country."
[21] From the Chinese, used to denote a tract or commentary authored by an ordinary citizen and displayed in a public place.

"bousiller la syntaxe politique du monde" (133). It is an idea-based form of aesthetic resistance that foregrounds self-consciously the act of creation, the specificity of art forms themselves (graffiti, poetry, theatre), and the pleasures of the aesthetic experience. It is a highly political form of art, intended to provide "un joyeux refuge contre la morosité ambiante" (135).

But neither the *Anartistes* nor their "Manifeste du Chkoupisme" advocates a retreat from society to some transcendental aesthetic realm. The first line of the "Manifeste" reads: "La place naturelle de l'intellectuel est dans l'opposition" (245). The document reappropriates the language of armed struggle and calls for a "guérilla culturelle," that will "prendre linguistiquement le pouvoir et défaire les récits officiels […] occuper esthétiquement le territoire" and "occuper plastiquement, visuellement, la ville" (246). Occupation here becomes the business of art, an act that will serve to liberate the population from the corrupt occupation of *le pouvoir*. And while the "Manifeste" is dogma-free, existing political identities are not wholly absent from it. The *Anartistes* seek to "réactiver le communisme […] récupérer l'Islamisme" and "réanimer le foyer kabyle" (246). To accomplish this, the document champions a collective effort to "casser l'Ordre narratif dominant et provoquer un bouleversement du champ sémantique national […] et casser le logocentrisme ambiant" (249-50). Existing narratives and the whole semantic structure of the nation need changing, and art is identified as the most effective way to achieve a collective, utopian reimagining of Algerian society. What marks this manifesto as modernist is its insistence on the potential of art and aesthetics to

effect change through a rejection of inherited forms, and its proposed literary and visual assault on the concretized narrative order.

Benfodil recently authored a manifesto of his own, the "Manifeste pour une contre-élection," posted on Facebook in February of 2014. In it, he advocates not violence, but "une alternative à la violence qui travaille le corps de la société en profondeur. Les Algériens ne veulent plus de solution coup de poing. Il faut libérer la parole. La parole réparatrice, comme thérapie politique et catharsis sociale" ("Manifeste"). Speech is once again at the center of Benfodil's project, and he invests it with the power to bring about therapeutic, cathartic change. Speech is the antithesis of what the Concorde Civile and Charte de la Paix sought, both projects of silencing speech and policing memory. Benfodil previously attempted to "liberate speech" in an installation he created for the Tenth Annual Sharjah Festival, in the United Arab Emirates. Of it, he writes:

> The central piece is a parody of a football match involving 23 headless mannequins. The T-shirts worn by one team are printed with extracts of my writings (novels, theatre, poetry), whereas the other team contains a hybrid of material taken from Algerian popular culture and other urban signifiers (songs, jokes, popular poetry, recipes, board games, etc.). Of course, my texts (particularly the graffiti) are not terribly "polite." In fact, I refer to the extent of social and political violence that surrounds me. This is what my literature feeds off. It is perhaps a fault of mine to have naively

> believed that life is not polite. And that art is free to be impolite and impertinent. ("Because Art")

The headless mannequins evoke an Algeria where personal agency, autonomy, free speech, and sovereignty are under assault. Thought is policed through what Benfodil identifies as the trinity of the state's ideological apparatuses: "l'école, la mosquée et l'ENTV[22]" (Khelifi), and as a result, the Algerian *joueurs* are only bodies—they can't speak, see, hear, or think. Benfodil's writing meets pop culture texts on a football field, which may suggest something oppositional about the encounter, but I read the confrontation as instead suggestive of a playful meeting. The game requires the presence of both "teams," and their impoliteness (Benfodil's theater, poetry, and novels are all, at times, rather crude), echoes the impoliteness of the "social and political violence" endemic to contemporary Algeria. The exhibit was much criticized, and the curator of the Biennial was fired for allowing Benfodil's work to be shown. Like the police who ripped Leïla's drawing out of Benfodil's hands, these authorities attacked when confronted with the subversive potential of art. But while this work may be "impolite," it is not gratuitous. The *cruauté* of Benfodil's art (as with his writing) aims at "challenging imaginaries, tastes, aesthetic canons, and thought processes" ("Because art"), and it remains very much a nationalist project. Just as Benfodil sang Algeria's national anthem prior to and during his arrest on Rue Didouche Mourad, he closes his *anti-4ème mandat* manifesto with the words: "Je me mets humblement à la disposition des forces populaires qui

[22] The primary television station in Algeria.

désirent écrire un autre destin…Tahya El Djazaïr[23] et gloire aux martyrs de la démocratie!" ("Manifeste"). Benfodil's literary and artistic referents are drawn from around the globe and culled from over two millennia of cultural production, and the author himself has been a journalist in Iraq, a student in the US, and an artist-in-residence in France and Belgium, but his object is always Algeria, where he lives, publishes, and frequently gets arrested. His is an art that fosters nationalism and at the same time, "internationalism and transcultural solidaristic affiliation" (Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious* 64).

One international reference that appears in much of Benfodil's work is the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges.[24] In *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, Borges is quoted as saying "le secret d'un bon conte [est] qu'on 'ne sente pas trop le métier'; que le propre de l'art [est] de cacher l'art. Plus de subtilité, de profondeur, de poésie" (44). This passage appears in Marwan's "Carnet de bord," and voices his anxiety over the future of the novel he's writing and the difficulty he's having trying to "séparer le roman papier du roman conte du roman objet du roman histoire du roman jaquette du roman plaisir du roman marketing du roman écriture du roman érectile du roman projectile du roman verbe du roman marché du roman inconscient (de l'humanité)." Written at 3:45am (the novel gives the time), Marwan is transcribing in free verse the author's material dilemma, and he exposes the weight of anxiety, influence, and the pressures of the literary market that he feels. This is a direct contradiction of Borges: we see here all the joint work and

[23] "Vive l'Algérie"
[24] In Benfodil's play, *Clandestinopolis*, God is a passenger on a railway car and bears a striking resemblance to Borges.

carpentry involved in fashioning a novel that evokes less Versailles than Le Corbusier's *Cité Radieuse*. It is a brutalist writing, one in which the labor of the artist-mason is everywhere in evidence, and it corresponds with Lazarus's observation that "in much postcolonial literature, as is to be expected, intellectual work (not only writing, but cultural production of all kinds) is brought into focus *as work*, with its own—specific and irreducible—modalities and materialities" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 53). This emphasis on the process of work demystifies the art's aura and, without denying it its aesthetic specificity, calls our attention to creation as an active, engaged, and dynamic process. It isn't something that happens in a void. It is difficult, laborious, and always the product of some human hand working in a specific time and place. Benfodil here brings the more experimental and avant-gardist elements of his work into clearer, cultural materialist focus: the many references, word games, and literary cartwheels are not the product of mere genius—Coleridge waking from an opium-laced dream to transcribe "Kubla Khan"—but the agonized and self-conscious project of an individual in society.

Criticism, interpretation, and reading are also shown to be work, and can often lead to faulty conclusions. When Yacine is a university student majoring in mathematics, he is seduced by the idea that the universe is "un mystérieux fouillis de signes, un chaos organisé," and arrives at the conclusion that his vocation in life is to "mettre le monde en equation et d'élaborer l'Algorithme à même de déchiffrer le mystère de l'Univers" (42). Such a project requires a certain lack of humility, and the arrogance of a finalized project of decryption is obvious to all but Yacine. His approach (to isolate himself in a rat-infested room with thousands of books) fails to yield any satisfying results, and it's only

when he leaves the monastery of his dorm room to exist in the world that he makes any progress toward understanding. Kamel El Afrite, in his effort to understand the found manuscript of *L'Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, performs what he calls "l'autopsie des mots au lieu de celle des morts" (183). He calls himself a "tisseur d'hypothèses" (184) and does things like counting the number of times the word "mort" appears in the text (193). He constructs a psychological profile of Marwan, gleaned from both the internal narrative and the "Carnet de bord" commentaries in *L'Archéologie*: "L'Auteur était particulièrement amateur de littérature pessimiste […] L'Auteur était déprimé et mélancolique à temps plein […] L'Auteur souffrait de vide affectif" (196). This is the work of the literary critic, and by creating in Kamel a surrogate for the reader of *his* text, Benfodil is commenting on the act of interpretation and the pitfalls of poor or quick reading. While not exactly "wrong," Kamel's initial conclusions leave something to be desired and tell only part of the story.

To complete the picture, Kamel enlists the help of his friend, a professor of literature at the Université d'Alger. After reading the manuscript, the professor concludes that Marwan "souffrait d'un cycle œdipien inachevé. Ce qui expliquerait d'ailleurs sa rébellion contre la loi du père, acteur symbolique fort dans l'Œdipe lacanien […] le fait de se voir constamment rejeté pourrait avoir décidé de son orientation sexuelle" (205). This interpretation leads Kamel down a *fausse piste* as he searches out the mysterious "IL" of the novel—an unnamed (presumably male) love interest repeatedly mentioned in Marwan's commentary. "IL," it turns out, is an *elle*: Ishtar Lahoud, a cousin of Marwan's who lives in Beirut. The professor's (mis)reading of Marwan's sexuality and Kamel's

many false steps toward a reconstruction of events suggests that reading, too, is tricky, as things are not always what they seem; only slow, careful reading (a meticulous "autopsy of words") allows the text to speak clearly.

Yacine only becomes an *anartiste* after arriving at the other end of his chain of affected revolutionary identities. He has to experience apathy, isolation, and violence before he can assume a meaningful and well-articulated aesthetic posture. Kamel has to read and reread Marwan's text before he can begin to understand its significance. He had to get professional advice, then reject that advice and draw his own conclusions. In each case, progress is not linear, but a game of false starts, missteps, and stumbles. Deconstructing the dominant narrative order in Algeria, the text seems to suggest, is a slow, laborious, and circuitous project.

And perhaps most important, it is one that also requires love. Yacine, like Marwan, concludes the novel with a love interest: Amina. She appears late in his narrative, but transforms the misanthropic introvert into a romantic, a prospect that frightens Yacine. Upon receiving a letter from her, he writes: "Mon corps tremblait, mon cœur manquait d'exploser. Pourquoi les lettres font-elles toujours un tel effet? L'amour est ainsi fait que dans les moments de vérité, il inspire immanquablement une terreur infinie. Décidément, l'amour est un terrorisme. L'amour est pire qu'un attentat!" (170). Love's explosive quality is what makes it an indispensable weapon for the *maquis esthétique*. If it can transform the hardened Yacine, it may begin to tear at the fabric of *le pouvoir* and make space for new forms of collective life. Benfodil owns fully the romanticism and naïveté of his position, and writes: "je suis un citoyen romantique, et

quand je suis en panne de foi, je me dope aux utopéphamines" ("Manifeste"). "Utopéphamines" are Benfodil's drug of choice, and for a society so saturated with disappointment, confronted daily with the absurdist theatre of the regime, why not a little romantic aspiration?

Love was on full display in Benfodil's jail cell following the Didouche protest. One of the men with whom Benfodil shared his detention that day was a "barbu de 60 ans, islamiste impétueux, enfant de la Casbah, qui nous raconte comment, tout petit déjà, il se frottait à la Révolution" ("Manifestation"). The man was arrested for protesting on behalf of an organization that lobbies for the rights of the unemployed. He complained that "honest people" were arrested, while "les supporters de Bouteflika défilent à leur guise, sans être inquiétés." Benfodil and this man should have little to talk about, as they represent two very different strata of Algerian society. Benfodil is of Berber origin, drinks alcohol, and while he self-identifies as a Muslim, supports a secular state model. The bearded Islamist, according to the myth of a polarized (secularist vs. Islamsit) Algeria, should be Benfodil's sworn enemy. But he wasn't, and complained about such divisions, "cultivées par le pouvoir." The man even went so far as to address his jailers, proclaiming: "Nous voulons vous libérer, vous aussi. Même la police coloniale avait pitié des femmes et des enfants. Pourquoi vous ne créez pas un syndicat? Nous allons vous aider à retrouver votre dignité. Révoltez-vous!" This type of cross-class solidarity isn't supposed to exist in Algeria. But in that jail on that day in February, the myth of the fractured public became a little less stable. On the video footage of Benfodil's arrest, the author is shown embracing the very police who were (violently) arresting him. He put his

arm around the first uniformed man who grabbed him, not to resist, but to say "you, too, are my brother, and this nation belongs to both of us."

The era of literary realism and testimonial fiction in Algeria served a specific purpose and, despite what has been said about it, was not as purely documentary as it may appear on first inspection. But this most recent moment in Algerian letters, led by the authors of the *génération '88,* offers a different model of engaged literature. The material realities that continue to haunt Algeria are still front and center, but they are groped at through form, through self-conscious attempts at destabilizing received structures, and through the pleasure effects of art. Reconstituting a modernism *à l'algérienne* is a way of moving from diagnosis to imagination. Williams writes that "it is easy to gather a kind of energy from the rapid disintegration of an old, destructive and frustrating order. But these negative energies can be quickly checked by a sobering second stage, in which what we want to become, rather than what we do not now want to be, remains a so largely unanswered question" (*Politics of Modernism* 105). Algeria today finds itself in this second stage, and authors like Benfodil have found a language in which to articulate a process of becoming that begins to furnish answers.

II. Mnemonic Imperatives

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, the Algerian government was busy preparing for the many ceremonies and celebrations it had organized to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of independence from France. Several weeks of regional and municipal events preceded a culminating *spectacle* that featured 10,000 singing and dancing children, hosted by the Ministère de la jeunesse et des sports, "mettant en avant l'épopée héroïque et les valeurs patriotiques du peuple algérien durant la guerre de libération nationale, en hommage à tous ceux qui ont fait l'Indépendance, mais aussi à sa jeunesse, la force vive de l'Algérie et de son avenir" (Ministère de la jeunesse 5). The official program, widely circulated, promised "des décors grandioses, déployant des moyens techniques, logistiques et pyrotechniques dignes d'une épopée héroïque" (5). And the event did not disappoint. While modest compared to the perennial "public games" of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the opening ceremony was well organized and well attended, and by all accounts, a success.

At another state venue in another part of the capital, a different group of young people prepared for a very different kind of performance. Advanced English students at the Université d'Alger had spent months memorizing and rehearsing Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* which they performed uncut, off-script, and in English at the university's showpiece amphitheater. It was an interesting choice for this particular moment in

Algerian national history. Arguably one of Shakespeare's funniest comedies, *Twelfth Night* lacks the weight of the big tragedies (*Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*), and its political overtones are more opaque than those of the various Richards and Henrys. Harold Bloom called the play "decentered" with "almost no significant action, perhaps because nearly everyone behaves involuntarily" (*Invention* 228). His observation that a "much funnier Nietzsche might have conceived it, since forces somewhat beyond the characters seem to be living their lives for them" (228) begins to answer the question: Why this play, at this time, in this place?

The theatre of modern Algerian politics—sometimes heroic, sometimes tragic—has more than once resembled a comedy of errors, and Algerians often describe public life as a rigged game whose outcome is decided in advance. In such a context, the organizing logic of the epic and the narrative arc of the tragic would seem less appropriate than the chaos of the comedic. Perhaps more surprising than the play itself was the mere fact of its performance. This was the first time students in Algeria had staged Shakespeare in English, and no one present could remember an English-language performance of Shakespeare anywhere in the country—Racine, Bachtarzi, Kateb, Alloula, Smaine, Molière, even Beckett would have made sense, but *Shakespeare*? Beyond the play's bawdy repartee, immodest drinking, and gender bending, the difficulty of the language (in a country where English lags behind Algerian Arabic, Tamazight, Modern Standard Arabic, and French) would seem an insurmountable obstacle, and yet the students delivered their lines in British-inflected accents with clarity and conviction. The "theatre"—a large, modern, and air-conditioned lecture hall—presented challenges

of its own. The students were not allowed to remove the massive Algerian flags that buttressed the stage, nor could they disturb the portrait of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The large table that stretched the length of the dais was also non-negotiable and would have to stay. Undeterred, the players worked around this state furniture, integrating it into their performance and making do with what they had.

Both the play and its staging could serve as apt metaphors for post-millennial Algeria. Young people, indifferent to the state-sponsored Independence Day celebrations scheduled across town, brought an unfamiliar text from an unconventional source (early seventeenth-century England) into one of the nation's primary spaces of higher learning. Framed though their performance was by official décor, the actors ignored, coopted, and moved around these symbols to present something new and different, something seemingly untethered to the dramas of the present, the legacies of French colonialism, and the National Liberation Struggle. Women played male roles (many wearing *hijabs* under plumed hats) and performed romantic scenes together, reversing the Elizabethan tradition of having male actors play women onstage. But to the audience and actors I spoke to, this was all largely unremarkable. The students' mastery of Elizabethan prose was the evening's true *coup de théâtre*, and the considerable effort it required of them was a testimony to the increasingly global (and decidedly un-Francophone) idiom through which Algeria's young are expressing themselves.

A salient feature of aftermath's permanence in Algeria is the constant repetition and redeployment of a singular national narrative, one deeply rooted in the War for Independence and structured around predictable heroes and villains. By skirting that

history and reaching back in time, across the Mediterranean and over France to another literary and historical tradition, these students interrupted the closed-circuit loop of memorial exchange that so often limits itself to France-Algeria, Algeria-France. As McDougall notes:

> Algeria's contemporary history remains overshadowed by the epic armed struggle that, having triumphed with independence, was memorialized as the birth rite of the state but then horribly resurrected, in the 1990s, in a ghastly epilogue that seemingly plunged an irremediably terrorized/terrorist Algerian subject back into the cycle of reprisals. (*History* 50)

While some Algerian authors combat this "overshadowing" by focusing on the specificity of the Algerian present, others introduce alternative histories, memories, and aesthetic traditions as productively disruptive third and fourth terms that work to ease the burden of history on today's Algerians. Recognizing that Algeria's "immanent past is not inherent but on the contrary […] constructed, a cultural artifact" (52), these writers, filmmakers, actors, comedians, historians, and political cartoonists plot paths away from the well-traveled north-south axis of national memory to more promising horizons elsewhere.

There is no shortage of historical memory in Algeria and no shortage of scholarship on Algeria that takes memory as a primary object.[25] The past two decades

[25] See Harbi and Stora, Lorcin, and Stora (*La Gangrène* and *La Mémoire*).

have seen numerous memoirs, novels, and films stage returns to the colonial past and the transition to independence through a distinctly memorial lens.[26] Despite this investment in Algeria's memorial culture, recent fictional returns to the nation's great awakening have often failed to catch the attention of critics, and the literary output of the 1990s and early 2000s has been unfairly described as obsessed with testifying to the horrors of the political present through graphic realism. Such criticism misses the ways in which the past has been used by contemporary authors as an antidote to daily headlines and news reports that numb a fatigued Algerian public, exporting to the world a particularly bloody postcard of life in present-day Algeria. By exploring the present through a messy and contradictory past, these narratives challenge the mythologies of independence that the state works so hard to maintain. Boualem Sansal links Algeria's two wars when he describes a widely shared disappointment with the aftermath of the Revolution and its inability to bring about the lasting change it had promised:

> [L]'Indépendance au vingtième siècle est venue créer une situation inattendue: le paradis tant rêvé ne s'est pas concrétisé, une dictature aveugle s'en est emparé comme le pire des colonisateurs et a fait de ce pays un enfer sur terre. Mais l'ennemi n'est plus l'étranger, il est des nôtres, c'est nous-mêmes. (Abderrezak 340)

The revolutionary dream has been replaced by blind dictators and a hellish existence, and for the new regime to succeed, it must compensate by policing national memory and

---

[26] See Bensmaïa, *Alger*; Bey, *Bleu*; Boudjedra, *Les figuiers* and *Hôtel*; Guemriche; and Sebbar.

public discourse. The failure of the Revolution to sustain the optimism and hope it once inspired and Sansal's comparison of the current leadership to the former colonizer recall Marx's observation in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (5), or Stephen Dedalus's reformulation of this maxim in Joyce's *Ulysses*: "History […] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (28). Familiar forms of oppression (censorship, curfews, wrongful detentions and "disappearances"), the entrenched kleptocracy of one regime after another, and collective hopes repeatedly dashed produced more than a decade of bloodshed during the civil war of the 1990s. The literary tactic of addressing the present through the past not only reminds readers of a time when Algerians worked together to oppose the colonial occupier, it also paints a portrait of French colonial abuse that, in its resemblance to more recent models of state terror, implicates the current leadership.

But trying to understand the "black decade" through the exclusive lenses of colonialism and the war for independence runs the risk of deepening associations—both foreign and domestic—of Algeria with violence. This danger came into full view during the 2013 hostage-taking at the BP oil fields at In Amenas. Nabila Ramdani's article in the *Guardian,* "Algeria Spills More Blood," begins with a sweeping diagnosis of the crisis and its resolution: "Given Algeria's savage history, it is tragic but hardly surprising that the In Amenas hostage standoff would end in a bloodbath." She describes the episode's villain, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, as "the personification of an Algerian narrative that, in living memory, has involved the most destructive colonial conflict in modern history, and a civil war that claimed at least 250,000 lives" (Ramdani). She here draws a clean line

from the War of Independence through the civil war of the 1990s (ignoring, incidentally, the many things that happened in between), and ending at the BP compound on the Libyan border. This narrative sustains for foreign readers an Algeria trapped in a pathology of violence and, as McDougall notes in a much-needed response to Ramdani, ignores the current, specific, and *unique* circumstances that framed the hostage taking: the fall of Gadhafi's regime in Libya and the proliferation of weapons that resulted, French military intervention in Mali, the Global War on Terror ("Algeria's Terrorist Attacks"). An aftermath painted in the colors of violence and perpetual struggle is in this instance maintained both internally—by a state that has, since 1988, relied on a near-constant state of crisis to legitimate its authoritarian control of the population—and externally, through reductive representations of Algeria that read into its national history an ingrained and quasi-biological pathology of violence.

Against such linear readings of national history, artists and scholars have begun looking for more constellational and less restrictive ways of describing contemporary Algeria. A new concept in Maghrebi studies is that of the "transnational" or "postnational" Maghreb.[27] Attention to globalization, nomadism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, emigration, diaspora, exile, "Empire," and "the Multitude" has fueled a markedly less-national approach to the literary and filmic works of North African artists,

[27] Recent dissertations that explore the notion of the post- or transnational in the Algerian and Mediterranean literary context include Tamalet, "Modernity," and Gueydan, *(Post)national ImagiNation.* Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy, in their edited volume, *Transnational French Studies*, ask what it means to speak of "Francophone" (or, by extension, "Maghrebi") literature as a distinct sub-genre, particularly in the wake of recent efforts to rebrand such studies under the rubric: "littérature-monde."

while historians like Julia Clancy-Smith and Nabil Matar have reframed the historic Maghreb as having long been a fluid, dynamic, and multicultural space of exchange. These new cartographies and revised chronologies complicate exclusively regional and national historical lineages, enriching the field by reminding us that the globalized Maghreb is not such a new thing after all. A thick spot on the now web-like fabric of Maghrebi cultural studies is the question of Jewish history in twentieth-century North Africa, and more recently, that of the Shoah.[28] The Maghreb had for centuries been home to important Jewish communities, and during the Second World War, much of North Africa was occupied by the Wehrmacht, entangling the region in devastating ways with the Nazi Holocaust. In addition to drawing these direct historical links, growing bodies of both historical research and fiction have made lateral, comparative moves from North African history to Holocaust memory, suggesting that a shift from empirical historiography toward what Michael Rothberg has termed a "multidirectional" approach enriches studies of the Maghreb and the Holocaust.

Connections between colonialism and the Holocaust have been drawn before. Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* posits that Nazism visited Europe as a "boomerang effect" of colonialism. He notes that Europeans, "before they were [Nazism's] victims, […] [they] were its accomplices […] they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them, […] they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimated it, because,

---

[28] See: *The Journal of North African Studies* 17.5 (2012), a special issue dedicated to the study of "Jews and French Colonialism in Algeria." For cinematic examples, see Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Les Hommes libres*, which tells the story of how the imam of the Grande Mosquée de Paris worked to save Maghrebi Jews during the Nazi occupation. For a literary example, see Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge.*

until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples" (35). Other anti-colonialists (Fanon, Tillon, and Bourdeau) used the Holocaust as what Gilles Manceron termed a "métaphore mobilisatrice" that would "faire appel contre le colonialisme aux mêmes reflexes d'indignation que le nazisme a suscités" (ctd. in Rosello, "Guerre des mémoires" 204). Referring to the Shoah, Rothberg writes that "there is probably no other single event that encapsulates the struggles for recognition that accompany collective memory in such a condensed and global form" (*Multidirectional* 6). Ross Chambers points to the need for some kind of referent to make historical trauma legible, "recognizable to those who have not experienced it […] to provide a semiotic referent for an experience without such a referent," for without it, "there can be no communication" (39). The readership for Maghrebi literature in French is a global one, and the prohibitive cost of books, various flavors of state censorship, and dearth of bookstores in many towns in North Africa make for a reading public often located in Europe or North America. Thus the Holocaust-*qua*-referent grants texts an ease of mobility that more localized referents may not.

But evoking the Holocaust in a comparative register is a move that carries with it a certain amount of risk. Rothberg responds to Yehuda Bauer, Steven Katz, Claude Lanzmann, and Elie Wiesel—all of whom promote, to varying degrees, the incomparable singularity and uniqueness of the Shoah—to argue that the Holocaust is indeed unique and singular, but comparison neither impoverishes its import nor diminishes its significance:

> [W]hile it is essential to understand the specificity of the Nazi genocide (as of all events), separating it off from other histories of collective

> violence—and even from history as such—is intellectually and politically dangerous. The dangers of the uniqueness discourse are that it potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering (which is morally offensive) and removes that suffering from the field of historical agency (which is both morally and intellectually suspect). (8-9)

Rather than bracket the Holocaust from other histories (or History), Rothberg considers how Holocaust memory and other post-war collective memories (namely, decolonization) might be thought together. In place of collective memory as a "zero-sum struggle over scarce resources," Rothberg describes a multidirectional relationship between memories, "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross referencing, and borrowing: as productive and not privative" (2-3). Scientists use a concept first coined by the nineteenth-century philosopher George Henry Lewes called "emergence" to explain what happens when simple agents operating in an environment show complex and unexpected behaviors in proximity to one another (what Lewes called the "co-operation of things of unlike kinds" [413]), creating a totality that exceeds the mere sum of its constituent parts. Memories—collective and individual—seem to work this way, too. The generative entangling of unlikely threads is memory's multidirectionality at work, and recent turns in Algerian fiction to Holocaust memory show a willingness on the part of authors to cooperate with "things of unlike kinds" to undo the tired repetition of the same.

While the previous chapter analyzes the literary production of Mustapha Benfodil and "*la génération '88,*" the present study focuses on two writers who lived through the

war for independence as children, and whose literary returns to that history take important detours through the Holocaust memory. Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* and Maïssa Bey's *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* are novels that express memory's multidirectionality, albeit in different ways and to different ends. In each text, protagonists must return to a painful past and confront the lives and deaths of their fathers. Sansal links the Algerian War for Independence to the Holocaust through the figure of a Nazi war criminal who fled to Algeria, fought with the FLN during the war for independence, and died in the 1990s when his village was attacked by Islamist insurgents. The Nazi Holocaust, the National Liberation Struggle, the plight of immigrants in France's *banlieues*, and the horrors of Algeria's civil war intermingle and overlap in violent and suspect ways in a sprawling text that shuttles between two narrative voices and three continents.

Bey's novella does something quite different. The story unfolds on a train from Paris to Marseille, and the protagonist (a middle-aged Algerian woman, recently arrived in France after fleeing the unrest of the *décennie noire*) finds herself sitting across from a retired French doctor who, we learn, participated in her father's torture, death, and burial during the War for Independence. The word "Holocaust" makes no appearance in Bey's text, but the woman on the train is reading Bernhard Schlink's *Le Liseur* (*The Reader/Der Vorleser*), the story of one German's confrontation with the Nazi past. At various moments in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*, passages from the French translation of Schlink's novel interrupt the narrative and call any reader familiar with *Le Liseur* to draw comparisons. The act of following Michael Berg (Schlink's protagonist)

through *his* various attempts at coming to grips with a difficult past (in German, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung,* or "mastering the past") prompts the woman on the train to confront the man sitting across from her. Without this mitigating third term, it is unlikely any meaningful dialogue would have taken place, and the journey would have been a silent one.

In both novels, characters are called to remember, not by a sense of national duty or some inner longing, but rather by a text: in Sansal's case, the dead Nazi's military service book; in Bey's, Schlink's novel. The act of reading stimulates what I call a "mnemonic imperative," at once a need to remember and a command (*l'impératif*) received unexpectedly from some outside source. These are not state-sanctioned memorial rituals—the plaques and statues common in French and Algerian cities. Nor are they stories that survive in the oral tradition of multigenerational transmission. They are flashes of lightning, jumping off the page and connecting with unsuspecting readers. The act of reading—intimate, personal, and slow—sets the stage for these acts of familial remembrance. Mnemonic imperatives in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* and *Le Village de l'Allemand* (and, for that matter, *The Reader*) surprise and awaken dormant, unsatisfied desires to know and understand missing, absent, or dead fathers. The fathers in these texts are very different from one another (a Nazi war-criminal-turned-war-hero, a murdered Algerian school teacher, and an aloof and emotionally distant German philosopher), and yet the holes created by their absence animate the discovery quests that structure all three narratives.

Both Bey and Sansal reference the Holocaust (implicitly, in the case of the former, and very explicitly, in the latter) to comment on Algeria's two wars, but the multidirectionality of their work doesn't stop at the level of history. Both narratives use literature as a prod to unsettle the sedimentation of the present, and their appeals to other literatures constitute a second front in the authors' respective wars on cliché. In *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…,* the inclusion of Schlink's text testifies to the power of reading as not only a personal palliative, but also a mode of resistance against imposed and inherited memorial and literary frameworks. Sansal brings outside literary traditions into his novel in less overt ways. Various texts make appearances in *Le Village de l'Allemand* (primarily Holocaust histories and survivor testimonies), but it is the similarities between Sansal's narrative and an unlikely literary antecedent, Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* that are most telling. In what follows, I analyze how Sansal, Bey, and Schlink (invited by virtue of his presence in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*) all leverage not only alternative *histories,* but alternative *literary* traditions to unsettle stale memorial structures, cultivate "emergence" from the collision of disparate texts, and respond to the various mnemonic imperatives that confront them.

Framing Guilt

Le Village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller is a journal within a journal. The frame narrative is that of Malek Ulrich Schiller ("Malrich"), and within it, we read selections from the diary of his recently-deceased brother, Rachid Helmut ("Rachel").

Born in the Algerian village of Aïn Deb to Aïcha (a Berber Algerian) and Hans Schiller (a German who relocated to Algeria after the Second World War and trained FLN resistance fighters), both brothers emigrated to France before they were ten. While Rachel became a model of integration and married a French woman, Ophélie, Malrich languished in the stagnation and poverty of France's *banlieues.* In April of 1994, Aïcha and Hans were killed when Aïn Deb was attacked by members of the Islamic insurgency. Rachel travels to Algeria to visit his parents' grave and while rummaging around their bedroom, discovers a hidden box filled with newspaper clippings, medals, photographs, records of Hans's exploits with the *maquis*, and a worn booklet—his father's military record from his time as a chemical engineer and officer in the SS. The discovery of this *carnet* sets Rachel off on a year-long investigation into his father's past, one that costs him his job, his marriage to Ophélie, and ultimately his life. The magnitude of his father's crimes (as a chemist stationed at various Nazi concentration camps) leads Rachel to kill himself in his garage by inhaling exhaust gas, and his journal is delivered to Malrich via a local police official, Commissaire Lepère ("Com'Dad"). After reading it, Malrich writes his own journal and begins his own investigation.

Hans's military record and Rachel's diary become maps to be read, each with specific geographic and historical trajectories, issuing particular mnemonic imperatives to the reader. The two first-person narratives become what Mireille Rosello has termed "lieux de mémoire mélangée," transforming Rachel and Malrich—composite sobriquets both—into "porteurs d'une mémoire plurielle, hybride, à la fois nationale et internationale" ("Guerre des mémoires" 196). The novel links the Second World War to

the National Liberation Struggle through Hans, but to uncover their father's secrets, the brothers must travel to Germany, Poland, Egypt, and Turkey, expanding their memorial cartography beyond the limits of mere ancestry to reflect the complexity and transnationality of post-war history. And while the novel is punctuated throughout with place names, dates, and historical detail, the story of the Schiller brothers is a peculiar one.

The jacket of the book's English translation—*The German Mujahid*—describes the novel as "groundbreaking," announcing that "for the first time an Arab author directly addresses the moral implications of the Holocaust." Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961* was published in 1999, almost a decade before *Le Village de l'Allemand*, and has much to say about the unresolved "moral implications of the Holocaust" in France. Sebbar uses Maurice Papon (a high-ranking police official who served in Bordeaux, during the Nazi occupation; in Algeria, during the war for independence; and again in Paris, during the October 1961 massacre of Algerian protesters) to trace a lineage of repression, murder, and collective forgetting in France and Algeria, and it is unclear why the editors at Europa Editions would choose to ignore Sebbar's well-known text, nor do they explain what qualifies *Le Village de l'Allemand* as "an Arab novel." Unlike Sebbar, Sansal does not center his story on a particular historical figure or event, but opts instead for an extreme expression of multidirectional memory, fabricating a situation in which the most abhorrent type of Nazi war criminal (one of the chemists behind Zyklon B) becomes a hero of the Algerian revolution *and* dies at the hands of Islamist insurgents.

Commenting on the singularity of the novel's premise, Rosello remarks that "c'est parce que leur histoire est unique qu'elle peut servir de paradigme représentatif de l'unicité de toute mémoire même au sein de l'espace discursif qui privilégie l'idée selon laquelle l'appartenance à une communauté va de pair avec l'héritage d'une histoire en particulier" ("Guerre des mémoires" 208).[29] Rather than undermine the force of Sansal's narrative, the uniqueness of the Schiller brothers' story functions as a critique of any logic that would require the text to adhere either to an empirical reading of history or to one particular cultural, historical, or literary tradition. Their lives suggest that within any collective memory space—even those heavily traveled, like memories of the Holocaust or Algeria's National Liberation Struggle—there is considerable variety, slippage, and negotiation at work.

Disjointed memory in *Le Village de l'Allemand* does more than simply compare alternative histories or point to what they share; it draws a clear parallel between Nazism and Islamic fundamentalism (in both Algeria and France). Unnerved by this particular equation, Rosello observes that

> [l]e geste qui consiste à comparer les conditions des banlieues françaises aux camps nazis est aussi provocateur d'un point de vue quantitatif que d'un point de vue qualitatif. Le parallèle risque d'aliéner et ceux qui

[29] Discussing his inspiration for the novel, Sansal points to a specific moment when fragments of a story about a Nazi hiding in Algeria came to him while on a trip into the Algerian countryside: "*Le Village de l'Allemand* est un roman qui s'est clairement imposé à moi. Un jour, ce village s'est mis sur mon chemin et m'a soufflé les premiers mots d'une histoire dont je ne savais rien, qui est venue à moi peu à peu, à travers des lectures faites au hasard" (Abderrezak 344). And while Sansal may have loosely adopted the premise for the novel from this encounter, he clearly departed early and often into the realm of fiction when constructing the text's plot and characters.

> redoutent l'islamophobie et ceux qui souffriront de voir la mémoire de la Shoah galvaudée au profit d'une prise de position politique sans rapport avec le génocide. Et même si l'on prend soin de distinguer le point de vue de l'auteur de celui d'un protagoniste qu'il présente comme un homme jeune et peu instruit, le parallèle est non seulement inattendu mais stupéfiant. (200)

Tarnishing the legacy of the War for Independence by turning one of its heroes, however fictional, into a Nazi war criminal is a risky move, as is comparing the rise of Nazism in Europe to violent manifestations of Islam in French housing projects.[30] Whereas Césaire compared colonialism to Nazism to show Europeans that the logic and methods of the Third Reich were not so dissimilar from those that inspired Europe's colonial adventures, Sansal has cast Europeans (and docile, "moderate," and "integrated" immigrants) as victims. The text warns against the impending arrival of violent Islamic extremism in Europe, and for public intellectuals like Pascal Bruckner (who deny that European Islamophobia even exists), such reasoning no doubt meets with a certain degree of self-congratulatory relief. If handwringing over the destruction of the *pax Europa* by radical Islamists is happening "within the community," the story goes, surely such fears are justified and the worrier, innocent of any racism.[31]

---

[30] Sansal remarks that the text "a enragé les milieux nationalistes et islamistes en Algérie. Les insultes et les menaces de mort m'ont poursuivi tout le long de 2008 et 2009" (Abderrezak 343).

[31] See Bruckner.

One of the novel's problems is its constant blurring of the line that separates victims and perpetrators. Dominick LaCapra writes that

> the after effects—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone. But the indiscriminate generalization of the category of survivor and the overall conflation of history or culture with trauma, as well as the near fixation on enacting or acting out post-traumatic symptoms, have the effect of obscuring crucial historical distinctions; they may, as well, block processes that counteract trauma and its symptomatic after effects but which do not obliterate their force and insistence—notably, processes of working through, including those conveyed in institutions and practices that limit excess and mitigate trauma. (LaCapra xi)

LaCapra echoes Rothberg's assertion that traumatic memory is not owned by any one constituency, but contaminates other groups in unpredictable ways. His insistence on the need to apply a certain historical rigor to the categories of "survivor" and "perpetrator," however, challenges moments in *Le Village de l'Allemand* when these categories coexist in the same person. Few characters in the novel fit neatly into one category. Malrich is victimized by his parents' murder and his brother's suicide, but he channels his mourning into rage and vows to kill the local imam, whom he blames for infecting his neighborhood. Hans Schiller is at once the perpetrator of genocide and the victim of mass and indiscriminate violence when he and Aïcha have their throats slit in Aïn Deb. The

residents of Malrich's *banlieue* are both victims of the encroaching Islamist threat and the incubators of it. And Rachel, haunted by the discovery of his father's crimes, confuses his own victimization (losing his parents, learning that his father was not the man he thought he was) with the victims of the Shoah, so much so that he feels compelled to act out their trauma in his suicide, becoming both the gasser and the gassed.

The problem with Rachel is not that he sympathizes with the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, but rather his insistence that he is not only "une victime," but "*la* victime" (22, emphasis mine). Lucy Brisley notes that "Rachel lays claim to the 'truth' of the Holocaust, problematically investing himself with the authority to witness and testify on behalf of the victims of the extermination camps" (66), and Rachel's misreading of his own responsibility to the memory of the Holocaust's victims (or his father's legacy) undermines any genuine empathy and results in "self-referential melancholic meanderings" and a "narcissistic attachment" to Hans Schiller that is of little use to anyone (62). He reduces the Holocaust to a family affair and is unable to find any perspective. On his return to France from an investigative trip to Germany, Rachel writes in his journal:

> [J]'y pensais sans cesse. *Je suis le fils de mon père*… Je me le répétais au rythme monotone du roulement jusqu'à m'étourdir, jusqu'à m'anéantir, jusqu'à m'endormir. Je crois l'avoir dit tout haut, peut-être même crié. J'étais entre deux cauchemars, deux spasmes, deux envies, mourir sur cette banquette ou plus tard. (113-4)

The repetition of this filial guilt mantra leads Rachel to thoughts of suicide, thoughts that linger in the wings of his narrative throughout the text. The fact of *being Hans Schiller's son* obscures any other lens through which the Shoah (or, for that matter, contemporary Algerian history) might be read, and Hans becomes the cause of humanity's suffering, and Rachel, its redemptive cure ("je fais face à l'holocauste, une affaire à damner Dieu lui-même, pour de bon, et mon père en est l'artisan" [56]). As Rosello notes, this reduction of world history to a family drama prevents historical or structural considerations from entering into Rachel's field of vision: "en parlant de 'fils' et de 'pères,' on évite de parler d'état ou de responsabilité collective" (203). And here, Rachel is not alone. Malrich selects the local imam as the object of his hate, largely ignoring any role the French state might have played in creating a marginalized, ignored, and oppressed caste on the outskirts of its cities. When a young girl, Nadia, is found dead—"agressée par un barbu" (72)—Malrich promises to "couper le sifflet à ce SS qui veut transformer notre cité en camp d'extermination" (73). Historical frames are there, but they are the wrong ones. The Global War on Terror gets a pass, as do colonialism and the recent Chiraciste and Sarkoziste policies that foment anger in the *banlieues.*

Guilt, innocence, atonement, reparation, and peace are individual projects in the novel, and it would seem that on this point, the gulf between the text and the author is not a wide one. Following his controversial visit to Jerusalem in May 2012, Sansal remarked that

> peace is above all a human affair, too serious to be left in the hands of governments or, even less, political parties. They talk about territories,

> security, money, conditions, guarantees. They sign papers, conduct ceremonies, hoist flags, prepare Plan Bs. Humanity does none of that—they do what humans do, go to cafés, to restaurants, sit around the fire, gather in stadiums, meet one another in festivals, on a beach, and share happy moments, mingling their emotions and, in the end, promising to see one another again. ("I Went to Jerusalem" 18)

Sansal's mistrust of governments, institutions, and collective action displaces political reform from the parliamentary chamber and the public square to the world of middle-class leisure (cafés and beaches). But LaCapra warns against using privatized rituals as a form of engagement, arguing that "any politics limited to witnessing, memory, mourning dead victims, and honoring survivorship would constitute an excessively limited horizon of action" (*History and Memory* 198), and while Sansal's text succeeds in constructing ambiguous lineages of guilt and victimhood, Malrich's refusal to extend this ambiguity to the local and national forces at work in the *cité* limits his actionable horizon to vendetta.

Subsequent comments by Sansal suggest that perhaps in light of events in North Africa and Syria, he's come to see the role of the intellectual somewhat differently. In an interview with the Belgian online magazine *Le Vif*, discussing his most recent novel, Sansal argues that

> lorsqu'on est confronté à une question aussi menaçante que l'islamisation, on doit se comporter en militant. Écrire ne suffit pas pour faire avances les choses. Ce livre [*Gouverner au nom d'Allah*] vise à dépasser le simple

> discours politique pour examiner les mécanismes profonds. J'espère vivement qu'il provoquera un vrai débat" (Elkaïm).

The *militant* has replaced the café peacemaker, and Sansal recognizes that writing alone isn't enough. With the Israeli writer David Grossman, Sansal created an organization called "Écrivains pour la paix." Their founding document, the "Appel de Strasbourg," was published in October 2012 and addresses itself to a range of geopolitical crises.[32] Beginning with a brief gloss of the bloody twentieth century—the two world wars, European nationalism, the Shoah, Yalta, the fall of the Berlin wall—the manifesto then turns to a more contemporary suite of concerns: pollution, climate change, nuclear arms, poverty, illness, and terrorism. It is on this last point that the document makes its most full-throated *appel*:

> L'évolution de certains pays fait craindre le pire. Le fondamentalisme barbare, ancré dans l'Afghanistan des Talibans, n'a cessé de s'étendre et de provoquer en contrecoup des états de quasi guerre dans le reste du monde. Les points de tension se multiplient, en Afrique notamment, et les poches d'islamisme radical qui se développent dans maints pays arabes et musulmans, et jusque dans les pays démocratiques les plus éloignés de l'épicentre, menacent de s'étendre à la planète dans son ensemble. D'ores et déjà, des valeurs essentielles telles que la liberté d'expression et de

[32] Over 150 authors have signed the manifesto, including Pascal Bruckner, Michel Le Bris, and Abdelwahab Meddeb. For a critique of the manifesto's many problems, see Guemriche, "Rassemblement."

> conscience sont en péril. Face à cela, la communauté internationale reste incroyablement inefficace. L'Amérique et l'Europe tergiversent, la Russie et la Chine pratiquent le blocage, paralysant ainsi l'action des Nations-Unies. (Grossman et al)

Fundamentalism is "barbarous," the US and Europe, "hesitant," and China and Russia, "paralyzing." It is hard to see how drone strikes, targeted assassinations, SEAL team incursions, and the occupation of two Muslim-majority countries by coalition forces qualify as "hesitant" behavior, and the document here reads more like a hawkish neoconservative call for increased intervention than a call for peace from two writers. Against barbarism, hesitancy, and paralysis, Sansal and Grossman declare that "[l]es écrivains ont leur part dans ce combat et nous exprimons ici notre détermination à l'assumer avec fermeté et objectivité." Writers are called to this "combat" with resolve and "objectivity," though it appears that objectivity here means conformity to Sansal and Grossman's particular reading of the current state of world affairs, with "Islamisation" playing the role of the villain and "les droits humains, la démocratie, et la culture"—ambiguous, neutral, and uninterrogated—the saviors.

When *Le Vif*'s Kerenn Elkaïm asked Sansal if he thought a "nouveau vivre ensemble" was possible, he answered by asserting that "Je ne crois pas à la démocratie dans le monde arabo-musulman. Elle ne verra le jour que lorsque les intellectuels se mobiliseront massivement ou travailleront ensemble pour transformer la société et les partis politiques." Clearly democracy here is the allegedly neat, mature, and polite Euro-

American variety, and not the messy, complex business unfolding in Tunisia and Egypt. Sansal seems to forget conveniently the more unsavory moments of Euro-American democracies past (the French revolutions of the nineteenth century, the American Civil War, the election of Hitler in Germany), and he places an unjustified faith in the purity and unquestioned goodness of "human rights, democracy, and culture" (each of which, it should be mentioned, has played its own part in justifying the oppression of entire populations in the last century). But the shift from the beach-café approach to peace that Sansal first championed upon returning from Jerusalem to this decidedly more interventionist tone is telling. Militancy and engagement are necessary, but, critically, only in the hands of intellectuals. It is up to them to transform "society" and "political parties," business too serious, perhaps, to be left to the angry mob.

Curiously, in *Le Village de l'Allemand* it is not the intellectual Rachel who turns to writing as a form of militancy, but rather his unschooled brother, Malrich, and this, only after working through various revenge fantasies. And like Sansal, Malrich invests heavily in the ideals of the very Republic that colonized his ancestors and oppresses his neighborhood. But before he can arrive at a place of civic engagement, he must first follow Rachel through his process of discovery and doomed attempts at responding to the mnemonic imperative that Hans's journal imposes.

Not long after discovering the truth about his father's past, Rachel describes himself as "partout et nulle part […] Je cherchais mon père et personne ne pouvait m'aider. J'étais un enfant perdu" (60-1). Lost, not because his father is dead, but because the image of the man he thought he knew no longer exists unmolested in his memory. Hans Schiller has become two men: Hassan Hans dit Si Mourad, the loving father and FLN hero who sent his sons to live a better life in France, and Hans Schiller, the Nazi war criminal. The second usurped and killed the first when the son opened the hidden box in his parents' bedroom, relegating Rachel to the status of quasi-bastard and throwing him into a psychic tailspin that ends with his suicide. From this initial moment of discovery, *Le Village de l'Allemand* becomes a kind of *Hamlet* meme: ambiguous paternity, a scandal, stalled revenge, suicide, abandonment, inaction, the redemption of the family name, the need for a *chroniqueur* to share the tale with the world, even Rachel's wife, Ophélie, all harken back to the tragedy of the Danish prince. Whereas Sansal's very literal linkage of contemporary Algerian history to the Holocaust—innovative and certainly provocative—ultimately deflates the potency of memory's multidirectionality, the text's more subtle redeployment of *Hamlet* calls us to consider the payoffs not only of alternative historical frames, but alternative *literary* ones as well.

Margaret Litvin, in *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, locates the central concern of Shakespeare's tragedy as "the problem of historical agency." Hamlet "asks what it means 'to be' in a world where 'the time is out of joint' and one's very existence as a historical

actor is threatened. He thus encapsulates a debate coeval with and largely constitutive of modern Arab identity: the problem of self-determination and authenticity" (2). For Litvin, "Hamlet comes to represent a group: the Arab and/or Muslim community" (9). Time in Sansal's Algeria or in a Parisian *banlieue* is in many ways "out of joint." As spaces that inhabit the temporality of failed revolutions past—both French and Algerian—Aïn Deb and the *cité* exist in the decayed ruins of idealism. Another Schiller, the German ethical philosopher Freidrich Schiller (1759-1805), looked upon the French Revolution with a mix of emotions. He respected its underlying ideals, but feared the methods being used to translate those ideals into practice. In the fifth letter of his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller writes that

> I no longer recall which of the ancient or modern philosophers it was who remarked that the nobler a thing is, the more repulsive it is when it decays; but we shall find that this is no less true in the moral sphere. The child of Nature, when he breaks loose, turns into a madman; the creature of Civilization into a knave. (27)

The legacies of both the French and Algerian Revolutions share a mix of madness and knavery. Noble at the outset, vice quickly replaced virtue and the distance between the idea and the reality grew, and this fraught relationship between revolutionary pasts and unpalatable presents is mapped in the novel onto the Schiller family.

Questions of paternity and generational transition are central to both *Le Village de l'Allemand* and *Hamlet.* As the Shakespearean scholar Margreta de Grazia has noted, "in

a patrilineal system, climactic events tend to occur at the generational turning points" (85). Hamlet is thirty years old when his father dies, and Rachel is thirty-one when he learns of his father's death. And when the action of Sansal's novel begins, in 1994, independent Algeria is thirty-two. Shakespeare begins many of his tragedies at the end of a generational cycle to dramatize "the devolution from one generation to the next," and in Hamlet, "the older generation is clearly failing" (85). Since Malrich and Rachel are both sons of the Algerian Revolution, we might include the post-revolutionary state in the cast of failed fathers. And since both grew up in Paris, the République is yet another father that didn't live up to his promise. Hans, the FLN, and the Fifth Republic are all bad fathers, and Malrich and Rachel must therefore confront the existential quandary of being fatherless—without a *père* or a reliable *patrie*—and are forced to find alternative ways of claiming the rights of sons and citizens.

Le Village de l'Allemand and *Hamlet* also ambiguate the very notion of patrilineage and, by extension, historical memories mediated through it. James Joyce, another author interested in the tragedy of the Danish Prince, presents in the Scylla and Charybdis chapter of *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus' *Hamlet*-inspired theory of paternity:

> Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten. On that mystery and not on the Madonna which the cunning Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe the church is founded and founded irremovably because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood. *Amor*

> *matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son? (170)

Stephen contrasts the biological certainty of motherhood with the ambiguous relationship (before the days of DNA testing) of fathers to their children—a somewhat dark view of the family that leads Stephen to declare that "a father […] is a necessary evil" (170). Evil, because a son must inherit his father's legacy for better or worse, without knowing if he is the legitimate heir. Accepting the broad strokes of Stephen's reading of *Hamlet*, Harold Bloom asks "Whose son was Hamlet? How far back in time did Gertrude's 'incest' and 'adultery' begin? Since the play refuses to say […] neither we nor Hamlet knows" (*Invention* 418). There is no question of biological paternity in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, but the man that Rachel once knew to be his father no longer exists, even in his memory, and Rachel must meet the usurper who killed that memory, a prospect that fills him with a profound fear: "J'ai tellement peur de rencontrer mon père où il ne faut pas, où pas un homme ne peut se tenir et rester un homme. Ma propre humanité était en jeu" (57). Malrich is even more explicit in his bifurcation of Hans Schiller, distinguishing between the *papa* of Aïn Deb and the *exterminateur* of the camps: "Papa, maman et nos voisins en étaient les victimes, mais c'est aussi à ce moment que Hans Schiller le SS, l'exterminateur, l'usurpateur, a fini sa vie" (198).

The question Malrich asks of his dead brother, "Qui es-tu, qui est notre père?" extends identitarian ambiguity from Hans to Rachel. If the father is not the man we

thought he was, what does it mean for the son? In the library scene in *Ulysses,* the only thing on which Stephen and John Eglinton agree is Shakespeare's dual roles in the play. He is both the father and the son: "He is the ghost and the prince. He is all in all. —He is, Stephen said. The boy of act one is the mature man of act five. All in all" (174). Stephen's realization that the son is also the father prompts him to remark that "Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves" (175). And Rachel, having come to a similar conclusion, not only assumes responsibility for his father's crimes, but begins to identify with him and increasingly suffers under the weight of this freighted mimetic substitution.

In Cairo, Rachel recruits three English women to pose with him in a photo that becomes the "réplique exacte" (248) of one he found among his late father's belongings. He occupies the same place in the photo that his father did, in what Brisley calls a "haunting reenactment of his father's history" that "almost becomes reality as the temporal and ontological frontiers between past and present, father and son, are gradually erased" (63). Rachel's true fear is that he is not only responsible for his father's sins, but that he might have within him the same capacity for cruelty—the fear that in meeting his true father, he has met his true self.

Describing the similarities between the "Dionysian man" and Hamlet, Nietzsche writes that

> both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change

> anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right the world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer who reflects too much and, as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action. Not reflection, no—true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man. (59-60)

Nietzsche might as well be describing the similarities between Rachel and Hamlet, though the two differ in an important way: while Hamlet grasps his own impotence and the humiliation he suffers at being asked to "set right the world," Rachel accepts this charge with a relative lack of self-critical clarity. In his final words to Malrich, Rachel writes that "si *rien enfin de ce que l'homme a le pouvoir de faire ne pourra plus jamais réparer,* on peut au moins s'obliger à cela: payer, payer sans faute […] ma mort ne répare rien, elle est un geste d'amour" (263-4, emphasis in the original). Payment implies an exchange, and a gesture of love needs an audience, but Hans's victims are all dead or dying, and it's not clear that any of them has asked that this particular debt be paid in this particular way. It is hard to imagine the survivors of the Shoah reading Rachel's suicide—imitative and grotesque—as a love letter. Whereas at the end of *Hamlet*, "a transcendental splendor seems to break outward from the eminence up to which the soldiers carry Hamlet's body" (Bloom, *Invention* 392), Rachel exits the novel's stage

alone, in a garage. Fortinbras closes *Hamlet* by noting that "such a sight as this/Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss" (V.ii.402—3); it is hard to say where the sight of a self-slain Rachel—the striped pajamas, the shaved head—would *not* "show amiss."

To be fair, few protagonists stack up well against Hamlet, but Rachel's absence of awareness and self-knowledge, borne out by the comparison, helps us understand why his story ends in such an undignified way. In one of his tirades, he asks:

> Mais le fils, que peut-il, sinon compter les crimes de son père et traîner le boulet sa vie durant? J'en veux à mon père, j'en veux à ce pays, à ce système qui l'a fait ainsi, j'en veux à l'humanité, j'en veux à la terre entière, j'en veux à ces illustres personnages qui ont froidement rendu compte de ce qu'a fait mon père. (244)

The objects of Rachel's hate multiply and no one escapes innocent, but it is the "que peut-il?" of the sentence that gives away Rachel's blindness. Never does he stop to consider any material form of reparation or the possibility of living a just life, of giving back, of forsaking his wealth-accumulating ambitions for some higher calling or loving more fully his family, his neighbors, or his community. When, in an angry address to his dead father, Rachel declares "Je dois assumer à ta place, je vais payer pour toi, papa!" (244), he leaves considerable ambiguity as to why he "must" assume his father's place, and how, exactly, he thinks he can "pay for" his father's sins. Who gets paid? What is purchased? Forgiveness? Absolution? How exactly does Rachel's death clear the ledgers?

If Rachel lacks Hamlet's ability to recognize the futility of remaking a world grown rotten, he nevertheless shares the Danish prince's need for a scribe and publicist. In his final remarks, Rachel writes that "pour mon père et pour ses victimes, je vais payer sans faute. Ce n'est que justice. Il ne sera pas dit que les Schiller auront tous failli" (263). For it "not to be said," word has to get out, leaving to Malrich the task of sharing the Schiller story with the world, which he does, dutifully. Addressing his brother, Rachel says "j'ai écrit ce journal autant pour moi que pour toi" (264), and no more honest words are written in the novel. His claim of having committed an act of love for the victims of Nazi genocide notwithstanding, Rachel's quest is above all one of familial redemption. The Schiller name needs saving, and through his journal, Rachel hopes to save it.

A dying Hamlet turns to Horatio and commands him to "report me and my cause aright […] And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain/To tell my story" (V.ii.340—9). He has selected in Horatio a scholar, and while not quite Hamlet's intellectual equal, he is sufficiently schooled in the classics to get right the tragic thrusts of the drama that has befallen Elsinore. Malrich—all instinct, street smarts, and passion—is no Horatio. Grossly underserved by the Éducation Nationale ("Il m'ont collé une histoire sur le dos, le casse du placard du dirlo, et renvoyé de l'école […] Je suis passé devant toutes les commissions et à la fin ils m'ont oublié" [16]), he is (literally) a bad reader of Rachel's story, admitting as much when he writes: "J'ai eu du mal à lire le journal de Rachel. Son français n'est pas le mien" (19). Malrich's limited knowledge of Holocaust and Algerian history further complicates the task of reporting and interpreting his brother's tale for the world, and encourages his transference of Holocaust crimes and suffering onto the *cité*.

Shortly after learning about his father's secret past, Malrich notes that "c'est bête à dire mais je ne savais rien de cette guerre, de cette affaire d'extermination. Ou vaguement, ce que l'imam en disait dans ses prêches contre les Juifs et des bribes attrapés par-ci, par-là. Dans mon esprit, c'était des légendes qui remontaient à des siècles" (50). The Shoah is a "legend," one set in a distant and inaccessible past that lives on only in fragments and anti-Semitic hate speech, and yet Malrich, armed with knowledge quickly gained (mostly through Rachel's journal), feels nevertheless qualified to compare it to the recent transformation of the *banlieue*.

Equally obscure for Malrich is the plight of Algeria in the 1990s: "Moi, je ne regarde jamais la télé […] si j'ai entendu parler du massacre, c'est en passant, je n'ai pas prêté attention. Aïn Deb, l'Algérie, ça ne me disait pas grand-chose" (23). From this place of relative ignorance and through Rachel's journal, Malrich constructs a historical narrative, but one wholly out of context and filtered through the narrow lens of Rachel's interpretation. Despite the considerable pains the novel takes to obscure categories of guilt and innocence, Malrich reads in black and white, and the Algerian insurgents become "ces chiens, ces nazis," who must be killed, "jusqu'au dernier, jusqu'à leurs femmes, leurs enfants, leurs petits-enfants, leurs parents" (187). "Islamists"—not Hans, the Third Reich, or any other national or transnational force—become the source of evil for Malrich because it is the one he feels he can fight; they are the only enemies left. Malrich fails to see that in adopting the rhetoric of total extermination, he is recycling the logic that drove his father to commit his crimes. It is perhaps not lost on Malrich that without Nazism (and Hans's involvement in the Nazi genocide, which prompted him to

flee Europe in search of safe harbor in North Africa), the brothers Schiller would not exist, and Malrich seems unable to locate blame firmly in the ideologies to which his father adhered.

In her reading of the novel, Caroline Beschea-Fache argues that

> [a]lthough he misreads the misery of his neighborhood and compares it with the suffering in the death camps, Malrich gains awareness of a certain injustice, of the violence and terror that surrounds him […] and at the same time, a sense of civic responsibility, strongly rooted in the French idea of the Republic that emancipates. […] [Sansal] offer[s] two outcomes to the question of a transnational heritage: death, on the one hand, and a responsible national consciousness on the other. (176-8)

Lost in this reading is the inherent paradox of a civic duty or sense of justice rooted in French Republican ideals. The Republic rejoiced in the wealth it accumulated through its colonial exploits and the *Éducation Nationale*, heir to Jules Ferry's enlightened reforms, failed the residents of France's *cités*, Malrich above all. And it is hard to describe the Malrich of the novel's conclusion as possessing "a responsible national consciousness," as his "consciousness" is decidedly personal and local. He tells his story to the world and talks about one day assembling the youth of the *banlieues* so that they might hear about the history of Nazism (lest they replicate its hate and violence in the guise of radical or militant Islam), but Malrich's contextual frame never extends beyond the family and his personal feelings toward the local imam. In Hamlet, we learn that something is "rotten in

the state of Denmark" (I.iv.90)—the *state*, and not merely the bubble of Elsinore. Malrich is quick and clearly very bright, but he engages in a narrow, one-eyed, cycloptic reading of modern history and cannot hold two contradictory thoughts in his head at the same time, rendering him a dangerous prophet.

Two unlikely voices of reason cry out from the Schiller brothers' journals: the local police commissioner, "Com'Dad," and Rachel's boss. These two surrogate father figures—the one, a servant of the state, the other, of capital—counsel the brothers to temper their thirst for revenge and atonement with patience, sobriety, and perspective, and to consider the impact their actions might have on the world around them. Commissaire Lepère's advice to Malrich is one of the novel's more lucid and penetrating moments:

> Tu fais un télescopage entre hier et aujourd'hui, entre Rachel et toi, entre ton père et l'imam, tu penses aux nazis qui t'ont volé ton père, qui en ont fait l'instrument d'un génocide, tu penses aux islamistes qui ont tué tes parents et cette pauvre Nadia, tu veux te venger, en commençant par l'imam parce que c'est le chef, le führer, parce que toi-même tu as fait partie de cette bande de minables qui veulent supprimer l'humanité, et que c'est là une façon pour toi de te racheter, de voir ton père autrement, de lui pardonner. Tu comprends? […] Mais relis bien le journal de ton frère et tu verras peut-être ce que lui-même n'a pas vu alors qu'il avait tout compris: on n'efface pas le crime par le crime, ni par le suicide. On a la loi pour ça et pour le reste on a sa mémoire d'homme et sa jugeote. Et surtout cela:

> nous ne sommes pas responsable ni comptables de crimes de nos parents. (83-4)

Recognizing the danger in Malrich's multiple "télescopages," Com'Dad reminds Malrich that he, too, once followed the imam and subscribed to his humanity-effacing rhetoric. Malrich's guilt at having once adopted the ideology that, in his associative logic, killed his parents is not something he recognizes on his own; he needs to hear it from someone else. Com'Dad advocates a closer reading of Rachel's story and suggests that there are truths in the journal that contradict Malrich's quick and facile interpretations. Simply responding to the journal's mnemonic imperative is not enough; patience and reflection are needed. This is a call to resist the temptations of bad comparison, speedy reading, and unqualified parallelism. Memory, legal justice, and reason (however imperfect these may be) are championed as productive avenues for recourse against Malrich's eye-for-an-eye brand of justice and Rachel's suicide-*qua*-atonement. It is as if Com'Dad—in his roles as both a paternal surrogate and intermediary between the *banlieue* and the state—gives Malrich permission to forgive himself for his father's crimes *and* his parents' death. The last words of Malrich's journal ("on ne voit pas quel miracle pourrait dégoupiller ça" [259]) and the relative calm in which his preface seems to have been written suggest that perhaps some of Com'Dad's words got through. Malrich spends so much of the novel angry and yelling at the world that his confusion in the journal's conclusion is a comforting sign; this ambiguity about what action to take (beyond that of telling his story) softens the bloodlust of earlier passages and offers the possibility that Malrich will

continue to learn and expand his interpretive frame as he reads more, talks more, and leans into the moral complexity of life in a French *banlieue*.

When Rachel's boss confronts him to inquire about his recently dismal sales figures, Rachel tells him about his parents' death and his father's secret past, "le tout en moins de cinq phrases, comme nous procédons en réunion de débriefing" (93). The boss's reply, also delivered as if from a series of talking points, offers Rachel an alternative to his chosen path of self-destruction:

> Un, tu fais le deuil de tes parents. Tu ne les ressusciteras pas en te lamentant sur toi-même. Chaque année, comme un bon fils, tu te rendras sur leurs tombes et tu prieras pour le repos de leur âme. Tu les remercieras de t'avoir donné la vie et tu leur diras que tu en profites autant que possible, sans folie ni arrogance. Pour le reste, l'Holocauste et toutes les barbaries de ce monde, prie Dieu que cela ne se reproduise jamais. C'est tout ce que tu peux faire. Lis, milite si tu veux, apporte ta petite pierre, mais pas davantage. Tout ce que tu feras de plus viendra du diable, ça voudra dire que tu auras versé dans la haine, que l'esprit de revanche s'est emparé de toi. (94)

Like Com'Dad, the *patron* is able to see the danger in the revenge trajectory that Rachel is following. He advocates not denial, but rather a step-by-step process for working through the trauma, one of moving from melancholia to the more therapeutic stages of mourning. His suggestion that Rachel might *militer* is the first (and only) time in the

novel that engaged citizenship or political advocacy are offered as healing alternatives to either Rachel or Malrich. And though Rachel ignores this advice—losing his job, ruining his marriage, and thrusting the weight of his memorial burdens onto his brother—its place in the novel is not innocent. Sansal's professed mistrust of collective forms of action notwithstanding, this moment in the text gestures to mourning rituals other than those chosen by the brothers. Both Com'Dad and Rachel's boss—authority figures from within the flawed hierarchies of the *police nationale* and big business—transcend their respective social positions to offer insight and clarity to two brothers desperately in need of both. The refusal of the Schiller brothers to take this advice reflects their insistence on a singular reading of both family and transnational history.

But despite their stubbornness, the Schiller brothers aren't uniformly bad readers of history. Walter Benjamin, in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," writes that

> to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. (255)

Both Schillers articulate the past historically when they are commanded to do so by the mnemonic imperatives of Hans's military *carnet* and, in the case of Malrich, his dead brother's diary. The memory of the Shoah, flashed in "a moment of danger" (Hans and

Aïcha's murder), undergoes important changes as it gets translated into the Schiller present. When Rachel is the receiver of the memory, he transforms it into a personalized epic in which he must martyr himself to redeem the Schiller name. When Malrich receives the memory of the Holocaust—mediated through Rachel's diary—it becomes a parable applicable to current affairs in the *cité.*

By adapting Rachel's diary and integrating it into his own narrative, Malrich performs the double meaning of the French *journal*. He selects critical passages from Rachel's journal that provide the reader with necessary information, and to this, he adds details about the local imam and life in the *banlieue.* This is journalism, the communication of information in its moment of newness. In "The Storyteller," Benjamin writes that

> the value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing and time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time (90).

Importantly, Malrich does not sell the Schiller saga to *Paris Match.* He transforms it into a lengthy volume. He has a former French teacher read it and help him with the language, and hewrites a preface. These are the actions not of the *Figaro* founder for whom, as Benjamin tells it, "an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid" (88). By coupling the histories of the Holocaust and the Algerian Revolution

with the "facts" of his family members' tragic ends in an edited, revised, and structured text, Malrich turns mere *information* into a *story*. His acknowledgement of the French teacher who was needed to revise the prose, the admission of his limited knowledge of history, and even Sansal's tacit inclusion of the *Hamlet* intertext, all call for a careful reading that goes deeper than *faits divers*.

Moreover, the text's integration of so many elements from *Hamlet*, conscious or not, affirms the value of reading widely. Malrich and Rachel both fail to interpret the world around them in any broad or comprehensive way. But *Le Village de l'Allemand,* understood as a warning against bad reading, the dangers of too little education, and the consequences of failed social and economic policies in France, has much to say. If Malrich's association of Nazism with the rise of violent Islam in France is not the careful work of comparative politics, but rather the side effect of one young man having acquired a dangerous amount of historical knowledge divorced from any broader context, the text can be read as an indictment of educational systems that fail to read carefully with students the difficult pages of modern European and colonial history. *Le Village de l'Allemand'*s resonances with *Hamlet* reward broad reading; the comparison enriches our understanding of the brothers' journey and foregrounds the pitfalls of cycloptic reading, both for the Schiller brothers and for critics who accept too willingly Malrich's hasty comparisons. Rachel and Malrich show what happens when multidirectional memory goes wrong, when it is deployed sloppily and from the claustrophobia of a family crisis. But Sansal's text, read slowly and with an eye to literary and historical horizons beyond

those offered in the brothers' intertwined narratives, redeems the comparative gesture and asks that when we move horizontally between contexts, we do so with care.

Strangers on a Train

Entendez-vous dans les montagnes… is not a memoir, but Maïssa Bey doesn't hide the similarities she shares with the book's unnamed protagonist. Opposite the first page, we see a picture of the author with her father taken in 1955, during the second year of the National Liberation Struggle, two years before he was "dragged out of his house in the village of Boghari, south of Algiers, tortured by French gendarmes for an entire night, and summarily executed the next morning" (Ruta 16). The woman in Bey's story is from this same village and also lost a father under similar circumstances, but unlike the author, she is given the opportunity to confront one of the men responsible for her father's death. The text mocks the contrived nature of the meeting on the train between the daughter of a murdered *résistant*, a French war veteran (Jean), and the granddaughter of French settlers (Marie):

> C'est presque irréel. Qui donc aurait pu imaginer une scène pareille? Cela ressemble à un plateau télé, réuni pour une émission par des journalistes en quête de vérité, désireux de lever le voile pour faire la lumière sur '*le passé douloureux de la France*.' Il ne manque plus qu'un harki. Et surtout, pour mettre en relief l'absurdité ou l'étrangeté de cette situation, il ne faudrait pas omettre de la présenter non seulement comme une fille de

> fellaga, mais elle-même contrainte à fuir son pays pour échapper à la folie intégriste. On pourrait presque en faire le sujet d'une pièce de théâtre, en choisissant un titre anodin, d'une banalité recherchée, par exemple: '*Conversation dans un train*.' (43-4)

The situation *is* absurd and strange, but it forces an encounter among what have traditionally been disparate memorial constituencies: Algerian survivors of French colonialism, the *anciens combattants,* and the pied-noir community. Bey's three characters—a middle-aged woman, an elderly man, and a teenager—foreground memory's intergenerational multidirectionality through what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory […] a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but […] at a generational remove" (347, emphasis in the original). The chance meeting provides the context for the mnemonic imperatives that compel both Jean and the woman to face past traumas they would rather not, and Marie's presence provides them with a third, voiced mnemonic imperative in an inquisitive teenager who needs answers, representative of a generation that may know little about its national history. While the story could function without Schlink's *The Reader*, the woman's literary pursuit of Michael Berg on his journey into the darker recesses of German history encourages her to walk into the mnemonic unknown and confront the man sitting across from her. In Bey's novella, the characters share with those in *The Reader* a desire to avoid feeling the pain of the past. To do so, they turn to rationalizations and alibis. But for each, escape proves elusive,

necessitating the work of return and repair before the memorial knots that bind each can begin to loosen.

The first sentence of *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* makes clear the woman's intention of putting her past behind her: "Elle renferme derrière elle la porte du compartiment dans l'espoir de ne pas être dérangée, de faire seule le voyage" (11). When the elderly Jean arrives, he too "renferme la porte derrière lui" (11). These are travelers looking to move forward, "s'enfuir…tout quitter sans regarder derrière soi" (30); but having arrived in the same train compartment, their hopes of escape are thwarted and their memorial collision, set on course. Each of the three passengers carries a distracting object: for Jean, a newspaper; for Marie, a Walkman (it's the 1990s); and for the woman, Schlink's *The Reader*, "ce livre qu'elle a choisi au hasard en passant dans une libraire, non pas vraiment au hasard, mais pour quelques passages lus en le feuilletant" (18-9). *The Reader* is the story of Michael Berg, a teenager in postwar Germany who falls in love with Hanna, a woman in her thirties. Years after the affair has ended, Michael learns that she was a concentration camp guard who must now stand trial for her crimes. As a law student, Michael attends Hanna's trial, visits the Natzweiler-Struthof camp in Alsace, and even travels to Israel to try to understand her hidden past. His investigation uncovers a secret buried even more deeply than her involvement with the Nazi genocide: Hanna is illiterate. While the Hanna-Michael relationship (with its considerable ethical complexity) has been the focus of the vast majority of scholarship on the novel—much of it highly critical—it is Michael's relationship with his father, an emotionally unavailable

professor of Enlightenment philosophy, that speaks most directly to the questions raised by *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*[33]

Like the protagonists in Bey's novella, Michael's father "did not want to talk about himself" (Schlink, *The Reader* 92). During the war, he was fired for scheduling a lecture on Spinoza (a Jewish philosopher), and subsequently took a job publishing hiking maps. Absent any horrific crime of which to accuse his father, Michael writes that he, like much of his generation, "condemned our parents to shame, even if the only charge we could bring was that after 1945 they had tolerated the perpetrators in their midst" (92-3). In a series of lectures delivered at Oxford in 2008, Schlink remarked that "the act of not renouncing, not judging and not repudiating carries its own guilt with it […] to not renounce others includes one in that person's guilt for past crimes, so that a new sort of guilt is created" (*Guilt* 15). Berg *père* is a silent and "undemonstrative" father who "could neither share his feelings with [his children] nor deal with the feelings [they] had for him" (*The Reader* 139). The guilt that stems from his silence during and after the war produces still more silence, and torments both father and son through the muffled suffering of the *non-dit.*

Silence—thick, freighted, and suffocating—takes up a lot of space in the train compartment of *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…*When Marie complains that no one wants to talk about the Algerian War for Independence—neither her grandparents nor her

---

[33] Schlink was criticized for many of the choices he made in *Der Vorleser*. Some critics pointed out the danger of fictionally representing an event like the Holocaust (see Bartov, Ozick, and Sansom), while others objected to the depiction of Hanna as a sympathetic perpetrator of genocide and the intermingling of sex and Nazism in the same text (Donahue).

history teachers—the woman and Jean both respond that while one cannot forget, "on peut se taire," it is the only "recours…ou le seul remède si vous voulez" (62-3). But silence as a remedy doesn't seem to work for any of the passengers. Jean is haunted by memories of the war, memories he is unable to suppress, "[m]ême sous les yeux fermés. Même dans le néant illusoire du sommeil. Même dans les vains égarements et les divagations de l'ivresse. Même dans les échos lancinants du silence" (17). In one of his flashbacks, he recalls the moment he was ordered to bury the dead bodies of tortured detainees in an unmarked grave near the French barracks in Boghari. A fellow soldier told him not to worry, "on les retrouvera demain!" (74). "Demain" for Jean would mean every day of his life. And the woman cites the persistence of silence as a national malady in Algeria:

> [I]l y a encore des silences…il y a plein de blancs dans notre histoire, même dans l'histoire de cette guerre. Pendant des années, nous n'avons entendu qu'un seul refrain, dit sur le même air. Un air patriotique, forcément. Et ça continue…Nos pères étaient tous des héros. […] Les héros seuls ont le droit de parler. […] Et ils parlent tellement fort qu'ils peuvent croire qu'on n'entend qu'eux. Et cela tranche avec le silence et les mensonges des bourreaux, et le silence complice de ceux qui ne peuvent pas regarder leur histoire en face. (65)

Silence in Algeria perpetuates violence and mythologizes a particular reading of national history, one designed to legitimate successive waves of FLN leadership and obscure

inconvenient historical truths.[34] Silence also frustrates and inhibits more banal types of speech. In a 66-page novella, there are 275 sets of ellipses and aposiopeses. No one seems able to formulate a complete thought. The narrator reminds us frequently that Jean, in particular, never finishes a sentence (52, 57-8, 62). Silence doesn't make room for other, less threatening forms of dialogue; it fragments thinking, inhibits conversational attempts at moving on, and prevents any kind of resolution.

When silence doesn't work, the characters in both *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* and *The Reader* seek refuge in various alibis. Remembering the early days of his romantic tryst with Hanna, Michael recalls rationalizing his desire as "an entry in a strange moral accounting" that muted his "bad conscience" (19). He recognizes that, like his father, he early established a pattern "in which thinking and doing have either come together or failed to come together" (20). Michael's retreat to paralytic analysis produces "a narrator who remains locked in the realm of thought, unable or unwilling to reach conclusions because they call for clear action" (Reynolds 250). But he cannot seem to think his way out of his guilt as a German, the son of parents who remained silent during and after the war, and the former lover of a Nazi war criminal. To fill this affective void,

---

[34] In addition to the many "blank pages" surrounding the war for independence, a legislated culture of silence also surrounds the *décennie noire*. The 2006 "Charte pour la paix et la réconciliation nationale," adopted by referendum, not only protects government actors and select categories of "terrorists" from any criminal or monetary sanctions, it outlaws public conversations about the conflict that might embarrass or shame the state. Article 49 declares: "Est puni d'un emprisonnement de trois (3) ans à cinq (5) ans et d'une amende de 250.000 DA à 500.000 DA [3,400-6,800 USD] quiconque qui, par ses déclarations, écrits ou tout autre acte, utilise ou instrumentalise les blessures de la tragédie nationale, pour porter atteinte aux institutions de la République algérienne démocratique et populaire, fragiliser l'État, nuire à l'honorabilité de ses agents qui l'ont dignement servie, ou ternir l'image de l'Algérie sur le plan international" (Ministère de l'Intérieur).

Michael seeks other, arguably less appropriate avenues for emotional release. And, like Rachel in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, he begins identifying with the victims of the Shoah. Obsessed with the history of Nazism and the trials of war criminals, Michael wanted to "share in the general passion" (93). He compares sitting in the courtroom day after day to "being a prisoner in the death camps who survives month after month and becomes accustomed to the life, while he registers with an objective eye the horror of the new arrivals: registers it with the same numbness that he brings to the murders and deaths themselves" (102). But unlike Rachel, Michael (who lives long enough to gain some perspective) can view this attraction to vicarious trauma and sympathetic (mis)identification with the healthy skepticism of hindsight, noting that "when I likened perpetrators, victims, the dead, the living, survivors, and their descendants to each other, I didn't feel good about it" (103). Michael's inherited propensity for silence and rationalization fail to comfort, heal, or resolve anything, and neither does co-opting the suffering of others. These strategies are unable to provide him with a narrative path out of his guilt, and as alibis, they fall short.

In Bey's novella, however, Jean's guilt is that of the perpetrator. Unlike Michael (or Rachel, or Malrich), Jean carries with him the direct memory of his crimes, and must therefore construct more elaborate alibis to defend against the weight such guilt carries. He pleads his own version of the Nuremberg defense[35] and legitimates the war of colonial oppression by equating it with France's participation in both world wars: "C'était sa guerre à lui. Oui, c'était une vraie guerre. Son père avait eu lui aussi sa guerre. […] Et

[35] "Il y avait ceux qui donnaient des ordres…et ceux qui…exécutaient. […] Inutile de se poser des questions…de chercher à discuter les ordres. Il fallait server et obéir" (57-8).

avant lui, le père de son père" (56). In a conversation he has with Marie, we learn that Jean's decision to become a doctor after the war was meant to redeem him, "une manière de réparer […] de se rendre utile" (63). It is as though Jean needed to undo the physical pain he inflicted on others during the war through acts of healing. Each alibi is its own form of failed self-deception and presents a Jean who *doth protest too much*. When the conversation turns more explicitly to murder and torture, he must summon the newspeak he learned as a French soldier to avoid having to pronounce those unsavory words:

> [L]es mots sont encore imprimés dans sa mémoire. Il a retrouvé sans effort, au bout de tant d'années, les mêmes mots, les mêmes arguments: refus de collaborer, rébellion, pacification, interrogatoires, recherche prioritaire de renseignements, prévention, protection des civils Européens…ainsi rien n'est effacé. Mais ce mot—là…jamais! On ne parlait jamais de tortures, de sévices…non. C'était des interrogatoires…poussées, certains disaient…musclés. Obtenir le maximum de renseignements. C'était ça la formule consacrée. Interrogations poussés parfois jusqu'à… (72)

So "imprimés" in his memory are these obfuscating terms and the rationales that produced them, Jean cannot say the words "torture" or "murder," but he *can* think them. His efforts at self-deception are futile, the failure proved by his inescapable nightmares. Neither Jean nor Michael can avoid with any finality the guilt carried with them from

their pasts, and only through a return to the initial trauma—an honest moral accounting of their responsibilities—are they able to begin the process of psychic mending.

Returns and Repairs

The female protagonist of *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* reminds us repeatedly of her need to escape, "se préserver de la peur qui broie, qui brise, qui pétrifie et surtout qui finit par détourner de tout sentiment humain, parce qu'elle aveugle au point de faire naître la haine, la violence, le désir irrépressible de vengeance, la tentation de tuer avant d'être tué" (39). But the train she rides is not headed away from Algeria, but rather towards it. Bey could have structured her text around a northward ferry trip from Algiers to Marseille, followed by a train ride to Paris, but she did not. The woman on the train, having flown to Paris, is headed south. And so inescapable is her past that even attempts at literary distraction return her to her childhood village. A particular scene in *The Reader,* in which "un homme […] interroge son père pour comprendre le passé," stands out for the woman, so much so that it is quoted in Bey's text:

> Non, je ne parle pas d'ordres reçus et d'obéissance. Le bourreau n'obéit pas à des ordres. Il fait son travail. Il ne hait pas ceux qu'il exécute, il ne se venge pas sur eux, il ne les supprime pas parce qu'ils le gênent ou le menacent ou l'agressent. Ils lui sont complètement indifférents. (19)

This passage from *The Reader* is not, in fact, from a scene between Michael and his father; it takes place in a taxi, and the words we read are from a lecture the chauffeur delivers to Michael, unsolicited, on the drive to the Struthof concentration camp in Alsace. The woman on the train is so fixated on the figure of the father that she misreads the passage and filters it through the exclusive lens of paternity. Michael's cloistered father (he asks that his children make appointments to see him during office hours) never offers any kind of defense or rationale for his or anyone else's behavior. The taxi driver seems to channel Hannah Arendt's argument about evil's banality and speaks an ugly truth that Jean—still clinging to the "following orders" defense—cannot or will not face. The chauffeur pulls back the curtain on Jean's argument and presents to the reader of Bey's novella (and to the woman on the train) the unspoken truth lurking behind Jean's vague and stilted rationalizations about war's universal cruelty. The woman's attempt at distracting herself by reading Schlink's novel fails, and she cannot divorce the text from her own past.

The Reader not only leaks prose onto the pages of Bey's novella, it begins to inhabit the consciousness of the female protagonist, provoking in her distinct psychological and physiological responses ("elle ne se sent pas très bien […] c'est peut-être à cause de ce qu'elle vient de lire" [18]). But just as the book affects her, calling to the surface past traumas and buried memories, she reshapes the book through her misreading, and projects onto it what she most needs to see, creating a mutually transformative feedback loop between reader and text that ignites the mnemonic encounter with Jean. Such a process of adaptation across cultural contexts echoes David

Damrosch's argument that "*World literature is writing that gains in translation*" (288, emphasis in the original). He explains that

> [t]raveling abroad […] a text does indeed change, both in its frame of reference and usually in language as well. In an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening* of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text. In this respect a poem or novel can be seen to achieve its lasting effect precisely by virtue of its adaptability to our private experience. (292)

The woman's misreading of Schlink's text meets with a very specific set of local circumstances (sitting in a train compartment across from her father's torturer) to stimulate a conversational encounter that in turn becomes the basis for Bey's novella. A reader familiar with *Le Liseur* is in on the slippage, gaining in the process a fuller appreciation of the woman's fixation on all things paternal. But even for a reader who doesn't catch it, the scene still works. A woman reads a German text (in translation), reflects on her own Algerian past, and, as a result, adjusts her actions in present-day France. Schlink's foreign text enables this return and initiates the work of repair. *Der Vorleser*—become *Le Liseur* and embedded in Bey's novella—expresses a key function of Damrosch's concept of world literature as "elliptical refraction," with texts reflecting "as much about the host culture's values and needs as […] a work's source culture […] with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives" (283).

Within this elliptical space—here framed by three cultural polarities—Enlightenment thinking (both French and German varieties) plays a central role. A second quoted passage in *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes*…(this time correctly read as taking place between Michael and his father) puts the Kantian ethos that Berg *père* holds so dear into the defendant's box along with Hanna. When Michael figures out that Hanna is illiterate (a discovery that explains her decision to decline a promotion at the factory where she was working and enlist as a Nazi prison guard) he wants to inform the judge presiding in her trial, hoping that the revelation might explain Hanna's decision to switch professions from factory worker to concentration camp guard. Conflicted about betraying a secret that Hanna guarded so dearly, Michael approaches his father for advice, only to receive a lesson on ethics: "Lorsqu'il parla, il me fit un exposé sur la personne, la liberté et la dignité, sur l'être humain comme sujet et sur le fait qu'on n'avait pas le droit de le traiter en objet" (qtd. in Bey 37). This is ironic, because Michael has always been treated like an object by his father, as he is here—the empty vessel waiting to be filled with the professor's wisdom. And while we get the sense that this encounter leaves Michael (and the reader) rather unsatisfied, he is unwilling to blame his father and still less, the positivist rationality that frames his worldview.

Throughout much of *The Reader*, Michael believes in "progress in the history of law, a development towards greater beauty and truth, rationality and humanity" (182). Selecting books to read aloud to Hanna on audio tapes that he regularly sends her in prison, Berg avoids experimental literature, claiming of these texts, "I did not recognize the story or like any of the characters. To me it was obvious that experimental literature

was experimenting with the reader, and Hanna didn't need that and neither did I" (185). The "great and fundamental confidence in bourgeois culture" (185) that leads Michael to select canonical figures of German literature (Frisch, Bachmann, Lenz), as well as his resurrection of a Third Reich aesthetic ideology that viewed modernism and the avant-garde with great suspicion, all cast doubt on the reliability of Michael as a clear-sighted narrator. He seems to believe that both he and Hanna need "the aesthetic illusion such texts offer" as a means of escaping to a "*heile Welt,* a world in which conflict and ambivalence get resolved" (Mahlendorf 470). Reynolds notes that "one might conclude that *Der Vorleser* picks up the line of argument advanced by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*¸ namely that Enlightenment ideals of rational thought […] enabled the dehumanization of Holocaust victims by their executioners" (247-8)—an argument supported by the taxi driver's insistence that the murder of the Jews was a question of work and indifference, not hate or vengeance. Hanna's time spent listening to the great works of great writers (before and during the war) failed to prevent her from committing murder, and only later, when in prison she becomes literate and reads (on her own) Levi, Wiesel, Borowski, and Améry, does she develop something approaching a mature understanding of her actions. Reynolds cautions that by "placing European literature and the Enlightenment alongside Nazi crimes, Schlink is not subscribing to a notion of causality whereby the whole of German culture leads teleologically to Auschwitz," (248) and yet the problematic presence of these texts and their failure to create in Hanna any ethical self-awareness suggest that "if the Enlightenment did not cause the Holocaust, it certainly did not prevent it" (248). But this connection is not one

that Michael easily grasps, and only at the end of the novel does he come to doubt the efficacy of the *heile Welt* fantasy and the soundness of the Enlightenment value system he inherited.

As an old man and accomplished scholar of legal history, Berg eventually realizes that these beliefs "were a chimera," and he begins to conceive of "a different image of the course of legal history. In this one it still has a purpose, but the goal it finally attains, after countless disruptions, confusions, and delusions, is the beginning, its own original starting point, which once reached must be set off from again" (182). Importantly, this admission follows on the heels of Berg's rereading of the *Odyssey*, a text that gets eight mentions in the novel—far more than any other. As a young man, Michael read the epic as "a story of homecoming" (181). One can imagine him sharing in Odysseus's "drive for knowledge, the yearning for home, yet also the restless need to be different, to be elsewhere" (Bloom, *Odysseus* 5-6). But when Michael rereads Homer decades later, he has lost his faith in the finality of the ending. "How," he asks, "could the Greeks, who knew that one never enters the same river twice, believe in homecoming?" He ultimately concludes that "Odysseus does not return home to stay, but to set off again. The *Odyssey* is the story of motion both purposeful and purposeless, successful and futile" (181-2). The "purposeful and purposeless" formula is a riff on the third critique of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but Berg recasts it here to describe a circular, postmodern understanding of narrative, one much messier than a younger Michael would have been willing to accept.

Entendez-vous dans les montagnes… invites us to reflect on the French Enlightenment before we even open the book. The novella's title is lifted (in slightly altered form) from a line in Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle's 1792 "Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin" ("La Marseillaise")—a song that in 1795 would become the anthem of the young Republic. Bloody and jingoistic, it calls the citizens of France to rise up against tyranny (and foreign invaders) in defense of liberty. By substituting *montagnes* for *compagnes,* Bey relocates the hymn to Algeria and reverses the invader/defender binary, casting French troops in the role of the former. Re-read in the colonial context, certain verses sound as though they could have been written by Fanon:

> Quoi! des cohortes étrangères
> Feraient la loi dans nos foyers!
> Quoi! Ces phalanges mercenaires
> Terrasseraient nos fiers guerriers!
> Grand Dieu! Par des mains enchaînées
> Nos fronts sous le joug se ploieraient
> De vils despotes deviendraient
> Les maîtres de nos destinées! (Assemblée)

This most Republican of songs—complete with chains, masters, and despots—describes accurately the behavior of the French Third and Fourth Republics in Algeria, behavior that exposed the emptiness of the *liberté, égalité, fraternité* mythologies as they were experienced by the colonized. But the myths didn't go down without a fight, and Bey

describes her father, the French teacher, as a "native [who] would absorb this civilization and this culture and transmit it to other natives, [who] could implant it deeply in their minds, thereby hastening the accomplishment of the colonizers' noble mission" ("My Father" 28). Even during the National Liberation Struggle, when he was an active *moudjahid*, Bey's father clung to a certain faith in the legitimacy of French Republican ideology. She writes that

> perhaps because he had been educated in the French school system, because he had been inculcated with ideals of justice and liberty that he in turn was teaching his pupils to cherish, he hoped and believed—overlooking the gulf that in those days separated inalienable (it says) rights guaranteed by the constitution of the country of the rights of man (mere words on paper) from the bloody Algerian reality—yes, I'm convinced of it, he thought he would be tried in a court of law, and convicted quite probably, but that like every man accused in a nation ruled by laws, he would have been granted a lawyer to defend him. (30)

When the French authorities came to arrest Bey's father, his last words to his wife were "Don't forget the lawyer's address in the notebook"—but there was no need for a lawyer. Instead of a trial, "he was tortured. Then executed" (30).

Jean, as an agent of the French state in Algeria, saw firsthand and participated in the lie of the Republic and the hypocrisy of the *mission civilisatrice*. The Orwellian language designed to insulate soldiers from the violence of their actions failed to blind

him to the wrongs he committed. Decades after the war, he remains a haunted man. Marie, a pupil in a French school, is shielded from the war's harsher truths by teachers who don't want to talk about it. As an appendix to *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* Bey includes images of her father's various official documents, including his "Certificat de Nationalité" and "Certificat de Bonnes vies et mœurs." These pieces of paper—heavily stamped and elegantly signed—proved worthless at the moment of his arrest. The rule of law meant little in the village of Boghari, both for Bey's family and for the woman on the train.

Exposing the gap between the official myths of the nation-state and the lived reality (one that persists, to varying degrees, in both France and Algeria) is central to the reparative work of Bey's text. The woman on the train must confront another mythology, one in which her father's killers are faceless, "des monstres […] des hommes encagoulés, entièrement vêtus de noir […] des bourreaux représentés dans les livres et les films d'histoire" (41-2). Confronting one of her father's killers on the train and recognizing that "les bourreaux ont des visages d'homme […] ils ont des mains d'homme, parfois même des réactions d'homme, et rien ne permet de les distinguer des autres" (75) is a frightening but necessary revelation for the woman. Looking into Jean's face, sitting in close proximity to him, alerting him to her pain, and comparing him, out loud, to "tous les autres. D'abord aveugles et sourds, et depuis longtemps…muets…et même amnésiques" (75) has the effect of untangling and unknotting something inside her ("quelque chose s'est dénoué en elle"). While not exactly justice, a version of closure happens on the train. The woman puts *Le Liseur* back in her bag, noting that "elle a du

temps pour lire, pour chercher des réponses […] elle sera ailleurs peut-être […] elle fera d'autres voyages" (76). Replacing the faceless monster with the image of Jean—old, sad, and distracted—frees the woman to think in the future tense, to imagine other journeys and other days. Schlink's *Le Liseur* spurs the encounter that works to untie this particular *nœud de mémoire* and allows the woman to step outside the France/Algeria binary.[36]

Leaving the train, Jean asks the woman if he can help her with her suitcase, to which she responds "Non, non, merci…elle n'est pas trop lourde" (77). He carries it anyway and follows her to the exit of the station. Before she can thank him, Jean tells the woman that she has "les mêmes yeux…le même regard que…que [son] père" (77). It is the first and only time he admits to having met her father. Gone are his alibis and obfuscations, his *langue de bois* hedges and circumlocutions. He finishes *this* sentence and leaves the woman having lightened the weight of his own baggage as well. The two depart in a politeness of a *déjà dit* that replaces the *non dit* of the novella's preceding pages, a conclusion that attests to the potential value of confrontation and dialogue as first steps in a process of reparation and reconciliation.

---

[36] The term "*nœuds de mémoire*"comes from a special issue of *Yale French Studies* edited by Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal, and Max Silverman. They use the concept to rethink Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire,* arguing that the term *nœuds de mémoire* "suggests that 'knotted' in all places and acts of memory are rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialization (whether at the local or national level) and identitarian reduction" (Rothberg et al 7).

Conclusion

Five years ago, I attended a screening of Jackie Reem Salloum's documentary, *Slingshot Hip Hop,* a film about the development of the hip hop genre in Palestine. Present at the screening was DAM, one of the groups featured in the movie. During the question and answer period, an elderly man who identified himself as a Palestinian asked Suhell Nafar, one of the artists, why there weren't more Middle Eastern influences in DAM's music: "Your songs are nice, but they don't speak to my experiences as a Palestinian. I don't recognize anything in the melodies and rhythms." Nafar responded that as a child, he didn't listen to Umm Kulthum or play the *oud*. He listened to Run DMC, Tupac Shakur, and NWA. Ignoring these actual influences in search of ones that would read as "more authentic" would betray the soundtrack to his youth.

A similar question came up when I was discussing *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes...* and *Le Village de l'Allemand* with a colleague. "Why," he asked, "would these authors turn to European history and literature? Aren't there more localized referents they could have used?" Both this question and the one asked at the film screening assume a linear axis of authenticity on which distance from the local results necessarily in a less authentic product. Like arguments that historical traditions (and collective memory) should be quarantined and insulated against foreign corruption, such thinking restricts the tools and antecedents available to artists and asks that they limit themselves only to what they can find in their neighborhood. Such limits are rarely placed on first-world artists. Few complained that Joyce was betraying Ireland by

modeling *Ulysses* on a Greek epic. And Picasso's decision to reference African masks in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is celebrated as innovative, not an abandonment of Iberian culture. Bensmaïa argues that "to think of the relation subaltern/colonizer as a fixed relation that can only be undone—like the Gordian knot—by a return to the self, or a return to one's native land, is to forbid the disciple from being free from the master" (*Experimental* 162-3). When Bey cites a German text or when Sansal gestures to Shakespeare, they are not selling out any local history, tradition, or culture; they have moved past thinking about memory (or history, or literature) as a competition for scarce resources, and have instead created a multidimensional space in which influences cross each other, memories collide, and new elements combine with old ones in a generative process of *emergence*.

But who is reading these books? In 2011, the filmmaker Tariq Teguia was asked what it means to make movies in Algeria when there are so few cinemas. The journalist Aurélie Charon wondered whether a film can have any impact on Algerian society when few Algerian films are shown and distributed locally. Teguia responded that "Oui, mais on va pouvoir dire que c'était fait. Et ça va rester dans les archives […] On le retrouvera un jour. C'est pas un problème de date" (Charon). Literary production in Algeria faces similar hurdles. It might be tempting to conclude that the insertion of Holocaust history, German fiction, or Shakespearean drama preordains these texts as global, investing them with a marketability and *laissez-passer* that more identifiably local frames do not. And there is likely some truth in this. But it would be wrong to assume that market forces alone or a desire for international acclaim drives the decisions of authors like Bey and

Sansal. Bey lives in Sidi Bel-Abbes, where she teaches French and runs a local library and literary workshop, *Bibliothèque paroles et écritures.* In an interview, she was asked about the genesis of the *Bibliothèque*, and describes having had

> a very hard time winning acceptance for the idea—just the idea—of a space open to all, where the shelves could hold, side by side, books in every language—French, Arabic, German, English, and others—of every literary genre, and available to everyone who longs to renew the contact—lost decades ago in our country—with the physical reality of books. (Ruta 17)

Entendez-vous dans les montagnes… creates space on the bookshelf of its pages for Schlink's *Le Liseur.* The protagonist's journey is in part a literary one, and speaks to the power of diverse literary works living side by side on a shelf.

Teguia's point about the importance of the archive suggests that we would be wrong to focus too much on yearly publication statistics in Algeria. Aleida Assman has described the function of the archive as "a kind of counterbalance against the reductive and restrictive drive of the working memory" (337). If the working memory is trapped in the limiting calculus of the present, the archive is there to be a "'lost-and-found office' for what is no longer needed or immediately understood," and novels and films for which there is now only a limited audience in Algeria will be there, "preserved in a state of latency" (336), to be consumed, debated, and enjoyed at some future date. In the interim, these works *are* being read abroad, and in this sense, they play an important role in

combatting the externally-imposed permanence of aftermath in Algeria. When Algerian history is characterized as a never-ending cycle of violence, and when literary scholars and historians reduce Algerian history to its two most-recent wars, aftermath remains. When Algerian authors return to the historical past not to celebrate or even to understand it, but to turn it into what Bahri calls "a transforming utopian vision […] a potential drawn from the broken promises of the past rather than from the past as such" (*Native* 115-8), they combat this paralysis and complicate foreign attempts at reading into Algeria a singular history of bloodshed and suffering. Marx writes that "the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future," but he qualifies this by noting that "it cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past" (6). Alternative histories, cultures, and literatures are being put to work by Algerian authors eager to discard the stale clichés that so heavily season conversations on or about Algeria. Reading outside the limiting framework of Franco-Algerian history to other places and other times challenges readers through a textual mnemonic imperative that is rewriting Algerian cultural production out of the straitjackets that so often bind it.

III. Voids

Introduction

In September 2005, the Cinémathèque d'Alger hosted a special screening of *Guerre sans images: Algérie, je sais que tu sais,* a documentary by Mohammed Soudani. The film follows Swiss photographer Michael von Graffenried around Algeria as he reunites with the subjects of his multiple photo essays on the civil war of the 1990s. In one scene, von Graffenried is talking to residents of a Kabyle village near Tizi Ouzou, and he shows them an image taken at a local soccer stadium. In the photo, tiny players are arranged on the field, surrounded by a blurry crowd; in the foreground, a single Kalashnikov rifle cuts through the frame. Upon seeing this, one of the men gets angry:

> En tant que journaliste, vous savez tout! La situation sécuritaire, le pays, comment il vit, et cetera […] Mais un simple citoyen, il connait pas tout ça. Il regarde uniquement la photo […] Je sais que c'est un policier qui tient la Kalache, mais un étranger, hors de l'Algérie […] il va dire que c'est un citoyen parmi les spectateurs qui détient la Kalache. (Soudani)

Von Graffenried protests, insisting that the text at the beginning of his book explains the photo, but his interlocutor argues that anyone looking at the book "regarde uniquement la photo." At stake in this exchange are the consequences and ethics of representation. Who has the right to represent another's conflict? How do images travel across contexts? How

do they form or deform understanding? How does a spectator who "regarde uniquement la photo" fill in the missing narrative blanks of the photo?

Literary studies asks similar questions of texts, particularly those that announce themselves as inspired by historical events. For Bonn, quasi-journalistic or testimonial artistic works obscure "les enjeux véritables" of war and ultimately do more harm than good. However, he sees in literature, precisely through its "aspect dérisoire, […] le seul lieu où l'innommable risque d'entrevoir un sens" (*Paysages* 7). Literature's distance from the real as a "luxe inutile," rather than its potential capacity for descriptive accuracy or political poignancy, accords it a particular force and offers the possibility of glimpsing meaning through formal innovation and literary artistry.

So what are the responsibilities of the artist during times of conflict? Do we harm literature by asking it to communicate material realities? And what forms of engagement remain for authors when critics dismiss their referential fiction as mere testimony, but audiences and publishers demand that they speak on behalf of a people and their conflict? During and after the National Liberation Struggle and the *décennie noire,* literary works provided a range of responses to these questions. Some authors aimed to tell untold stories through naturalistic, often bloody accounts of what was happening. Others attempted to textualize the unnamability of trauma through less literal means, leveraging an aesthetics of absence that more closely resembled the deeper structures of aftermath in Algeria. In two conflicts so saturated with the paradoxical coexistence of visible horror and hidden suffering, artists had to find creative ways of holding in tension the inescapability of war and its unspoken and unseen realities.

Algeria in the 1990s was a violent place. We know this because it was presented that way in newspapers and on television. We know that the civil war was particularly gruesome because "plus qu'elle s'éternise, apportant chaque semaine son cortège de morts souvent assassinés de manière atroce, moins on en perçoit les enjeux véritables" (Bonn, *Paysages* 7). The duration of the conflict and the circulation of violent images reduced the ability of foreign spectators to discern the "enjeux véritables": time and repetition worked against comprehension. This is Bonn's major criticism of the "testimonial" literature of the black decade, which he reads as attempting to communicate violence through realistic renderings of bloodied bodies, but which generally produces numbness and confusion. Bonn delineates a transition in Algerian literature away from the formal innovation and subversion of the Maghreb's "génération terrible" (Kateb Yacine and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine), towards a "return of the real," a real of "limited literary value" (8, 10). In the epilogue to *Qui se souvient de la mer*, Mohammed Dib argues against realism as an apt artistic response to historical trauma: "Un peu de sang répandu, un peu de chair broyée, un peu de sueur: il n'existe pas de spectacle plus désespérément terne. L'horreur ignore l'approfondissement; elle ne connaît que la répétition" (189). *Qui se souvient de la mer*, following suit, eschews the naturalism of Dib's earlier novels and never once mentions Algeria or independence in a novel about Algerian independence. To avoid the banality of mangled flesh, Dib prefers shock form to shock imagery. Estranging the reader from the referent is for him the only appropriate literary method for representing "the horror" on the page.

Bonn aims his critique primarily at academics and publishers, rather than texts or their authors, and argues that critics have applied the wrong criteria when analyzing Algerian literature; they are guilty of being "trop préoccupé[s] par l'impact politique immédiate de cette nouvelle littérature maghrébine" (22). Editors select texts for their graphic depictions of violence and hastily publish novels that closely resemble each other but have little to do with serious literature (16-17). While Bonn excuses writers who, in a climate of fear and violence, fail to evaluate their work against their predecessors ("le vécu de l'horreur ne permet guère de se poser une telle question" [17]), he chastises the publishing industry for reproducing the same tragic narratives and planting them firmly in the fields of the political. Importantly, not only editors and publishers, but also *readers*—particularly those in Europe and North America—share in the blame. As Bonn notes in his 1982 *Thèse d'État:*

> Le roman maghrébin de langue française est d'abord lu à travers une grille idéologique, qui par la "bonne volonté" même dont elle procède lui nie une énonciation autonome en ce que cette lecture est différente de celle qu'on réserve au roman français, allemande, italien, ou américain. (*Thèse*)

This "bonne volonté" translates into a paternalistic approach to Maghrebi literature—Algerian, above all—that reads ethnographically and through the lenses of cultural sensitivity and kindness rather than with critical acumen.[37]

[37] Bensmaïa describes Maghrebi literary works that, once "finally integrated into the deconstructed canon of world literature […] were made to serve as tools for political or ideological agendas. This kind of reading resulted more often than not in their being

Bonn's argument favors avant-garde texts over realism, documentary, or "témoignage" as responses to historical violence, and his essay invites a series of critical questions: Does state censorship—an attempt to limit the circulation of images and depictions of violence—create a public need for artistic realism? If all the photos of the bodies have been destroyed, is it the artist's responsibility to paint new ones? Might there be advantages to having access to both referential and anti-referential art? What about the place of narrative healing or the right of authors to tell their own story? How might we explain recent trends in Algerian literature away from testimony?

There are compelling arguments for why we need literary narratives of historical atrocity. Leigh Gilmore argues that literary testimonial accounts "broaden the testimonial archive" and "hold open the possibility that we can become more engaged readers not only of fiction but also, and indissolubly, of testimony" (80). Were it not for literary depictions of historical trauma, the textual trace of these events would be limited to legal documents, medical reports, NGO *bilans*, and the like. The act of representing would fall to centralized institutions (states, medical boards, courts) that may well have participated in or enabled the original violence. Stories add to this archive and contribute multiple, discordant, and potentially subversive voices. Beyond creating a more complete archive, testimonial literature for Gilmore "shape[s] a just outcome" and asserts "the category of the human in the face of its radical disavowal by genocide, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and rape" (81). For her, stories move toward justice and counter forms of violence that deprive the individual of speech.

---

reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard for what makes them literary works in and of themselves" (*Experimental* 6).

And testimonial literature's ability to write out of an imposed silence is one of its most powerful claims. Describing Algeria in the 1990s, Stora writes that

> Des mesures ont été prises pour empêcher les journalistes et les caméras de pénétrer dans le pays, ce qui a rendu difficile la production de représentations. À la censure étatique classique est venu s'ajouter l'autocensure des "rapporteurs" de faits, en particulier les journalistes par pressions des pouvoirs étatiques ou intégristes. La tâche d'ombre s'est élargie encore. (*La Guerre invisible* 111-12)

When the State prevents images from circulating, art finds itself confronted with the resulting void and must decide how and if to fill it. Stora argues that the invisibility of events "provoque l'incapacité de donner un sens au monde" (117); images and description order chaos, and their absence contributes to a crisis of invisibility. In the mind of the spectator/reader, speculative fantasies or ignorance stand in for the missing images, and for Stora, this presents particular risks. He sees the censorship of the 1990s as an attempt to make the images of violence go away without drawing attention to the ways in which that erasure happens. Narratives of those erased events—both literary and historical—fill the blank pages with something other than the revisionist accounts and ideological projections of state actors.[38]

---

[38] Gafaïti writes that "On 7 June 1994, in [Algeria's] progressively critical sociopolitical context, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Communication adopted a confidential decree that imposed a veto on coverage or information related to security issues. In short, this meant that journalists were subjected to systematic censorship and that they could not work independently. Two years later, these were completed by the 11

Beyond the public or collective value of testimonial literature that Stora and Gilmore articulate, Bhabha argues that individuals claim their rights as sovereign subjects through self-narration. He posits that

> [t]he right to narrate is…a metaphor for the fundamental human interest in freedom itself, the right to be heard, to be recognized and represented….When you fail to protect the right to narrate you are in danger of filling the silence with sirens, megaphones, hectoring voices carried by loudspeakers from podiums of great height over people who shrink into indistinguishable masses. (Bhabha)

For Bhabha, speaking animates the self and demands recognition from the other. Quiet, personal stories—the atomized histories of a people—defend against the cacophony of more audible narrative channels (sirens, megaphones), and must therefore be protected. Each of these arguments extolling the value of testimonial literature forecasts a world deprived of the testimonial literary archive as one in which politicians and jurists author our contact with the suffering of others. But even if we agree with these scholars that: (1) artists do indeed have a responsibility to respond to violence; (2) their responses work to complete the necessarily incomplete archive created by official documents; (3) responding artistically as an oppressed person is a way of speaking out against the

---

February 1996 governmental decision to appoint to every printing house 'reading committees' consisting of civil servants whose function was to verify the content and treatment of security-related information by newspapers before publication. Although these committees were suppressed in early 1998, the exercise of other forms of direct censorship is widely maintained" ("Power" 58).

oppressor; (4) art interrupts state control of the historical narrative; and (5) self-narration is an expression of human freedom, we realize that there are things beyond the reach of language that testimonial literature cannot grasp.

Stora advocates a central role for artistic testimony in this "guerre invisible" (a war full of images, but little understood outside of Algeria), but he concedes that there are places art cannot go:

> Comment évoquer les égorgements épouvantables, les tueries et les massacres? Comment parler des blessures personnelles, enfouies, au travers desquelles se profilent la complexité des nœuds de l'histoire coloniale et post-coloniale, l'impossibilité de les dénouer sereinement, tant ils sont constitués de violences, de non-dit? (113)

Words can only grope at the horror. As Dib reminds us, they never make it "more profound." He uses science fiction and neologisms in *Qui se souvient de la mer* to escape the discursive boundaries of realism; anti-referentiality is for him the appropriate mode of expression for a novel at the end of a revolution whose images, by 1962, had lost their shock value. If these "knots of history" are indeed impossible to untie "serenely," what can the writer do with the violence of the "non-dit"? Farida Boualit describes the paradox in which many Algerian authors found themselves in the 1990s: it was both impossible to write about the violence and impossible not to write about it.[39]

[39] "[C]es auteurs veulent être considérés en tant que tels et non en tant que témoins, car le système accorde la primauté à la création. Or, la création transcende les faits donc le temps; d'où le refus de la notion d'écriture d'urgence par certains nouveaux écrivains.

While it might well be impossible to represent atrocity, it might also be a bad idea to try. James Dawes asks a number of questions that start to delineate the ethical dilemmas that saddle literatures of atrocity:

> How does one avoid the trap of commodifying intense suffering to elicit maximum effect (or career advantage)? How do you resolve the paradox that your audiences hunger for these images and stories both because they want to understand their world and their moral responsibilities to it, and because they are narrowly voyeuristic? (166)

These inquiries concern themselves primarily with the individual—someone might be exploited, spoken for, or commodified. But traumatic stories also carry potential consequences for communities, as they can prolong feuds or become rallying cries for violent retribution. Julie Stone Peters adds two structural concerns: the testimonial narrative might provide the illusion of remedy or replace material reparations (as is the case with the truth and reconciliation commissions), and stories of individual suffering risk eclipsing the community tragedy, to the detriment of the latter:

> The epidemic of storytelling that has come to rights culture, and literary theory's implicit claim that it can offer rights a narrative foundation, may indeed be a curative return, one that both mobilizes compassion and serves as an art of healing. But it may be one that – precisely by drawing on the suppressed paradigm at the origins of humanitarian rights – merely offers

---

Néanmoins, il subsiste un certain malaise parce que même chez ces écrivains, l'écriture est dépendante du contexte socio-politique algérien" (36-7).

> hysterical repression a ritual expression. It may be a way of focusing on our little fingers at the expense of a global corpus (with its dreary impersonality), or at the expense of getting down to the complicated technical business of saving lives. (37)

The story—curative though it may be—becomes a distraction when it puts the "little finger" before the "global corpus." Maybe, Peters asks, there is too much feeling, too much sympathetic identification with individuals? Maybe a more sober, high-altitude perspective would afford a better view of things and provide some sense of coherence? If we ask too much of the individual story—that it heal, speak for community injustices, stand up to power, accurately represent the complexity of a horror, and do so ethically, without commodifying the bodies it represents—are we setting an impossible task before the text? Should we expect literary works to behave in such a prescribed way?

Perhaps we have invested too much in the idea that form is action. John Treat warns that the "pleasure" of form "is to be mistrusted: a belief in the human instinct for form may make us think that the well-executed lyric or novel can restore coherence, through its own internal order, to even a disintegrating world" (39). In the epilogue to *Qui se souvient de la mer*, Dib asks, "Comment parler de l'Algérie après Auschwitz, le ghetto de Varsovie et Hiroshima?" (190). His response in that novel is to avoid speaking the name "Algeria" and to communicate the inner realities of war through imagined spaces and names. In the 1990s, Algerian literary works in French began once again to name names, though the best of these make no pretense of achieving anything like

resolution, coherence, or order. They challenge statist attempts at censorship and forced amnesia, but also recognize the limits of their capacity to represent suffering or effect change.

Modes of Engagement

For Bonn, the hungers of a fascinated international audience during the *décennie noire* and the absence of a reliable war narrative created an opening in the literary market that bound text and public in formative ways. But what about the author? What forms of engagement remain for intellectuals when their political art is derided as mere testimony, but they are always and everywhere asked to speak for and on behalf of an armed conflict? How do Algerian intellectuals engage in a political landscape with no "side" to pick, no good political option, no party fervor? How does the concept of *auteurs engagés* apply to contemporary literary works?

Benoît Denis provides a useful definition of engagement as

> une confrontation de la littérature au politique, au sens le plus large. C'est une interrogation sur la place et la fonction de la littérature dans nos sociétés. Pour les écrivains qui l'ont pratiqué, cela a été, entre autres choses, une manière d'examiner dans quelle mesure la littérature pouvait être simultanément objet esthétique et force agissante. (296)

Denis describes an engagement that "confronts" and "interrogates"; it is a "practice" that "examines." This is a language of process and action, not destination or accomplishment. Engaged authors produce texts that participate, oppose a literature of abstention, and eschew any pretense of autonomy. Sartre, in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, defines the engaged author as someone who "embrasse étroitement son époque: elle est sa chance unique: elle est faite pour lui et il est fait pour elle" (12-13). For Sartre, writers cannot avoid the world that surrounds them and should therefore seize the present and "embrace" their historical moment, and he describes this meeting as both a blessing ("sa chance unique") and inevitable ("il est fait pour elle"). It is the responsibility of the author, therefore, to heed this call and respond with adequate gusto.

Adorno argues in "Commitment" that the true subversive potential of a work of art lies not in its ability to confront the political, embrace its *époque*, or serve as a "force agissante," but rather in its capacity to reject the forms bequeathed to it and create new ones. He writes that

> when the social contract with reality is abandoned, and literary works no longer speak as though they were reporting fact, hairs start to bristle. […] [T]he debate on commitment […] ignores the effect produced by works whose own formal laws pay no heed to coherent effects. So long as it fails to understand what the shock of the unintelligible can communicate, the whole dispute resembles shadow-boxing. (*Aesthetics* 303)

Critics of the avant-garde—those who might accuse anti-referential artists of retreating to a non-space of political apathy—miss the point, Adorno tells us. Anti-referential art participates fully in the world because it resists by "form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads" (304). But when art resists the temptation to counter the horrors of the world with a representational pistol of its own, "hairs start to bristle"—the response is visceral and the effects, lasting. "Committed" works of art (and the artists who produce them) can, for Adorno, only "assimilate themselves sedulously to the brute existence against which they protest, in forms so ephemeral […] that from their first day they belong to the seminars in which they inevitably end" (301). They have a short shelf life and expire quickly as new headlines replace old ones, and the urgency of the present fades before new crises and new bodies.

For Sartre, however, this "shock of the unintelligible" communicates mostly silence, which is for him an endorsement of the status quo—"se taire, ce n'est pas être muet, c'est refuser de parler, donc parler encore" (32). While according to Jameson,

> the very concept of the work of art *qua* aesthetic object is itself a fetishization and an abstraction. What is real is precisely not the isolated script or text itself but rather the work-in-situation, the work-in-performance, in which for a brief moment the gap between producer and consumer, between *destinataire* and *destinateur,* is momentarily bridged, and the twin crisis of a missing public and an artist without social function is temporarily overcome. (*Ideologies* 185-6)

For Jameson, a work read outside its "situation" is already co-opted. Aesthetic contemplation provides a cover, a transcendent alibi, but fails to attain the force of the work consumed "in situation." Jameson makes this point in his extended review of Jacques Leenhardt's *Lecture politique du roman: La Jalousie d'Alain Robbe-Grillet*. Reading a novel that announces itself as "anti-referential" through the lens of Marxism requires Leenhardt to prove that "Robbe-Grillet's novel is about something and possesses a genuine 'referent'" (177). The trees, servants, verandas, and bugs of *La Jalousie* invite us to read out of the text a specifically colonial space, and our experience of the novel is richer for having done so. Jameson describes Leenhardt's method as "a transcendence of the inner, formal experience of the work or of the signifier by a study of its material and referential preconditions" (177). This type of reading opens up the possibility of a compromise: the inner formal experience is in constant dialogue with its material and referential context, and attention to both (and to their shared tensions) makes for a more meaningful encounter with the novel.

Even Adorno acknowledges the paradox of autonomous art, noting that "[t]here is no material content, no formal category of an artistic creation, however mysteriously changed and unknown to itself, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free" (314). In other words, sculpted, glazed, and transformed, the clay remains the stuff of the earth. Roland Barthes, in his own project of imagining a writing that escapes the polarities of political realism and aesthetic purism, describes in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* a certain "tragique de l'écriture," wherein "chaque écrivain conscient doit désormais se débattre contre des signes ancestraux et tout-puissants qui, du fond d'un

passé étranger, lui imposent la littérature comme un rituel" (64). Fantasies of pure art or social realism imagine artists either powerful enough to detach themselves fully from the world around them or conversely, capable of understanding it intimately enough to translate its meanings for the rest of us.

In Algeria, the past twenty-five years have forced artists and intellectuals to make choices about the possibility of engagement and the role of art in times of civil strife, as they have become targets of both the state and insurgent forces. During the struggle for independence, intellectuals were engaged in very material ways by their moment, whether they wanted to be or not. Gafaïti describes the practice of targeting intellectuals during the war for independence as paving the way for "the theocratic discourse which is now trying to erase not only thought and art, but life" ("Culture" 73). Intellectuals were "targeted by illegitimate political forces that oppose each other in every respect with the exception of their common will to eradicate those who question their status, that is to say, those who refuse participation" (75). Unlike Sartre's France, Algeria in the 1990s had no major political organism, no *PCF des années 50* that could in any way serve as a credible rallying point for dissident writers. The nature of the civil war was such that neither the FLN nor the insurgency enjoyed anything like majority support. There was no side to take and no serious architecture of democratic resistance to endorse. Participation, for the contemporary Algerian intellectual, often takes the form of non-partisan, non-participatory art that engages with the present but refuses to sign on to any *programme*. It is *engagement sans embrigadement*.[40]

[40] The term is Landsberg's.

One strategy favored by engaged authors writing in or about Algeria is to foreground the trope of absence. Disappearances, censorship, canceled elections, unmarked graves, falsified census reports, off-shore bank accounts, and legislated forgetting have all punctuated the post-independence period in formative ways. Enforced voids in Algeria are perhaps most remarkable for their obviousness—these acts of effacement are well known and openly mocked, but remain *le pouvoir*'s favored strategy for skirting inconvenient truths. Obvious though they may be, voids foreclose on the possibility of an honest accounting and halt collective progress toward reconciliation. When the fate of thousands of abductees from the civil war is unknown, when the location of stolen oil revenues remains a mystery, and when difficult chapters from the nation's history go unread, aftermath persists. Cognizant of the challenges that absences create for Algeria, authors have found creative ways of not only filling the nation's blank pages, but performing the very phenomenon of absence in their work. Such strategies deploy the arsenal of literary aesthetics to do what history, journalism, and testimonial fiction cannot: satirizing the obscenity of absence and exposing the structural legacies of the void in Algeria.

Quantifying Ashes

Abdelkader Djemaï's 1995 novel, *Un été de cendres*, was published shortly after the author left Algeria in 1993, when many authors were being targeted by the Islamist insurgency. The text is not a literary letter to the world written from the urgency of a

conflict, documenting day-to-day violence of the *décennie noire*. It neither describes the civil war through literary realism nor retreats to an autonomous space of transcendent formal innovation. His text centers squarely on the impossibility of description and one man's failure to order and structure a turbulent and decaying world. The protagonist, Sid Ahmed Benbrik, is a functionary in the Ministry of Statistics under "office arrest" for having alerted the government to over two million people missing from the most recent Algiers census report. At a meeting with his supervisors, he suggests creating "une autre rubrique pour comptabiliser les personnes assassinées dans la rue ou chez elles, devant leurs enfants, leurs épouses," but, unsurprisingly, "La Direction a refusé" (19). They confine Benbrik to his office, where he must ride out the summer heat wave inside a brutalist bureaucratic labyrinth. To pass the time and "pour ne pas perdre la main," the statistician counts individual beans, lentils, coffee grains, rice, salt, peas, and chickpeas. He is allowed to visit a prostitute once a week, shaves carefully, and methodically polishes his shoes. At night, he roams the building and measures its hallways. And outside his window, he observes, "une tragique litanie, les barrages, les ratissages, les arrestations, les enlèvements, les viols, la torture, les mutilations, le racket, les actes de sabotage, les assassinats aveugles" (83). Freezers at the city morgue have broken down and the smell of decaying bodies hangs over the city. The narrator drinks too much coffee and smokes too many cigarettes, and as a result, suffers tremors. At the novel's conclusion, Benbrik embarks on his final project: counting all the flies in Algiers.

He is a protagonist faced on several fronts with an unknowable world that is spinning out of control, and he's beholden to the weather, his bosses, the smell of bodies,

the sounds of a civil war, and his own boredom. Benbrik attempts to correct a false national narrative (the government's fictitious head count) with more honest accounting, and for this, he is punished. To regain control of his life, he tries to conquer his hermetic world with knowledge and certainty, assuring the reader that "[j]e peux vous dire, par exemple—et avec exactitude—que le couloir qui longe mon cagibi mesure trente-six pas et trois doigts de la main" (21). In fact, the only thing that Benbrik can know and say with "exactitude" is the length of the hallway and the number of grains of rice in a bag. With no new rubric for tallying casualties in the capital, the dead—having lost their bodies—now lose their names and cannot even become statistics. Algeria's corpses disappear into the file cabinets, waste baskets, and *classeurs* of the Ministry's basement in a final, banal act of disappearance.

The capital's broken morgue reminds us that there are some things that surpass the regulatory powers of the *dossier*. The regime cannot keep its machines running, and the pungent odor of its dysfunction is a constant and inescapable reminder to the people of Algiers of the bodies that cannot be fully erased or ignored. Like the ashes of the novel's title, the bodies are a remnant—the traces left by failed attempts at total erasure. Something was there (bodies, an election, democracy), and now it's gone, but there's an odor of the thing that went missing. The void in Algeria is not total absence, but rather *absence materialized*. It is absence with a glaring remainder, one that confronts the population daily as a reminder of the loss, be it personal, familial, economic, or political. When Benbrik visits his wife's grave, he notices that "le cimetière a quadruplé de surface depuis trois ans. À chaque fois que la municipalité repousse les murs, la mort, sans se

hâter, les rattrape, les dépasse. Parmi les nouvelles tombes se trouvent, fraîches et nues, celles des personnes assassinées" (105). The only thing blooming in the sweltering summer heat is the cemetery. The containers of state—the morgue, the census—are unwilling and unable to respond to the scope and scale of violence in Algeria in the early 1990s, but an organic materiality remains and cannot be repressed or hidden. Benbrik responds to this overflow by focusing his attention on the tiny world of his office building, counting, measuring, and authoring little truths in a sea of lies.

Life in the city has become utterly de-humanized. Curfews make for deserted streets that Benbrik wanders after his weekly visits to the sex worker Nouria. He describes a city "à la recherche de sa propre ombre" (50). Algiers is yet another *there that isn't quite there*, its residents living in

> [l]es ruines des vieux quartiers, sous des tentes avec des lits de camp […] Et dans ces grottes creusées à même les collines qui entourent la ville ceinturée de bidonvilles et de taudis. Des familles vivent aussi dans des caves, des buanderies, des garages […] D'autres, des salles de classe, des dépendances de cimetières, des toilettes publiques. (35)

People are reduced to beings that, like Benbrik, must find *cagibis* of their own. Humans metamorphose into rodents in search of shelter, chased out of their homes by a housing shortage and the bombings that by 1995 had made certain neighborhoods uninhabitable. Benbrik describes Algerois as "[f]antômes livides et dépenaillés, ils errant dans les mille huit cent quatre-cinq rues, impasses, avenues et ruelles de la ville, rongée elle-même par

une sourde anxiété qui mine ses murs zébrés de graffiti vindicatifs ou haineux" (35-6). The hard surfaces of the urban landscape—avenues, streets, and walls—structure the flow of the fluid, ghostlike residents who "errent." Dehumanized and zombie-like, they perform the blurring nature of the void in their daily existence, not quite living but not quite dead. One of the popular slogans of the "graffiti vindicatifs" in 1990s Algeria was "Vous ne pouvez pas nous tuer. Nous sommes déjà morts."

Benbrik boasts of having "de bons yeux et une mémoire infaillible" (37), which is why he poses such a threat to the leadership of the statistics ministry where he works. What *le pouvoir* least needed in the 1990s was an attentive public with a good memory. Blindness and forced amnesia were the orders of the day, and a number-obsessed statistician with a photographic memory working in the very office tasked with manipulating census data to reflect various *mythes du jour* was a nuisance to the regime. But Benbrik can't help himself. His dedication to the truth of numbers is such that he guarantees his quasi-imprisonment through his inability to play the scripted role required of him by his superiors. Wandering the empty hallways of his building one night, he enters an office and finds

> [u]n journal abandonné […] ouvert à la rubrique des meurtres, des incendies d'écoles, de lycées, de mairies, d'usines, de forêts, de trains, d'autocars. Un encadré, avec une photo, est consacré à la morgue et aux efforts déployés pour la réparer. […] Près d'un classeur métallique, un magazine […] ouvert, lui, sur les pages des programmes de télévision, des

> mots croisés ou fléchés, des recettes de cuisine, des conseils pratiques, des proverbes, sur les horaires de prières, de trains et sur l'horoscope. (61-2)

The newspaper documents the country's descent into the "cendres" of the novel's title, while the magazine offers distraction. Whereas the headlines are ugly reminders (unneeded, perhaps) of the ravages of civil conflict, the magazine presents a world that goes on and is best handled by passing one's time with a crossword puzzle. Benbrik finds both in the office of one of his bosses, and both are "ouvert." The powerful men in charge of Algeria had to become masters of holding this paradox in tension: the tragedy, on the one hand, and the distraction, on the other. The regime's survival requires men with the ability to see without seeing—a *refus de voir* when such refusal was impossible.

Benbrik can't look away from the truth of the body count and he compensates for the trauma of looking squarely at the national tragedy by attempting to tame the unruly present through quantitative study. He seeks small moments of reprieve in sex, bad food, cigarettes, and coffee, and fixates on artificial representations of other places. Counting, lists, and measurements grasp at ordering the immediacy of the present, while images in the novel connect to anchors in the past or offer the fantasy of escape. Benbrik catalogues the contents of his colleagues' offices and organizes the many posters that decorate the walls into categories:

> Des vues nocturnes de Montréal, Londres, Madrid, Vienne, de Paris [qui] montrent des fleuves et des avenues opulentes et richement illuminées. Des équipes de football, des voitures de collection, des vedettes de

> cinéma, de la chanson raï et de la boxe complètent ce catalogue destiné en cette époque de sécheresse, de sang et de cortèges funèbres, à former des rêves. (62)

The rivers and avenues of these North American and European cityscapes—channels of opulence, illumination, and wealth—distract from the dry lifelessness of the city and its "cortèges funèbres" (62). Posters of urban El Dorados hang alongside soccer teams, cars, and celebrities, and these objects of desire (for escape, success abroad, sex, and power) respond to the anxieties of the present with fantasy, not description. Such images (inside the ministry charged with detailing the current size, location, and composition of a society) provide something to look at other than falsified spreadsheets or the helicopters outside that circle "lentement au-dessus des quartiers réputés chauds" (82). The bedside portrait of Benbrik's late wife, Meriem, shows her standing beside "un grand vase débordant de fleurs en plastique" (16), and behind her, "une tapisserie de couleur olive représente une scène bucolique où folâtrent des gazelles sous des cascades étincelantes" (17). Nouria's bedroom, too, is "décorée de paysages de dunes, d'oasis et d'oueds" (50). These are all reminders of someplace else: Europe, North America, Brazilian soccer turfs, and unnamed pastoral renderings of unblemished nature. But they are cheap and gaudy—*trompe l'oeil* that fail to *trompe*. Behind the posters are cracked walls and chipping paint, and the plastic flowers may endure, while Meriem is dead. Fantasies are there, but they are Potemkin fantasies that can't adequately mask the suffering they are designed to obscure.

Djemaï's text presents the polarities of Benbrik's manic counting and his co-workers' travel posters as bad, if understandable, coping strategies. *Un été de cendres* stages a compromise by acknowledging a present reality that exceeds existing forms of certainty (census data, names on lists, and morgues), while remaining always already mediated by their limiting frameworks. Responses to external chaos take shape as either the expression of faith in one's ability to order the world (counting grains of coffee) or denial (dreaming of life in Vienna)—the impossibility of description or the impossibility of escape. Djemaï's Algeria has dead people, government corruption, and decay to spare, but the text presents these not in a heroic or tragic narrative with prescribed emotional responses, but rather translates them through the optics of a protagonist who experiences such horrors "out there," mediated through windows, census reports, and newspapers that are "pleins de choses crues, horribles, effroyables. [Une] réalité [qui] dépasse souvent la fiction" (46). Evil, in its horrific banality, makes testimonial fiction redundant when readers are already numbed to such descriptions. But despite these pressures, Djemaï's text faces its present head on and exposes the artist's inability to escape the pincers of inadequate realism and detached fantasy. The author's struggle itself becomes the clearest and most faithful expression of a divided and conflicted present, a testimony at once impossible and inescapable.

Djemaï was neither the first nor the last author to use the figure of absence as a response to the many material and historical absences that permeate Algeria. The void is not a recent FLN confection, and it has a long history in Algeria. The French excelled at effacement, and during the colonial occupation and war for independence, the proliferation of absence became a site for literary intervention, as writers—Algerian and French—sought ways of telling the untold stories. Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1955 novel, *Le Voyeur,* makes no mention of Algeria, or, for that matter, France. The text explicitly resists being situated in time or space and seems to exist in an autonomous *non-lieu* of its own invention. The story is deceptively simple: a watch salesman, Mathias, returns by ferry to the island of his youth to spend the day selling watches. After eighty-seven pages, there is a single blank page representing one hour of his day. When the narrative picks up again, a young girl, Jacqueline, is found dead at the bottom of a cliff. Mathias spends the rest of the novel refining and explaining his alibi to anyone who will listen. After missing his boat back to "the continent," he spends an additional three days on the island and returns home a free man. Page eighty-eight—the *page blanche*—has been the subject of much debate. For some, the blank page replaces the scene of the girl's torture, rape and murder. Other critics question whether there really was a crime at all, and Bruce Morrissette even suggests that it might be a typographical coincidence (91). But I read the blank page—and *Le Voyeur* more broadly—as responding to the Algerian "conflict" ("les évènements"), in its second year at the time of the novel's publication. France after

the Second World War was a country busy building monuments to the heroes of the resistance and liberation, while awkwardly hurrying past the unsightly traces of the Vichy regime and its collaborators. Defeats in Indochina and the crumbling of the colonial empire created blank spaces on the map that were once French, and *Le Voyeur* is very much a product of and a response to this emerging void in the French national psyche. The fact that the novel does not directly address the "Algerian question" in no way renders it any less political or historical. Robbe-Grillet's critique is structural, and foregrounds trauma, forgetting, and absence to expose the selective and collective mutism of his day.

Historical readings of the *nouveau roman* (a genre which sought consciously to dispense with external referents and resist interpretation) might seem intellectually suspect. But the formal import of the *nouveau roman*—its affront to bourgeois aesthetic norms and existing narrative conventions—has deep roots in the material landscape of the Fourth Republic. Objects, subjects, perception, reception and narration form a constellation of literary determinants that the *nouveau roman* organizes in politically-charged ways. If this anti-referential novel is in fact highly political and historically engaged with its moment, the established lines between aesthetic, literary, or formal concerns and political or historical ones become productively fuzzy. To read Robbe-Grillet as a situated, even *engaged* author, writing from within a specific context and moment, is, I would argue, to understand him and *la Françalgérie* of 1955 more fully.

Le Voyeur is a novel heavy with things. Lengthy, exhaustive descriptions of houses, ports, cafés, and watches everywhere bombard the reader, and it is not long

before one begins to beg of these objects some pattern or meaning. In his foreword to Bruce Morrissette's 1975 *The Novels of Robbe-Grillet*, Roland Barthes writes that

> embedded in a quantity of different meanings, with which men of different sensibilities, poetic visions, and attitudes have suffused the name of each object, the work of the novelist becomes as it were cathartic: he purifies things of the meanings which men constantly assign to them. How? Obviously, by description. Robbe-Grillet therefore produces descriptions of objects sufficiently geometric to discourage any inductive derivation of poetic meaning residing in the thing, and sufficiently minute to break the fascination of the story. (10-11)

The different meanings "embedded" in objects are dispensed with in an act of purification, the detritus of literary metaphor, swept off the engineer's desk, and our fascination, "broken," leaving us the world as it is and little more. And yet Barthes, some five pages later, points to new currents in "Robbegrilletian" criticism that turn his novels into things "not only full, but full of secrets" (15). Criticism, for Barthes, "must begin to search out what lies behind and around this object: it becomes an act of deciphering, of hermeneutics; it seeks for 'keys' (and usually finds them)" (15). Things now rescued from their status as mere objects, we are encouraged to follow Morrissette on something of a quest ("search out," "decipher," "keys"), with the promise that behind the thick walls of description, a treasure of meaning awaits.

Morrissette argues that Robbe-Grillet never imagined his novels existing in a vacuum. He writes that:

> [d]iscussing specifically the role of *things*, Robbe-Grillet explains how, though they are in themselves unrelated to man, indifferent to his emotions, unaffected by his glance, totally unsymbolic, they may nevertheless acquire the psychic 'charge' that they obviously carry in many crucial passages of the author's novels, becoming, in a word, objective correlatives. (33)

The evocation of "things […] indifferent" and "unaffected" says a great deal about the paradox of the so-called "objective novel." These objects must first be perceived (presumably by a human), at which point they fall victim to our desires, needs and habits. We imbue them with meaning and give them personality, as Morrissette does in referring to them as "indifferent" or "unaffected"—adjectives that one usually associates with cognition and affect. Olga Bernal stages this combat between humanity's desiring gaze and the resistance of objects with even greater clarity, noting that "[le] regard pourra imaginer—et le regard chez Robbe-Grillet est toujours imagination—les choses comme il le voudra; les choses elles-mêmes resteront inchangées, neutre à l'égard de l'homme, sans lien avec lui" (183). We are free to imagine and project as we like, but objects remain cold and static, unmoved by our symbolic drive.

The "regard" in *Le Voyeur* is constantly organizing objects; they may well be "indifferent" to the gaze, but the reader experiences the novel through the mediated

procession of the narrative, one that selects objects for inclusion or exclusion. They assume what Roger-Michel Allemand calls “une fonction indicielle très forte” (65) and serve as *repères* for the meaning-hungry protagonist and reader alike. The novel’s organizing system for objects is manifest most clearly in the repetition of various forms of the figure eight. The string in Mathias’s pocket is “roulée en forme de huit” (163), while at the port we encounter “des anneaux de fer scellés” (133). At one of the houses Mathias visits, “il y avait deux nœuds arrondis, peints côte à côte, qui ressemblaient à deux gros yeux—ou plus exactement à une paire de lunettes” (36-7). These objects may indeed be purified of all the meanings which we might assign them, but in the narrative, they are freighted with the significance granted them by the text’s structure and repetition.

When Mathias is unable to decipher the objects that surround him, he is lost and perplexed:

> Le complet manque de forme qui régnait dans l'agencement (du repas) empêchait une fois de plus le voyageur de savoir à quoi s'en tenir sur sa propre situation. [...] Autour de lui, l'état des choses ne fournissait aucun repère: le repas n'avait pas plus de raison de s'achever là que de se poursuivre. (144)

This “manque de forme” impedes Mathias’s environmental literacy—he is in the same situation as the reader, groping for some signage that might constitute a semblance of order or furnish a roadmap to the internal logic of the text. When objects refuse

interpretation and resist meaning, Mathias, like the reader, is confronted with an "impossibilité d'agir." In *Pour un nouveau roman*, Robbe-Grillet writes that "[l]'objectivité au sens courant du terme—impersonnalité totale du regard—est trop évidemment une chimère. Mais c'est la *liberté* qui devrait du moins être possible" (18, emphasis in the original). This "liberté" translates for the reader into a kind of interpretive freedom. Absent narrative authority, we (like Mathias) can make of these objects what we will. Mathias's attempts at imposing an order on objects provide us with the attention to detail and repetition that structure the text, but we are never led from observation to analysis; the objects are there for Mathias (and for us) but are denied the coordinates of commentary or symbolic extrapolation. Narrative power has been wrested from the text and returned to readers, allowing us to wade through the viscosity of these objects in hope of arriving at some legible destination.

The proliferation of both objects and descriptions in *Le Voyeur* begs the question, "Who decides what gets mentioned?" and there is a marked ambiguity of narrative perspective. Are we inside Mathias's head or floating above him through the observations of some unnamed narrator? The obsessive, repetitive descriptions signal that whatever the source of the narration, it is in no way "indifferent" or "unaffected." As Allemand observes:

> Dans *Le Voyeur*, tout le contenu de la conscience du personnage est donc traduit par les descriptions du monde qui l'entoure. Car c'est son regard qui choisit les objets et en varie l'évocation par une récurrence quasi obsessionnelle, tandis que la sélection des images exprime la subjectivité

> d'un être névrosé, enfermé dans un univers paradoxal où il n'existe plus de distinction entre l'intériorité et l'extériorité. (71)

Mathias selects and distributes objects and description along the axis his own subjectivity. And yet, as Morrissette reminds us, the "optics of the scenes are not always Mathias's" (83). The text moves cinematically from above our narrator to inside him, collapsing (to use Allemand's language) "interiority and exteriority." It envelops the world through perception and description: Mathias is always seeing and things are always seen, and he is *seeing himself see* in a communion of vision and the visible, acts neither divorced nor discreet but intertwined and overlapping. The question of whose narrative voice we hear (Mathias's? The narrator's? Robbe-Grillet's?) becomes superfluous; we are confronted with a textual rendering of perception that by its very nature includes a constellation of things seen, a subject seeing, and a subject seeing himself see. We are shown to exist not in dominance over objects, others, or the world around us, but rather in concert with them. In our very look, we both consume the visible and bestow visibility upon others. This intimacy carries with it a correlative responsibility for the collective, as there is nowhere to hide. When everyone is both seer and seen, everyone knows. And Robbe-Grillet seems to suggest that a community unwilling to accept the burden of its own knowing is guilty, through its silence, of the crimes perpetrated in its name, a conclusion with ramifications for 1950s France and contemporary Algeria.

Another question that takes up a great deal of real estate in the critical commentary concerns the ambiguity of the novel's eponymous *voyeur*. Morrissette

rejects the idea of Mathias as the voyeur, noting that "Mathias, instead of being the *voyeur,* is himself the *object* or victim of the real *voyeur* of the novel […] [he] becomes chiefly the object of the look of young Julien […] The *voyeur,* therefore, is Julien" (103-4)—a young island resident who likely saw Mathias commit his crimes. Ben Stoltzfus takes a different view: "The real voyeur is Mathias or perhaps even the reader who 'sees' the crime happening long before it has occurred" (507). Jeffrey Kittay points to "the newspaper clipping, describing a rape, which Mathias carries with him" as a form of journalistic voyeurism (57). I find the search for the ultimate "voyeur" to be largely unimportant. Julien is the voyeur, Mathias is the voyeur, and the reader (both of the newspaper article and the novel) is a voyeur, because voyeurism is a condition of human existence in the modern age. We long for images and seek access to what Conrad termed "the horror." Reality television and crime dramas are but the most recent expressions of our "fascination with the abomination" (10). And just as we are all voyeurs, so too are we always observed. We see others, we are seen, and we see ourselves, both seeing and as seen. The text's genius lies in negotiating the spaces between and among these multiple visions and visibles.

There is little controversy over the particular place of the reader in Robbe-Grillet's text. Morrissette describes "Mathias's mind-visions in whose centre the reader places himself, first as a disoriented *observer* and later, despite the persistence of a certain 'aesthetic distance,' as a *participant*" (77, emphasis in the original), while Valerie Minogue argues that "we create, in our reading of the novel, the details of a scene of sexual sadism which is itself never projected on the novel's screen" (827). Stoltzfus

positions the reader as "analyst: he must solve the behavior of the protagonist instead of having it explained for him, he must perceive and establish the function of the relationship hidden beneath the visible surface 'play' of objects" (499). And for Ruth Holzberg,

> [c]'est ainsi que se révélera le rôle actif du lecteur et de l'écrivain et que se définira l'évolution d'un texte basé principalement sur les rapports entre ces deux personnes […] En fait, tout ceci importe peu, car s'il y a une enquête policière, c'est *nous* qui la menons, et c'est ainsi que *nous* créons le récit, que *nous* lui permettons d'exister. (849)

In a novel so filled with gaps and elision, the reader is tasked with completing the narrative through supposition, projection, and imagination. The text assumes an intimacy with the reader that produces effects in that same reader. And nowhere is the reader more implicated than on page eighty-eight, the blank page. In the preceding eighty-seven pages, we are given plenty of clues to anticipate what is coming: Mathias obsessively toys with a string in his pocket, purchases candy at a candy store, and lingers on lengthy descriptions of young girls in sexually-suggestive positions. But when we leave Mathias on the threshold of the blank page, he is at a fork in the road: one path leads to the cliff and the other, to the next farm. When we re-join him after the *vide*, he is again on his bicycle and we must complete the scene with our own projections, imagining what happened between Mathias and Jacqueline. In a formal move that recalls John Cage's 1952 composition *4'33"*—a piece in which no music is played, forcing the audience to

confront the sounds of its own anticipation (squirming, coughing, squeaking chairs)—this page becomes both screen and mirror. We project what we want but must also confront our own projection. Do we imagine the scene from Mathias's perspective or from Jacqueline's? Do we watch from some removed, third-person position? What details do we include? How does it make us feel? Alain Goulet argues that "[l]'écriture a pour fonction de voiler et dévoiler le désir, non seulement de Mathias, mais aussi des lecteurs, et à travers eux ce sont les fantasmes de notre monde contemporain qui sont mis à jour, les pulsions de notre inconscient collectif" (49). Robbe-Grillet empowers us to write our own scene, but this empowerment is also a condemnation: our desire to look into the void forces us to return with what we have seen and decide what to do (or not) with what we've created.

Mathias returns to the crime scene through dreams, visions, hallucinations, and reflections, each containing shifting details and unstable descriptions. Having authored our own film of the crime, we must compare what we witnessed with Mathias's various accounts. As the text provides no stable testimony of what took place, we are the only witnesses. There is no text to deconstruct or explicate, and no possibility of collectively working through what we have seen, since each projection is unique to the individual reader. Robbe-Grillet transforms us into silent witnesses—keepers of the text's secret. We are left guilty and implicated, the text echoing our own silence with an island population seemingly unconcerned with the death of Jacqueline.

Minogue observes that

> [o]nce Mathias's crime is committed, there is a steady trickle of betrayal from his consciousness, even as he hushes up the events and tries to rewrite the narrative. He has, in fact, quite lost control of the narrative. Not only is Mathias unable to give a coherent, and innocent, account of his activities, but every quirk of the narrative seems to betray his guilt. (824)

Like Julien (the only potential witness to Mathias's crime), we are aware of Mathias's "betrayal" of consciousness and undergo our own process of auto-betrayal. We know that something took place but are tempted to doubt, and in so doing, write an alibi of our own. Doris Davis notes that "[n]ulle part n'est décrit le crime (s'il y en a un)" (479) while Barthes asks, "Mais de ce meurtre suis-je bien sûr? L'acte lui-même est narrativement blanchi" (Morrissette 64). *Le Voyeur* encourages us to doubt Julien's credibility, forcing us to wonder if perhaps there was ultimately nothing to see after all. Julien's eyes are described as "rigides et bizarre—comme inconscients, ou même aveugles—ou comme idiots" (215). We know that Julien, just like Mathias, is a liar. The two collude (in dialogue) to cement the fictitious details of Mathias's alibi:

> 'Vous êtes descendu de vélo et vous avez frappé à la porte. Après, vous êtes allé voir à la barrière du jardin. Et avant de partir vous avec pris une clef, dans une petite sacoche accrochée sous la selle, pour resserrer un truc à votre changement de vitesse.'

> ‘Oui, oui, c’est ça!’ confirmait Mathias à chaque phrase, en essayant de sourire, comme si ces actes imaginaires avaient été aussi évidents que sans importance. (199)

Kittay reminds us that alibis contain an element of solidarity, noting that “if you have it alone, you don’t have one. It is a very social story, your alibi, it has to be in the presence of others to stand up. […] Alibis have to be shared, otherwise they’re no good” (72). The heinousness of Mathias’s deed makes us want to look away from the crime scene that we constructed while turning the blank page. The reader may prefer complicity with Mathias’s alibi to confronting the darker recesses of their subconscious, projected onto the void as the details of the violent episode. This complicity eases the burden of testimony and the need to remember, for if we can admit even momentarily the possibility that there was no crime, we have nothing to remember, nothing to report, and nothing to own.

And yet such a will to efface the crime (on the part of readers and critics alike) should raise a serious flag of caution. In Lynn Higgins’s analysis of Alain Resnais’s adaptation of Robbe-Grillet’s screenplay, *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* (in which an absent rape is also central to the plot), she flags the dangers of putting the factuality of rape into doubt through narrative omission:

> Real people (nearly always women) get raped, and they do not want to hear that rape is only one among an infinite number of possible meanings of their experience […] Critical arguments that erase rape from the film

> are exactly those used to invalidate real women's accounts of rape: It could have been many other things. Are you *sure*? Are you sure you're sure? Rape becomes an interpretive 'malaise' […] We cannot claim that *Marienbad* is a rape story to the exclusion of other stories, but only how the other stories serve to cover up rape by rewriting it. And perhaps show how easy it is to hide rape, and thus how dangerous. ("Screen" 305-18)

Barthes's and Davis's remarks—in which the very existence of a crime is in doubt—begin to sound like a cover-up. And this is precisely what *Le Voyeur* does: we know that something happened (after all, it is we who wrote the scene of rape, torture and murder) but we then proceed to doubt our own account—*maybe we were wrong, maybe nothing happened?* Rather than position Robbe-Grillet's text in a morally-dubious light, this inscribed doubting mirrors a prevailing *refus de voir* that was endemic to France in the early years of the Algerian war. Marie Chominot notes that

> [l]e souvenir douloureux de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et de l'Occupation, le traumatisme de Diên Biên Phu, l'ébranlement de la grandeur française, mais aussi le repli sur soi lié à la société de consommation naissante et au confort individuel enfin accessible après des années difficiles sont autant d'éléments qui convergent pour expliquer ce refus de voir. (576-7)

The wounds of the Second World War were still raw, the horrors of the present too ugly, and the culture of consumption sufficiently distracting that honest accounts of what was happening in Algeria were hard to come by and infrequently sought.[41] It was easier to go to the movies, listen to records and enjoy the economic growth of the 1950s than to focus too closely on the Algerian "question."

In *Le Voyeur*, this *refus de voir* allows Mathias to return home from the island a free man, and the island returns to life as normal. As Stoltzfus argues:

> [t]he novel is full of "violence sans objet" since the murderer, Mathias, has no "reasonable" motive for his crime. Because no one suspects the violence of his compulsion, he is not apprehended. […] Therefore, his crime is "sans résultat" because, contrary to the traditional detective novel, the guilty person in *Le Voyeur* is not caught and does not atone for his offense against society. (505)

And yet there is an object (Jacqueline) and there is a consequence (she's dead). If we move too quickly from thinking in terms of victims and perpetrators, we complete Mathias's alibi. A *refus de voir* can transform all too easily into a *refus de justice*. The island does not want to see, renders no verdict, and attains neither final closure nor a cathartic ending.

Despite Morrissette's assertion that Mathias is "the *object,* or victim of the real *voyeur* of the novel" (103, emphasis in the original), I think we should pause before

---

[41] See Ross.

conflating too hastily categories of victims and types of trauma. Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between what he terms "structural trauma," to which everyone is subject, and "historical trauma," which happens to specific people in specific times in places (*Writing History* 79). He also distinguishes between the trauma of the witness, the trauma of the perpetrator and the trauma of the victim. Each functions through similar mechanisms of denial, repression, acting out and forgetting, but he urges us to avoid blending these into a single category (78-9). The reader might have suffered a kind of trauma in authoring the rape-torture-murder scene, and Mathias may well have suffered a form of perpetrator trauma, but these should not be confused with the trauma suffered by Jacqueline. Taken too seriously, these secondary and tertiary traumas risk implicating us in Mathias's alibi, fostering doubt and paving the way for forgetting. Ricœur argues that "individual manifestations of forgetting are inextricably mixed with its collective forms, to the point that the most troubling experiences of forgetting […] display their most malevolent effects only on the scale of collective memories" (443-5). Erasure enables this collective forgetting, both at the individual and community level, with sanitized official memories displacing messier, individual ones. The trap of memory is set, and inconvenient recollections removed from the memorial archives both of individuals and of the national psyche.

At the end of *Le Voyeur*, the island's inhabitants enact various erasures of their own: shopkeepers wash windows and streets, rain showers clean rooftops, and municipal workers collect debris along the port. The community performs a cleansing that mimics the will to forget. In the town's central square, we see "[d]e l'autre côté du monument

aux morts, […] le panneau-réclame du cinéma recouvert d'un papier entièrement blanc, collé sur toute la surface du bois" (250). The violent and sexually-suggestive movie poster is literally covered up with a clean sheet of paper. The island has willed a forgetting that masks, rather than works through, its soiled memories. The monument to the dead is also revealing. Its appearance early in the text animates the conflict between official memory and the darker individual memories it replaces:

> Au centre de la place, Mathias remarqua une statue qu'il ne connaissait pas—du moins dont il n'avait pas gardé le souvenir. Dressée sur une éminence de granite sculpté imitant un roc naturel, une femme en costume du pays (que personne ne portait plus d'ailleurs) scrutait l'horizon, vers le large. Bien qu'il n'y eût aucune liste de noms gravée sur les faces du socle, ce devait être un monument aux morts.
>
> Tandis qu'il passait le long de la haute grille de fer entourant la statue—cercle de barreaux rectilignes, verticaux et équidistants—il vit surgir à ses pieds, sur le trottoir aux larges dalles rectangulaires qui complétait l'ensemble, l'ombre de la paysanne de pierre. Elle était déformée par la projection, méconnaissable, mais bien marquée. (44)

Mathias has no childhood memory of the statue, suggesting to contemporary readers a monument to the dead of the Second World War. In place of his absent memory, the statue becomes an official emblem, saturated with "eminence." But its eminence is "imitant" and seems inauthentic, clothed in an outfit that no one wears anymore. There

are no names of the dead and we are tempted to wonder if perhaps this island provided no combatants. It is a protected monument, with an iron fence ensuring that the official memory will remain intact and unmolested. And yet the shadow is there: deformed and unknowable, but glaring. Despite official attempts at securing a stoic, solid, enduring reminder of sacrifice and national pride, the shadow remains, reminding us of the blank historical pages (of collaboration, apathy and silence) that get no statues, no plaques, and no street names.

Cautioning us against situated readings of *Le Voyeur*, Morrissette claims that "[c]ommitment or *engagement* for the writer cannot be political; his only possible commitment is literary, or artistic. For the 'committed' writer, literature is the most important enterprise in the world, its own justification and end" (27, emphasis in the original). But Robbe-Grillet, despite insisting upon the anti-referential quality of his work in his critical writings, admits to the aspirational and necessarily uneven results of such a project:

> Qu'il n'y ait qu'un parallélisme assez lâche entre les trois romans que j'ai publiés à ce jour et mes vues théoriques sur un possible roman futur, c'est l'évidence même. Chacun estimera, du reste, normal qu'un livre de deux ou trois cents pages ait plus de complexité qu'un article de dix ; et, aussi, qu'il soit plus facile d'indiquer une direction nouvelle que de la suivre, sans qu'un échec—partiel ou même total—soit une preuve décisive, définitive, de l'erreur commise au départ. (*Pour un nouveau* 22)

Leenhardt, in his political reading of *La Jalousie*, argues that decolonization cannot be thought of as an independent phenomenon, but is rather something that informed all of mid-century French thought and cultural production. Even when it is not *there*, it is *there* (27). Higgins, discussing *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, remarks that the novel "is not as totally antireferential as Robbe-Grillet claims it is […] what is missing from *Marienbad* is not indicated by a hole at its centre, but by a void around its edges," a void that Higgins rightly identifies as the Algerian war (*New Novel* 102).

Even before drawing specific links between *Le Voyeur* and the Algerian war, one can discern in the *nouveau roman* a writing that is both subversive and highly political. Describing the difference between traditional novelists and the *nouveaux romanciers*, Robbe-Grillet writes that

> [l]e rôle de l'écrivain consistait traditionnellement à creuser dans la Nature, à l'approfondir, pour atteindre des couches de plus en plus intimes et finir par mettre au jour quelque bribe d'un secret troublant. Descendu dans l'abîme des passions humaines, il envoyait au monde tranquille en apparence (celui de la surface) des messages de victoire décrivant les mystères qu'il avait touchés du doigt. Et le vertige sacré qui envahissait alors le lecteur, loin d'engendrer l'angoisse ou la nausée, le rassurait au contraire quant à son pouvoir de domination sur le monde. (*Pour un nouveau* 22)

The description of the traditional novelist venturing out into nature, laying its secrets bare, and sending back the fruits of his labors to a domestic readership recalls the economic machinations of colonialism. Having unveiled mysteries and sent them home "victorious," the author assures himself and his reader of their mutual "domination sur le monde." In reclaiming from the author the power to reveal secrets and splendours procured in the literary "abroad," the *nouveau roman* empowers readers to examine their own projections, imaginations, and fantasies. The various strata of perception in *Le Voyeur* democratize the act of viewing and level the hierarchies of subject and object, interiority and exteriority—an attempt at social reorganization that I read as overtly political. This is how Robbe-Grillet explains his own relationship to politics:

> I live in society, I am part of that society, I am myself inside its ideology, and not exterior to it. But I see a system for maintaining my freedom within this ideological prison. The system is born of the New Novel and of all modern art […] It consists of detaching fragments from society's discourse and using them as raw materials to construct something else. ("What interests me" 93)

His is a revolution of form, one in which the new novel undoes the narrative mastery of the old. And yet Robbe-Grillet did not, as an individual, shy away from overt political engagement. In 1960, he signed the "Manifeste des 121," a "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie," in which public intellectuals decried the persecution of the war in Algeria (with specific references to torture). Fearing censors,

Les Temps Modernes replaced the original declaration with two blank pages, followed by a list of signatories, and was not published in its entirety until August, 1960. Despite (and in part because of) this early censorship, the "Manifeste" circulated widely in Paris and should have put to rest any notions of a detached and apolitical Robbe-Grillet.

It is tempting, in the context of the Algerian war, to read *Le Voyeur* as a kind of allegory: a stranger arrives in a foreign land for purposes of economic gain (yes, he was born there but he is a stranger, not *of the land*); he captures, tortures, rapes and murders one of the locals, then returns to the continent an innocent. The early scene of the ferry's arrival—with the "terrified" locals looking on from the port as tight ranks of travellers disembark—recalls journalistic footage of French soldiers landing in Algeria.[42] And yet the novel is more than an allegory. Through its language and structure, it performs absence—the absence of memory, the absence of testimony, the absence of justice. *Le Voyeur* arrived in France amidst a rapidly shifting landscape in Algeria; events were becoming hard to ignore and efforts to manage the public narrative, increasingly desperate.[43] Higgins notes that during the filming of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*,

---

[42] "Tous les passagers se taisaient, immobile, serrés les uns contre les autres à l'entrée de la coursive déjà bondée, par où la sortie allait s'effectuer. Prêts pour le débarquement depuis de longues minutes, la plupart d'entre eux tenaient leurs bagages à la main. Tous avaient la figure tournée vers la gauche et les yeux fixés sur le haut de la jetée, où une vingtaine de personnes se trouvaient rassemblées en un groupe compact, également silencieux et figé, cherchant un visage à reconnaître parmi la foule du petit vapeur. De part et d'autre l'expression était la même: tendue, presque anxieuse, bizarrement uniforme et pétrifiée." (11)

[43] On December 6, 1951, Claude Bourdet publishes "Y a-t-il une Gestapo algérienne?" in *L'Observateur*; on January 13, 1955, he publishes "Votre Gestapo d'Algérie" (again in *L'Observateur*). On March 20, 1955, "The Mairey Report," documenting specific acts of torture, is submitted to the government of Edgar Faure. On April 1, 1955, a state of emergency is declared in Algeria. On April 23, 1955, "la censure préalable" is established

> rape was already part of the public discourse about Algeria, particularly surrounding an event that preoccupied Paris in June 1960: the scandal, brought to public attention by Simone de Beauvoir, of the torture, rape, and murder of an Algerian woman, Djamila Boupacha, by French paratroopers in Algeria. From that time, journalistic references to 'the rape of Algeria' proliferated. (*New Novel* 108)

Robbe-Grillet published *Le Voyeur* five years before Djamila's rape and murder, but in a sense, the novel anticipates the event. The rape of Algeria had been underway for well over a century and Robbe-Grillet's novel, precisely through its absence of referents, forces the reader to look into the void created by this largely untold history and see what everyone knew was happening.

Le Voyeur and *Un été de cendres* were written during two of the most violent moments in Algeria's modern history, and they respond to this violence by indicting invisibility. Both Djemaï and Robbe-Grillet recognized the limits of documentary fiction, and their novels use the aesthetic particularities of literature to challenge readers to make sense of the voids in their pages. When readers land on the blank page, they must decide what they want to see; when they begin to sweat along with Benbrik in the claustrophobia of his office, counting beans at his side, they encounter a structure of feeling endemic to 1990s Algeria, one that exceeds mere statistics. The saturation of Algerian history with

---

in Algeria. On September 12, 1955, the communist journal, *Alger Républicain*, is suspended. On December 10, 1955, elections in Algeria are canceled (Harbi and Stora 683-4).

blank pages prolongs aftermath. The voids swell, and not talking about them doesn't make them go away. By textualizing this absurdity during Algeria's two most recent wars, these novels plot paths for engagement other than testimony and documentary (needed though these are). These texts are hard work, and readers have to want to derive meaning from two odd protagonists and the Kafkaesque worlds they inhabit. But the effort is rewarded with a sense of what it means to simultaneously see and not see, and what it means to be responsible for both.

IV. Burning Books

Introduction

Writing fiction in Algeria during the 1990s was dangerous. The story of militant Islamists targeting intellectuals and cultural figures is a familiar one, but in practice, writers, journalists, and artists found themselves threatened by *fatwas* on one side, and increasingly heavy-handed state censorship and harassment, on the other (Le Sueur 172). As Jane Hiddleston notes, "for both groups, and perhaps in particular for the Islamists, literary critique and the potential use of supple, idiosyncratic literary forms to undermine the protected, sanctioned rhetoric of political unity and renewal, [were] to be treated with suspicion" ("Political violence" 2). Algeria's version of what Le Sueur has termed the "Rushdie Syndrome" (169) sent many writers into exile—mostly in France—and resulted in the death or disappearance of hundreds of the writers and journalists who remained. Accused of blasphemy by the insurgency and charged with discrediting the regime by *le pouvoir*, the mere act of writing in Algeria became a life and death gamble.

In May 1993, Tahar Djaout, one of the country's most talented writers, was shot three times in a car outside his apartment building. Dajout was a vocal critic of the Islamist insurgency and the state's violent repression of it, and his journalism, poetry, and novels named injustices committed by both sides. His death reverberated through Algerian society and prompted Jacques Derrida, Václav Havel, Salman Rushdie, and Wole Soyinka to found the International Parliament of Writers, dedicated to helping

imperiled writers from around the world. Literature, as a "singular and subjective genre, a space of questioning where the author is at liberty to experiment with argument and form […] [had] come to be perceived as a danger" in Algeria (Hiddleston, "Political violence" 1-2). The county's civil war—fought in the Aurès Mountains, in Kabylia, and on the streets of Algiers—was also a struggle for narrative control. State and Islamist groups both wanted singular and total authority over narratives not only of the civil war, but of the country's history and destiny as well. The "liberty" of the author to "experiment with argument and form" challenged the dissemination of dominant, competing attempts to own the rhetoric of authenticity and moral superiority.

This state of affairs had specific consequences for the fictional production of the 1990s. As previously noted, much writing turned to documenting the crisis in the absence of reliable or satisfactory media coverage—the infamous *littérature d'urgence*. Interpreting texts by authors who eschewed realism during the *décennie noire* is a more difficult task. In her reading of works by Tahar Djaout and Assia Djebar, Hiddleston argues that the events of the black decade

> result[ed] in a separation between literature and national identity, as writers [sought] less to represent the Algerian community than to affirm their detachment from it. If at one stage, francophone Algerian literature provided a locus for anti-colonial resistance and on this level contributed to a sense of a national cause […] the terror of the 1990s has led novelists and artists to question any notion of national unity. The quest for a collective identity has dissolved, and writers such as Djaout and Djebar

> use the flexibility of the literary form to draw attention to the diversity of the Algerian people and the multifaceted nature of their singular-plural culture. ("Political violence" 8)

Hiddleston's interpretation describes the embattled Algerian intellectual as "detach[ed]," while the writers of the National Liberation Struggle were committed to "resistance" and a "national cause." She establishes a table of equivalency wherein a "national cause" implies homogeneity, and the possibility of a nationalism *built on plurality* is nowhere to be found. And the link between "detachment" and the "multifaceted nature" of Algeria's "singular-plural culture" is unclear. But is the plurality of Algeria's contemporary society really something that can't be reflected in its modes of literary engagement? Is it only ever done justice from the confines of detachment? Isn't there a long history (Dib, Kateb, Haddad) of using "the flexibility of literary form" to resist oppression? And it seems odd to lump Djaout and Djebar together. Djebar, in the 1990s, was living in Paris and later, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she was chair of the French and Francophone Studies Department at Louisiana State University. Writing in Paris and Baton Rouge is not the same thing as writing in Algeria in the 1990s, and the tactics, forms, and projects of the two writers necessarily differed as a result of their relative proximity to the war. Djebar's detachment was physical and political, while Djaout was very much at the center of the nation's violent culture wars. His writing—poetic, inventive, and complex, to be sure—engages precisely in the work of affirming the "national causes" of participatory democracy and justice. If anything, his late work can be read as an elegy to the lost spirit

of national unity, a mournful reflection on the *déchirement* of Algerian society rather than a writing "divorce[d] […] from national identity" that uses "literature and journalism to invent new landscapes and to conceive alternative idiolects" (Hiddleston 8).

Hiddleston is not alone in finding in the best of Algerian fiction from the 1990s an aesthetic quality that resists national, historical, or allegorical forms of interpretation. In his extended reading of Djaout's *L'Invention du désert*, Bensmaïa calls the reader to assume a "radically new position," one that requires that s/he "read with caution, but with the clear stipulation that henceforth, 'to read' no longer consists merely of searching for a signified hidden behind the words of fragments of narratives" (*Experimental* 76-7). He argues that allegorical readings of postcolonial literary works, particularly those that traffic in Jameson's now-infamous brand of *national allegory*, no longer do justice to rhizomatic texts by postcolonial writers. Where such allegories linger, the reader should be doubly cautious, for

> [i]f it is indeed true that an allegorical dimension persists in most so-called postcolonial texts, allegory is clearly almost never the primary or sole ambition of the authors in question. When it is, however, experience has shown that we often find ourselves faced with texts that could be called didactic, the artistic or literary value of which is slight or nil. (68-9)

Bensmaïa begins here by asserting doubt ("if it is indeed true…") that trace elements of allegory do, in fact, remain in "so-called postcolonial" fiction. He then claims to know the artistic "ambitions" of the authors in question, authors who "clearly almost never"

place allegory at the center of their texts. Those few that do, "experience has shown," make bad art. All self-conscious allegories of the nation in this reading crowd under the umbrella of didactic propaganda.

In place of allegory, Bensmaïa turns to Paul de Man and Homi Bhabha to frame his reading of *L'Invention du désert*, and concludes that the novel's central "line of force" is

> the tension between two radically heterogeneous or even opposite modes of exposition and translation of Algeria's real present. There is a tension between the pedagogical and the performative […] but there is also a tension between the syntactic in this text […] and the rhetorical […] the experience of the impossibility of giving form to or narrating the nation […][I]t is no longer a simple historical or narrative logic that must be brought to bear, but a theory of rhetoric that takes into account all the effects of tension mentioned above. (73)

Fine, but to sacrifice the potential payoffs of historical or allegorical readings, to surrender these so that a proper combat between "the pedagogical and the performative" or "the syntactic" and "the rhetorical" might be staged, needlessly limits the interpretive possibilities for a text that is in fact thickly allegorical. The problem here lies in Bensmaïa's dismissive assumption that all "historical or narrative logic" is by definition "simple," an echoed refrain of his earlier argument that the allegorical dimensions of postcolonial texts are too often "susceptible to a purely historical or even political

explanation […] grounded in a confusion 'of reference with phenomenality,' of the linguistic with natural or historical reality" (73). The bad interpretive actors in Bensmaïa's drama are history, politics, and above all, allegory, while the heroes are syntax, translation, rhetoric, and difference, with the implication that these latter forces are without histories or politics of their own.

Bensmaïa first made these arguments in a paper delivered at ACLA Annual Conference in 1999, but the real target of his critique was Jameson, who in 1986 argued that

> [a]ll third-word texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. […] Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. ("Third World" 69)

These remarks prompted a torrent of criticism and spawned decades of competitive umbrage among scholars (first Aijaz Ahmad, later, others) eager to read into Jameson's remarks an essentializing imposition of a particular form of writing on all the world's

postcolonial writers.[44] Neil Lazarus, writing some twenty-five years later, remarked that "it was as though, for postcolonialists, Jameson had suddenly fallen foul of the standards not only of intellectual credibility but also of *decency*" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 92). And while in the past two decades, important voices have responded to this outrage with tempered, measured readings of Jameson's remarks,[45] the response has been (and remains) mostly negative. As Imre Szeman notes, "Jameson's essay has come to be treated as little more than a cautionary tale about the extent and depth of Eurocentrism in the Western academy," but he argues that "almost without exception critics of Jameson's essay have willfully misread it" (804). He continues:

> [T]he publication of Jameson's essay in the mid-1980s provided postcolonial critics with a flash point around which to articulate general criticism of dominant views of North-South relations expressed within even supposedly critical political theories (like Marxism). It also provided a self-definitional opportunity for postcolonial studies: a shift away from even the lingering traces of Marxist interpretations of imperialism toward a more deconstructive one exemplified by the work of figures such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. (804)

---

[44] In his critique, Bensmaïa accuses Jameson of attempting to "inscribe 'all third world texts' under the same regime or genre of signification" (68). Later in this same essay, Bensmaïa falls guilty to his own acts of regime inscribing, noting that "what characterizes the work of third-world writers is not so much the political dimension of what they write. Rather this work is better characterized by their renewed challenge of anything that tends to reduce the history of the third world" (79).

[45] See McGonigal, Quayson (*Postcolonialism* 76-102); and Szeman.

Bensmaïa's argument—with its clear preference for post-structuralist over Marxist interpretive methods—draws the bulk of its heat from this particular "flash point." For Szeman, misreadings of Jameson's essay almost always stem from unimaginative and sloppy dissections of the terms "national" and "allegory." Both, he argues, have "fallen into disrepute," with "the nation" conjuring images of the "virulent nationalisms of the twentieth century" and "allegory," implying "a naïve mode of one-to-one mapping […] a presumed passage from text to context that is epistemologically and politically suspect" (806). Adherents to this reductive translation of Jameson's vocabulary accuse him of condescending to texts from the third world, imagining them as simplistic narratives that can only ever symbolize. According to Szeman, the nation, as Jameson uses the concept in his essay, means "something different than simply the empirical community or collectivity for which the cultural revolution is undertaken" (816). Rather, it "should be taken instead as a reference to a reified 'cultural pattern'" (816) that can also serve as "a frankly utopic space" (821) that adumbrates the demands of some future collective life. Less a game of flags and borders, the nation is a useful concept for thinking through communal action and opposition to domination (imperial, colonial, or postcolonial). As for "allegory," Jameson himself clarifies what he means when he uses this term. Far from being a one-to-one system of decoding, "the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities," while the equivalencies themselves are "in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text" ("Third world" 73). The nation is aspirational and utopian, and allegory, dynamic, and neither term, the punitive muzzle so often described by Jameson's detractors.

Lazarus comes to Jameson's defense over his use of "third world." He posits that "in Jameson's essay, it functions more as the name of a political desire […] than as the descriptor of any actual place or historical location […] It gestures towards a world in which autonomy and popular self-determination will be politically meaningful," and he goes on to argue that "in a world of colonies and nation-states, such an aspiration can only be imagined as coming into being through nationalism" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 106)—here conceived of not as an end-point, but as a necessary way station. This seems particularly true during times of national crisis. When the fabric of a society is being torn apart—as it was in Algeria during the 1990s—literature responds in its own way, often through precisely the type of shifting allegories Jameson describes. And when texts are read abroad during such historical moments (as much francophone Algerian literature was and is), the force of the national allegory—intended or not—is all the more potent. When the nation's destiny is being fought over, and the meanings of its history and the trajectory of its future are hotly contested at the ends of rifles, even the absence of any easily discernable allegory must be read as symptomatic of a particular socio-historical landscape. In what follows, I read Tahar Djaout's *Le Dernier été de la raison* and Kamel Daoud's "La Préface du Nègre" as two texts that leverage precisely the type of national allegory described by Jameson to diagnose and react against the assault on creativity that took place during Algeria's *décennie noire*. Though they were written more than fifteen years apart and in very different historical contexts, each work confronts the suffocation of creative enterprise by placing burning books at the center of their narratives. Through

their use of national allegories, these texts slow down the chaos of the present and offer readers a temporality other than that of urgency.

Allegorizing Algeria

On the surface, these stories would seem to be at odds. "La Préface du Nègre" takes place in the colonial villa of an *ancien moudjahid* who, now old and infirm, wants to write his memoir. The illiterate veteran hires a ghostwriter, or "nègre," to transcribe and edit his recollections of the war for independence, and the preface the narrator writes is the text we read. Frustrated at having to transcribe the veteran's embellished tales of heroism during the war for independence, the narrator decides to write his own stories around the veteran's, but neither the memoir nor the narrator's smuggled fiction see the light of day, as the old man burns them after the last day of dictation. *Le Dernier été de la raison* is set in a dystopian Algiers that closely resembles the capital during the 1990s, and the story centers on Boualem Yekker, the last bookseller in the city. As the war on free thought rages around him, Boualem is harassed by neighborhood children, sent anonymous death threats, and becomes increasingly aware of his imminent death for daring to sell flights of imagination that distract from or directly challenge the singular authority of "the Text." Whereas Djaout's novel casts young, radicalized Algerians as the agents of the nation's downfall, Daoud's short story vents anger and frustration at the war generation and their authoritarian (mis)rule. For Djaout, imagination becomes impossible when Islamists are closing all the bookstores and burning all the books, but for Daoud, there is only one

possible story that can be written in Algeria because *le pouvoir* has such a firm grip on narrative. And yet read together, these texts indict in concert a societal power structure that fails to value or even allow for fabulation, and they overcome the facile division of Algeria into the binaries so often imposed on it—secular/Islamist, francophone/arabophone, young/old—to diagnose the progressive atrophy of beauty and creativity as endemic to the nation as a whole. Rather than retreat to disengaged, privatized form of lament, these texts step forward to decry the erosion of thought through a form of literary engagement that relies heavily on the potency of national allegory.

The trope of decay is central to both texts. Daoud's short story opens with the narrator in the *ancien moudjahid*'s home, staring out into the garden:

> Nous étions au paradis: il y avait le figuier, le pommier dont je ne voyais que la moitié, à droite, par la grande porte-fenêtre qui donnait sur la cour, il y avait aussi une nuée d'oiseaux qui laissait imaginer des espèces infinies. Je voyais aussi le ciel encore frais par-delà le mur du jardin et je m'y laissais absorber lorsque la voix du Vieux ne s'adressait plus qu'à lui-même, par-dessus toute l'humanité qui déjà lui tournait le dos. (73)

The *paradis* of the scene is ironic, and the narrator will later describe how much he loathes his meetings with "le Vieux." The verdant landscape, with its birds conjuring images of infinite possibility, stands in stark contrast to the murmurings of the decrepit *moudjahid*, to whom no one listens anymore. The garden—walled and owned by the

veteran—is the cloistered potential of the nation. Beauty and hope do exist in Algeria, but they're obstructed and cordoned off by the thick walls of the oligarchy. Importantly, the villa is not the source of *paradis*; the garden is. The narrator's longing is not for the material wealth of either the *colons* or the new residents of their former villas. It's the quiet splendor of the birds, the fresh sky, and the expanse of possibility that, as a resident of an overcrowded and decaying city, he desires. But as an employee and guest in the *ancien moudjahid*'s home, he can only watch through the window. The garden is not his, and he knows it.

Contemplating the ills that plague contemporary Algeria, the narrator remarks:

> J'avais l'intuition, depuis ma jeunesse, que ce pays souffrait non pas d'un manque de nourriture et d'espoir, mais d'un mal encore plus terrible et qui pouvait conduire à la construction de pyramides ou à la perpétration de massacres: le désœuvrement […] le pays n'avait vécu qu'une seule histoire de guerre et, depuis, ne cessait d'y explorer son propre reflet au point de refuser la guérison qu'avaient connue d'autres peuples. (99-101)

The singularity of the liberation narrative leads to collective inaction and narcissistic, wasteful, and destructive self-congratulation for past exploits. Stagnation is the enemy, and the source of that stagnation, the inability of the country to heal. The reference to pyramids mocks the practice of monument building in Algeria—something of a state obsession—and pairing it with the commission of massacres couples malignant forms of both construction (monuments that repeat endlessly tales of war heroism) and destruction

(disappearances, repression, collective violence)—both, in their own way, instruments of securing and maintaining *le pouvoir*'s authority.

In *Le Dernier été de la raison*, it is Algiers itself that has become the symbol of decay and lost promise. The capital is described as "jadis radieuse, désormais soumise à l'effacement et à la laideur que commande l'ascétisme […] cette ville transformée en désert où toute oasis a disparu" (17-8). The temporality of "jadis" is left ambiguous, and it's unclear if the city was at its radiant peak before the arrival of the French, during colonialism, or in the relative prosperity of the Boumédiène era (1965-78). Effacement and ugliness have obscured whatever traces of beauty may have remained from each of these historical moments, and

> toute musique est bannie de la ville. Toutes les choses invisibles et mystérieuses qui se liguent pour rendre la vie plus belle et plus stimulante ont cessé de livrer leurs sucs et de murmurer leurs secrets. Le monde est devenu aphasique, opaque, et renfrogné; il a adopté une tenue de deuil. (21)

This is a city grown silent, a demystified city robbed of its allure and even its capacity to speak. The heat of the summer *canicule* scorches the concrete urban labyrinth, choked by monstrous traffic jams that encircle the city like a "python métallique" (52). To compensate for the "laideur" that surrounds him, Boualem fantasizes about what the city could be like, an ideal city: "Il y aurait d'abord de la verdure—arbres et pelouses—beaucoup de verdure qui fournirait l'ombre, la fraîcheur, les fruits, la musique des feuilles

et les gîtes d'amour. Il y aurait des créateurs de beauté, de rythmes, d'idylles, d'édifices, de machines" (67). In place of the sterile, brutalist metropolis, Boualem imagines an abundance of life and fertility, an urban Eden, poeticized in the alliterative incantation of "fraîcheur…fruits…feuilles." And yet this is no dream of escape to Walden Pond; Boualem wants "machines," but pulsing ones, not the immobile agents of stagnant traffic jams (the materialized expression of wasted potential: machines designed to move people reduced to waiting).

Evocations of nature in Djaout's novel subject the narrative to cosmic forces larger than the microcosm of the city in the early the 1990s. The summer heat wave is interrupted periodically with heavy rains that make the roads "impracticables" (67). They provide moments of respite from the insufferable *canicule* and cause Boualem to go inward, retreating to the realm of memory: "Ces moments de rêverie sont autant de mirages rafraîchissants qui adoucissent l'implacable sécheresse du monde. La vie a cessé de se conjuguer au présent. Boualem fait partie de ces personnes atteintes d'une nouvelle maladie: un surdéveloppement de la mémoire" (15). No longer able to conjugate in the present nor anticipate the future, the past (Boualem's memory and his books) becomes the only reliable palliative—refreshing, nourishing, and hydrating—available to him. Even weather reports in Boualem's Algeria are outlawed (85), so unthinkable is tomorrow. Temporality itself is deformed, and Boualem has the feeling of occupying

> un espace et un temps anonymes, irréels et provisoires, où ni les heures, ni les saisons, ni les lieux ne possèdent la moindre caractéristique propre ou la moindre importance […] c'est comme si le monde avait renoncé à son

> apparence, à ses attributs, à ses différentes fonctions, déguisé le temps d'un carnaval. (19)

The carnivalesque time of the black decade assumes a surreal quality and becomes unrecognizable and permanent. The summer itself seems as though it will never end, becoming not only the "le dernier été de la raison," but perhaps "le dernier été de l'histoire" (27). Daoud's *désœuvrement* and Djaout's eternal summer describe a country at once victim to its own (ongoing) history and at the same time, "sorti de l'histoire" (Djaout 27). Both narratives unfold during the hot summer months and it's unclear if in either, the renewal offered by fall, winter, and spring will ever come.

Generational conflict in these texts might be thought of as producing another kind of permanent summer—the natural transition from one season to the next stalled by the younger generation's regressive thinking (in Djaout) and the older generation's unwillingness to let newness enter the public sphere (in Daoud). The narrator of "La Préface du Nègre" describes his relationship to "le Vieux" with a vitriol that extends well beyond the limited context of their contract:

> J'étais chargé d'écouter comme un peuple entier la parole de cet homme, de la mettre par écrit, de la corriger et de lui donner cette architecture qu'ont les livres capables de désigner, à l'extrême de leur magie, tout le ciel par un seul mot, et de raconter le cillement d'un homme quelconque avec les mots qu'il faut, pour toute une vie de discours sans interruption. Le bonhomme, comme tous ceux de sa génération, ne savait pas écrire

> mais rêvait d'un livre final, comme d'une dernière victoire sur le Colon qui lui avait refusé l'école ou qui l'avait obligé à la quitter pour prendre les armes. […] Le pire était qu'il estimait que je devais lui servir de nègre non parce qu'il me payait mais parce que je devais payer une dette en quelque sorte, une dette à celui qui m'avait offert ce pays sur un plateau sans s'apercevoir qu'il en avait déjà mangé plus de la moitié. (81-2)

The ghostwriter is a stand-in for "un peuple entier" that must not only listen, but make sense of and improve upon the received narrative without any of the rights of authorship. The supposed "victory" of "Le Vieux" over the colonizer is here rendered absurd on multiple fronts: the veteran never did learn to read and the publication of his memoir is only possible through the "nègre," his invisible intermediary; the "Colon" is likely not listening to the veteran anymore, so he is narrating to an empty room; and finally, the damage of reproducing the singular national epic is inflicted on contemporary Algerians, punishing them with self-serving mythologies, much as the French did during the occupation. The "nègre" is meant to listen out of a duty he hasn't accepted as his—the payment for a half-eaten independent country in which he has neither agency nor independence. He is reduced to a mere instrument, "nègre dans l'absolu, sans prénom, répondant à la clochette, à peine plus visible qu'une machine d'orthographe magique" (85).

"Le Vieux" is also *sans prénom* in the short story and he stands accused by the narrator of all the crimes committed by his generation. The memoir may have been

conceived of as a revenge on the colonizer, but for the scribe, the veteran is trying to compensate for the (unnamed and unacknowledged) tragedies of the post-independence period. By hiring a young ghostwriter to mythologize his exploits, and by framing them as a gift bequeathed to younger generations, he forces the narrator to become "l'image avec laquelle [le Vieux] surmontait sa castration, son impuissance ou la légendaire infécondité de toute sa génération" (86). But once again, these attempts at repair are for naught, as the repetition of the "livre unique" only compounds the collective *désœuvrement* and strengthens the force of aftermath in contemporary Algeria. To rebel against the order imposed upon him, the scribe decides to smuggle into the veteran's story his own narration, "une histoire clandestine qui doublerait la sienne, lui survivrait et en habiterait la carcasse comme un ver patient […] un ver dont le but n'était pas de devenir le papillon trop prévisible du proverbe, mais de manger les feuilles, le fruit, puis tout l'arbre" (76). The metamorphosis here is not from larva to butterfly, but from scribe to *auteur-trabandiste*,[46] a transformation that involves turning the act of destruction on the destroyer. The rotting cadaver of the *moudjahid*'s memoir will serve as the incubator of a new narrative, one that, once nested, will feed off of and ultimately consume its host. Daoud's short story seems to suggest that writing fiction in Algeria requires first *un*writing; counter-narration must deconstruct existing monuments before it can build anew.

Vitriol travels both up and down the generational ladder of *Le Dernier été de la raison.* The first act of violence Boualem Yekker suffers is delivered in the form of a

[46] "Trabandiste" is the term used by Algerians to denote *petits trafiquants*—those who sell illegally imported goods on the black market.

rock thrown by a twelve year-old girl. But generational revolt and the dismantling of the old order in Djaout's novel don't materialize as inventive counter-narrations—the youth are rebelling against the old with rocks, death threats, and rifles. And the order that Boualem Yekker represents is not the illiterate veteran class of Daoud's "Vieux," but a marginalized, middle-aged generation that was too young to fight in the National Liberation Struggle and grew up in the optimistic early years of independence. Yekker is not only literate, he makes his living (or did, when people still bought books) selling fiction in multiple languages. He is representative of an urban cultural élite that in the 1990s found itself caught between an insurgency that despised it for its francophone leanings and a government eager to elminate any opposition (cultural or political, real or imagined) to its repressive tactics. Children who should represent the nation's future and its unrealized potential are here instruments of hate and destruction, waging war on those who, like Boualem, question the myopic readings of faith, culture, and society that emerged as dominant during the period.

The novel paints a particularly sad portrait of Algeria's youth during the *décennie noire*:

> La jeunesse d'aujourd'hui n'a cure des musiques de la nature, des beautés qui sollicitent le regard ou titillent les recoins secrets du corps. C'est une sorte de jeunesse mutante, vide de tout désir humain, habitée et obnubilée par un brûlant rêve de pureté et de rédemption. C'est une jeunesse dévolue au noble combat pour la foi où la mort se donne et s'accueille avec un détachement terrifiant. Le licite et l'illicite sont les deux seules frontières

> qui bornent leurs horizons, qui balisent leur champ moral: on se sacrifie pour instaurer l'un, on se bat jusqu'à la mort pour effacer l'autre. Jeunesse sans générosité et sans entrailles, sans raison et sans retenue, tout entière agitée par un flux dévastateur, le flux du dogme qui commande de souffrir et de faire souffrir, d'anéantir et de disparaître sans une pincée d'état d'âme! (109-10)

Robbed of the pleasures of adolescence—music, beauty, nascent sexuality—the young of Yekker's Algiers live in a dichromatic world of good and bad, right and wrong. It is a generation turned into objects and instruments, acted upon ("habitée…obnubilée…agitée") and caught in a "flux dévastateur" of someone else's making. Djaout writes that "[l]es enfants sont très impliqués dans l'œuvre 'civilisatrice' que les nouveaux maîtres du pays entreprennent. Ils secondent les adultes dans des travaux de volontariat, des missions de propagande et même dans les opérations punitives" (48). The language here is particularly martial ("missions de propagande…opérations punitives") and reintroduces a colonial lexicon ("l'œuvre 'civilisatrice'…nouveaux maîtres…travaux de volontariat") that links the machinations of the "new masters" with those of the old. Behind the façade of faith, morality, and religion, the text points to a type of power grab that Algeria has seen before. Clearly Yekker doesn't hate kids, but he *does* hate what is being done to them and what they are being made to do. He laments the fact that "la jeunesse ne sait guère chanter" (114); they stop to look at the colorful books in his store's window, but never enter to flip through

their pages (48). In one of Boualem's dreams, he is taken captive by Islamists and made to stand before a kangaroo court and answer for his insolence. One of his jailors is his estranged son, Kamel, whom Boualem kills in a struggle. At the moment of his death, "le masque imperturbable et barbu que portrait son fils est tombé […] Le vrai visage de Kamel est apparu, visage d'adolescent, imberbe et frais" (58). Boualem's dream may on the surface be a filicide fantasy, but when the "vrai visage de Kamel" appears, the boy is smiling and unharmed. Boualem doesn't want to kill his actual son, but desperately wants to rid him of the hateful mask he now wears. He wants to return to Kamel (and Algeria's youth, writ large) the ability to sing and the imaginative, earthly pleasures of innocence.

Suffocating Imagination

Creativity and beauty are under assault from multiple directions in both texts. The narrator in "La Préface du Nègre" grew up in a country that was missing many of its writers and artists—victims not only of the *décennie noire*, but also previous wars on intellect that robbed Algeria of much of its creative potential. He notes that "la révolution a choisi très tôt d'assassiner tous ceux qui pouvaient, un jour ou l'autre, mettre en péril l'unique version des faits, récolter des témoignages divergents ou écrire des livres qui dédaignaient la guerre" (94-5). In 1956, Aït Hamouda Amirouche ("Colonel Amirouche"), a hero of the National Liberation Struggle, ordered the execution by beheading of some 2,000 educated young Algerians who had recently joined the resistance. Manipulated by the French security services, Amirouche believed these men

were part of a plot to destroy the revolution from within (Gafaïti, "Culture and Violence" 72). Gafaïti connects this act of thought destruction to the work of insurgents and government agents during the black decade, describing a "dramatic continuity between the current attempts to eradicate all forms of free intellectual activity and a political life based on democracy and the attempts by various political forces to eliminate all those who advocated diversity and tolerance" (72). "Le Vieux" is not only a representative of the war generation who assassinated the nation's intellect, he is one of the actual assassins. In a dictation session with the scribe, he recounts an episode from the war in which "il avait été chargé par le commandement de tuer quatre-vingt-douze compagnons de maquis soupçonnés de préparer un livre, de l'avoir lu ou simplement d'en être capables" (95). The veteran, in the midst of dictating his own autobiography, celebrates the fact that he killed 92 of the nation's potential authors, and he is incapable of recognizing that his text (or, rather, those like it) sits on a bookshelf where other, more imaginative texts should be.

The killing of intellectuals during the war for independence and the exile and murder of writers during the 1990s devastated the landscape of creative possibility in Algeria. The "nègre" writes that for authors like him, "il était impossible d'écrire une simple histoire d'amour, par exemple, ou une histoire de rencontre ou de pêche miraculeuse, sans déboucher, malgré soi, dans cette bibliothèque violente et terrible où l'on a ramassé quelques millions d'exemplaires d'un livre unique" (93). Even if the contemporary Algerian writer wants to write something detached from the "violent and terrible" history of the nation, circumstances won't allow it. Allegorizing the nation is the

necessary passageway out of the prison of the "livre unique," a text written by those who, like the veteran, continue to inflict its worn narrative on the nation. Only rarely does fiction succeed in breaking free of the narrative chokehold in which it finds itself in post-independence Algeria, and the narrator remarks that "les meilleurs romans de ce pays sont d'ailleurs le fruit d'une parenthèse, l'exercice d'un faux anonymat ou l'accident préfabriqué d'un homme qui suspend sa rotation autour du soleil pour décrire ses propres chaussures" (94). Only when authors are capable of creating a temporality other than those offered by the crisis do they succeed in producing something beyond the "livre unique," and the act of describing one's shoes becomes an act of revolt against the need to repeat *ad infinitum* the foundational mythologies of the nation.

And it is not only texts by Algerians and about Algeria that are under attack. In *Le Dernier été de la raison*, Boualem complains that "les différentes taxes de transaction rendent le livre quasi inaccessible. Un ouvrage de Maupassant, de Steinbeck, de Mohammed Dib ou de Hermann Hesse coûte la moitié de la mensualité d'un manœuvre" (33-4). All novels—as invitations to distraction and inquiry—are kept from the public through the intimidation of the insurgency and financial hurdles imposed by the state. More than anything, it is the capacity of Algerians to "créer et à répandre la beauté" (16) that is quashed when "le pays est entré dans une ère où l'on ne pose pas de question, car la question est fille de l'inquiétude ou de l'arrogance, toutes deux fruits de la tentation" (22). Keeping books away from the population thwarts questioning and limits the contextual frame of the crisis to the immediacy of the now. Tales from other times of strife and aestheticized accounts of societies and states interacting and making sense of

one another (Steinbeck, Dib) fail to enter the public dialogue, turning bookstores into a kind of archive-*qua*-tomb. When the crisis cannot be thought but only felt, citizens get reduced to "de simples bêtes préoccupées de leur survie" (110). As the proprietor of this book-filled tomb, Boualem enjoys a luxury of literary escape denied his fellow citizens. Words become "des véritables bouées de sauvetage qui le ramènent délicatement vers les rivages familiers" (14). His retreat to the world of literature is accompanied by a second, related escape to memories of better times. Boualem resuscitates mental images of "de paysages lointains et lacunaires avant que le chaos devienne sans recours" (15), authoring for himself a mnemonic film ("un jardin d'Éden qui irradie dans les ténèbres" [73]) capable of transcending the confines of the eternal summer.

It might be tempting to read into Djaout's text a wholesale indictment of Islam, but this would be a mistake. At three different moments in *Le Dernier été de la raison,* a sympathetic Boualem clarifies for the reader his own relationship to his faith. In the first instance, he recalls a childhood realization that "Dieu […] nous a donné une poitrine avec un cœur impatient, des jambes, des doigts, des yeux et une langue à l'étroit dans la cage des dents, c'est pour que nous en fassions usage et nous les mettions à l'épreuve" (62-3). And the God of the "nouveaux maîtres" is not one that he recognizes: "un Dieu … [qui] ne connaît ni le pardon, ni la compassion ni la tolérance. C'est le Dieu de la vengeance et du châtiment" (89). Finally, an exasperated Boualem prays aloud: "Mon Dieu, montrez-moi le chemin. Car mon chemin n'est pas le leur" (111). The bookseller is no atheist. And even his relationship to language is more complex than a Manichean division of Algerian society into francophone and arabophone camps would allow:

> Boualem aime beaucoup les textes arabes à la ponctuation lâche, textes ignorant les guillemets et où toutes les voix dialoguent et se mélangent. Longues spirales discursives. Abstraction des lettres incurvées en une vraie géométrie de bas-relief. Langue elle-même abstraite en dépit de la charge des mots et de leurs sonorités à réveiller la mémoire embourbée. Il faut être constamment sur ses gardes pour, lecteur vigilant, rétablir les lignes du sens, borner le territoire des phrases, dessouder les paragraphes lovés. La lecture est chaque fois une aventure, des avancées incertaines, des allées et venues tortueuses pour débusquer le visage des mots, leur redonner une fonction, les établir dans leur rôle de locomotive ou de wagon. Lecture hésitante, prudente, où l'on essaie de se garder des chemins dévoyeurs ou dispersants. (59)

In place of the unimaginative, linear discourse of the "nouveaux maîtres," Boualem takes solace in other forms of Arabic writing—poetic texts whose meanings are subject to negotiation, interpretation, and uncertainty. It is this open form of reading (in any language) that he values, and which forms a counterpoise against the closed-meaning singularity of Islamist rhetoric during the *décennie noire*. Tahar Djaout, killed for his "blasphemous writing," celebrates in this novel a rich, complex, and nuanced version of faith. Boualem's story cannot be reduced to the logic of atheist vs. believer in a text that stages a confrontation between two iterations of Islam in contemporary Algeria.

The transcendent properties of literature appear in Daoud's short story as well, and the narrator of "La Préface du Nègre" uses books as a way of escaping what was, even before the *décennie noire*, a climate of limited imaginative possibilities: "La littérature que je dévorais depuis mon premier roman policier, lu à l'âge de neuf ans […] était le seul moyen d'échapper à cet univers de gloire nationale qui ne pouvait plus s'assurer l'éternité que par l'usage de la photocopieuse" (92). Later, when the narrator tries his own hand at fiction, he discovers that "il était impossible d'écrire autre chose que cette histoire de guerre, et d'écrire contre elle" (92), and it is "contre elle" that the "nègre" writes through the stories he smuggles into the veteran's narrative. Realizing that the illiterate "Vieux" has no way to verify that his transcriptions are accurate, the scribe decides to transform himself into an author and invent

> un livre imaginaire où rien ne se passerait de plus sérieux que le gargouillis d'un ventre creux face au souvenir d'un grand repas de fête. Je décidai, du coup, de réutiliser la même cassette pour le second rendez-vous, de l'effacer au fur et à mesure et sans en avertir le Vieux, comme on le faisait avec les vieilles peaux de bêtes, les papyrus et les omoplates de chameaux autrefois, à l'époque où les livres sacrés pouvaient disparaître avec la mort des récitants. (78-9)

By interrupting the veteran's war memoir with an "imaginary" book about grumbling stomachs longing for a holiday meal, the *auteur-trabandiste* would appear to leave the realm of representational writing for something altogether different. But the "nègre"

describes Algeria as a nation delivered to his generation half-eaten, "sur un plateau" (82). This supposedly anodyne image of a hungry man remembering more plentiful times links to the author's own metaphor of the nation as a meal, calling us to question his assertion of the tale's *rien*ness. And reusing the cassette day after day to record the veteran's own words over his previous monologues literalizes the oft-cited notion of palimpsest in Algeria with an important difference: history is here being recorded over with more of the same. In place of the overlaying of disparate and conflicting voices found in Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia*, this cassette tape becomes an etch-a-sketch on which the same drawing is erased and retraced, over and over. Only when these dictations are "transcribed" by the narrator around stories of his own invention is the repetitive cycle broken.

The stories the "nègre" chooses to include, while divorced from the documentary pretensions of the veteran's autobiography, retain a distinctly allegorical dimension. The narrator announces:

> J'y avais tout mis en farce: l'histoire d'un coureur de fond qui n'arrivait plus à s'arrêter, et que j'avais imaginée il y a quelques années, celle d'un fabricant d'avion halluciné que j'avais croisé un jour, et les premiers chapitres d'un roman, que je n'ai jamais pu finir, sur un homme qui ne voulait plus sortir de son appartement avant de sortir de son corps. (106)

A running man who cannot stop, a hallucinated plane, an agoraphobe who wants to leave his own skin: the protagonists in these vignettes long for a fundamental shift in their way

of being in the world (to stop running, to take flight, to leave one's skin). This is a desire shared by the scribe, who writes his stories as a way of redeeming the humiliation of being asked to transcribe the life history of a man he hates, a man who stands for everything he despises about contemporary Algeria. When he leaves his daily meetings with the veteran, the "nègre" is "épuisé, avec de violents maux de tête et certain d'avoir été vidé de quelque chose de plus essential que le sang et d'avoir server de repas à un animal sale" (87-8). Reclaiming ownership of the manuscript allows him to replenish the dignity that is drained from him during these meetings, and by voicing his feelings of humiliation (being made to feel like food for a dirty animal), the "nègre" shames the source of his shame.

While writing in and around the veteran's narrative is a way for the scribe to preserve his sense of self, Boualem Yekker locates in others' stories "le refuge le plus sûr contre ce monde de l'horreur […] le plus agréable et le plus subtil moyen de voyager vers une planète plus clémente" (110-11). But such refuge comes at a cost, and at times, Boualem feels imprisoned by his books (66), so insulated by the escape they offer that he cannot live meaningfully in the present. The comfort of refuge gives way to a fear that he may have lost the ability to make sense of the world, noting that he "n'arrive plus à trouver le réconfort auprès des livres qui l'entourent. Quelque chose a été rompue en profondeur. C'est comme s'il découvrait une fissure irréparable séparant son corps livresque de son corps de chair" (45). Enjoying the pleasure of the text in total isolation, surrounded by a society that judges him harshly for the activity that gives him the most pleasure, splits the man in two. He becomes a Boualem unable to distinguish between his

literary and corporeal selves: “ses mains livresques et ses mains charnelles, son corps de papier et son corps de sang s’imbriquent et s’emmêlent bien souvent. Boualem lui-même a fini par ne plus bien faire la distinction” (104). His hands, as the instruments of touch and contact with the world, as well as his heart, are doubled, and his outward- and inward-facing selves become confused when the books that deliver him from the static present—*les livres qui le livrent*—are burned by the “nouveaux maîtres.”

The conflagration that reduces his *librairie* to ashes is described as “un incendie exorcisant” (124). The Islamist insurgents “ont compris le danger des mots, de tous les mots qu’ils n’arrivent pas à domestiquer et à anesthésier. Car les mots, mis bout à bout, portent le doute, le changement” (124). The exorcism expels the possibility of doubt and is designed to ensure that future generations won’t be burdened with uncertainty and ambiguity, recalling the execution of the nation’s authors described in “La Préface du Nègre,” which the narrator of the short story calls an “étrange autodafé commis par ce pays, commençant par brûler les livres avant qu’ils soient écrits, et tuer tous ceux qui pourraient un jour enfanter un écrivain, un lecteur ou un simple conteur d’histoires indisciplinés” (96-7). In *Le Dernier été de la raison*, books from all previous generations are burned so that future generations won’t be distracted from the (religious) “livre unique,” while in “La Préface du Nègre,” the nation’s books were “burned” before they were even allowed to be written (the young intellectuals beheaded in 1956) so that the heroic, nationalist “livre unique” would be the only possible story that could be told in post-war Algeria.

But neither Daoud nor Djaout suggests that returning all the stories to Algeria and spreading literacy alone will rescue the nation from either the narrow dogma of a particular brand of Islam or the narrow dogma of a particular brand of nationalism. Djaout was a journalist at *El Watan* and wrote powerful, poignant essays against various forms of repression, both state and Islamist. And Kamel Daoud is an editor and syndicated columnist at *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, and in addition to his novels and short stories, published a collection of essays, *Mac-Arabe*, in which he comments on everything from the events of 9/11 to Algerian electoral politics. Both men have understood in their own lives the importance of coupling artistic creation with meaningful engagement in the material present. Djaout was and Daoud is a public intellectual. Boualem Yekker, the protagonist of Djaout's novel, didn't understand the necessity of this second role and failed to step out from behind his wall of books to put his gifts to work in a country whose intellectuals were headed north or had gone missing altogether. But in the midst of the psychic trauma he feels at having been deprived of his books, Boualem remarks that "maintenant, il va peut-être, pour le temps qui lui reste, vivre la vie de ces gens-là, connaître des horizons pareils aux leurs" (104). Yekker's detachment from the word—the intellectual's privatized retreat from society described by Hiddleston—cedes here to an admission that in the (few) days that remain for the former bookseller, he will live with and suffer alongside his fellow citizens, rejoining the community from which he had grown distant.

In "La Préface du Nègre," we learn that before the veteran burned the manuscript the night it had been delivered to him, he had "scruté le manuscrit pendant des heures"

(108). We were assured that "le Vieux" was illiterate, so what was he doing staring at the book for hours? Was he searching for evidence of the scribe's treachery, which he may have suspected all along? Or was his scrutinizing an act of proud admiration, a man touching pages he could not read but that he knew represented the pivotal accomplishments of his life? And why, then, burn the book? The narrator announces that even if "le livre n'avait jamais été écrit […] vous pouvez le lire n'importe où dans ce pays. […] Il manquait seulement la Préface" (109). Whatever his reasons, it doesn't really matter why he burned the manuscript, for the book that was supposed to have been written can be read "n'importe où," and the preface *does* exist for us to read, with all its commentary and insight. And in both its original publication by Éditions Barzakh and its subsequent publication in France, with Sabine Wespieser, "La Préface du Nègre" is one of a collection of Daoud's short stories that sound very much like those the "nègre" smuggled into the veteran's memoir. There's an account of a taxi driver who can never arrive at his destination, a runner at the Athens Olympic Games who can't stop running, and an aviation fanatic who tries desperately and in vain at a world's fair to generate interest in a prototype he's assembled with his own hands. These are stories published independent of the textual carcass of the veteran's memoir, and just as Djaout's stories and poems survive him (they were not burned), Daoud's imaginative fiction *is* possible, though the inclusion of the "Préface" suggests that a necessary condition for its writing is the *un*writing of the nation's foundational mythology. All of which transforms these two texts—both rather pessimistic and apocalyptic—into participants in a utopian imagining of a future that aspires to be "a world in which autonomy and popular self-determination

will be politically meaningful concepts, in which 'independence' will not correspond merely to 'flag independence'" (Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious* 106).

One final allegorical trope in *Le Dernier été de la raison* and "La Préface du Nègre" deserves mention. Birds appear in the first paragraph of Daoud's short story and are everywhere in Djaout's novel. The "nouée d'oiseaux" allows the scribe to imagine "des espèces infinies"—infinite species, but perhaps also infinite spaces ("espaces"), other beings and other places. The stories he inserts into the veteran's memoir are representatives of another literary genre, one born of this same imagination. In *Le Dernier été de la raison*, Boualem Yekker describes pigeons as "Heureux volatiles!" that, unlike the Algerian citizenry, are not "contraints à changer de mœurs et de chants, à moduler des airs qui contrediraient les pulsation de leur cœur" (113). In other words, they are "la personnification même de la liberté" (113). The birds in both texts share with the texts themselves a freedom to explore (the sky, the page), and a mobility to travel within and beyond Algeria's borders. Whatever the calamity of things on the ground, the birds *are* there and *will be* there, and will continue to sing their songs. Their persistent presence and the songs they author provide both narratives with a model for creation in times of conflict and confer upon these texts a hope that the more dour moments in their pages might otherwise obscure.

Conclusion

In her study of literary works authored during times of conflict, Lucette Valensi uses the term "Scheherazade Syndrome" to describe a situation wherein authors

> confronted with lethal danger […] come forward and delay the sentence. In the face of deadly threat, [the storyteller] not only postpones her own death but also keeps the killer hostage to her own voice. It is through the medium of tales that she challenges deadly violence. It is through a poetization of a brutal reality that she unveils it to the public and to the protagonists. (153)

Both *Le Dernier été de la raison* and "La Préface du Nègre" unfold within the altered temporalities of crisis. In the case of the former, time is deformed in the absence of a conceivable future and the effacement of the past that happens in a war on thought. In the latter, the past is the *only* possible temporality in a country doomed to relive the heroic epic of independence in the repetition of the nation's singular narrative. These texts intervene to create a new temporality, leveraging the specificity of literature to slow down the present-ness of the crisis and clarify its effects—structural, aesthetic, and psychological. Aesticizing aftermath through allegory is the method by which Daoud and Djaout confront and *un*write the narrative scleroses they both face.

Allegory is the vehicle these authors use to arrive at what Jacques Rancière has called a "literature conceived neither as the art of writing in general nor as a specific state

of language, but as a historical mode of visibility of writing, a specific link between a system of meaning of words and a system of visibility and things" (155). These texts do more than stage "the tension between two radically heterogeneous or even opposite modes of exposition in Algeria's real present" (Bensmaïa, *Experimental* 73)—they link language to materiality through allegories that, when read against the backdrop of Algerian history, disclose the symptoms of aftermath and propose alternatives other than suffering them in perpetuity. In his defense of Jameson's reading of third-world texts as "national allegory," Szeman argues that

> if in the third world, private stories are *always* allegories of public situations, this does not thereby imply that of necessity third world writing is narratively simplistic or overtly moralistic, or that all such texts are nothing more than exotic versions of Bunyan, as might be supposed in the terms of a more traditional sense of allegory. The claim is rather that the text speaks to its context in a way that is more than simply an example of the Western text's familiar "auto-referentiality": it necessarily and directly speaks to and of the overdetermined situation of the struggles for national independence and cultural autonomy in the context of imperialism and its aftermath. (808)

Only by misreading Jameson's use of "allegory" as a fixed, one-to-one system of equivalency can we conclude that he is affixing to third-world texts a punitive label. Algeria, as a nation trapped in the combined permanency of the aftermaths of

colonialism, the war for independence, and the black decade, is a space in which writing "necessarily and directly" springs from the condition of aftermath. And it often does so with considerable creativity and guile, not in the simplified idiom of an "exotic" version of "Bunyan," but in the dynamic and plucky language of postcolonial poetics. Neil Lazarus concludes that "if Jameson had not postulated his 'national allegory' hypothesis, we would have had to invent it. This is not primarily for theoretical reasons […] but in order to keep pace with, to be accountable to, modern and contemporary writings from the postcolonial world" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 107). Keeping pace with postcolonial texts from Algeria requires an interpretive framework attentive both to the context in which these works were written and the aspirational, theoretical status of the "third-world nation" as an ideal to hope and long for.

If literature is indeed the art of "displaying and deciphering the symptoms of a state of things […] revealing the signs of history, delving as the geologist does into the seams and strata under the stage of the orators and politicians" (Rancière 162), than we as readers would do well to first identify the "state of things," and locate the "stage of the orators and politicians" before starting the work of parsing language's internal tensions. Interpretations of postcolonial literature that shy away from allegory (out of a fear of condescending to the text) or nationalism (out of a misplaced association of the term with nasty, European varieties) deny texts the fullness of their creative potential. Such readings, no doubt well-meaning and intended to apply to postcolonial literary works a similar analytical method as those used with first-world novels, force texts to become versions of themselves ripe for deconstruction along less politically threatening grounds.

But doing so commits the very same totalizing and universalizing errors for which Jameson was attacked and neuters the potency of literary works born in and responsive to a particular moment of national crisis.

Conclusion

On his Facebook page, Kamel Daoud recently posted a short essay, "L'une des maladies qui expliquent notre soumission." He begins by announcing that "La peur de soi. C'est le propre de l'Algérien, en gros." According to Daoud, this fear is the byproduct of the nation's shame, "de sa langue, ses langues, ses racines, ses ancêtres et son passé." And there is a second, related fear: the fear of the people. He argues that

> le but du voyage algérien n'est pas de se retrouver […] mais de se fuir. Se débarrasser de soi aux bords derniers de la terre. Ne pas se rencontrer. S'oublier. S'effacer. Voyager à reculons, avec un balai à la main pour effacer les traces de ses propres pas et que personne ne vous suit ou ne vous retrouve. […] Et c'est cette peur de soi comme monstre ingouvernable, comme horde, comme barbarie dormante qu'il faut guérir. ("Maladies")

Having diagnosed the nation's *maladie,* Daoud signals the possibility of a treatment, a pathway to collective health beyond the fear and shame that drive Algeria to corporate acts of effacement and forgetting. In my reading of Algerian literary works from the past twenty-five years, I have attempted to locate attempts by authors who, like Daoud, recognize this malady and imagine, through their works, possible remedies.

I have argued that aftermath in Algeria is permanent, but I should stipulate here that its permanence is dependent upon certain criteria, structures, and circumstances.

Were these to change, Algeria would find itself in a post-aftermath era, with new challenges and possibilities before it. One of my principal concerns has been to resist fragmenting Algeria's post-independence history into distinct epochs, and post-independence society into identity-based camps. Aftermath is an equal-opportunity malaise that has organized structures of feeling in Algeria in a fairly consistent way for over five decades. The surreality of the nation's politics, the memorial incest between France and Algeria, the ubiquity of voids and effacement, and the sustained assault on imagination are the straps that bind (and have bound) the nation in its condition of abeyance. The works I have studied here make these forces visible and confront them with a creativity unique to art.

To make these arguments, I have relied less on the traditional bedfellows of postcolonial literature in French and have engaged primarily with cultural materialists working in England and the US. Thinkers like Bahri, Brennan, Eagleton, Jameson, Lazarus, and Williams advocate a political reading of literature that doesn't cheat the aesthetic particularities of the texts they study, and this body of scholarship constructs bridges beyond the aesthetics-versus-politics debates that continue to generate a certain amount of heat in the field. Returning to the study of Algerian literature a materialist, Marxist approach seems particularly appropriate when these texts are reanimating a nationalist energy that was central to the work of left-leaning authors during the anti-colonial struggle.

Appreciating the depth of these writers' engagement with the political present and historical past requires a shift in the interpretive paradigms that have been used to discuss

Algerian literary works. Throughout this project, I have attempted to apply pressure to recent movements in Francophone Postcolonial Studies that detach literatures from their national contexts and herald the arrival of a post-national literary age. Algerian texts are mobile, travel broadly, and resonate with regional and global themes in a way that makes such an approach tempting, but I have tried to show that the pull is as much towards Algeria as away from it. While many Algerians leave the country in search of opportunities elsewhere, writers in Algeria are harnessing a wide net of references, and I read this as an important counterpoise against the export model of Algerian culture described by proponents of its transnationality.

Bringing these novels and short stories into dialogue with so many Anglophone thinkers, and reading them alongside texts by Homer, Joyce, Robbe-Grillet, Schlink, and Shakespeare might lead the reader to conclude that I am somehow championing a return of the canon or otherwise engaging in interpretive acrobatics to prove the worthiness of these texts. This was not my intent. By re-clothing the most precious treasures of European letters and refashioning them for use in the twenty-first century, Algerian authors are expanding the referential repertoire available to them. Nothing is off limits, and neither French nor "traditional," precolonial Maghrebi sources can claim an influential monopoly on contemporary cultural production. Algerian literature is calling us to be more attentive to the centripetal flow of influences and referents toward the nation, and they ask that we pause to consider not only northward and westward flows of goods, ideas, and people from postcolonial spaces, but also those things that remain or arrive on Algeria's shores.

In the conclusion to his Facebook essay, Daoud addresses the Algerian people directly: "Peuple d'Algérie, vous n'êtes pas des monstres! On vous pousse à la monstruosité. Réveillez-vous au moins à cette certitude. Un par un. Il en naîtra un jour une dignité et pas cette détestable vanité qui dure depuis des décennies" ("Maladie"). This "one-by-one" national "awakening" is a political, economic, and democratic process. But it is also a psychological one, and for such a "dignity" to be born, imaginations need to stir. By introducing creativity, utopian thinking, and a sense of collective identity back into the Algerian mix, authors like Daoud are doing their part to put an end to the "désœuvrement," the "peur," and the "honte." Lest we become complicit with an aftermath that relies on external, punitive interpretations of Algeria's history, her people, and her possible futures, those of us reading the nation from the outside must listen closely and often to the words of authors who demand that we respect their rights of self-narration. Aftermath's permanence is being contested on the streets of Algiers, in the pages of *El Watan*, and in the Barzakh printing house. The task of the first-world critic, then, is to notice.

Bibliography

Abderrezak, Hakim. "Entretien avec Boualem Sansal." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 14.2 (2010): 339-47. Print.

Abdessemed, Rabia. *La Voyante de Hodna*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993. Print

Adorno, Theodor W. "Commitment." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gephardt. Trans. Francis McDonagh. London: Continuum, 1982. 300-18. Print.

Adorno, Theodor, et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso, 1980; 2007. Print.

Agar-Mendousse, Trudy. *Violence et créativité: de l'écriture algérienne au féminin*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006. Print.

Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory*. London: Verso, 2008. Print.

Alleg, Henri. *The Question*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1958. Print.

Allemand, Roger-Michel. *Alain Robbe-Grillet*. Paris: Seuil, 1997. Print.

Allouache, Merzak, dir. *Harragas*. Perf. Lamia Boussekine, Nabil Asli and Samir El Hakim. 2010. DVD.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodernity*. London: Verso, 1998. Print.

Apter, Emily. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.

Armes, Roy. *Postcolonial Images: Studies in North African Film*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005. Print.

Assemblée Nationale. "Paroles de la Marseillaise." *Assemblé Nationale*. N.p., Web. 10 April 2014.

Assima, Fériel. *Une femme à Alger: chronique du désastre*. Paris: Arléa, 1995. Print.

Assman, Aleida. "Canon and Archive." *The Collective Memory Reader*. Eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. 334-7. Print.

Bahri, Deepika. "New Aestheticism, the Culture Industry, and the Postcolonial Novel." *The Renewal of Cultural Studies*. Ed. Paul Smith. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011. 63-72. Print.

__. *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

Bakhai, Fatima. *Un Oued pour la mémoire*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Seuil, 1972. Print.

Barthès, Yann. *Le Petit Journal*. Canal+. Paris, 18 December 2013. Television.

Bartov, Omer. "Germany as Victim." *New German Critique* 80 (2000): 29-40. Print.

Ben Mansour, Latifa. *La Prière de la peur*. Paris: La Différence, 1997. Print.

Benfodil, Mustapha. *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*. Alger: Barzakh, 2007. Print.

__. "Because Art is Free to be Impolite." *Facebook*. N.p., 10 April 2011. Web. 15 March 2014.

__. *Les Bavardages du Seul*. Alger: Barzakh, 2003. Print.

__. “Manifestation anti-4e mandat.” *El Watan.* N.p., 07 March 2014. Web. 10 March 2014.
__. “Manifeste pour une contre-élection.” *Facebook.* N.p., 26 February 2014. Web. 27 February 2014.
__. “The *Shuhada* of the past Fifty Years.” *Manifesta Journal* 16 (2013): 28-32. Print.
__. *Zarta!* Alger: Barzakh, 2000. Print.
Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations.* New York: Schocken, 2007. Print.
Benmalek, Anouar. *Le Rapt.* Paris: Fayard, 2009. Print.
Bensmaïa, Réda. *Alger ou la maladie de la mémoire: L’année des passages.* Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997. Print.
__. *Experimental Nations or, the Invention of the Maghreb.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
Bernal, Olga. *Alain Robbe-Grillet: le roman de l'absence.* Paris: Gallimard, 1964. Print.
Beschea-Fache, Caroline. “Transnational Heritage in Boualem Sansal’s *The German Mujahid.*” *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 53.2 (2012): 163-79. Print.
Beverley, John. “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35.1 (1989): 11-28. Print.
Bey, Maïssa. “My Father the Rebel.” Trans. Suzanne Ruta. *World Literature Today* Nov.-Dec. 2007: 27-30. Print.
__. *Bleu, blanc, vert.* Paris: L’Aube, 2006. Print.
__. *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes…* Paris: L’Aube, 2010. Print.
Bhabha, Homi K. “Literature and the Right to Narrate.” 28 October 2000. *University of Chicago Lecture.* Web. January 2012.
Black, Ian. “Algeria's Bloody History Forged Brutal Response to Saharan Camp Raid.” *The Guardian* 18 January 2013: N.p. Web.
Bloom, Harold. *Modern Literary Characters: Odysseus/Ulysses.* New York: Chelsea House, 1991. Print.
__. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. Print.
Bonn, Charles and Farida Boualit, eds. *Paysages littéraires algériens des années 90: Témoigner d'une tragédie?* Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999. Print.
Bonn, Charles. “La Réception universitaire française de la littérature maghrébine.” *Actes du colloque de Heidelberg, octobre 1993, Université de Heidelberg & Université Paris-Nord*. Heidelberg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995. 48-56. Print.
__. “Le Roman algérien contemporain de langue française: espaces de l'énnonciation et productivité des récits.” 1982. *Limag.* Web. 17 April 2012. Web.
__. “Les pouvoirs du langage.” *Itinéraires et contactes de cultures* 21-22 (1996): 149-68. Print.
__. “Paysages littéraires algériens des années 90 et post-modernisme littéraire maghrébin.” *Paysages Littéraires algériens des années 90: Témoigner d'une tragédie?* Ed. Charles Bonn and Farida Boualit. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999. 7-24. Print.
__. *La littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lecteurs.* Sherbrooke: Éditions Naaman, 1974. Print.

Bouadna, Cheffa. *Carnet de bord: tours et retours d'Alger.* Paris: La pensée universelle, 1992. Print.
Boualit, Farida. "La littérature algérienne des années 90: 'Témoigner d'une tragédie?'." *Paysages littéraires algériens des années 90: Témoigner d'une tragédie*. Ed. Charles Bonn and Farida Boualit. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999. 25-40. Print.
Boudjedra, Rachid. *Hôtel Saint-Georges*. Paris: Grasset, 2011. Print.
__. *Les figuiers de Barbarie*. Paris: Grasset, 2010. Print.
Brennan, Timothy. "Intellectual Labor." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108.2 (2009): 395-415. Print.
__. "Running and Dodging: The Rhetoric of Doubleness in Contemporary Theory." *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 277-299. Print.
__. *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.
__. *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. Print.
Brisley, Lucy. "Melancholia and Victimhood in Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand: Ou le journal des frères Schiller.*" *Research in African Literatures* 44.1 (2013): 55-74. Print.
Brown, Nicholas. *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.
Bruckner, Pascal. "L'invention de l'Islamophobie." *Liberation.fr.* Libération, 23 November 2010. Web. 10 May 2013.
Cage, John. *4'33".* 1952. Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1952. Print.
Camus, Albert. *L'Étranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971. Print.
Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism.* 1955. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review P, 2000. Print.
Chambers, Ross. "The Long Howl: Serial Torture." *Yale French Studies* 118 & 119 (2010): 39-51. Print.
Charon, Aurélie and Caroline Gillet, narr. "Alger, nouvelle génération." *FranceInter.* N.p., August 2011. Web. 25 July 2012.
Chominot, Marie. "Le 'film' de la guerre: Les débuts de la guerre d'Algérie dans l'hebdomadaire illustré Paris Match (novembre 1954-juillet 1956)." Eds. Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora. *La Guerre d'Algérie 1954-2004: la fin de l'amnésie.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004: 575-596. Print.
Chrisman, Laura. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism, and Transnationalism*. Machester: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.
Clancy-Smith, Julia. *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900.* Berkeley: U of California P, 2010. Print.
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Kubla Khan." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 7th Edition.* Ed. M. H. Abrams. New York: Norton, 2000. 439. Print.
Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness.* New York: Norton, 1988. Print.
Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
Daoud, Kamel. *Chroniques Mac-Arabe (Raïna Raïkoum).* Oran: Dar El Gharb, 2005. Print
__. *La Fable du nain.* Oran: Dar El Gharb, 2003. Print.

__. *La Préface du Nègre: Nouvelles.* Alger: Barzakh, 2008. Print.
__. "Le bien portant imaginaire." *EuroAlgérie.* N.p., 05 March 2014. Web. 17 March 2014.
__. *Le Minotaure 504: Nouvelles*. Paris: Sabine Wespieser, 2011. Print.
__. "L'une des maladies qui expliquent notre soumission." *Facebook.* N.p., 21 April 2014. Web. 15 April 2014.
__. *Ô Pharaon*. Oran: Dar El Gharb, 2005. Print.
Davis, Doris McGinty. ""Le Voyeur" and "L'Année dernière à Marienbad"." *The French Review* 38.4 (1965): 477-84. Print.
Dawes, James. *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* . Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
De Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet without Hamlet.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
Déjeux, Jean. *Les tendences depuis 1962 dans la littérature maghrébine de langue française.* Algiers: Centre culturel français, 1973. Print.
Denis, Benoît. *Littérature et engagement: de Pascal à Sartre*. Paris: Seuil, 2000. Print.
Dib, Mohammed. *Qui se souvient de la mer*. Paris: Seuil, 1962. Print.
Djama, Sofia, dir. *Mollement, un samedi matin.* ARTE, 2011. Film.
Djaout, Tahar. *Le Dernier été de la raison*. Paris: Seuil, 1999. Print.
__. *L'Invention du désert.* Paris: Seuil, 1987. Print.
Djebar, Assia. *Algerian White.* Trans. David Kelly and Marjolin de Jager. New York: Seven Stories P, 2000. Print.
__. *L'amour, la fantasia.* Paris: Albin Michel, 1995. Print.
__. *Le blanc de l'Algérie.* Paris: Albin Michel, 1995. Print.
Djemaï, Abdelkader. *Un été de cendres*. Paris: Michalon, 1995. Print.
Donahue, William Collins. "Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and the Moral Limits of Holocaust Fiction." *German Life and Letters* 54.1 (2001): 60-80. Print.
Donnadey, Anne. *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001. Print.
Eagleton, Terry, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990. Print.
Eagleton, Terry. "Comrades and Colons." *Antipode* 40.3 (2008). Print.
__. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. New York: Verso, 1975; 2006. Print.
__. *The Function of Criticism*. New York: Verso, 1984. Print.
__. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Print.
Elkaïm, Karenn. "Je ne crois pas à la démocratie dans le monde arabo-musulman." *LeVif.be.* 28 October 2013. N.p. Web. 14 January 2014.
Feraoun, Mouloud. *Les chemins qui montent.* Paris: Seuil, 1957. Print.
Ferroukhi, Ismaël, dir. *Les hommes libres.* Perf. Tahar Rahim, Michael Lonsdale, Mahmud Shalaby. Pyramide Productions, 2011. Film.
Freidman, Thomas. *The World is Flat.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. Print.
Gacemi, Baya. *Moi, Nadia, femme d'un émir du GIA.* Paris: Seuil, 1998. Print.

Gafaïti, Hafid. "Culture and Violence: the Algerian Intelligentsia between two Political Illegitimacies." *Parallax* 4.2 (1998): 71-77. Print.
__. "Power, Censorship, and the Press: The Case of Postcolonial Algeria." *Research in African Literatures* 30.3 (1999): 51-61. Print.
Gall, Carolotta. "Politically Adrift, Algeria Clings to Its Old Ways." *New York Times.* N.p., 8 November 2013. Web. 10 November 2013.
Gikandi, Simon. "The Short Century: On Modernism and Nationalism. *New Formations* 51 (2003-04): 10-25. Print.
Gilmore, Leigh. "'What Was I?': Literary Witness and the Testimonial Archive." *Profession* (2011): 77-84. Print.
Glissant, Édouard. *Traité du tout-monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. Print.
Goulet, Alain. *Le Parcours Moebien de l'écriture: Le Voyeur.* Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1982. Print.
Graffenreid, Michael von. *Photographies d'une guerre sans images*. Paris: Hazan, 1998. Print.
Grossman, David and Boualem Sansal. "Appel de Strasbourg pour la paix." *Facebook.* N.p., 14 October 2012. Web. 13 March 2013.
Guemriche, Salah. "Rassemblement mondial des écrivains pour la paix': ma réponse à David Grossman et Boualem Sansal." *Mediapart.* N.p., 12 October 2012. Web. 15 March 2013.
__. *Un été sans juillet.* Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2004. Print.
Gueydan, Alexandra. *(Post)national ImagiNation of Algeria: Identity Politics and Practice in Algerian Francophone Literature.* Diss. Yale U, 2008. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011. Print.
__. *ImagiNation (post)nationale de l'Algérie: Politique et pratique identitaires de la littérautre francophone algérienne.* New Haven: Yale UP, 2009. Print.
Gueydan-Turek, Alexandra. "'Homeland beyond Homelands' Reinventing Algeria through a Transnational Literary Community. Assia Djebar's Le Blanc de l'Algérie." *Cincinnati Romance Review* 31 (2011): 85-102. Print.
Harbi, Mohammed and Benjamin Stora, eds. *La Guerre d'Algérie: 1954-2004, la fin de l'amnésie.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004. Print.
Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.
Hargreaves, Alec G., Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds. *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and* Littérature-monde. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2010. Print.
Harrison, Nicholas. "Who Needs an Idea of the Literary?" *Pragraph* 28.2 (2005): 1-17. Print.
__. *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003. Print.
Hiddleston, Jane. "Political Violence and Singular Testimony: Assia Djebar's *Algerian White*." *Law and Literature* 17.1 (2005): 1-20. Print.
Hiddleston, Jane and Patrick Crowley, eds. *Postcolonial Poetics*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2011. Print.

Higgins, Lynn. *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and Representation in Postwar France*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1996. Print.
__. "Screen/Memory: Rape and Its Alibis in *Last Year at Marienbad*." *Rape and Representation.* Eds Lynn Higgins and Brenda Sliver. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 303-22. Print.
Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *The Collective Memory Reader*. Eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. 346-7. Print.
Holzberg, Ruth. "Décryptage du Voyeur: le contrepoint et les répliques du 'voyant.'" *The French Review* 52.6 (1979): 848-55. Print.
Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1996. Print.
Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 1944. *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt: M. Fischer, 1988. Print.
Howbsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.
Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing at the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
Jameson, Fredric. *The Ideologies of Theory*. New York: Verso, 2008. Print.
__. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88. Print.
__. *The Postcolonial Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Meuthuen, 1981. Print.
Jeyifo, Biodun. "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory." *Research in African Literatures* 21.1 (1990): 33-48. Print.
Joyce, James. *Ulysses.* 1922. Ed. Walter Gabler. New York: Vintage, 1986. Print.
Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason.* 1781. Trans. Paul Guyer. Eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
Kerouani, Dalila. *Une fille d'Algérie éprise de la liberté.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991. Print.
Khelifi, Ghania. "Interview de Mustapha Benfodil." *Babelmed.* N.p., 20 February 2010. Web. 22 February 2014.
Khelladi, Aïssa. *Peur et mensonges.* Paris: Seuil, 1998. Print.
Khiari, Wahiba. *Nos Silences*. Tunis: Elyzad, 2009. Print.
Kittay, Jeffrey. "Alibi: On Handwriting, Rewriting, and Writing Rhythms in Le Voyeur." *Romantic Review* 71 (1980): 57-74. Print.
LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Memory after Auschwitz.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998.
__. *Writing History, Writing Trauma.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.
Lakhdar-Hamina, Mohammed, dir. *Le vent des Aurès/Rih al-awras.* Algiers: ONCIC, 1967. Film.
Landsberg, P.L. "Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel." *Esprit* 62 (1937): 179-97. Print.
Lazarus, Neil. *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
__. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

Le Bris, Michel et al. "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français: Le manifeste de quarante-quatre écrivains en faveur d'une langue française qui serait 'libérée de son pacte exclusif avec la nation.'" *Le Monde des Livres* 16 March 2007. N.p. Web. 7 December 2012.
Le Sueur, James D. *Between Terror and Democracy: Algeria since 1989.* London: Zed Books, 2010. Print.
Leenhardt, Jacques. *Lecture Politique du roman: La Jalousie d'Alain Robbe-Grillet.* Paris: Gallimard, 1973. Print.
Lewes, George Henry. *Problems of Life and Mind: First Series, Volume II.* London: Trübner, 1875. Print.
Litvin, Margaret. *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011.
Lorcin, Patricia, ed. *Algeria and France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia.* Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2006. Print.
__. *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia: European Women's Narratives of Algeria and Kenya 1900-Present.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
Mahlendorf, Ursula R. "Trauma Narrated, Read and (Mis)understood: Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader:* '…irrevocably complicit in their crimes…'." *Monatschefte* 95.3 (2003): 458-81. Print.
Mammeri, Mouloud. *L'opium et le bâton.* Paris: Plon, 1965. Print.
Marouane, Leïla. *Ravisseur.* Paris: Julliard, 1998. Print.
Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*1859. Trans. Saul K. Padover. Eds. Alek Blain and Mark Harris. *Marxist Internet Archive.* N.p., 2010. Web. 15 May 2013.
Matar, Nabil. *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery.* New York: Columbia UP, 1999. Print.
McDougall, James. "Algeria's Terrorist Attacks owe Litte to its 'Pathological' History." *The Guardian*. N.p., 22 January 2013. Web. 28 January 2013.
__. "Martyrdom and Destiny: The Inscription and Imagination of Algerian History." *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*. Ed. Paul A. Silverstein and Ussama Makdisi. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006. 50-72. Print.
__. *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.
McGonigal, Julie. "Postcolonial Metacritique: Jameson, Allegory, and the Always-Already-Read Third World Text." *Interventions* 7.2 (2005): 251-65. Print.
Miliani, Hadj. *Une littérature en sursis? Le champ littéraire de langue française en Algérie*. Alger: Chihab, 2002. Print.
Mimoun, Mouloud. "Merzak Allouache, Réalisateur de 'Harragas': 'La censure devient anachronique.'" *El Watan.* N.p., 20 April 2012. Web. 30 February 2013.
Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Collectivités Locales. *Charte pour la paix et la réconciliation nationale.* Algiers: MICL, 2006. Web. 10 October 2012.
Ministère de la jeunesse et des sports. *Programme du 50ème anniversaire de l'Indépendence et de la jeunesse.* Algiers: MJS, 2008. Print.

Minogue, Valerie. "The Creator's Game: Some Reflections on Robbe-Grillet's 'Le Voyeur.'" *The Modern Language Review* 72.4 (1977): 815-28. Print.
Mokeddem, Malika. *La Malédiction.* Paris: Stock, 1993. Print.
Mokhtari, Rachid. *La Graphie de l'horreur: essai sur la littérature algérienne (1990-2000)*. Alger: Chihab, 2000. Print.
Morrissette, Bruce. *The Novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975. Print.
Mosteghanemi, Ahlem. *Algérie: Femme et écritures.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985. Print.
Ngũgĩ waThiong'o. *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012. Print.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy.* 1872. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967. Print.
Nora, Pierre, ed. *Les Lieux de mémoire.* Paris: Gallimard, 1997. Print.
__. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 1*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. Print.
Norris, Margot. *Writing War in the Twenty-First Century*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000. Print.
Ouadah, Rachid. "Sofia Djama: 'La jeunesse algérienne ne doit pas se laisser mourir.'" 24 April 2012. *Motion Media.* N.p., 23 July 2012. Web. 15 November 2013.
Oumahni, Cécile. "Maïssa Bey, l'écriture, part secrète de l'être." *Encres Vagabondes* (2002). Print.
Ozick, Cynthia. "The Rights of History and the Rights of Imagination." *Commentary* 107.3 (1999): 22-7. Print.
Peters, Julie Stone. "'Literature,' the 'Rights of Man,' and Narratives of Atrocity: Historical Backgrounds to the Culture of Testimony." *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore. New York: Routledge, 2012. 19-40. Print.
Picasso, Pablo. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.* 1907. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. Print.
__. *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.
__. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000. Print.
Rachedi, Ahmed, dir. *L'Aube des damnés/Fajr al-mu'adhhabin.* Algiers: ONCIC, 1965. Film.
Rahal, Malika. "Phrase du jour." *Facebook.* N.p., 17 April 2014. Web. 18 April 2014.
Ramdani, Nabila. "Algeria Spills More Blood." *The Guardian*. N.p., 17 January 2013. Web. 20 January 2013.
Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics.* Trans. Steven Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. Print.
Reem Salloum, Jackie, dir. *Slingshot Hip Hop.* Perf. Tamer Nafar, Suhell Nafar, Mahmoud Jreri. 2008. Film.
Renan, Ernest. *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1997. Print.
Reynolds, Daniel. "A Portrait of Misreading: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*." *Seminar* 39.3 (2003): 238-56. Print.

Riad, Mohamed Slim, dir. *La voie/Al-tariq.* Algiers: ONCIC, 1969. Film.
Rice, Alison. "All over the Place: Global Women Writers and the Maghreb." *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*. Ed. Christine McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. 160-76. Print.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.
Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *L'Année dernière à Marienbad.* Paris: Minuit, 1968. Print.
__. *La Jalousie*. Paris: Minuit, 1958. Print.
__. *Le Voyeur*. Paris: Minuit, 1955. Print.
__. *Pour un nouveau roman.* Paris: Minuit, 1963. Print.
__. "'What interests me is Eroticism': Interview with Germaine Brée." *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts.* Eds. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979. Print.
Roberts, Hugh. "The Algerian Exception: the Algerianization of North Africa and the Encirclement of Algeria." Middle East Studies Lecture Series, Brown University. 10 April 2013. Lecture.
Rosello, Mireille. "Guerre des mémoires ou 'parallèles dangereux' dans *Le Village de L'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal." *Modern & Contemporary France* 18.2 (2010): 193-211. Print.
__. *The Reparative in Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress.* Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2010. Print.
Ross, Kristin. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture.* Cambridge: MIT P, 1996. Print.
Rothberg, Michael, Debarati Sanyal and Max Silverman, eds. Noeuds de mémoire: *Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture.* Spec. issue of *Yale French Studies* 118 & 119 (2010): 1-238. Print.
Rothberg, Michael, Debarati Sanyal and Max Silverman. "Editors' Note: Nœuds de mémoire, Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture." *Yale French Studies* 118 & 119 (2010): 1-2. Print.
Rothberg, Michael. "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory, from Lieux de mémoire to Nœuds de mémoire." *Yale French Studies* 118 & 119 (2010): 3-14. Print.
__. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. Print.
Ruta, Suzanne. "The Rebel's Daughter: Algerian Novelist Maïssa Bey." *Women's Review of Books* 23.4 (2006): 16-7. Print.
S.K. "Anouar Benmalek à propos de son dernier roman 'Le Rapt.'" *Liberté*. N.p., 1 November 2009. Web. 10 October 2010.
Said, Edward. "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals." *The Nation* 17 September 2001. 27-36. Print.
Sansal, Boualem and David Grossman. "Appel de Strasbourg." *Facebook.com.* N.p., July 19, 2013. Web. November 8, 2013.
__. "I Went to Jerusalem, and Returned Delighted and Enriched." Trans. Daniel Simon. *World Literature Today* Sep.- Oct. 2012: 16-9. Print.

__. *Gouverner au nom d'Allah: Islamisation et soif de pouvoir dans le monde arabe.* Paris: Gallimard, 2013. Print.
__. *Le Village de L'Allemand ou Le Journal des frères Schiller.* Paris: Gallimard, 2008. Print.
__. *The German Mujahid.* 2008. Trans. Frank Wynne. New York: Europa, 2009. Print.
Sansom, Ian. "Doubts about *The Reader*." *Salmagundi* 124-5 (1999-2000): 3-16. Print.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Paris: Gallimard, 1985. Print.
Schalk, David L. *The Spectrum of Political Engagement: Mounier, Benda, Nizan, Brasillach, Sartre*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979. Print.
Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man.* Trans. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967. Print.
Schlink, Bernhard. *Guilt about the Past.* Queensland: U of Queensland P, 2009. Print.
__. *Le Liseur*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. Print.
__. *The Reader.* 1995. Trans. Carol Brown Janeway. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.
Sebbar, Leïla, ed. *Une enfance algérienne.* Paris: Gallimard, 1999. Print.
__. *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961*. Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999. Print.
Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.* 1603-23. Ed. Edward Hubler. New York: Penguin, 1963. Print.
Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night.* 1601-2. Eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Washington Square P, 2005. Print.
Slymovics, Susan and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds. *Jews and French Colonialism in Algeria.* Spec. issue of *The Journal of North African Studies* 17.5 (2012): 747-922. Print
Smaïl, K. "L'Algérie ne peut pas échapper à l'examen de la vérité quelle qu'elle soit." *El Watan* 1 November 2009: 18. Print.
Sorensen, Eli Park. "Postcolonial Melancholia." *Paragraph* 30.2 (2007): 65-81. Print.
Soudani, Mohammed, dir. *Guerre sans images: Algérie, je sais que tu sais*. Perf. Michael von Graffenried. 2005. DVD.
Stolzfus, Ben F. "A Novel of Objective Subjectivity: Le Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet." *PMLA* 77 (1962): 499-507. Print.
Stora, Benjamin. *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie.* Paris: La Découverte, 1991. Print.
__. *La guerre des mémoires: La France face à son passé colonial.* Paris: L'Aube, 2011. Print.
__. *La Guerre invisible: Algérie années 90.* Paris: Presses de Science Po, 2001. Print.
Su, John. "Amitav Ghosh and the Aesthetic Turn in Postcolonial Studies." *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (2011): 65-86. Print.
Sugnet, Charles. "Pour une littérature-monde en français: manifesto retro?" *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12.2-3 (2009): 237-52. Print.
Szeman, Imre. "Who's Afraid of National Allegory?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 803-27. Print.
Tabti, Bouba Mohammed. *Maïssa Bey: L'Écriture des silences*. Blida: Tell, 2007. Print.
Tamalet, Edwige. "Modernity in Question: Retrieving Imaginaries of the Transcontinental Mediterranean." Diss. U of California, San Diego, 2009. Print.

Titah, Rachida. *La Galerie des absentes.* Paris: L'Aube, 1996. Print.
Treat, John. *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
Twelfth Night. By William Shakespeare. Dir. Atra Bouatm. Prof. Hamid Bensaou's English class. L'Auditorium de l'Université d'Alger 2-Bouzereah, Algiers. 25 June 2012. Performance.
Valensi, Lucette. "The Scheherazade Syndrome: Literature and Politics in Postcolonial Algeria." *Algeria in Others' Languages.* Ed. Anne Emmanuelle-Berger. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002. 139-53. Print.
Vince, Natalya. "In Amenas: A History of Silence, not a History of Violence." *Textures du temps.* N.p., 20 January 2013. Web. 28 January 2013.
Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Materialism*. New York: Verso, 1980. Print.
__. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977; 2009. Print.
__. *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. New York: Verso, 1989. Print.
Yacine, Kateb. *Le Polygone étoilé.* Paris: Seuil, 1966. Print.
Young, Robert. "Ideologies of the Postcolonial." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1.1 (1998): 4-8. Print.