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The Afterlives of Amnesia: Remembering the Algerian War of Independence in Contemporary France and Algeria, 1999–2019

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Abstract

The objective of this dissertation, entitled "The Afterlives of Amnesia: Remembering the Algerian War of Independence in Contemporary France and Algeria, 1999–2019)," is to examine the mutually constitutive relationship between historiography, collective memory, and cultural narratives in the representation of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) in present-day France and Algeria. Taking the turn of the twenty-first century as its point of departure, this study analyzes modern cultural and media representations of the Algerian War to demonstrate the sustained traumatic impact of the anti-colonial conflict in contemporary France and Algeria. Integrating methodological approaches from history, memory studies, and literary and cultural criticism, the interdisciplinary nature of this scholarly inquiry highlights the complex nexus of narratives that have coalesced around the Franco-Algerian conflict in a postcolonial context. Furthermore, by calling attention to points of contact and historical complicity between the Algerian War and other histories of violence over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the transhistorical perspective of this study also serves, in part, to plot the transmission and transformation of its memory over time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements. Situating the singular case of the Algerian War within a set of scholarly conversations about the cultural representation of historical trauma, this dissertation offers an important contribution to the study of postcolonial memory and its transnational migrations.

Acknowledgements

Many years ago, while traveling across North Africa on a summer research trip, I went to Marrakech on a whim. My advisor at Northwestern was expecting a progress report; instead, I spent that weekend wandering aimlessly around the old city in Marrakech. I walked and walked until I started to pick out traffic patterns amidst the chaos of narrow streets. I played games of mental cartography with myself, trying to retrace my steps from point A to point B and back again. Sometimes I succeeded on my first try; more often, I would lose my way after a turn or two, and eventually stumble unexpectedly out of a side street onto the Jemaa el-Fnaa, which is to say, exactly where I had started, but unsure how I had gotten there or where I went wrong.

Writing my dissertation was, in many ways, like that whimsical weekend in Marrakech: a topography of false starts and wrong turns and the occasional stunning vista—a sudden, ephemeral sense of clarity followed often by confusion or the acrid taste of failure. Five years later, now that I have finally completed and defended my dissertation, I feel weightless; like a bird gliding gently above that claustrophobic tangle of collapsing walls and sun-cured leather, I can see the city spread out beneath me, each incomprehensible cluster of alleys at last unraveled, each jealously guarded courtyard exquisitely unveiled.

To write a dissertation is, by definition, to forge a path where no one else has deigned to wander. It can be a quiet, lonely expedition. Even so, I never roamed alone along that long and winding journey. My success in this solitary endeavor is a testament to those

who supported, comforted, and encouraged me along the way. I am humbled by their devotion and grateful for their friendship.

Nasrin Qader, my advisor, has been a steady compass throughout this labyrinthine process, gently guiding me and always waiting patiently when I wandered away for months at a time or walked myself into mental knots and imaginary dead ends. Doris Garraway has an uncanny capacity to prod at the precarious crux of an argument, and her careful, insightful reading of my work has made me a better academic writer. Alessia Ricciardi set high standards and always helped me achieve them.

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I have also been blessed with an exceptionally supportive bunch of colleagues. Matt Brauer, Colin Jackson, and Brian McLoughlin adopted me when I came into the graduate program as a lonely cohort of one. Matt, his wife Hallie Moberg Brauer, and their two cats quite literally put a roof over my head on multiple occasions and welcomed me into their beautiful family. Tamara Tasevska and her wife Jamie Price have been constant sources of comfort, care, and commiseration.

Many other friends, companions, and "compagnons de route" (as my French psychotherapist liked to say) accompanied me along the way. Among them, I am particularly grateful for the friendship and support of Sibel Agrali, Anders Blockmar, J.

Dakota Brown, Franco Chavez, Vince Dominguez, Adam Ensalaco, Jacqueline Feldman, Arnaud George, Matt Gilmore, Becca Goldklang, Miklos Gosztonyi, Amira Haddadi, Andreas Hausot, Katy James, Kurt Mueller, Scott Newman, Aleah Niemczyk, Nachiket Nadkarni, Jessica Passos, Daniel Richard, Elizabeth Rush, Mohamed Smahi, Craig Turskey, Danny Velazquez, Ben Violot, Robin Watts, and Jeremy Zerechak.

The circuitous path that led me to this point began one particularly frigid winter in Athens, Ohio, when Lois Vines introduced me to the works of Albert Camus in one of our many one-on-one tutorials together. I remember reading Camus's essay "Noces à Tipasa" in my sophomore year dorm room with Mary Forfia, feeling the heat of the Mediterranean sun radiating off of the page. I started my academic career as an English major in the Honors Tutorial College at Ohio University. After my high school French teacher Gloria Huff, it was Herta Rodina who truly recognized my potential in French and encouraged me to pursue a dual degree. Nancy Basmajian, Nick Creary, Robert DeMott, "Mama" Jan Hodson, Ghirmai Negash, Carey Snyder, David Wanczyk, and Jeremy Webster each helped to build the foundation on which my academic expertise still stands. But the soul of Athens will forever reside with the friends that I met and learned to love there, and whose homes and arms and hearts have remained open to me ever since: Rachel Collins, Stephanie Fisk, Colin Kruse, and Alex Menrisky.

Although my research has taken me all over the world, from Athens to Algiers by way of Avignon and Paris, it seems somehow appropriate that I should finally defend my dissertation from my childhood home in rural Ohio, in the midst of a global pandemic. My parents, Phil and Laura Grimm, inspired the curiosity, dedication, and passion for

knowledge that propelled me to pursue a PhD in the first place; however, it was perhaps a degree of healthy competition with my brilliant brother, Benjamin Grimm, that finally compelled me to complete it. I owe my wanderlust to my late maternal grandpa, Dan Mihuta, who traveled the world studying indigenous art; my love for reading is the living legacy of my librarian grandma, Barbara Mihuta, a gifted artist in her own right. My dissertation is dedicated to their memory.

Preface

À Amira

Il était une nuit où je me suis réveillée, apeurée, à cette heure silencieuse d'un été algérois, le voile d'un rêve de ma propre mort pesant sur la poitrine comme de la rosée froide sur une toile d'araignée. Le grondement incessant du chantier d'en face—en lutte douteuse contre les ravages d'une broussaille sauvage qui réclamait petit à petit les hauteurs d'Alger pour y dénicher chômeurs et chats de leurs gouttières débordantes de déchets depuis que les éboueurs rôdeurs furent privatisés par un état en faillite—était soudain oppressant par son absence. Les gendarmes qui surveillaient les embouteillages qui se formaient à l'entrée du quartier de Kouba somnolaient derrière des barricades de fer rescapé des casemates terroristes de la décennie noire.

J'ai cligné des yeux, une fois, deux fois, et je me suis réveillée le lendemain en naufragée, roulée par les vagues, sur la plage de Tipasa. Il était midi. Ma chère Amira, tu étais couchée sur l'autel d'un tombeau ouvert, blanchi par le soleil immuable qui tyrannise la terre depuis que ce pays a surgi, d'un sursaut de mémoire fabriquée par des *moudjahidine* en manque de patrie, de la nuit des temps. Prostrée sur les ossements d'une civilisation disparue depuis toujours, tu m'as répondu d'un ton sincère : « Chez nous, on estime un rêve de sa propre mort de bon augure pour l'avenir. On dirait que tu connaitras une vie longue et prospère. » Coquine, tu m'as désigné d'un geste de main l'autel funéraire où tu étais couchée sur le dos, les doigts de pied pointés raids vers le ciel, me priant de m'y allonger à côté de toi, comme deux amantes pompéiennes surprises dans une étreinte

éternelle sous un soleil poussiéreux. Et j'ai hésité, prise tout à trac d'une peur qui m'a laissé un goût métallique de sang dans la bouche.

Ce jour-là, tu m'avais emmenée sur la route qui longue la Baie d'Alger vers l'ouest, et contournant le Mont Chenoua, je m'attendais naïvement à ce que l'on voie surgir des reflets du soleil couchant l'amas calcaire d'Oran, perché hors de portée du bleu jaloux des vagues. Mais les plis doux du Mitidja s'étirent sur des longueurs infranchissables, et pour me consoler de mon imagination trop fertile, tu m'as raconté l'histoire d'une tribu perdue de femmes aux yeux bleus qui demeuraient autrefois au-delà de ces montagnes, et qui, selon la légende, étaient les seules descendantes d'un navire de marins nordiques qui s'étaient égarés dans les eaux froides de l'Atlantique et sont tombés, miraculeusement, sur un paradis nord-africain sans nom propre. Je t'ai raconté en guise de réponse qu'enfant je rêvais de devenir pirate, et ton ami Zacki, réglant la radio de sa bagnole en conduisant, s'est arrêté sur une chanson kabyle qui le fait toujours penser à son enfance.

Jean-Paul Sartre, dans une lettre à sa compagne Simone de Beauvoir, lui décrit le moment précis d'un soir de printemps où son amitié pour elle s'est transformée, abruptement, en amour ; où son désir têtu de conquérir tout ce qu'il ne comprenait pas s'est dévêtit de son armure et s'est pelotonné, tel un animal domestique, aux pieds de son idole ; où les dernières ondulations du parfum de sa bien-aimée l'ont pénétré de tout son être, jusqu'à ce que la vue de sa fenêtre, qui donnait (je l'imagine) sur les pavés luisantes d'une pluie fine sous les lampadaires du Quartier Latin, lui renvoie les reflets de son image tant chérie. Ainsi je me demande, parfois, à quel moment cette tendresse que j'avais toujours éprouvée envers ce pays lointain, l'Algérie, dès notre première rencontre dans un

cours de littérature à l'université, un hiver où il faisait affreusement froid dans l'Ohio, a pris les premières allures de l'amour.

Même si je ne garde aucun souvenir de notre première rencontre, ma chère Amira, je me souviendrai toujours du reflet de ta silhouette dans le clair-obscur de la cour de cet ancien palais tunisien que nous avons visité ensemble dans les hauteurs d'Alger. Ne connaissant rien de la capitale algérienne à part ce que j'avais lu dans les livres, je t'ai embauchée comme guide touristique sur la recommandation d'une amie d'un ami de mon ancienne université dans l'Ohio et dont la sœur te connaissait, il me semble, par le biais d'une amie à elle. Une rencontre fortuite, au final, dans un pays que je découvrais en chair et en os pour la première fois en cet été de 2015, et qui me surprenait surtout, à première vue depuis la voiture de Kenza qui m'avait récupérée à l'aéroport, par la blancheur du soleil sur les immeubles délabrés qui loguent la côte, dressés comme des dents cassées dans la bouche béante de la Méditerranée. Tu as dû me proposer comme première sortie le Musée de Bardo, et donc te voilà, à mes côtés, devant une exposition de tissage algérien, et je ne voyais que toi. Tu te moquais déjà de mon accent quand je tentais de te parler en arabe—trop *fusha*, tu disais, trop érudit—mais c'était encore trop tôt pour que je reconnaisse la source de la chaleur que j'ai cru sentir dans ta présence malgré la fraicheur de la salle du musée, vide et silencieuse à part nous et nos pas étouffés.

Était-ce alors pendant une de ces innombrables heures que nous avons passées ensemble dans les jours à venir, bloquées dans la circulation infernale qui étouffe la capitale d'une lourde couche de fumée jaunâtre, inondant l'arrière-pays, au-delà de Blida où le maquis se transforme en désert martyrisé par l'assaut souverain du soleil, d'une pluie

acide qui avale les dernières récoltes de la révolution ; et dans l'intimité accablante d'un embouteillage, j'ai cru apercevoir dans tes yeux de biche le visage de ta mère qui jadis te tenais prisonnière de ses fuites dépressives vers le néant?

Ou était-ce au moment où tu m'as pris la main en descendant les marches poussiéreuses de la Casbah d'Alger, à l'ombre de la prison infâme de Barberousse où de nombreux camarades de l'oncle de Zacki, qui nous servait de guide ce jour-là, furent éliminés par l'armée française pendant la guerre ; et une fois surgies au grand jour sur la Place des Martyrs, tu m'as acheté une glace italienne au citron tout en me traduisant avec un sourire coquin le babillage que nous balançaient sans cesse des badauds bavant d'une curiosité vicieuse devant nos épaules audacieusement découvertes?

Mais non, ça a dû être au moment où j'ai compris à quel point ton absence m'a été accablante, un soir où j'avais accompagné mon ami Amin sous les arcades abandonnées du port d'Alger ; un soir où, sur la place devant la Grande Poste, un groupe de musiciens chantait la gloire du Sahara Occidental, au regret des voisins marocains, ceux pour qui ce territoire encore controversé mérite toujours la fermeture définitive des frontières avec l'Algérie, tracées quelque part d'invisible au milieu des sables mouvants du désert, et qui réservent, pour cette raison anodine, entre autres, un déluge d'insultes destinées aux oreilles bouchées de leurs frères algériens, ces étrangers intimes.

Ce soir-là, ma chère Amira, un vent frais soufflait de la mer de sorte que je sente la chaleur de la peau foncée d'Amin tout près de la mienne, tel un feu de joie, comme les grands feux qu'on allume lors de la fête de la Saint Jean que l'on ne fête plus ici en Algérie depuis le départ escarpé des Français il y a un demi-siècle, s'éloignant de la côte, la queue

enfoncée entre les jambes, et pleurant sur des bateaux bondés en direction d'un pays inconnu qu'ils réclamaient dès lors comme étant le leur par voie d'un héritage depuis longtemps ignoré. Face à la mer noire qui s'étendait à l'infini devant nous, moi et Amin, j'ai eu soudain envie de partager ce moment de bonheur avec toi, *ya habibti*.

De jeunes algériens dansaient sur une chanson de Raï sur le pont d'un paquebot amarré au port; et quand les pêcheurs de nuit ont grimpé sur leurs camions stationnés sur le quai pour y piquer un roupillon avant de lancer leurs filets, j'ai été surprise par le souvenir d'une nuit que j'avais presque oubliée, quelques années auparavant, où j'avais observé depuis le jardin d'une maison coloniale à Jinja, en Ouganda, les bateaux de pêche flottant comme des étoiles sur le Lac Victoria, attirant leur prise à l'aide des lampes primitives qui simulaient la lumière du soleil équatorial. Lors de cette soirée étoilée, sur les quais dépeuplés d'Alger centre—vides depuis longtemps, mais encore baignés d'un sang à pleine séché—c'est à toi que je pensais, ma chère Amira, toi dont les yeux enflammés auraient reflété tous les étincellements de la lune sur la mer.

Avec quelle autorité écris-je sur l'Algérie, un pays qui me reste si lointain, si inconnu, malgré tout, après tant d'années d'études patientes, de recherches dans les archives autrefois fermées, de lectures assoiffées? Celle de l'amour ; celle d'une vague qui se répand sur une plage rocailleuse et se retire ensuite, brûlée par la crudité ensoleillée de ce pays que l'Occident semble avoir oublié, ou bien refoulé, quelque part au fond d'une mémoire blessée.

Car l'Algérie, et tu le sais mieux que quiconque, c'est un pays blessé, qui n'a jamais su guérir de son passé, et qui lèche encore ses anciennes blessures tout en s'en infligeant de

nouvelles, sans forcément le savoir ni le vouloir, tant cette patrie s'est accoutumée à la douleur. Elle souffre de son histoire, l'Algérie ; elle n'a jamais su s'y confronter. Ses plages paradisiaques débordent de déchets ; ses femmes se cachent le visage, honteuses. Et quand tu me parlas, de longues années plus tard, dans l'éclairage brut d'un café parisien sur le Canal Saint Martin, de la violence anonyme qui a ravagé ton enfance, c'était la tragédie de ton pays martyrisé que je pleurais, tandis que toi, ma chère Amira, tu as toujours refusé d'en être la victime.

Un jour, sur une plage pas si loin de Tipasa—pas loin, enfin, de cette stèle dressée à la mémoire d'Albert Camus et dont l'inscription à moitié effacée par le vent impitoyable revendique encore la gloire de l'amour—nous nous sommes éloignées de la côte, toi et moi, et tu t'es mise à me faire part de tes aveux scandaleux, évoquant le nom d'un dieu dans lequel tu ne croyais plus. Tu m'as parlé des cieux glorieux, de la mort, d'un noir sans horizon, pendant que le courant nous tirait vers le néant, pendant que Zacki, qui est resté sur la plage, parlait au téléphone avec son banquier pour se voir rembourser d'une charge frauduleuse sur son compte bancaire (elle s'était acheté une robe de mariage, la pauvre, cette petite délinquante). Et c'est à ce moment-là, je le crois bien, que cette amitié a dû basculer définitivement vers l'amour, un amour sans fond, sans fin, pour un pays qui ne m'appartient point, mais que je défendrai jusqu'au fond, jusqu'à la fin de mes jours.

Te rappelles-tu, ma chère Amira, le jour où tu m'as emmenée dans un hammam turc à Blida? Dans une salle crue qui m'a fait penser (je l'avoue) aux salles de torture du temps de la guerre, une masseuse dont le corps débordait de chair m'a prise dans ses bras forts et m'a écorché la peau avec un torchon, me frottant avec cette douceur rude d'un chat qui

lèche ses chatons avec une langue qui fait un mal d'amour. Et savais-tu qu'après, quand tu as déversé un seau d'eau froide sur mon corps tremblant et exposé, j'ai eu soudain envie de t'embrasser? Dans la douceur de ton étreinte j'ai découvert ce jour-là que je t'aimais. Et je t'aime encore.

Je n'ai aucune autorité à parler de ce pays, l'Algérie, à part celle qui fait battre le cœur, celle qui fait défendre sa mère avant la justice, celle qui se souviendra toujours de la chaleur de ta peau trempée tout près de la mienne dans la baignoire humide d'un hammam dans une ville à la lisière du désert infiniment loin de la mienne, où notre nudité partagée ne faisait plus aucun scandale. À quel moment alors, notre amitié, cette tendresse, s'est-elle transformée sans arrière-pensée en amour? C'était au moment où l'horizon du hasard qui nous a rapprochées s'est glissé tout doucement dans le berceau de la mer qui nous sépare, notre mère méditerranéenne.

Car on est tous enfants de ce pays oublié, l'Algérie, et nous compris, les Américains : ceux qui ont découvert cet étranger intime dans un cours de littérature à l'université, et ceux qui ont eu la chance de contempler les vagues sableuses de son désert depuis les hauteurs de Blida, à l'arrière-pays, où le vent foisonne toujours de secrets silencieux, et les veuves de guerre pleurent encore la disparition au maquis de leurs jeunes maris, et dont la mémoire les réveillent parfois la nuit, à cette heure silencieuse où le passé et le présent se confondent dans une danse funeste de fantômes dans le noir.

Des années plus tard, en 2019, je t'attendais dans un bar à Paris tout près de la Gare du Nord, appelé la Colonie, où un groupe de militants, français et algériens et africains de toute couleur, s'était rassemblé pour discuter des événements qui secouaient l'Algérie

depuis quelques semaines déjà. Tu ne venais pas, toujours pas, alors je sirotais toute seule une bière dans un coin reculé, écoutant cette assemblée hétérogène demander la déposition du vieux Bouteflika, et entre deux discours passionnés, chanter la gloire d'une révolution à venir. Depuis le 22 février, la place de la République à Paris s'était transformée chaque vendredi en champs de bataille, et je t'y cherchais dans la foule à chaque passage.

À quoi ressemblerait-elle, cette nouvelle république que l'on réclamait bruyamment dans les rues d'Alger et sur la Place de la République à Paris? Sur quelles ruines se bâtiraient les rêves d'une génération dont l'enfance a été ruinée par les représailles du passé, et quels monuments dresserait-on pour leur mémoire? J'avoue que la pensée d'une prochaine révolution en Algérie me laissait un goût métallique de sang dans la bouche, comme une langue mordue par les dents d'un destin dont on ignorait encore le dénouement. C'est du passé-présent que l'on vit de nouveau en Algérie, et si l'histoire récente de ton pays nous a appris une seule chose, c'est que rien n'est plus meurtrier que l'histoire.

Et pourtant, je m'accroche à l'histoire de ton pays car j'ai peur de l'avenir qui s'écrit au présent dans le mien, maintenant que la pensée même d'une foule nous parait impensable. Isolés depuis des semaines innombrables chez nous, il n'y a plus de destinées individuelles, "seule[ment] une destinée collective, " comme l'avait prévu Camus, "faite de la peste et les émotions partagées par tous." Depuis que la peste fait ses ravages à l'aveugle à travers le monde, nous rapprochant dans une peur collective, c'est de la chaleur d'une étreinte dont je rêve : celle d'un soleil infatigable, ou celle d'un amour assoiffé.

C’est Camus qui m’a appris à lire, il y a si longtemps au milieu d’un hiver invincible, mais c’est l’Algérie qui m’a appris la gloire de l’amour.

In living, loving memory of

Dan, Barbara, and Lucy

Contents

Introduction

Between Repression and Recuperation: Historical Trauma and the Archive of the Algerian War of Independence

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was.' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.
> —Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"[1]

I. Project Summary, Corpus, and Objectives

In June 1962, in the final, frantic weeks of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), the director of the Regional Archives of Algiers, Pierre Boyer, embarked on a boat in the Bay of Algiers with a small group of French soldiers. The archivist's intention was to sink the cargo brought onboard: approximately thirty large cartons of documents hastily confiscated from the police archives in Algiers. Frustrated by the unexpected buoyancy of the cartons' contents, the soldiers doused the documents in gasoline and set them ablaze.[2] On the eve of Algerian Independence, officially conferred by Charles de Gaulle on July 5, 1962, hundreds of thousands of tons of archival documents were similarly destroyed or evacuated from Algeria in haste; countless others simply disappeared. According to a recent estimate by the Algerian Minister of *Mujahideen*, Tayeb Zitouni, only 2% of the archives seized by the French have since been returned to the relevant Algerian authorities.[3] An enduring testament to the troubled relationship between France and its

[1] Walter Benjamin, qtd. in Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 16.
[2] Khelassi Noureddine, "Il était une fois les canons et les cranes: Entre l'Algérie et la France, il y a l'Histoire, la mémoire, des archives et des biens patrimoniaux," *La Tribune* (Algiers), June 13, 2012.
[3] Abdou Semmar, "La France n'a restitué que '2% des archives' à l'Algérie," *Algérie Focus*, last modified July 5, 2016, accessed May 13, 2020, http://www.algerie-focus.com/2016/07/histoire-france-na-restitue-2-archives-a-lalgerie.

most contentious former colony, these archival documents are today at the center of an ongoing diplomatic dispute concerning not only the historical patrimony of colonial Algeria, but also the political stakes of history in the process of postcolonial nation-building.[4] From the silence of their neatly numbered cartons, the archives of colonial Algeria seem persistently to ask: to whom does the recent history of Algeria belong, and who has the right to write its story?

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the mutually constitutive relationship between historiography, collective memory, and cultural narratives in the representation of the Algerian War in present-day France and Algeria. Taking the turn of the twenty-first century as my point of departure, I analyze modern cultural and media representations of the Algerian War to demonstrate the sustained traumatic impact of the anti-colonial conflict in contemporary France and Algeria. Integrating methodological approaches from history, memory studies, and literary and cultural criticism, the interdisciplinary nature of this scholarly inquiry highlights the complex nexus of narratives that have coalesced around the Franco-Algerian conflict in a postcolonial context. Furthermore, by calling attention to points of contact and historical complicity between the Algerian War and other histories of violence over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the transhistorical perspective of this study also serves, in part, to plot the transmission and transformation of its memory over time and in discrete

[4] As Jacques Derrida has argued, "[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation"; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4.

spatiotemporal arrangements.[5] Situating the singular case of the Algerian War within a set of scholarly conversations about the cultural representation of historical trauma, this dissertation offers an important contribution to the study of postcolonial memory and its transnational migrations.

Although the early twenty-first century has seen a sudden increase in popular cultural and media representations of the Algerian War, I have chosen to focus primarily on six literary and cinematic works that I consider to be representative of this recent trend. These works include Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* (1999), Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (2010), Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* (2011), Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête* (2013), and David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes* (2014).[6] Representing a diverse cross-section of historical perspectives and mnemonic pathways, each of these works contributes in its own way to an ongoing, transnational conversation about the collective memory of the Algerian War and its traumatic aftermath.

With the notable exception of Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* and, increasingly, Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, the works discussed in this dissertation have been the subject of relatively little scholarly literature to date. Although scholars have increasingly turned their collective attention to the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s or, alternatively, to

[5] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).
[6] Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sepulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002); Jérôme Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (Paris: Babel, 2010); Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011); Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2014); *Loin des hommes*, directed by David Oelhoffen, One World Films, 2014.

contemporary representations of the Algerian diaspora in France, the post-1999 period has not yet surfaced in most scholarly perspectives as a historical object of inquiry. In addition to analyzing narrative and aesthetic commonalities between a corpus of contemporaneous yet comparatively understudied works, this study is among the first of its kind to focus almost exclusively on the memory of the Algerian War in the twenty-first century. The relative paucity of existing scholarship on this particular period has provided an important opportunity to contribute to the study of contemporary French and Algerian literature in today's post-postcolonial moment.

Additionally, by calling attention to certain aspects of the Franco-Algerian conflict that have been historically understudied—from the fratricidal infighting between rival nationalist parties in Algeria to the troubling resurgence of colonialist discourse in contemporary France—each of these works serves as an essential supplement to conventional historical accounts of the Algerian War. As the literary scholar Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux has observed, "là où l'histoire reconstitue des principes de causalité pour combler les lacunes, archiver, expliquer, rétablir un horizon de sens, la littérature semble creuser paradoxalement les défaillances, les oublis et les silences."[7] Put another way, where official accounts and histories of the Algerian War have acted paradoxically as agents of selective amnesia, literature can articulate an alternative kind of historical archive, one characterized by the inconsistency of collective memory and incorporating a heterogeneity of cultural narratives. What, then, is the relationship between the historical record, or

[7] Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux, *Mémoire vive d'Algérie: Littératures de la guerre d'indépendance* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 2012), 18.

archive, and the collective process of remembering historical trauma, and what is the role of literature in mediating this contentious transition?

II. Historical Background

Boyer's panicked burning of the police archives in the Bay of Algiers in June 1962 presciently prefigured a broader project of state-sanctioned amnesia in France in the immediate aftermath of the Algerian War. Born out of an attempted military coup in Algiers in 1958, the nascent Fifth Republic was eager to conceal the contentious "events" that had led to its hasty creation amidst the political chaos of the Franco-Algerian conflict.[8] In subsequent years, the enactment of comprehensive amnesty legislation for war crimes committed in Algeria,[9] the aggressive (albeit inconsistent) censorship of certain pro-Algerian publications,[10] and the suppression of historical research through strict restrictions to archival access, [11] among other regressive measures, acted together to fabricate the appearance of forgetting like an invisibility cloak around the collective

[8] Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli: La Mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 78.
[9] Ibid., 215.
[10] As Stora has noted, the absence of an official declaration of war in Algeria led to the inconsistent implementation of censorship laws both during and after the Algeria War. Euphemistically understated as the "événements d'Algérie," "actions de maintien de l'ordre," "opérations de rétablissement de la paix civile," or "entreprises de pacification," the Algerian War was presented by French authorities to the general public as a simple peacekeeping operation. Despite the aggressive censorship of certain pro-Algerian publications during and after the war, some reports of torture were published and circulated as early as 1958; Henri Alleg, *La Question* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958). That same year, however, Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *L'Affaire Audin*, which accused French authorities in Algeria of the torture and killing of the mathematician Maurice Audin, managed to escape the censors' scrutiny; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L'Affaire Audin* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit), 1958). For Stora, the inconsistent use of censorship can be correlated to the ambivalent legal status of the Algerian War, writing: "Cette situation met en évidence l'incohérence de l'attitude des censeurs confrontés à un état de guerre qu'ils se refusent à qualifier clairement"; Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, 69.
[11] Krzysztof Pomian, "The Archives: From the Trésor des chartes to the CARAN," trans. Christine Haynes, in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 4, *Histories and Memories* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 34–42.

memory of the Algerian War. At a pivotal time of political change in France, characterized on the one hand by a resurgence of Gaullist fervor, and on the other, by the existential collapse of the French Left, the recently formed Fifth Republic sought to turn the public's attention to a more heroic moment in recent history by reviving the myth of the French Resistance.[12] After the depredations of the German Occupation during the Second World War—a shameful, painful period that was already beginning to attract uncomfortable comparisons with France's prolonged colonial presence in Algeria—a stretch of economic expansion and a series of sociocultural upheavals in France seemed to have appeased the French people, who appeared to have little appetite for the bitter aftertaste of France's *sale guerre*.[13]

Meanwhile, in a newly independent Algeria, the collective memory of the Algerian War ran a perpendicular course. Despite the diversity of nationalist movements and political coalitions that had prospered in the interwar period, the precipitous ascent of the armed faction of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in 1954 put an effective end to the exercise of political plurality in Algeria for the next three and a half decades. For the twenty-two founding fathers of the Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action, a provisional political coalition comprised primarily of former members of the Organisation

[12] For Stora, the Gaullist regime "*a honte en effet de sa naissance*, et le premier putsch d'Alger qui a ouvert la voie au retour du Général au pouvoir et permis le passage de la IVe au Ve République n'est pas un événement que l'on peut célébrer. . . . Le consensus qui s'édifie avec le mythe mobilisateur de la Résistance, sorte de glorieuse improvisation patriotique, ne vise, dans les faits, qu'à surmonter les amertumes, cacher les brisures"; Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, 222. See also Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy: De 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987); Guy Austin, "Trauma, Cinema and the Algerian War," *New Readings* 10 (2009): 19.

[13] Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, 211–14.

Spéciale (OS), the clandestine paramilitary organization of Messali Hadj's Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (MTLD), the armed insurrection of November 1, 1954 "prend valeur de mythe fondateur."[14] As the Algerian historian Benjamin Stora has argued, the leaders of the FLN "se proclament en rupture absolue avec le passé. . . . [une rupture radicale] qui séparerait la nation algérienne, 'régénérée' par la violence révolutionnaire, de l'ancienne société algérienne. Ce faisant, ils font repartir l'histoire du nationalisme algérien du point zéro."[15] Put another way, after over 130 years of French colonialism in Algeria, the ascendant ruling party sought to consolidate its own power by connecting its political legitimacy to the mythic legacy of the Algerian War. Consistently articulated around the affirmation of an ancestral, Arab-Islamic identity, forged in armed conflict against centuries of successive colonial occupations, the official narrative of Algerian nationhood has served systematically to silence a veritable chorus of dissident

[14] Ibid., 149.

[15] Ibid., 151. The revolutionary party's appeal to a radical rupture with the past recalls the process of nation-building described by Ernest Renan in *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*, published in 1882. Emphasizing the equal importance of memory and its opposite in the creation of a new nation, Renan writes: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, est c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger. L'investigation historique, en effet, remet en lumière les faits de violence qui se sont passés à l'origine de toutes les formations politiques, même de celles dont les conséquences ont été le plus bienfaisantes. L'unité se fait toujours brutalement"; Ernest Renan, qtd. in E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 12. Similarly, in order to obscure its own "illégitimé originale," the FLN would severely restrict historical research in the decades following Algerian Independence; Abdelkader Djeghloul, qtd. in Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, 229. Rival political factions were routinely besmirched by the FLN as foreign-backed interventions into Algerian internal affairs, alternative accounts of the Algerian War were accused by the state-run media of manipulating the memory of the revolution for personal or commercial aims, and by the late 1970s, all proposed historical research was required to obtain prior approval from the Centre National d'Études Historiques (CNEH), an overtly partisan institution that was controlled and closely surveilled by the state; Benjamin Stora, "Les Retours de la mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance," *Modern & Contemporary France* 10, no. 4 (2002): 461–62.

voices, including those of the Messalist opposition movement,[16] the hundreds of thousands of native Algerians known as *harkis* who collaborated with or otherwise supported the French counterinsurgency efforts,[17] religious and ethnic minorities, and, in certain respects, Algerian women.[18]

Whether muffled by silence or silenced by myth, the contentious memory of the Algerian War was made subject to some form of collective forgetting in both France and Algeria in the decades following Algerian Independence. However, after over thirty years of continual purging, prevarication, or hyperbole on the part of both postcolonial nations, the turn of the twenty-first century marked for many observers a new page in the history of the history of the Algerian War. In France, this mnemonic shift was signaled by two events of

[16] For more on the internal politics and political rivalries of the FLN, see Kay Adamson, *Algeria: A Study in Competing Ideologies* (London: Cassell, 1998); James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mohammed Harbi, *Le FLN, Mirage et réalité: Des origines à la prise du pouvoir (1945–1962*) (Algiers: NAQD, 1993); Mohammed Harbi and Gilbert Meynier, *Le FLN: Documents et histoire, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2004) Renaud de Rochebrune and Benjamin Stora, *Des origines à la Bataille d'Alger*, vol. 1, *La Guerre d'Algérie vue par les Algériens* (Paris: Éditions Denöel, 2011).

[17] During the Algerian War, approximately a quarter of a million native Algerians fought alongside the French. These individuals, known as *harkis*, were vociferously condemned by the FLN upon Algerian Independence, and by January 1953, an estimated 25,000 Algerians had been killed by their compatriots for collaborating with the French. Passivity or a perceived "lack of enthusiasm" were similarly punished. As Stora has observed: "Ainsi, l'engagement, même momentané, du côté de la France, est nécessairement le fruit d'un mal exogène: dans le corps 'sain' de la société nouvelle qui s'affirme par la guerre, il ne peut pas y avoir de place pour l'hésitation, l'erreur, qui se convertissent en fautes, puis en crimes. La définition du 'délit,' avec l'indépendance qui arrive, se dilate jusqu'à inclure la 'passivité,' et le manque d'enthousiasme"; Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, 200.

[18] Algerian Kabyles, an ethnically Berber population indigenous to the mountainous region of Kabylie, were among the first and most fervent supporters of the national liberation movement in Algeria. Following Algerian Independence, however, the Arabization of all public institutions and the promotion of an Arab-Islamic national identity not only obscured the cultural particularity and historical contributions of Algeria's Berber population, but also threatened the socioeconomic livelihood of many Kabyles; Michael J. Willis, "The Berber Question," *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 208. Similar to the Kabyles, Algerian women who contributed actively to the anti-colonial cause felt betrayed by the Islamist policies of an increasingly authoritarian FLN. The passage of the regressive "Code de la Famille Algérien" in 1984, which relegated Algerian women to the legal status of minors, represented a major blow to gender equality in Algeria.

equal importance to historians.[19] First, in compliance with Articles L.213–1 and L.213–2 of the French *Code du patrimoine*, the military records of the Algerian War were incrementally declassified and released to the public over the course of the mid-1990s.[20] Secondly, on June 10, 1999, the French Parliament broke with its time-tested pattern of rhetorical equivocation by finally recognizing the so-called "événements d'Algérie" as a *war* properly defined.[21] Shortly thereafter, in the early 2000s, a series of scathing revelations concerning the use of torture in Algeria coincided with a sudden rash of scholarly research, media investigations, television specials, documentary and narrative films, personal memoirs, and literary texts on the subject of the Algerian War, as well as several unprecedented acts of public commemoration.[22] Had the twilight of the French empire, so swiftly forgotten and reluctantly remembered, finally breached a new dawn?

[19] Coincidentally, although not necessarily casually related, these historic events coincided with a similar "remise en question" of the collective memory of the Vichy Regime and its collaboration with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. This rhetorical "retour de mémoire" was occasioned, in part, by the public trial of Maurice Papon, a Nazi collaborator who was convicted in 1998 for crimes against humanity. The criminal proceedings also called attention to Papon's complicity in the Paris massacre of October 17, 1961, which several dozen Algerians were killed by the police during a peaceful demonstration.

[20] Terrence Peterson, "The French Archives and the Coming Fight for Declassification," *War on the Rocks*, last modified March 6, 2020, accessed April 10, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/the-french-archives-and-the-coming-fight-for-declassification/.

[21] Blandine Grosjean, "La 'Guerre d'Algérie' reconnue à l'Assemblée: Les députés adoptent la proposition de loi officialisant cette expression," *Libération* (Paris), June 11, 1999, accessed May 11, 2020, http://www.liberation.fr/france/1999/06/11/la-guerre-d-algerie-reconnue-a-l-assemblee-les-deputes-adoptent-la-proposition-de-loi-officialisant-_277134. The Algerian War first appears by name in a bill modifying existing legislation concerning military pensions and disability allowance. The first article of the June 10, 1999 law reads: "La République française reconnaît, dans des conditions de stricte égalité avec les combattants des conflits antérieurs, les services rendus par les personnes qui ont participé sous son autorité à la guerre d'Algérie ou aux combats en Tunisie et au Maroc entre le 1er janvier 1952 et le 2 juillet 1962. Elle leur accorde vocation à la qualité de combattant et au bénéfice des dispositions du présent code."

[22] In certain cases, the public commemoration of the Algerian War actually preceded its official recognition by the French Parliament. In 1998, for example, during the public trial of Papon, a plaque was quietly placed on the Pont du Saint Michel in Paris, dedicated "[à] la mémoire des nombreux Algériens tués lors de la sanglante répression de la manifestation pacifique du 17 octobre 1961." Memorial plaques at Notre Dame de Lorette and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, inaugurated on October 16, 1988, and February 28, 1999, respectively, similarly recognize the service of soldiers who perished during the Algerian War. On the occasion of the first

Meanwhile, across the Mediterranean, postcolonial Algeria had plunged into a bitter civil war that would claim nearly a quarter-million lives over the course of the next decade, known in Algeria as the *décennie noire*.[23] By the time Chadli Bendjedid assumed the Algerian presidency in 1979 following the death of his predecessor, Houari Boumédiène, steadily deteriorating economic conditions had already begun to expose cracks in the mythic façade of the FLN. With declining state revenues due to the precipitous drop of oil prices on the global market in the early 1980s, the nominally socialist regime was forced to adopt a number of neoliberal economic reforms, resulting in the dismantlement of many of the social welfare programs that had secured the political acquiescence of the Algerian people. Ultimately, on October 5, 1988, anger over housing shortages, escalating rates of unemployment, and the increasing scarcity of basic foodstuffs provoked large-scale protests across the country. The regime responded first with bullets, killing hundreds, and then ballots; the popular uprising precipitated an unprecedented period of both economic and political liberalization in the final, ill-fated years of the Bendjedid administration.[24] The advent of multiparty politics in Algeria in the late 1980s revived a number of minority

annual "journée nationale d'hommage aux harkis" on September 25, 2001, a plaque was placed at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris, on which "La République témoigne sa reconnaissance envers les rapatriés anciens membres des formations supplétives assimilés ou victimes de la captivité en Algérie pour les sacrifices qu'ils ont consentis." Finally, in addition to these commemorative sites, France declared 2003 "Djazaïr: Une année de l'Algérie en France," with over 4000 events organized both in and beyond mainland FranceFor more on public acts of commemoration, see Jo McCormack, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954–1962)* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Benjamin Stora, *Le Livre, mémoire de l'histoire: Réflexions sur le livre de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Les Éditions du Préau des Collines, 2005), 18–19.

[23] Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre invisible: Algérie, années 1990* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2001).

[24] Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, "Octobre 1988, le tournant," in *Françalgérie, crimes et mensonges d'états: Histoire secrète, de la guerre d'indépendance à la 'troisième guerre' d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004); Sally Clark Nyhan, "Amnesty International's 1989 Report Criticizes Algeria, Iran, Iraq and Israel," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (February 1990), 39.

rights groups, calling into question the Arab-Islamic ideology adopted by the Algerian regime for the first time since the Berber Spring of April 1980, a short-lived and swiftly repressed movement for the constitutional recognition of the Berber culture and language.[25] At the same time, the precipitous rise of Islamic fundamentalism posited a fundamental political challenge to the FLN, revealing extant rifts within the ruling coalition as well as the deep-rooted discontent of urban constituents, who voted in large numbers for the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in local elections in the early 1990s.[26] Finally, in December 1991, the annulment of an Islamist victory in national elections fatally fractured the fragile power-sharing agreement between the ruling FLN and the Islamist opposition, pitching Algeria into a prolonged civil war a mere thirty years after Algerian Independence.

[25] Reflecting on the Berber Spring during a May 4, 2008 interview, Bendjedid maintained a staunch position on the Berber question, stating: "Il n'y a pas d'identité spécifique à l'Algérie en dehors de l'identité arabo-islamique. Nous appartenant à une société arabo-islamique qui a sa civilisation et nous tenons à l'appartenance à cette société et à cette civilisation et ses valeurs. . . . l'*amazighité* représente des traditions et des langues de certaines tribus qui appartiennent à des civilisations et des cultures qui existaient avant l'avènement de l'Islam. . . . Quant à ceux qui prétendent être des *Amazighs*, je leur dit avec fierté: nous avons été arabisés par l'Islam. . . La langue *tamazight* est dépassée par le temps et ne peut évoluer. C'est pour cette raison que nous disons, nous algériens que l'Islam nous a arabisé et de par notre foi en cette religion, nous avons voulu parler la langue arabe"; Masatoshi Kisaichi and Watanabe Shoko, "Interview de l'ancien président algérien Chadli Bendjedid et la signification historique de son témoignage," *Le Quotidien d'Algérie* (Algiers), October 10, 2010, accessed November 13, 2018, https://algeria-watch.org/?p=27233. For more on the Berber identity movement, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Lisa Watanabe, "Religion, Ethnicity, and State Formation in Algeria: 'The Berber' as a Category of Contestation," in *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa,* eds. Kenneth Christie and Mohammad Masad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Willis, "The Berber Question."

[26] For Stora, the emergence of Islamism in Algeria may be attributed, in part, to the negligence of the Algerian regime towards its constituents. He writes: "Face à un État puissant, arbitraire, autoritaire, il existe une tradition de refuge dans un espace privé (qui s'appellerait le religieux), permettant de résister à un État considéré comme impie et antireligieux. . . . Dans cette situation, les mosquées ont pu devenir, à partir des années 1980, des espaces de protestation contre le pouvoir central algérien. Se présente alors la possibilité de contester l'État et ses dirigeants, en quelque sorte à partir de l'islam"; Stora, *La Guerre invisible*, 39. For more on Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria, see Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Rachid Mimouni, *De la barbarie en général et de l'intégrisme en particulier* (Alger, Rahma, 1992), 80–88; Boualem Sansal, *Poste restante, Alger: Lettre de colère et d'espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Frédéric Volpi, *Islam and Democracy: The Failure of Dialogue in Algeria* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

Pitting the delegitimized military regime of the FLN against the decentralized opposition movement of the FIS, the Algerian Civil War (1992–1999) both exposed and exacerbated existing cleavages in Algerian society. As communities fractured along cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, regional, and religious lines, the official narrative of Algerian nationhood collapsed into a plurality of alternative perspectives on the past. Positing a challenge to the partisan myth of Algerian War that had been propagated by the FLN, the contentious memory of the anti-colonial conflict was taken up and wielded as a rhetorical weapon by warring factions in the fight for political recognition, representation, and retaliation. Ultimately, after nearly a decade of devastating violence, the military-backed election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika brought to the *décennie noire* to a precarious denouement in April 1999. However, in the immediate aftermath of the Algerian Civil War, the state sought to conceal its suspected complicity in atrocities committed over the course of the conflict through the enactment of sweeping amnesty and anti-sedition legislation. Remarkably, the Algerian regime has remained in large part impervious to international investigations into its conduct during the Algerian Civil War, having signed but never ratified the 1998 Rome Statute establishing the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. In spite of this, the civil conflict acted as a catalyst for change in other contexts, inciting alternative investigations into the criminal legacy of colonialism in Algeria.

III. Literature Review and Methodology

Centered on a relatively short period of cultural production in present-day France and Algeria, this study offers a novel perspective on the proverbial “return” of the memory

of the Algerian War that occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century. Contemporary scholarship on the subject has operated according to at least two theoretical assumptions about the relationship between the historical record and the cultural representation of historical trauma. First, scholars have often suggested that the opening of the archives acted as a catalyst for the resurgence of the Algerian War in public discourse and cultural production. Corroborated in part by the recent proliferation of media and cultural representations of the anti-colonial conflict, this popular, quasi-psychoanalytical narrative posits a causal relation between archival access and the psychosocial recuperation of a repressed historical trauma. Secondly, scholars have tended to both recognize and maintain a methodological distinction between the "history of memory," in the sociological tradition of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierra Nora,[27] and the psychoanalytic approach to memory studies that was popularized in the 1990s by scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, among others.[28] However, in spite of a recent spate of scholarship on the traumatic memory of the Franco-Algerian conflict, scholars have remained somewhat uncritical of the methodological paradigm of trauma theory itself as a means of remembering a painfully repressed past.

[27] Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925); Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950); Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992), Volumes 1–3.
[28] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Shoshana Felman and Lori Daub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Shoshana Felman, *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader*, ed. Emily Sun, Eyal Peretz, and Ulrich Baer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). See also Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

The theoretical observations outlined above are consistent with several contemporaneous trends in the academic fields of history, memory studies, and literary and cultural criticism. To start, the importance accorded to the archive in contemporary scholarship on the Algerian War is indicative of what Ann Laura Stoler has termed an "archival turn" in critical theory and the humanities.[29] Subsequent to the publication of Jacques Derrida's influential essay *Le Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* in 1995, scholars across disciplines have become steadily more attuned to what the philosopher diagnoses as the problematic, "hypomnesiac" properties of the archive.[30] Drawing on theoretical developments that can be traced in many cases to Michel Foucault's *L'Archéologie du savoir*, scholars have come increasingly to see the archive as the material figment of an epistemological forgetting, or what Derrida calls a constitutive amnesia. Contrary to the popular conception of the archive as a "Babelic library that gathers the dust of [past] statements and allows for their resurrection" in the present under the archivist's benevolent care, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, Derrida argues that the archive acts as a sort of mnemonic prosthesis, which serves to supplant an original absence of memory.[31] Indeed,

[29] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 43. See also Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'archive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995); Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013); Philippe Carrard, *History as a Kind of Writing: Textual Strategies in Contemporary French Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Lorraine Daston, *Silence in the Archives: Pasts, Presents, Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[30] Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995).

[31] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 143. For Derrida, following Freud, the spatial exteriority of the archive—that is, the physical consignment of history to paper—also constitutes the archive's traumatic temporality. Like trauma, the archive can neither comprise nor comprehend its own history contemporaneously, but only retroactively (*après-coup*), through a process of compulsive repetition.

he continues, there would be no archive "without the radical finitude [of memory], without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression."[32] Accordingly, Derrida argues, the archival institutions and practices that purport to preserve a material imprint of the past can also act counterintuitively as agents of amnesia as they seek to conceal to the contingency of their own historical constitution and authority.[33]

Consequently, while the opening of the archive can certainly be *correlated* to a resurgence of the Algerian War in public discourse and cultural production, it would be inaccurate to suggest that archival access alone could have *caused* the "retour de mémoire" that has appeared to take place in present-day France and Algeria. To the contrary, contemporary scholarship on the subject attests to a critical shift from the "archive-as-source" to the "archive-as-subject," as scholars across disciplines have increasingly highlighted the hegemonic power of historical narratives and the institutions that produced or sought to preserve them.[34] This emergent methodological paradigm can be evidenced by the cautious, self-critical posture adopted by many scholars when it comes to studying the archival inscription of the Algerian War. In her preface to *La Torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie*, for example, the historian Raphaëlle Branche outlines how the archival practices of the Service Historique de la Défense and other colonial administrations acted to conceal ("camoufler") evidence of atrocities committed over the

[32] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.
[33] Ibid., 2.
[34] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 43. Critically recast as "both a corpus of statements and a depot of documents," as institutions of knowledge production and "sites of the imaginary," the archives can be read as a source of information and obfuscation alike, revealing in their margins just as much as they conceal; Ibid., 45–46.

course of the anti-colonial conflict, even after the archives were made accessible to the public.[35] Similarly, in *Une drôle de justice: Les Magistrats dans la geurre d'Algérie*, Sylvie Thénault reads the archives of the colonial justice system in Algeria as "rhetorical sleights of hand" that served retroactively to produce and perpetuate a perceptual reality in which otherwise inconceivable acts of violence were seen as possible and came to be practiced systematically against Algerian subjects.[36]

However, such calls for a critical "remise en question" of the archival record of the Algerian War have hardly been restricted to the former colonizer. To the contrary, following the torture controversy that scandalized France in the early 2000s, an influential group of scholars and anti-torture activists known as the "Douze" called for a trans-Mediterranean "'travail de mémoire'" on the subject of torture and the Algerian War, acknowledging the importance of bilateral, scholarly collaboration between France and Algeria "as a means to achieve a fuller understanding of the past."[37] However, as Neil MacMaster has observed in a recent article on the subject, the Algerian regime responded to these calls for collaboration and historical accountability with a "stunning silence"; for the late Algerian opposition leader Hocine Aït Ahmed, the regime's tepid response to the French torture controversy revealed a reluctance on the part of the ruling party to revisit certain painful histories that could have potentially challenged or subverted its own historical claim to power.[38] In their respective scholarship, Branche and Stora have echoed

[35] Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l'armée pendant la Guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
[36] Ranajit Guha, qtd. in Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 44.
[37] Neil MacMaster, "The Torture Controversy (1998–2002): Towards a 'New History' of the Algerian War?," *Modern & Contemporary France* 10, no. 4 (2002): 455.
[38] Ibid., 456.

and amplified this sentiment by calling attention to the regressive archival practices of the Algerian regime, including the partial destruction or disappearance of the party archives of the FLN,[39] the politically motivated manipulation, fabrication, or confiscation of veteran's papers by the Algerian Ministry of *Moujahideen*,[40] or the partisan influence of the state-controlled Centre National d'Études Historiques (CNEH) on historical research in Algeria.[41]

The critical reconfiguration of the archive in contemporary historiography is consistent with a second, contemporaneous movement in the realm of memory studies. As the site of the archive has become analytically unmoored from many of its institutional anchors, so, too, has the concept of collective memory; as the literary scholar Debarati Sanyal has commented in her introduction to *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance*, contemporary mnemonic discourse is undoubtedly "on the move."[42] For Sanyal, recent developments in memory studies reflect "a profound shift in the conceptualization of cultural memory," moving from spatial frames of reference, such as Halbwachs's "cadres sociaux de la mémoire" or Nora's "lieux de mémoire," to metaphorical figures of movement, transference, and migration .[43] In contrast to what Richard Crownshaw has called the "centripetal" mode of collective memory, which tends to coalesce around commemorative sites, heroic figures, or historic events with cultural

[39] Noui M'hidi Abdennour, "La Torture pendant la révolution," *Le Jeune Indépendant* (Algiers), December 4, 2000, accessed April 20, 2020, https://algeria-watch.org/?p=62132; MacMaster, "The Torture Controversy," 456.
[40] Raphaëlle Branche, "The Martyr's Torch: Memory and Power in Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 2011): 431–43.
[41] Stora, "Les Retours," 461–62.
[42] Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 4.
[43] Ibid., 4.

significance to the imagined community of the nation-state, "centrifugal" models conceive of collective memory as a process or movement, attesting to the "fluidity of remembrance in a postcolonial age of globalization and mass migration."[44]

Increasingly unconstrained by the "container culture" of the nation-state and its institutional moorings, the concept of collective memory has come to figure in contemporary scholarship as a force on the move, reflecting the transnational currents of globalization, mass migration, and technological connectivity that characterize the postmodern mnemonic landscape. Even a cursory survey of the semantic topography of contemporary memory studies can attest to this methodological shift, as evidenced by a rapid proliferation of rhizomatic metaphors of palimpsestic layers, pleats, and folds (Max Silverman), mnemonic membranes and connective tissue (Andrew Hoskins, Marianne Hirsch), memorial crossings and migratory itineraries of remembrance (François Vergès), global memoryscapes (Kendall R. Phillips, G. Mitchell Reyes), or multidirectional circuits and positive-sum pathways of memory (Michael Rothberg).[45] Transgressing the cultural,

[44] Ibid., 5.

[45] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateau: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980); Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Andrew Hoskins, "7/7 and Connective Memory: Interactional Trajectories of Remembering in Post-Scarcity Culture," *Memory Studies* 4, no. 3 (2011): 269–80; Andrew Hoskins and John Tullock, *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Memory and Memories of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Françoise Vergès, "Mémoire fragmentées, histoires croisées: Esclavage colonial et processus de décolonisation," *NAQD* 1, no. 30 (2013): 17–36; Kathryn Kleppinger and Laura Reeck, eds., *Post-Migratory Cultures in Postcolonial France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018); Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes, eds., *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2011); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal, and Max Silverman, eds., *Noeuds de Mémoire: Multidirecitonal Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

temporal, and territorial boundaries of traditional memory studies, contemporary scholarship has sought to offer a more inclusive approach to the study of historical trauma, articulated around points of contact and historical complicity instead of competitive or privative claims to memory.

Recent cultural representations of the anti-colonial conflict have tended to reflect the transnational drift of contemporary memory studies, raising concomitant questions about the continued relevance of trauma theory as a methodological paradigm for understanding the collective memory of the Algerian War. Although contemporary accounts have continued to incorporate certain aesthetic and narrative tropes commonly associated with trauma, the repetitive and recurring nature of these narratives across time and space also points to the need to move beyond the mnemonic framework of repression and recuperation, or amnesia and anamnesis. Suggestive of a generational shift away from binary or identity-based accounts of the Algerian War, recent cultural representations can be characterized by at least three common narrative, aesthetic, and ethical claims.

First, contemporary cultural production has increasingly adopted a trans- or post-national perspective on the Algerian War, situating the Franco-Algerian conflict within fluid, migratory flows and cosmopolitan currents of memory. In Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008), for example, the present-day Paris *banlieue* serves as a backdrop for the concurrent resurgence of traumatic memories of the Second World War, the Algerian War, and the Algerian Civil War. After the shocking murder of their parents by members of the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) in Aïn Deb, near Sétif, two French-born brothers of Algerian descent, Rachid Halmut and Malek Ulrich, return to Algeria to find the country

embattled in a bitter civil war. There, the brothers discover devastating evidence of their German father's role in the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust, raising cynical questions about his self-imposed exile in Algeria and his ardent support for the anti-colonial cause.[46] In addition to the Holocaust and the Second World War (Tahar Ben Jelloun, Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar),[47] contemporary authors have also explored sweeping, transhistorical connections between the Algerian War and a range of other conflicts over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including the First Indochina War (Jérôme Ferrari, Alexis Jenni),[48] the Soviet-Afghan War (Habib Tengour, Yasmina Khadra),[49] and the advent of Arab-Islamic extremism in the United States and Europe (Assia Djebar, Alice Zeniter).[50] In each of these novels, the Algerian War acts a mnemonic paradigm for apprehending and addressing other histories and historical experiences of violence, highlighting an intersectional, anti-hierarchical imaginary of historical trauma across time and space.

Secondly, consistent with a number of the aesthetic and narrative tropes that are commonly associated with trauma, the Algerian War often figures in contemporary cultural production as a sudden, traumatic rupture, or a nightmarish return to a painfully repressed

[46] Boualem Sansal, *Le village de l'Allemand, ou Le journal des Frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).
[47] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Les Raisins de la galère* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); Assia Djebar, *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997); Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge* (Paris: Éditions Thierry Magnier, 1999). See also Jonathan Littell, *Les Bienveillantes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Patrick Modiano, *L'Herbe des nuits* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).
[48] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*; Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre*. See also Benjamin Stora, *Imaginaires de guerre: Les Images dans les guerres d'Algérie et du Viêt-nam* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004); Pamela A. Pears, *Remnants of Empire in Algeria and Vietnam: Women, Words, and War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
[49] Habib Tengour, *Le Poisson de Moïse* (Algiers: EDIF, 2000); Yasmina Khadra, *Les Hirondelles de Kaboul* (Paris: Julliard, 2002).
[50] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*; Alice Zeniter, *L'Art de perdre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017).

past. In Anouar Benmalek's *Le Rapt* (2009), for example, the kidnapping of a teenage girl during Algeria's *décennie noire* triggers a traumatic spiral of remorse, repentance, and redemption for crimes committed by members of her family several decades prior during the Algerian War.[51] Similarly, in Laurent Mauvignier's *Des hommes* (2009), another act of sexual aggression, committed by an alcoholic veteran of the Algerian War against the only Arab woman in a post-industrial French town, provokes a "hémorragie interne" of traumatic memory.[52] The violent scene punctures a spatiotemporal hole in the novel's narrative landscape, which plunges into the dark night of an extended flashback of the Algerian War.[53] In both novels, individual experiences of pain and suffering are explicitly situated within expansive, transhistorical timelines of systemic inequality and oppression, raising concomitant questions about relationship between the collective traumas of th colonial past and the possibility of reparative justice in the postcolonial present.

Finally, the transhistorical perspective of recent cultural representations of the Algerian War points to a problematic, historical slippage between the victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence. In both Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (2010) and Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* (2011), for example, characters who have experienced torture and imprisonment during the French Resistance and/or the First Indochina War are later shown to commit violent atrocities both during and after the Algerian War.

[51] Anouar Benmalek, *Le Rapt* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).
[52] Jérôme Garcin, "'Des hommes': Les Blessures assassines de Laurent Mauvignier," *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris), August 27, 2009, accessed April 24, 2020, https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20090827.BIB3898/des-hommes-les-blessures-assassines-de-laurent-mauvignier.html.
[53] Laurent Mauvignier, *Des hommes* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2009).

Similarly, in Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, the narrator bemoans the bitter irony of Algeria's *décennie noire*, which saw the surviving heroes of the anti-colonial conflict adopt the same oppressive counterinsurgency tactics, including torture, as their former oppressors. While the portrayal of such a slippage between the victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence has the potential to produce ethical forms of recognition or solidarity that cut across cultural, temporal, or territorial boundaries, it also runs the risk of mnemonic conflation and historical relativism, as Sanyal has appropriately cautioned.[54]

Although cultural representations of the Algerian War have often conformed to the methodological currents of contemporary historiography and memory studies, each of the above-cited works also contributes uniquely to the constitution of new mnemonic paradigms. "Si les œuvres littéraires peuvent être vues comme un 'dépôt,' un 'réceptacle' de traces mémorielles," as Désirée Schyns has suggested, "elles sont aussi constitutives de mémoire, en ce sens que par leur organisation, leur hiérarchisation, leur dramatisation ou leur point de vue narratif, elles structurent et 'informent' la ou les mémoires."[55] From this perspective, each of these works not only reflects the contours of contemporary memory discourse on the Algerian War, but also raises important questions about the state of postcolonial memory today and its transnational migrations to come. For instance, how is the historical record portrayed, appropriated, or subverted in recent cultural representations of the Algerian War, and how has literature writ large offered an

[54] Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 12.
[55] Désirée Schyns, *La mémoire littéraire de la guerre d'Algérie dans la fiction algérienne francophone* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 10.

alternative to hegemonic accounts of history in both France and Algeria? What has the spatiotemporal "unmooring" of the Algerian War shown about the migratory patterns of memory, and what historical narratives are revealed, concealed, or reified by these nascent, postmodern "memoryscapes"? Finally, how has the ethical affirmation of historical trauma contributed to a cultural shift in the condition of victimhood, and what are the attendant risks associated with such a "pathologization" of memory in the public sphere?[56]

IV. Chapter Summaries

I address each of the above questions over the course of four approximately chronological chapters. The story that I tell in this critical study of contemporary French and Algerian literature starts in Algeria in 1999, as the country was bashfully emerging from the fog of a bitter civil war that had killed an estimated quarter-million civilians, decimated Algeria's economy and intellectual class, and fractured the Algerian political establishment. In my first chapter, entitled "On Mourning, Melancholia, and Murder: Investigating the Crimes of Decolonization in Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares*," I demonstrate how contemporary Algerian detective fiction has acted as a conduit for social, political, and historical critique in the aftermath of the Algerian Civil War. Building on the Freudian binary between mourning and melancholia, I argue in this chapter that the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the *roman policier* have provided a powerful

[56] Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma*; Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone, eds., *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2014); Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 3–26.

hermeneutic for investigating the historical trauma of Algeria's colonial past and its sustained traumatic impact in the postcolonial present.

In my second chapter, entitled "'Une voix venue d'ailleurs': Voices of the Past in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*," I shift my attention from the silenced crimes of decolonization to focus instead on the unsung heroes of the Algerian War, calling specific attention to the contributions of Algerian women to the anti-colonial cause. Framed, in part, as a critique of the "monumental" myth of the Algerian War in the official narrative of Algerian nationhood, this chapter follows the Homeric quest of the novel's author-narrator as she returns to the site of her Algerian childhood, where she attempts to recover the voice of Zoulikha, a female resistance fighter who was tortured and disappeared in 1957. Through an analysis of multiple vocal patterns in Djebar's polyphonic novel, I show how the strategic mobilization of the imaginary as a mode of historical storytelling can offer a potential alternative to the territorializing tropes of traditional memory discourse.

The inescapable, all-pervasive theme of torture during the Algerian War is afforded particular treatment in my third chapter, entitled "The Remains of an Empire in Ruin: Remembering Torture and the Colonial State of Exception in Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* and Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre*." Situating the singular case of the Algerian War within a set of seemingly disparate histories, including the Second World War, the First Indochina War, and the American-led War on Terror, this chapter considers the cognitive, discursive, and ideological conditions under which torture has been perceived as permissible across time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements.

Drawing on the theoretical work of Agamben, I argue in this chapter that the practice of torture—whenever and wherever it occurs—is contingent on the construction of a perceptual state of exception in which the normative dictates of law and morality are perceived to have been suspended or have simply ceased to apply. This chapter expands the scope of existing scholarship on torture and the Algerian War by calling critical attention to the modes of perception and collective memory that tend to arise from the suspension of normative frames of reference.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, I commemorate the Franco-Algerian author that first inspired my enduring affection for Algeria: Albert Camus. In this chapter, entitled "An Impassable Crossing: Albert Camus and the Horizon of Postcolonial Hospitality," I consider the contemporary status and stakes of the French colonial canon in a postcolonial context by examining the recent adaptation of two classic texts by Camus. Although several of Camus's works have been adapted in recent years across a range of genres and media, I have chosen to focus primarily on Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, a complex, postcolonial counter to Camus's *L'Étranger* (1942), and David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*, an aesthetically sparse, cinematic response to Camus's short story "L'Hôte" (1957). Inspired by Derrida's classic reading of "L'Hôte" as an allegory of hospitality, I argue in this chapter that the creative adaption of canonical, colonial texts in a postcolonial context constitutes a kind of cultural "hospitality," blurring the categorical boundaries between host and guest, colonizer and colonized, and self and Other.

Taken together, these chapters make a significant scholarly contribution to the study of the Algerian War and its cultural legacy in contemporary France and Algeria.

Between repression and recuperation, the contentious memory of the anti-colonial conflict continues to resonate with multiple meanings and significance, influencing ongoing dialogues about the diplomatic relationship between France and its former colonies, the essence of national identity in an increasingly trans- or post-national age, and the future of Algerian democracy in the aftermath of present cultural, social, and political upheavals in Algeria. The chapters that follow seek to trace the contours, implications, and potential pitfalls of these critical conversations.

Chapter One

On Mourning, Melancholia, and Murder: Investigating the Crimes of Decolonization in Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares*

> L'histoire n'est pas l'histoire quand les criminels fabriquent son encre et se passent la plume. Elle est la chronique de leurs alibis.
>
> —Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*[1]

In the three decades between Algerian Independence and the outbreak of the Algerian Civil War in the early 1990s, the collective memory of the Algerian War of Independence was dominated in large part by the official narrative of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), Algeria's revolutionary party.[2] Since the party's ascent to power in 1962, the FLN has systematically manipulated the memory of the Algerian War to construct a nationalist mythology of collective martyrdom, which has served not only to usurp a dynamic history of nationalism and multiparty politics in Algeria prior to the armed insurrection of November 1954, but also to consolidate political power in the hands of the military upon Algerian Independence. However, the civil war of the 1990s fundamentally challenged the hegemony of the FLN, as well as the ruling party's monopoly on mnemonic discourse. Precipitated by the advent of multiparty politics in the early 1990s under the administration of President Chadli Bendjedid, the Algerian Civil War provided a platform for competing communities and identity groups each vying for historical legitimacy after three decades of dominance by the FLN. Following a military coup annulling an Islamist electoral victory in the national elections of December 1991, the

[1] Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 461.
[2] For the sake of clarity, the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) will henceforth be referred to as the Algerian War and should not be confused with the Algerian Civil War (1992–1999).

Algerian Civil War pitted the delegitimized military regime of the FLN against the decentralized opposition movement of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS).

Over the course of the Algerian Civil War, both the FLN and the FIS repeatedly invoked the legacy of the Algerian War to legitimize their respective political positions, as well as the violent strategies that they used to defend them. While the FLN disparaged the Islamic fundamentalism of the FIS as a betrayal of Algeria's democratic values, denouncing their detractors as disloyal *harkis*, the FIS criticized the corruption and impiety of the FLN, condemning the regime as a continuation of colonial authoritarianism.[3] By adopting the revolutionary rhetoric of the fight against French colonialism, both the FLN and the FIS represented the Algerian Civil War as the traumatic reenactment or repetition of the Algerian War.[4] Consequently, while the commemorative mourning of the Algerian War had unquestionably obscured the complexities and internal contradictions of decolonization, the melancholic rhetoric of the *décennie noire* seemed to ensnare the newly independent nation in a state of perpetual revolution, reducing political agency to inevitable cycles of violence and retroactive claims of victimhood. Caught in a mnemonic bind between mourning and melancholia, the contested legacy of decolonization continues to dominate the politics and practice of collective memory in contemporary Algeria.

After nearly a decade of fratricidal violence, the *décennie noire* was brought to a precarious denouement in April 1999 with the military-backed election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Under the restored leadership of the FLN, the Algerian government remained

[3] Benjamin Stora, *La guerre invisible: Algérie, années 90* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2001), 39.
[4] Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie depuis l'Indépendance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994), 101–2.

reticent to investigate the atrocities of the civil war, including the suspected complicity of the state in a number of civilian massacres officially attributed to armed Islamist groups.[5] To the contrary, the Algerian regime sought actively to suppress the collective memory of the civil war through amnesty and anti-sedition legislation, effectively proscribing official inquiry into past crimes while simultaneously criminalizing present criticism of the conduct of the state.[6] Under the guise of peace and national reconciliation, the Algerian

[5] On the night of September 22, 1997, approximately four hundred civilians were brutally slaughtered by a group of bearded men who emerged from a nearby orange grove armed with machetes and machine guns. The day after the Bentalha massacre, the Algerian press reported nearly one hundred dismembered, decapitated, or otherwise mutilated bodies among the carnage; an Amnesty International report published in 1997 on human rights violations in Algeria estimates over two hundred casualties in Bentalha, and survivors of the massacre have placed the number of dead at over four hundred; Nesroulah Yous, *Qui a tué à Bentalha?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000); "Thinking the Unthinkable: Will the Truth behind the Appalling Brutality of Algeria's Long Civil War Ever Be Known?" *The Economist*, November 9, 2000 (London), accessed May 11, 2020. https://www.economist.com/international/2000/11/09/thinking-the-unthinkable. "Human Rights Have No Borders," *Amnesty International*, last modified October 27, 1997, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/164000/mde280331997en.pdf; Stora, *La guerre invisible*, 32–3. Although the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), an insurgent faction of the FIS, claimed responsibility for the massacre, subsequent reports have raised disturbing questions about the possibility of government complicity, citing the failure of the army to intervene on behalf of the victims despite their confirmed presence on the outskirts of Bentalha on the night of the attack. In *Qui a tué à Bentalha?*, Nesroulah Yous, a survivor of the Bentalha massacre, attests to the presence of the army on the night of the attack, corroborating the accounts of other survivors. Yous observes that although the sound of explosions and screams could be heard well beyond the besieged neighborhoods, soldiers stationed in the area failed to intervene and purportedly prevented neighboring civilians from coming to the aid of the victims. Yet as the assailants fled the scene of the massacre, the army nevertheless neglected to cordon off the area, allowing the butchers of Bentalha to escape unscathed. Yous's account, if accurate, suggests that the Bentalha massacre was not merely the work of Islamists exacting revenge on a recalcitrant civilian population, but perhaps also the cynical plot of a shadowy military regime fighting to maintain its increasingly precarious grip on power; John Lancaster, "As Algeria's Savagery Grows, So Does Mystery Shrouding It." *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), October 18, 1997, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/10/18/as-algerias-savagery-grows-so-does-mystery-shrouding-it/fa9e9635-dbce-4c6b-bf07-9c7414ff4e18/.

[6] With the passage of the Civil Harmony Law on July 13, 1999, nonviolent actors were preemptively pardoned; subsequent amnesty legislation extended protections to the members of select opposition groups, government security forces, and state-armed militias. Article 46 of the "Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation," adopted without parliamentary debate on February 27, 2006, reads: "Anyone who, by speech, writing, or any other act, uses or exploits the wounds of the National Tragedy to harm the institutions of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state, or to undermine the good reputation of its agents who honorably served it, or to tarnish the image of Algeria internationally, shall be punished by three to five years in prison and a fine of 250,000 to 500,000 dinars"; "Algeria: New Amnesty Law Will Ensure Atrocities Go Unpunished," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 28, 2006, accessed February 5, 2018. https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/02/28/algeria-new-amnesty-law-will-ensure-atrocities-go-unpunished.

government resorted to a regressive mnemonic politics that, paradoxically, recalls that of the French in the decades following Algerian Independence, characterized by rhetorical disavowal, a denial of responsibility, rigorous censorship, and historical revisionism.[7] As a result, although the *décennie noire* exposed and exacerbated existing fractures in the nation's mnemonic consensus, the civil conflict failed to produce a progressive politics of collective memory that could unfetter contemporary Algeria from the shackles of the past.

In the absence of any substantive inquiry into the atrocities of the civil war, contemporary Algerian authors have sought alternative means and venues to investigate the silenced, unsolved crimes of Algeria's violent past. Accordingly, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the traditionally "low-brow" genre of detective fiction has gained traction as a powerful, if perhaps improbable, platform for political commentary and a conduit for social critique, avoiding the wrathful pen of government censors while also reaching a mass audience of readers, both at home and abroad. Although the culture of Algerian detective fiction dates to the 1970s, with the publication of a series of spy novels by Youcef Khader, a budding crop of contemporary authors has increasingly taken advantage of the popular literary genre to address protracted questions about the complex criminal apparatus that contributed to the outbreak of the Algerian Civil War in the early 1990s.[8] In contrast to the highly stylized spy and crime novels of the 1970s and early

[7] Benjamin Stora, *L'Algérie en 1995 : La guerre, l'histoire, la politique* (Paris: Éditions Michalon, 1995), 36.
[8] Beate Burtscher-Bechter, "Wanted: National Algerian Identity," in *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*, ed. Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 184. As Burtscher-Bechter has observed in her brief history of Algerian detective fiction, "Racist elements, stereotypical descriptions and a very biased point of view characterize the series of novels by Youcef Khader, which are obviously driven by one ulterior motive: the proclamation of a national identity devised for Algeria by the politicians in power in order to provide some point of reference to a

1980s, which tended to reflect the nationalist ideology, social mores, and racial prejudice of the Algerian ruling class, contemporary authors have increasingly traded "idealist allegiance to the political paradigm of the Algerian government" for a more critical perspective on the conditions of political corruption and socioeconomic disparity that have continued to plague Algerian society in the aftermath of the *décennie noire*.[9]

The hard-boiled novels of Mohamed Moulessehoul, better known by his female penname, Yasmina Khadra, typify the critical trajectory of detective fiction in contemporary Algeria. In his popular Inspector Llob series, for example, the Algerian military officer *cum* novelist has sought explicitly to explore the social, economic, and political contours of the "criminal 'phantom-state'" that emerged and flourished in Algeria in the latter half of the 1980s, allowing both private and public actors to amass fraudulent fortunes by exploiting jurisdictional anomalies in the nominally neoliberal policies of the Bendjedid administration.[10] In contrast to the clear-cut confines of crime as depicted by conventional detective fiction, the violence of the criminal phantom state exposed by Khadra's novels "does not so much repudiate the rule of law or the licit operations of the market as appropriate their forms. . . . Its perpetrators create parallel modes of production and profiteering, sometimes even of governance and taxation, thereby establishing

population in desperate search of its roots after a hundred and thirty years of colonial rule. The same aim is pursued in the idealization of the Algerian War of Independence that also recurs in Youcef Khader's work and becomes a mythical component in Algerian political identity"; Ibid., 189.

[9] Sharae Deckard, "'Nothing Is Truly Hidden': Visability, Aesthetics, and Yasmina Khadra's Detective Fiction," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49, no. 1 (February 2013): 76; Beate Burtscher-Bechter, "Wanted," 183.

[10] Jean and John L. Comaroff, eds., *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.

simulacra of social order."[11] By the early 1990s, when Khadra first entered the literary scene, the collapse of critical infrastructure and stark levels of income inequality and unemployment coincided with the aleatory assassination attempts, terrorist attacks, civilian massacres, and retaliatory violence that would come to characterize Algeria's *décennie noire*. Consequently, for Sharae Deckard, "the conjunction of political violence with a burgeoning criminal economy provided ample raw material" for the emergence of a new form of Algerian detective fiction, presenting crime not as an isolated problem to be solved by an intrepid investigator and punished by the legitimate authority of the state, but rather as endemic both to the Algerian government and the criminal apparatus operating in the shadow of state corruption.[12] At the same time, conditions of rampant corruption and criminality further contributed to the collapse of critical discourse on Algerian history, which continued to be wielded as a key to achieve corrupt, self-serving ends within or by way of the Algerian state and its proxies.

Consequently, as the literary critic Adam Shatz has observed in his review of Khadra's 2004 novel *Les Hirondelles de Kabul*, the genre of detective fiction seems "morbidly suited" to the literary representation of recent Algerian history, which may be justifiably described as "one big murder mystery."[13] Indeed, the sociopolitical situation in

[11] Ibid., 5.
[12] Deckard, "Yasmina Khadra's Detective Fiction," 77.
[13] Adam Shatz, "One Big Murder Mystery," *London Review of Books* 26, no. 19 (October 7, 2004). In warm praise of Khadra's prose, Shatz compares the Algerian author to the American *noir* novelists Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain, but tepidly describes the plot of Khadra's 2002, *Les hirondelles de Kaboul*, as "a predictably tragic chain of events." Overall, Shatz gives a middling review of Khadra's Inspector Llob series, attributing much of the author's international success to his unrepentant criticism of the rise of radical Islam. Indeed, Shatz opens his review by stating, "It is a good time to be a Muslim writing about 'the trouble with Islam,'" echoing the title of Irshad Manji's 2004 book, a feminist critique of Islam.

Algeria since the late 1980s has shared many of the thematic elements of contemporary detective fiction, including the prevalence of political intrigue, the omnipresent threat of violence, and the mysterious identities and motives of violent perpetrators operating under the auspices of a criminal phantom state. Yet while the sociopolitical themes of the *romon policier* may explain in part its recent popularity, my primary hypothesis in this chapter is that the discursive force of detective fiction derives from the genre's constitutive concern with the legibility and control of competing narratives. In both content and form, I suggest, detective fiction provides a narrative framework through which to reconsider the relation between past and present violence, moving collective memory beyond the mnemonic binary between commemorative mourning and melancholic repetition.

I begin this chapter by discussing the distinct form and discursive function of classical detective fiction, as well as the ways in which the narrative content and conventions of the genre have been appropriated, adapted, or parodied in a postcolonial context such as Algeria. Focusing on the relation between historical inquiry and mnemonic discourse in contemporary Algerian detective fiction, I suggest that the postcolonial *roman policier*, adopting the hermeneutic skepticism of its "metaphysical" counterpart, subverts the positivism of classical detective fiction to engage in an epistemological critique of hegemonic institutions of knowledge production. Put another way, I contend that the critical objective of contemporary Algerian detective fiction is not simply to solve crimes and to expose criminality, but also to investigate how the stories that a postcolonial society tells about its colonial past contribute to its conception of legal justice in the present. These hypotheses—concerning the content, form, and function of the postcolonial *roman policier*

in relation to its classical antecedent—inform my subsequent analysis of Algerian author Boualem Sansal's first novel, *Le Serment des barbares*, published in 1999. Set at the height of the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s, Sansal's novel weaves together histories of past and present violence to critique the confiscation, exploitation, and manipulation of the collective memory of the Algerian War by competing identity groups in contemporary Algeria. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the extent to which the genre of detective fiction can provide a model for a progressive politics of collective memory in the traumatic aftermath of the Algerian War.

Dramatizing the discursive battle for the legibility and control of competing narratives, Sansal's *Le Serment des barbabres* opens on a cemetery on the day of two concurrent burials. The Algerian Civil War is approaching its bloody apogee, and in the besieged Algerian capital, the days are counted in freshly dug graves. On this particular day, the cemetery crawls with curious onlookers as the bulbous body of a local businessman, Mohammed Lekbir, known as Si Moh, is slowly lowered into the ground. Formerly a formidable powerbroker in Algiers, Si Moh had been known for striking deals with the crony capitalists, illicit contractors, and seasoned criminals of the criminal phantom state that ran amok in the Algerian capital. Meanwhile, across the cemetery, an uninspired imam recites the requisite burial rites over the flaccid flesh of Abdallah Bakour, the reclusive groundskeeper of the Christian cemetery in Rouiba, an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Algiers. Having followed the French exodus upon Algerian Independence, Abdallah returned to Algeria in the early 1990s only to have his throat slit shortly

thereafter whilst tending the graves of the *pied-noir* employers that he had so faithfully served.

The stark contrast between the two funeral scenes has attracted the attention of Si Larbi, a disenchanted police investigator rapidly approaching the end of his government tenure. Si Moh, on the one hand, had amassed a fraudulent fortune by funneling subsidized resources away from Algeria's nominally socialist government and into the pockets of corrupt capitalists and Islamic fundamentalists alike. In this way, Si Moh had manipulated for his own profit the cavernous underground economy that had opened like a sinkhole under the economic liberalization policies of the Bendjedid administration. The life and death of Si Moh reflect the partisan entanglements of the *décennie noire*, during which state violence became indistinguishable from—if not indirectly intertwined with—that of its purported detractors. Abdallah, on the other hand, "s'en allait comme il avait vécu: seul et misérable." Abandoned in life by the false promise of assimilation on French soil and in death by a newly independent nation whose democratic ideals had been corrupted by one authoritarian regime after another, Abdallah's character embodies the bitter disillusionment of decolonization. Murdered on the same morning, Si Moh and Abdallah serve as caricatural examples of the contested legacy and aftermath of French colonialism in Algeria, as well as the complex power struggle fueling the fratricidal violence of the Algerian Civil War.

From the outset, Si Larbi embarks on at least two intertwined investigations. Initially, the detective undertakes a comparatively uncomplicated criminal investigation, analyzing empirical evidence and exercising deductive reasoning to examine the material

circumstances surrounding the synchronous murders of Si Moh and Abdallah. Despite the reticence of his colleagues, who dismiss the deaths as arbitrary acts of terrorism, Si Larbi is convinced that there exists some correlation between the two apparently unrelated crimes. Although he initially struggles to link Si Moh and Abdallah in the present, the investigator soon discovers that Si Moh and Abdallah had both fought against the FLN during the Algerian War on behalf of the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA), representing the nationalist leader Messali Hadj's Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA). The characters' past involvement with the rival nationalist group raises questions about their fidelity to the present Algerian regime. Juxtaposed in the opening scene of Sansal's novel against the backdrop of a cemetery, the murders of Si Moh and Abdallah provoke a second, historical investigation into the contentious connections linking Algeria's present violence to its violent colonial past and the unsolved crimes of decolonization. As the initial criminal investigation recedes in importance over the course of the novel, Si Larbi comes to act as a rogue historian, plunging into the proverbial archive of Algerian history to trace the violent origins of the fratricidal conflict that has come to fracture contemporary Algeria.

* * *

I suggested above that the appeal of detective fiction to a contemporary Algerian audience could be attributed to the genre's constitutive concern with the legibility and control of competing narratives, as well as the discursive conditions that make certain kinds of narratives possible in a particular sociopolitical context. My hypothesis stems in part from Peter Hühn's observation that detective fiction "seems to be unique among narrative genres in that it thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure, and an

achievement."[14] For Hühn, the detective novel uniquely intertwines narrative form and content to tell at least two encrypted stories of reading and writing, or what the literary critic describes as "authoring and deciphering 'plots.'"[15] The crime, which is authored and concealed or falsified by the criminal, is then read and recounted as the investigator deciphers and reconstructs the traces that the criminal act has deposited on the narrative landscape. As long as the initial author of the crime retains sole ownership and control of the story, and as long as the criminal act resists the arresting quality of the investigator's detection, the criminal remains free from the legal constraints and prescriptive norms of society. Meanwhile, the investigator's goal is quite literally to arrest and seize possession of the criminal, as well as the story of the crime that he has committed.[16]

The distinctive narrative structure of detective fiction operates according to at least two theoretical assumptions about the narrative form and function of the criminal investigation. First, although the criminal investigation unfolds in constant tension with story of the crime that it seeks to reconstruct, Tzvetan Todorov has observed that detective fiction nevertheless presupposes a closed spatiotemporal circuit, in which the sequential temporality of the criminal investigation eventually corresponds without remainder to the reconstructed chronology of the crime.[17] The genre furthermore operates on the assumption that the chronology and causes of a crime can be reconstructed positivistically

[14] Peter Hühn, "The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 451.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 460.
[17] Heta Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 11.

on the basis of empirical evidence and semantic signs that are scattered throughout the novel's narrative landscape.[18] Comparable in some respects to the practice of psychoanalysis, which Sigmund Freud described as a form of archaeology, the investigation carried out in classical detective fiction envisions the past as a "primeval crypt" in which concealed evidence, "deposited deep below the surface, must be excavated and analyzed along a spatio-linear trajectory"; in detective fiction, as in psychoanalysis, "the hidden truth . . . emerges as elements are pieced together in a teleological manner."[19] The objective of the criminal investigation is therefore to reconstruct a narrative network of causal-chronological relations in which disparate material and semantic clues acquire meaning and significance. In this way, the crime novel serves ultimately to stabilize the symbolic code on which the legal order rests.

From this first guiding principle follows a second: the premise of a singular and singularly knowable story that, once revealed and recounted by the investigator, restores the existing legal order. For Hühn, the unsolved crime threatens the legitimacy of the legal order precisely because it exposes a "narrative incapability on the part of society's official agents," that is, "their inability to discover and tell the story of the crime."[20] In contrast to the incompetent authorities, the investigator is cast as a "model reader" whose investigation both parallels and renders visible the underlying narrative structure of the

[18] Ibid., 9–10.
[19] Lucy Brisley, "Detective Fiction and Working Through: Investigating the (Post) Colonial Past in Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* and Yasmina Khadra's *La Part du mort*," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2013): 96.
[20] Hühn, "The Detective as Reader," 452.

novel.[21] By collecting, categorizing, and interpreting disparate material and semantic clues that are strewn throughout the text, the investigator guides the reader through a narrative landscape that has been rendered strange or unintelligible by the crime. The success of the investigation depends as much on the investigator's familiarity with existing semantic codes as it does with his ability and willingness to look beyond them, or to question preconceived notions and modes of perception.[22] Although the investigator's role as a "model reader" requires him to "look awry," as Slajov Zizek might say, the ostensible objective of the investigation still remains the reconstruction of a coherent narrative that ultimately upholds the established legal order. Moreover, while the investigator often occupies a marginal position in relation to law enforcement, as Heta Pyrhönen has observed, he nevertheless tends to work within existing social structures, legal institutions, and moral codes to uncover an elusive but ultimately knowable truth with the objective of bringing the guilty party to justice before the law.[23] Simply put, the investigator's goal is "to right wrongs by uncovering facts."[24]

Yet unlike the "model reader" of classical detective fiction, the investigator in Sansal's novel occupies a liminal position of both marginal authority and ambiguous objectivity.[25] Despite his senior rank, Si Larbi is regarded an outsider, routinely

[21] Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder*, 5.
[22] Hühn, "The Detective as Reader," 455.
[23] Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder*, 18–19.
[24] William W. Stowe, "Critical Investigations: Convention and Ideology in Detective Fiction," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 570.
[25] As the guardian of the legal structures and moral boundaries of the society he purportedly serves, the investigator enacts an essential transition between historical inquiry and the legal order, recalling the Foucauldian paradigm in which "'the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process'"; Caroline Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), xx; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish:*

disrespected by his junior colleagues, and rarely consulted on important matters of the state. "L'affaire Bakour," a crime of little consequence—and consequently, considered unsolvable—"lui échut naturellement."[26] Yet it is neither a desire for professional advancement nor an inherent passion for justice that compels Si Larbi to pursue Abdallah's case. To the contrary, Sansal describes the impetus behind Si Larbi's investigation as a kind of torment, or haunting: "Un tracas le poursuivait . . . une ombre qui trottait derrière lui sans pouvoir le rattraper, une chose inopinée . . . qu'il aurait vue ou entendue, qui serait choquante."[27] Like a malignant phantom that has returned from a repressed past to haunt the present:

> l'idée accoucha d'un projet dingue comme une belle envie de meurtre jaillissant des tripes. Et, malgré lui, il se trouva décidé à . . . mener [l'enquête] à son terme quoi qu'il pût lui en coûter. Les réactions devant l'injustice sont ainsi, incontrôlables.[28]

In this passage, Si Larbi's pursuit of justice for Abdallah bears an uncanny resemblance to a homicidal impulse, beyond the pale of reason. From the outset of his investigation, Si Larbi is thus confronted with the instability of his own interpretation, undermining the impartiality that ostensibly characterizes the investigator.

The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 224. By dramatizing a conflict between civilization and its discontents, detective fiction performs what William Stowe, drawing on W. H. Auden's influential essay "The Guilty Vicarage," has described as a "ritual exercise in the localization and expulsion of guilt," or the performance of sociopolitical purification through the practice of ratiocination; Stowe, "Convention and Ideology," 573. Similarly, for Franco Moretti, detective fiction depicts society as "a great *organism*: a unitary and knowable body" whose symbolic boundaries are reinstated and reinforced through the rehabilitation or eradication of criminals and other agents of contamination; Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken as Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 2005), 145. In both interpretive gestures, the sociopolitical integrity of the body politic depends on the legibility and control of knowledge and narratives, ensured by the investigator's ability to read, reconstruct, and recount the story of the crime.

[26] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 35.

[27] Ibid., 38.

[28] Ibid., 38.

In contrast to classical detective fiction, the subjective liminality of the investigator in Sansal's novel is in fact a common characteristic of the postcolonial *roman policier*, which often challenges the presumed bifurcation between the police and the people by featuring minority or otherwise marginalized investigators with complex cultural identities, negotiating multiple modes of belonging and identity.[29] Peter Freese characterizes these postcolonial investigators as "cultural arbitrators" who operate in the "contact zone" between overlapping cultural spheres.[30] As they navigate the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic boundaries of the modern, multicultural cities that they inhabit, these postcolonial investigators often encounter "peoples and societies who are no longer subjects of the imperial nation-state, who traverse or reside on its borders or margins, or who suffer its politically charged times of transition."[31] Consequently, in further contrast to their upstanding counterparts in classical detective fiction, the scrappy investigators of the postcolonial *roman policier* are often placed in morally compromised positions or relations of complicity with the seedy underbellies of the societies that they police.

For Nels Pearson and Marc Singer, the marginal identity of the postcolonial investigator often coincides with a certain hermeneutic skepticism concerning the practice of policing itself.[32] While classical detective fiction tends to "[tantalize] readers with an

[29] Ed Christian, *The Post-colonial Detective* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
[30] Peter Freese, *The Ethnic Detective: Chester Himes, Harry Kemelman, Tony Hillerman* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1992), 9–10; Margaret J. King, "Binocular Eyes: Cross-Cultural Detectives," *The Armchair Detective* 13 (1980), 253; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4; Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen, eds., *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 6.
[31] Nels Pearson and Marc Singer, eds., *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 10.
[32] Ibid., 6.

aberrant, irrational criminality while assuring them that society ultimately coheres through a shared commitment to reason and law," as Pearson and Singer put it, the investigative practices of the postcolonial *roman policier* often "challenge presumptions of objective policing and deduction—and potentially, the legal and social orders that are founded upon such presumptions."[33] Frequently critical of the "fallibility or arbitrariness of Western modes of rationalism," the postcolonial *roman policier* in fact shares a number of the constitutive narrative concerns of the metaphysical detective story, an experimental subset of detective fiction that parodies or subverts the prescriptive conventions of the genre in order to address epistemological questions about the workings of language and the nature of reality.[34] Through the narrative representation of an unreliable or otherwise ineffectual investigator, the ambiguity or utter meaningless of material clues and semantic signs, and/or the self-defeating circularity of the criminal investigation, both subgenres question the epistemological foundations of the detective formula. For postcolonial detective fiction, however, the stakes are arguably higher (or at the very least, more politically salient), as the minor genre confronts and punches up ideological structures that have historically framed and warranted the oppression, containment, or discipline of marginalized peoples. In this way, I argue, the postcolonial *roman policier* plays an important part in the transformation of hegemonic institutions of knowledge production, as well as the legal and social structures that they purportedly support.

[33] Ibid., 1, 2.
[34] Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 9.

I have argued thus far that the critical objective of postcolonial detective fiction is not simply to solve crimes and expose criminality, but also to perform a form of historical critique by calling attention to the constructed nature of historical narratives that were once presented and accepted as natural fact. From the implicated subjectivity of its principal investigator to the playful skepticism of its investigative narrative, Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* adopts an epistemological approach to history that departs from the historical objectivism of classical detective fiction. Characterized by "a strict separation or binary opposition" between the investigating subject and the object of investigation, "a denial of transference," and "an exclusion or downplaying of the dialogic relation to the other," the historical objectivism of classical detective fiction operates according to the epistemological assumption that "gathering evidence and making referential statements in the form of truth claims . . . constitute necessary and sufficient conditions of historiography."[35] By contrast, in *Le Serment des barbares*, Sansal adopts what Dominick LaCapra has called a "constructivist" model of historical inquiry, focusing instead on the narrative structures and discursive conditions "in which referential statements are embedded and take on meaning and significance."[36] In other words, Si Larbi's investigative task in Sansal's novel is not simply to "right wrongs by uncovering facts," as Stowe puts it, but rather to examine the epistemological and ideological structures through which truth claims and corroborating facts are constituted and perceived as such.

[35] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001) 4–5, 1.

[36] In this model, observes Dominick LaCapra, "truth claims are necessary but not sufficient conditions of historiography. A crucial question is how they do and ought to interact with other factors or forces in historiography, in other genres, and in hybridized forms or modes"; Ibid., 1–2.

For LaCapra, one of the hallmarks of constructivist historiography is the "obscuring or obliteration of the boundaries between literature and other disciplines," resulting in the reduction of "all modes of [historical] thought to the common condition of writing."[37] In *Le Serment des barbares*, Sansal similarly signals the blurring of discursive and generic boundaries by willfully dispensing with any referential hierarchy that would delineate fact, fiction, and history. The difficulty deciphering the textual landscape of *Le Serment des barbares* stems from what Hühn has described as "a threefold indeterminacy: at the outset neither the limits of the *text*, nor the set of *signs* constituting it, nor the *code* in which it is written are certain."[38] First, in the tradition of metaphysical detective fiction, Sansal's novel is at times excruciatingly self-aware of its own status as *text*. *Le Serment des barbares* performs its own parodic self-awareness through a preoccupation with embedded texts, constituting a textual *mise en abyme* in which "letters, words, and documents no longer reliably denote the objects that they are meant to represent."[39] Over the course of his criminal investigation, Si Larbi frequently struggles to decipher an elliptical, falsified, or purloined paper trail, from skeletal forensic reports to missing witness testimonies and falsified confessions. This trail of partially embedded texts also extends to the archival institutions of the state. The police archive, depicted as an arbitrary collection of doctored documents that confirm official doctrine while actively silencing alternative narratives, is an object of constant criticism in Sansal's novel. Recalling the documented destruction and

[37] Ibid., 9.
[38] Hühn, "The Detective as Reader," 455.
[39] Merivale and Sweeney, *Detecting Texts*, 9.

hasty evacuation of administrative and military records on the eve of Algerian Independence, Si Larbi declares to a superior in the police commissariat:

> 'Souvenez-vous aussi des destructions de l'OAS, le sac des mairies, l'incendie des archives. C'est ainsi . . . le pays n'a plus de mémoire. Ce trouble fait plus qu'arranger ceux qui ne parlent que de l'avenir, vu qu'il est porteur d'intérêt et d'une plus grande amnésie.'[40]

In his exasperation, Si Larbi not only addresses the absence of an accurate historical record in Algeria, but also presents the extant archive as a potent weapon of political manipulation, wielded by those in power to consolidate their own authority.[41]

[40] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 164; Todd Shepard, "'Of Sovereignty': Disputed Archives, 'Wholly Modern' Archives, and the Post-Decolonization French and Algerian Republics, 1962–2012," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 2015): 869–83.

[41] Sansal's depiction of the disordered police archive recalls Jacques Derrida's deconstructive analysis of the putative origins of archive in his 1995 essay, *Mal d'archive*. Derrida opens his essay by deconstructing the origin of the word "archive," observing that its etymological root, *arkhe*, "names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*;" Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1; emphasis in original. In the archive, Derrida argues, the ontological order of the commencement and the nomological order of the commandment coincide, constituting a place where power both has place and takes place (*avoir lieu*). As the locus of authority, the functionality of the archive depends upon its consignation to "a stable substrate . . . at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority," which contains the threat of heterogeneity by demarcating the boundaries of intelligible discourse; Ibid., 3. For Derrida, the archive necessarily constitutes a homogenous milieu where the interpretive authority of the *arkheon* may be exercised without dissent, containing the threat of heterogeneity. In the archive, the topological and the nomological coincide, activating what Carl Schmitt describes as "the production of (political) order through spatial orientation"; Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 45. Thus consigned to a stable substrate, the archive has the force of law not because it constitutes the absolute origin of authority, but rather because it retroactively founds the field of its own enforceability. "Its very moment of foundation or institution (which in any case is never a moment inscribed in the homogenous tissue of history, since it is ripped apart by one decision), the operation that amounts to founding, inauguration, justifying law (*droit*), making law, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretive violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contract or invalidate"; Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 241. The archive, in other words, (dis)appears at the threshold between constitutive power and the constituted power of law. And much like the sovereign decision, which cannot invoke any existing law to institute a new legal order, the legal authority of the archive does not and cannot depend upon any anterior juridical or interpretive norm. In order to maintain its authority, the archive must conceal the violence and contingency of its arbitrary constitution. In this way, Derrida argues, "the concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, the memory of the name *arkhe*. But it also *shelters* itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it"; Derrida, *Archive*

The purloined paper trail, an aesthetic trope of metaphysical detective fiction, serves a double purpose in *Le Serment des barbares*, signaling the political stakes of Si Larbi's criminal investigation. A similar hermeneutic skepticism applies to the status of *signs* in Sansal's novel. In classical detective fiction, the investigator's task "consists in delimiting the text by separating the relevant signs from the mass of nonrelevant facts around it, until he is finally able to reduce the polyvalence to the one true meaning."[42] By contrast, in *Le Serment des barbares*, even unsubstantiated rumors and occult superstitions acquire the certainty of fact:

> Le nœud du problème est que la presse est branchée sur le fil de la rue où les badauds, inquiets par la religion, dévorent du papier jusqu'à plus soif, sans se soucier du qu'en-dira-t-on. Le cercle est vicieux. . . . [L]e mariage du ouï-dire et de l'écrit de son écho est consommé et leurs malheureux avortons, ouï-lire et lu-ouïr, sèment à leur tour de bien étranges histoires.[43]

For Lisa Romain, the status of hearsay in Sansal's novel is ambivalent at best; while the oral tradition might be interpreted as an alternative to the state-controlled media, "son introduction sur la page est . . . emblématique d'un roman où l'on ne peut ni tout accepter, ni tout rejeter."[44] In any case, by deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and

Fever, 2; emphasis in original. In other words, for Derrida, the archive acts as a kind of mnemonic prosthesis, an externalization that supplants a constitutive loss of memory, or rather, its violent amputation. For Derrida, following Freud, the spatial exteriority of the archive is also that which ensures its iterability; the archive cannot fully encompass or even comprehend its own history directly, but only retroactively, *après-coup*, through repetition. Indeed, there would be no archive "without the radical finitude [of memory], without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression"; Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19. In other words, the very logic of repetition, which is the condition of possibility of the archive, is therefore also that which threatens it with death and destruction.

[42] Hühn, "The Detecive as Reader," 455.

[43] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 39.

[44] Lisa Romain, "Écrire la guerre civile algérienne: La mise en place d'un nouveau pacte de lecture dans *Le Serment des barbares* de Boualem Sansal," *Dialogues francophones* 21 (2015): 23.

fiction, Sansal "[remet] en cause la fiabilité des médias d'expression du réel que sont le journalisme et les sciences humaines, et tout particulièrement l'histoire, dans un pays où le référent est insaisissable, falsifié par l'idéologie."[45] Intentionally confounding fact and fiction, the criminal investigation in *Le Serment des barbares* constantly calls the veracity of official narratives into question, seeding the semantic landscape with the weeds of doubt and false equivalency.

Finally, the *code* in which the criminal investigation is written and communicated to the reader represents the chaotic collision of cultural, linguistic, and social registers, saturated with semantic signs and potential clues. While the investigator's task is, in theory, to collect, categorize, and correctly interpret textually embedded clues, Sansal's dense—at times impenetrable—prose parodies the clarity of language that characterizes classical detective fiction. Bernard Aresu has described Sansal's prose as a "verbal vortex": a seemingly improvisational onslaught of intra- and multilingual puns, cultural code switching, register and perspective shifts, hallucinatory digressions, typographical anomalies, and ironic parodies of popular proverbs, fables, and myths. Sansal's prose displaces, transmutes, and transcends the extant meaning of signs, endowing the narrative landscape with a multiplicity of unexpected meanings.[46] Deciphering—or rather, excavating—the dense layers of Sansal's text requires a constant effort of intra- and multilingual interpretation, and yet his language actively resists translation, producing the kind of aphasic estrangement that Jacques Derrida describes so powerfully in *Le*

[45] Ibid., 22.
[46] Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder*, 5.

monolingualisme de l'autre.[47] In its defiance of monolingual propriety, Sansal's prose incorporates the plurality of polyphonic perspectives and intersecting cultures constitutive of the country's recent history, positing a powerful rhetorical rejoinder to the notion of a singular, historically homogenous Algerian identity.[48]

The dense sedimentation of cultural, linguistic, and narrative forms in Sansal's novel stands in stark contrast to the nationalist discourse adopted by the FLN, which advocates for a strategically selective account of Algerian history that obscures the country's ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. By contrast, the narrative landscape of *Le Serment des barbares* appears as a chaotic repository of historical fragments, strewn with ruins, both literal and figurative.[49] Evocative of death, decline, and decay, the ruins that litter Sansal's novel perform a dual narrative purpose. First, by depicting the history of Algeria as discontinuous, fragmentary, and irreducibly heterogeneous, the accumulation of historical

[47] Jacques Derrida, *Le monolingualisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).
[48] Furthermore, by presenting a cacophony of cultural and linguistic perspectives without the paratextual guidance of explanatory footnotes or a glossary of terms, Sansal forces his reader to decode the semantic landscape of the novel, doubling the reading process of the investigator; Romain, "Écrire la guerre civile algérienne," 22–23
[49] For Walter Benjamin, the symbol implies unification, transforming nature into an "abstract but authoritative entity" while consecrating "certain values as natural, permanent, and having an essential, unchanging existence"; Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 116. For this reason, Benjamin associates symbolism with the cultural and political hegemony of ideology, which presents its own values as essential and ideal while ignoring the historical contingency of authority and power. In contrast to symbolism, allegory corresponds "to a perception of the world in ruins"; for Benjamin, allegory disrupts the ideological hegemony of symbolism by reading history as a fragmentary landscape; Ibid., 110. He writes: "Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratiica* [death's head] of history as a petrified primordial landscape. Everything about history that from the very beginning has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head"; Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), 166. Whereas symbolism presupposes the eternal transcendence of nature, allegory perceives both natural and human history as marked from the beginning by death and decay. In allegory, "instead of timeless truths, there is the 'untimely,' the history that stands outside the chronological narrative of progress that makes up 'official' history"; Tambling, *Allegory*, 117.

fragments in Sansal's novel serves to deconstruct or undermine the monumental idols (and idylls) of Algerian nationalism. Secondly, as Si Larbi sorts through the scattered debris of a decade-long civil war, the representation of urban ruins also suggests a sociopolitical critique of the corruption, incompetence, and mismanagement of the Algerian regime in the decades following independence.

In both form and content, the investigative narrative in *Le Serment des barbares* thus performs a form of historical critique. Presenting the past as "un mystère qui défie le temps, qui condense l'espace, qui délie les lois de leur fermeté originelle . . . [qui] agace la raison et joue des sens," Sansal's novel parodies the principle of historical objectivism by calling attention to the contingent, constructed, or contradictory aspects of Algerian history.[50] In parallel, Si Larbi's investigation also deconstructs the mnemonic discourse of the Algerian regime by centering on sites that seem to mock the monumental quality of official commemorations of the country's revolutionary past. Amidst a chaotic constellation of signs and clues, two places in particular exert a powerful gravitational pull over the novel's periphrastic plot: the Rouiba hospital and the Christian cemetery. An ironic reversal of what the French historian Pierre Nora has memorably described as "lieux de mémoire," or "memory spaces," these sites embody the morbidity of mnemonic discourse in postcolonial Algeria. Depicted as diseased, decayed, and moribund, these satirical *lieux de mémoire* anchor the novel's errant investigative narrative while also supplying a sustained critique of the official narrative of Algerian nationhood.

[50] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 334–5.

A close reading of these two sites—the Rouiba hospital and the Christian cemetery—can help clarify the intersection between the novel's investigative narrative and its broader historical critique. Si Larbi first visits the Rouiba hospital to flesh out the skeletal forensic reports produced by the police department as substantiating evidence in the Bakour case. Festering with corruption, criminality, and medical malpractice, the Rouiba hospital figures in *Le Serment des barbares* as a sociopolitical allegory for the violence of nation building in postcolonial Algeria. "L'hôpital de Rouiba," writes Sansal, "est une usine; une méchante usine . . . [en] chantier perpétuel."[51] Sansal repeatedly describes the Rouiba hospital, purportedly a public institution of health and wellbeing, as a private, profit-driven enterprise that pollutes the air with the near-constant sound of construction. Operated at the expense of the sick and the dying—"cette pauvre populace funambulesque, abasourdie, râpée, fourbue, mais accrocheuse"—the Rouiba hospital pulverizes a dehumanized population into a homogenized mass, constituting the raw material that fuels the perpetual expansion of the medical establishment.[52] In the dystopian present depicted by Sansal in the *Le Serment des barbares*, modernization has become a force of destruction, and as the Rouiba hospital expands first horizontally and then vertically, the murderous impulse of the modern nation-state quickly prevails over the life-preserving mission of the medical establishment. From Sansal's richly descriptive perspective, the Rouiba hospital appears as a kind of biopolitical factory of death, built on the broken backs of a browbeaten population, docile and diseased.

[51] Ibid., 57.
[52] Ibid., 73.

The Rouiba hospital, like the Algerian nation, was born in violence; accordingly, Sansal describes its contentious construction in terms clearly evocative of the anti-colonial conflict and its violent aftermath. To make room for the first stage of horizontal expansion, the idyllic garden where the former colonial hospital "avait si longtemps somnolé au cœur d'un vaste parc où le laurier-rose était roi" is first raped and then razed, "le laurier déchu de son long règne fastueux."[53] Still bearing the physical scars of the colonial period, the hospital's construction parallels Algeria's spasmodic thrust into modernity. After interminable budget negotiations "négociées au sabre," the first extensions are erected on a "no man's land de quelques hectares" scattered with the "carcasses pelées" of discarded construction materials. Convalescent patients, united in their in opposition to the destruction of the shady garden, once a welcome respite from the suffocating heat of their infirmary cells, mount an "insurrection" against the administration; the kitchen staff strikes in solidarity, resulting in the death by starvation of "quelques héros."[54] To put an end to the stalemate, "on prit des mesures. Tels des stratagèmes militaires, elles furent conçues dans le secret et appliquées avec surprise."[55] Described anecdotally as an absurd military skirmish, the development of the Rouiba hospital doubles as a metaphor for the militarization of Algerian politics in the immediate aftermath of decolonization, demonstrating how the Algerian people, a martyred mass, had been deployed, manipulated, and even weaponized in the service of an increasingly socialist and authoritarian regime.

[53] Ibid., 58.
[54] Ibid., 58.
[55] Ibid., 59.

After nearly a decade of incessant and clamorous construction, the initial stage of development ends abruptly, or rather, brutally: "le silence tomba sur l'hôpital comme une bombe."[56] Concealing the internal conflicts that had plagued the construction of the hospital, the inaugural celebration conjures the image of a commemorative military parade. The administration parades a number of highly distinguished guests through gleaming hallways overflowing with counterfeit medical equipment, foreign nurses, and smiling patients provisionally placated by oversized portions of meat and sweets. To rally the support of the residents of Rouiba—restless, skeptical, and eager for substantive chance—the hospital distributes gaudy pamphlets "dégoulinants de couleurs dont le brillant voulait forcer le respect pour la révolution et appeler au don de soi."[57] Interpreted here as a metaphor for nation building, the initial construction of the Rouiba hospital reveals the gulf between the pomp and circumstance of official commemorations of Algerian Independence and the regime's slapdash or superficial implementation of progressive reforms.

Meanwhile, beneath the cloak of collective, costly celebrations, the hospital administration quietly collapses in on itself. Reminiscent of the internal power struggles that threatened to fracture the FLN from within in the years following Algerian Independence, the hospital's first administrative meeting ends dramatically with the explosion of the sound system, "[qui] finit par cramer sous la torture et le mensonge," and the extermination of a belligerent doorman.[58] To restructure the hospital administration, "on retraça l'organigramme," expelling the disloyal and several "vieux tortionnaires" from

[56] Ibid., 61.
[57] Ibid., 63.
[58] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 65.

its ranks.[59] Secretive commandos dispatched by the "Parti" arrive from the Algerian capital to claim their due, proving that even "la toute-puissance ne lui avait point ôté le goût de l'intrigue et de l'exploit; un parti révolutionnaire se doit de rester ombrageux et de corriger l'administration de temps à autre."[60] Finally, after the appointment of a special commission, "la neutralisation installa une paix morose dans les tranchées," and yet the hospital director "ne quitta pas pour autant le sentier de la guerre. En tapinois, il entreprit de révéler aux adversaires, pris isolément, ses ennemis véritables."[61]

Sansal's portrayal of the hospital administration, which serves as a metaphorical proxy for the Algerian regime, exposes the entrenched bellicosity and animosities of the ruling party. Shrouded in secrecy—"mode de fonctionnement de la société politique algérienne"—the hospital administration operates as a clandestine military organization, stoking the smoldering fires of old intraparty conflicts at the expense of efficiency, cohesion, and transparency.[62] The incoherent structure of the Rouiba hospital further replicates the opacity of the Algerian regime. At its entrance, "un gigantesque tableau synoptique, bariolé de hiéroglyphes sumériens"—cynically nicknamed "le mur des lamentations"—bars access to the hospital's largely illiterate visitors; "[s]on étude prend une heure aux connaisseurs armés d'une boussole et d'indices probants"[63] From the fraudulent labels used to disguise off-brand medical equipment to the "signalisation cafouilleuse" installed in the hallways, the hospital is littered with encrypted or otherwise

[59] Ibid., 66.
[60] Ibid., 67.
[61] Ibid., 68.
[62] Stora, *La guerre invisible*, 45.
[63] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 71–2.

indecipherable language intended to distract and disorient the public.[64] Again, through the ironic appropriation of the trope of the embedded text, Sansal illustrates the incoherence of the Algerian regime and its cynical strategies to quell dissent.

While the administrative opacity of the Rouiba hospital recalls that of the Algerian regime in the years following Algerian Independence, the management strategy later adopted by the hospital parallels the "liberal" economic policies of the Bendjedid administration prior to the outbreak of the Algerian Civil War. Comparable to the collapse of the Algerian rent economy in the 1980s, due in large part to the sharp decline in the price of oil, the hospital administration receives a stern "'[r]éveillez-vous' du FMI [Fond Monétaire International]" for its fiscal irresponsibility and is subsequently subjected to a series of regulatory actions.[65] The hospital, like the Algerian economy more broadly, undergoes a period of economic liberalization, resulting in the dismantlement of state-subsidized health and welfare programs and a general decline in the quality of life. Confronted with a suddenly increasing population of sick patients, the hospital administration decides to economize space by expanding vertically: pediatrics and geriatrics are stacked on top of one another, "le raccourci réduis[ant] la vie à un conte martien," and a controversial HIV/AIDS wing is built directly above the morgue.[66] As the

[64] Ibid., 60.
[65] Ibid., 71. For more on the oil glut of the 1980s and its economic and political impact on socialist states throughout the Middle East, see Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1995).
[66] Although the administration attributes the hospital's dizzying increase in population to the viral epidemic imported from the immoral West, "on [commence à se dire] qu'on est manipulé par un nouveau Service; il y a de la subtilité dans la peur; subitement, on s'affole à la pensée d'avoir été enrôlé dans un plan terroriste"; Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 69, 71.

quality of care declines precipitously, health and sickness are treated in the hospital as disposable, tradable commodities: "le souk de l'hôpital est inhumain; les incubes et succubes qui le régentent font dans ce qui leur sied et désespère le client; ils empochent sur l'hospitalisation des malades . . . ils grappillent sur les menus services."[67] Like its director of forensic pathology, ironically nicknamed Cheikh Dracula, the Rouiba hospital traffics in human life, presciently foreshadowing the shadowy, thanatological affair that Si Larbi will unearth over the course of his criminal investigation.[68]

Read allegorically, the Rouiba hospital scene reveals a sickly society thrust spasmodically into modernity yet marked from the outset by death and decay. Recalling in many respects the corruption and criminal malpractice of the Algerian regime, the hospital also serves as an allegory of the official narrative of Algerian nationhood, described here as an anthropophagic liturgy:

> Depuis trente années, installés dans la névrose, nous vivons sur les morts au point que la vie n'est qu'une contemplation hallucinée ; le vivant ne se justifie que par la mort, il en tire son droit à la vie, sa raison, sa légitimité. Le martyr de la révolution est devenu indigeste après trois décennies de consommation effrénée. On n'en pouvait plus de ce culte de héros, de cette débauche de cérémonies où fossoyeurs et pillards viennent étaler des mines de déterré, déployer des oraisons fabuleuses suivies de longues et graves ruminations.[69]

[67] Ibid., 73.
[68] "Débraillée, cynique, assoiffé de sang," the medical director is so "conforme à l'image du légiste imposée par la télé" that Si Larbi begins to question the validity of his own position as a police investigator: "'Peut-être fais-je flic de série?,'" he wonders; Ibid., 77. Si Larbi finds the medical director deeply engrossed in a crossword, "après le foot . . . le hobby chéri de l'Algérien lettré," a sardonic swipe at the idleness of the Algerian bureaucracy.
[69] Ibid., 247–48.

Thick with figurative language, this descriptive passage uncovers the necrophilic rot of a nation whose stagnant present remains stubbornly rooted in the reassuring stories of a mythical past. Hallowed like a holy object and ritually consumed, the myth of the revolution has been gnawed and swallowed so many times that its martyred bones have been sucked dry of their succulent marrow. As the nation's malnourished population continues to feed on the paltry remains of the past, an army of grave robbers is deployed to pillage the graves of the dead, or, where required, to fabricate a fresh crop of martyrs:

> On chasse de nouveaux territoires, on prépare de nouveaux festins, on affiche de nouveaux martyrologes. Là, les martyrs du djihad, mort de leur venin, saisis dans une exaltation fiévreuse ; là, les martyrs de la démocratie dont on parle avec des mots savants et dans le regard des grandes inquiétudes pour l'avenir d'ignorance fautive qui se profile à l'horizon ; là, les martyrs de rien, dont ne sait que faire, mais on leur trouvera une utilité, comptabilisés par tranches de mille, tombés pour de prunes, d'une balle perdue ou d'un piège à cons dans des ruelles surpeuplées ou des champs désertés. Tous mijotent dans les mémoires en ébullition ; ils prennent du fumet.[70]

Meanwhile, the cannibalistic commemoration of the revolution and its martyrs, either real or imagined, has finally martyred the living, causing them to become paralyzed in the image of the dead:

> Les vivants sont des morts qui s'ignorent, des morts qui délirent. . . . On ne peut à ce point fréquenter les morts sans finir par leur ressembler. On ne peut à ce point parler de la mort sans oublier de vivre. . . . Nous sommes des charognards, morts de nos os![71]

[70] Ibid., 248.
[71] Ibid., 249.

Read in parallel with the Rouiba hospital scene, these richly figurative passages reinforce the connection between the novel's investigative narrative and its broader historical critique. An allegory for the official narrative of Algerian nationhood, the Rouiba hospital reveals the morbidity of collective memory in contemporary Algeria, a country that has fallen sick with its own history.

Subsequent to the Rouiba hospital scene, the Christian cemetery emerges at the center of Si Larbi's ongoing criminal investigation, advancing the novel's investigative narrative alongside its critique of mnemonic discourse in contemporary Algeria. Much like the hospital, the Christian cemetery in Rouiba can be read allegorically; suggestive of the contentious connections between mourning, melancholia, and collective memory in contemporary Algeria, this morbid *lieu de mémoire* attests to the haunting legacy of French colonialism and its violent, fratricidal aftermath. Once a peaceful haven on the outskirts of Algiers, where Rouiba's *pied noir* residents would come to walk and respectfully honor their dead, the Christian cemetery has become in their prolonged absence "un dépotoir pratique" for the incessant construction of the Algerian capital: "Les chantiers de la ville y ont déposé leurs parts de gravats et les pirates de la preuve de leur mépris des lois. Dans cet enchevêtrement où gisent des constructions entières avortées par les malfaçons et les malversations, les clochards de la ville ont élu domicile fixe."[72] With its increasing homeless population and growing piles of debris from neighboring construction sites, the municipal government declares the Christian cemetery a danger to public safety. Locals mistake the

[72] Ibid., 167.

nocturnal howling of the drunken vagabonds that have taken up residence there for the mournful wailing of long-dead colonists. "Le quartier s'enveloppa de l'atmosphère suffocante des vieux films d'épouvante en noir et blanc . . . si prenante, si l'on s'en souvient, que l'apparition d'un vivant parmi ces ombres gémissantes agrippées au suaire mural provoquait la panique dans les cinoches populaires."[73] Flickering and immaterial like the pallid projection of old horror films ("[de] vieux films d'épouvante"), the colonial past creeps amidst the crumbling mausoleums of the Christian cemetery, a ghastly revenant that has returned to haunt the postcolonial present.

Like a "forteresse médiévale de la vielle Europe," the Christian cemetery clutches its secrets close to its chest, half forgotten but "toujours là . . . de plus en plus anachronique."[74] "[R]iche de son histoire," the Christian cemetery reflects the former glory of the French empire; yet in the Algerian government's efforts to cut all symbolic ties to the colonial master, the cemetery and its stately monuments have gradually fallen into disrepair. Alluding to the peace treaty that put an end to the Algerian War after nearly a decade of violence, Sansal writes: "La chose se décidait à Alger et à Paris, selon que les négociateurs s'entendaient ou pas sur le traitement des contentieux opposant les deux pays depuis les accords d'Évian."[75] In the interminable negotiations of decolonization, described by Sansal as a bitter divorce, "l'entretien des cimetières chrétiens en Algérie, peu connu du public, n'en est pas le moins important"; both parties see the remaining cemeteries in Algeria as

[73] Ibid., 168.
[74] Ibid., 165.
[75] Ibid., 172.

symbolic spoils of war.[76] Like the layers of sedimentary rock, the Christian cemetery in Rouiba is striated with historical stratum, suggestive of successive centuries of colonial rule in Algeria: "turques, byzantines, romaines, carthaginoises."[77] "[C]ouverte de nécrophages," the urban landscape has swallowed ("avala") the abundant, sculpted stone left behind in the capital city's abandoned cemeteries, feasting ("se repaît") on the remains ("vestiges") of the past.[78]

In *Le Serment des barbares*, the mournful quality of the Christian cemetery presciently prefigures the thanatological scheme at the center of Si Larbi's investigation, which will finally uncover a complex, criminal undertaking that feeds like a parasite on the grief of the former colonizer. Visiting the makeshift hovel where Abdallah had lived in the Christian cemetery, Si Larbi discovers a collection of receipts for purchases far surpassing the modest means of the poor groundskeeper: "des reçus pour des achats des pièces de marbre taillé, de ferronnerie, de plâtre, de cadenas, de peinture . . . et même des fleurs!"[79] Si Larbi, attempting to decipher the vandalized inscriptions on the cemetery's toppled tombstones, soon finds the fruit of Abdallah's patient labor at the crypt of the Villatta family, "le plus imposant du cimetière."[80] The family mausoleum of Abdallah's former *pied-noir* employers appears to have been recently maintained: "Une grille en barrait l'accès; repeinte depuis peu; une chaine cadenassé s'enroulait autour de ses barreaux. Neuf, le

[76] Ibid., 172.
[77] Ibid., 173; Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Continuum, 2006).
[78] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 173.
[79] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 156–66.
[80] Ibid., 176–77.

cadenas; un modèle chinois . . . difficile à crocheter."[81] Considering the quantity the receipts found in the groundskeeper's home and the quality of the upkeep of the Villata family's burial site, Si Larbi rightly suspects that "Abdallah est rentré [en Algérie] avec une mission: entretenir le cimetière."[82] The investigator soon comes to understand that the "contrat moral" struck between the faithful Abdallah and his former employers is in fact "au cœur d'une vaste affaire, scabreuse comme on les aime par ici . . . mêl[ant] la politique, la religion, la drogue, le fric, le sang, le sexe, le népotisme kabyle, la félonie arabe, le FMI, les ONG, [et] l'ONU."[83]

Embedded within the investigative narrative, the Christian cemetery serves in *Le Serment des barbares* as an allegorical battlefield on which divergent memories and competing histories violently vie for authority. For the hundreds of thousands of repatriated *pieds-noirs*, including the Villatta family, the Christian cemetery in Rouiba represents the last remaining vestige of a lost homeland, a totemic symbol of their former prosperity: "Ces lieux ne sont pas seulement la sépulture des leurs mais l'écot de leur indéfectible amour pour le pays."[84] The nostalgia of the *pieds-noirs* recalls what LaCapra has described as the conflation between absence and loss, the result of which is "the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia."[85] In the absence of an Algerian homeland, the *pieds-noirs* reconstruct their identity around the loss

[81] Ibid., 176.
[82] Ibid., 181.
[83] Ibid., 411.
[84] "Comme des tribus oubliées par le temps autour d'un totem et d'une légende, dont l'activité vitale est de se regrouper sur un calendrier quasi liturgique pour se compter et se recompter et en cercle intime et chaud évoquer et pleurer le passé"; Ibid., 436.
[85] Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Summer 1999): 698.

of "some original unity, wholeness, security . . . which others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated."[86] The *pieds-noirs*' nostalgia for the past coincides with a utopian quest for a reunified community in the future; in their melancholic longing for a "putative lost plenitude," the *pieds-noirs* envision a future conquest of Algeria that will depend on the political destabilization of the present Algerian regime.[87] Meanwhile, it is the *pieds-noirs*' utopian melancholy that allows the latent Messalist opposition movement to enlist their former enemies' financial support in their own efforts to destabilize the ruling party. By promising to protect and reconstruct the Christian cemeteries in Algeria, the Messalist opposition movement appeals to the so-called "nostalgérie" of the *pieds-noirs*, accentuating their mourning "en leur montrant, photos à l'appui, l'état calamiteux de leurs cimetières [pour] raviver leur haine du bicot."[88]As unlikely as this alliance may seem, Sansal notes: "n'ont-ils pas lutté contre le même ennemi, le FLN? N'ont ils pas été également trahis par l'armée française et les politicards de Paris?"[89] Consequently, for the repatriated *pieds-noirs* and the Messalist opposition movement alike, "la reconquête du pays commence dans les cimetières."[90]

In the Christian cemetery, the opaque connection between Si Moh and Abdallah becomes clear. Si Larbi, recalling the two men's respective political engagements during the Algerian War, comes to suspect that neither Si Moh nor Abdallah had relinquished his loyalty to the Messalist nationalist party, which, as we have seen, was aggressively silenced

[86] Ibid., 707.
[87] Brisley, "Detective Fiction and Working Through," 101.
[88] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 436.
[89] Ibid., 435.
[90] Ibid., 437.

by the political ascendancy of the FLN in the decades following Algerian Independence. Over the course of Si Larbi's investigation, it is revealed that Si Moh, profiting off of the nostalgia of the repatriated *pieds-noirs*, had enlisted the support of Abdallah, his Messalist comrade-in-arms, to protect and maintain the Christian cemetery in Rouiba. At the same time, Si Larbi also discovers that the formidable powerbroker, along with his crony capitalist friends, had been taking advantage of the socioeconomic unrest in Algeria to advance his own political ends, peddling political Islam like "une drogue bon marché" in order to transform an impoverished and disenfranchised population into "une armée de féroces assassins."[91] Thus uncovered, the criminal conspiracy at the center of Si Larbi's investigation exposes the complex interconnections between ostensibly antagonistic groups, from the complicity of the Algerian elite in the rise of religious fundamentalism to the strategic alliance between rival nationalist groups and a nostalgic population of *pieds-noirs*.

Offering a critique of the morbidly transactional complexities of the Algerian Civil War, Sansal's novel also calls attention to an ambiguous slippage in the historical condition of victimhood; in a contemporary Algerian context, Sansal writes, "[on est] loin de savoir où passe la ligne de démarcation entre terrorisme et contre-terrorisme."[92] Connecting Algeria's colonial past to the postcolonial present by way of the anti-colonial conflict, Si Larbi's criminal investigation blurs the binary distinction between victims and perpetrators, revealing the complex relations of complicity that connect them across time

[91] Ibid., 434.
[92] Ibid., 128.

and space, irrespective of identity, race, or affiliation. The novel's multidirectional perspective on history is not intended to deny or delegitimize the existence of victims or the validity of their experiences; to the contrary, what Sansal condemns in *Le Serment des barbares* is the strategic crystallization of the condition of victimhood as a mnemonic vector for competing claims to political legitimacy.[93] As Lucy Brisely has argued in her cogent analysis of Sansal's novel, a political appeal to victimhood "can only be sustained through a perpetuation of this debilitating state."[94] Consequently, in the "struggle for political visibility and recognition," Brisely continues, victims become bent on "preserving their own narrative of the past," adopting a competitive, exclusionary, and proprietary approach to the writing of history that impedes inter-subjective connections.[95] By contrast, Sansal's novel calls attention to the complex historical connections that have constituted Algerian history, allowing for hybrid or pluralized accounts of the past and its relation to the present.

* * *

In this chapter, I have argued that the genre of detective fiction, in both form and content, is uniquely suited to the representation of the contradictions, discontinuities, and reversals of recent Algerian history. Taking Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* as a case in point, I have supported this argument with at least three interrelated arguments. First, situating Sansal's novel within the larger literary context of detective fiction, I have shown

[93] For more on multidirectional memory, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).
[94] Brisely, "Detective Fiction and Working Through," 94.
[95] Ibid.

how the postcolonial *roman policier*, as a genre, strategically appropriates the generic conventions of classical detective fiction to call attention to the constructed nature of historical narratives and hegemonic institutions of knowledge production that produce and sustain them. While the postcolonial *roman policier* often offers a critique of colonial discourse, Sansal's novel is fairly unique in that it focuses especially on forms of corruption and criminality arising from the Algerian state apparatus itself in the historical context of postcolonial Algeria. Additionally, connecting the novel's criminal plot to its broader historical critique, I have analyzed how the investigative narrative of *Le Serment des barbares* calls into question the official narrative of Algerian nationhood by exposing the innate complexities and internal contradictions of the Algerian War and its violent aftermath. From its preoccupation with embedded texts to its chaotic, encrypted prose, Sansal's novel adopts and ironically adapts the aesthetic tropes of classical detective fiction to provide a powerful critique of historical discourse in contemporary Algeria. Lastly, focusing on two *lieux de mémoire* (the Rouiba hospital and the Christian cemetery) that figure prominently in Si Larbi's criminal investigation, I have demonstrated morbidity of the mnemonic landscape as it is depicted in *Le Serment des barbares*. Relating my close reading of these richly allegorical scenes to my broader argument about the postcolonial *roman policier*, I have once again argued that the genre's constitutive concern with the legibility and control of competing (historical) narratives can provide a narrative framework that has the potential to move collective memory beyond the mnemonic impasse of commemorative mourning and melancholic repetition.

While the postcolonial *roman policier*, as a genre, posits a potential path forward, this final point—the morbid paralysis of mnemonic discourse in contemporary Algeria—remains unresolved in Sansal's novel. Although Si Larbi manages to identity those responsible for the murder of Si Moh and Abdallah amidst a chaos of conflicting signs and clues, an anonymous bullet silences our intrepid investigator before he can present his case before the relevant authorities. The investigator's death suggests at a number of conclusions that can help to clarify the novel's historical critique. First, the murder occurs while Si Larbi is meeting for coffee with a historian named Hamidi, whose historical research has repeatedly incurred the wrath of the Algerian regime. Convinced that his criminal investigation is still missing what he calls "un facteur clé, la dimension historique qui assemble les faits et leur donne empennage et motricité," Si Larbi's conversation with Hamidi further blurs the distinction between fiction and historical fact. The unconventional use of the terms "empennage" and "motricité"—descriptive of feathered flight and forward motion, respectively—suggests an active mode of historical inquiry that would propel the novel's investigative narrative into the future rather than grounding it or immobilizing it in the past.[96] Furthermore, Hamidi's regular run-ins with the criminal justice system recalls the perils of historical critique in the context of contemporary Algeria.

However, despite the real threat of danger, Sansal's novel concludes with a powerful call to action. Speaking from the perspective of Hamidi, the historian *cum* criminal, Sansal states: "L'histoire n'est pas l'histoire quand les criminels fabriquent son encre et se passent

[96] The term "empennage" translates into English as "tailplane," a horizontal stabilizer at the tail of an aircraft. The term also refers to the "fletching," or feathering, of an arrow. The term "motricité" translates into English as "motor function."

la plume. Elle est la chronique de leurs alibis. Et ceux qui la lisent sans brûler le cœur sont de faux témoins."[97] This urgent plea, directed at the Algerian people's better demons, is all the more powerful in the context of Algeria's present political unrest. Since February 22, 2019, weekly protests throughout Algeria and across the Mediterranean in France have united the people in opposition to the military-backed regime of Bouteflika, resulting in his resignation after twenty years of unchallenged rule. The popular protest movement, known as the *Hirak*, or the Revolution of Smiles, has called renewed attention to the complexities and internal contradictions of decolonization and the *décennie noire* alike, reinvigorating appeals for a more multidirectional, pluralistic account of the past and its present reverberations. At the same time, the Algerian regime, which still operates under the heavy thumb of the Algerian military establishment, has continued to crack down on peaceful protesters, signaling a reluctance to accept criticism or to cede power to the people.

While Sansal could not have anticipated the popular uprising that would take the Algerian "pouvoir" by surprise twenty years after the publication of *Le Serment des barbares*, the novel nevertheless anticipates the urgency of the present moment in a number of prescient ways. First, drawing on the recent history of the *décennie noire*, Sansal's novel rightly diagnoses the danger of a single historical narrative. In addition to revealing the rampant corruption of the Algerian regime and the criminal economy operating in its shadow, the novel also shows how the official narrative of Algerian nationhood was strategically positioned by the FLN as a front, or a placating façade erected

[97] Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, 461.

to appease the Algerian people. Consistently critical of the compulsive, commemorative mourning of the Algerian War, the novel is equally skeptical of the melancholic repetition of past antagonisms. In this way, Sansal's novel points to the necessity of a model of collective memory that can reconcile the revolutionary pride of the Algerian people with the diversity of their historical experiences, identities, and perspectives. Emphasizing complicity and connectivity over competitive, exclusionary, or proprietary claims to historical truth, the novel allows for the articulation of an intersectional, hybrid, or pluralistic account of Algerian history. Finally, eschewing the catharsis of narrative closure, the novel presents the past as an unsolved mystery, inviting future investigation.

Chapter Two

"Une voix venue d'ailleurs": Voices of the Past in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*

I. En dette du commencement

> Où est le commencement? Est-ce quelqu'un ou quelque chose qui commence?
> —Maurice Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*[1]

From a hilltop overlooking the Jardin d'Essai du Hamma in the El Madania neighborhood of central Algiers reigns the Maqam E'Chahid, an iconic memorial to the martyrs of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). Erected in 1982 under the direction of President Chadli Bendjedid (1979–1992) to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Algerian Independence, the colossal monument is comprised of three concrete palm fronds joined at the peak around a domed turret resembling an Oriental minaret. Symbolizing peace and hospitality in Mediterranean cultures, the fronds are said to represent the three socialist revolutions (industrial, agrarian, and cultural) of the post-Independence regime under the administration of President Houari Boumédiène (1965–1978), who commissioned the design for the monument.[2] At the foot of each frond stands the imposing statue of an armed soldier, including two resistance fighters representing the revolutionary Armée de Libération Nationale and a uniformed member of the post-Independence Armée Nationale Populaire, evoking a legacy of armed resistance under the

[1] Maurice Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs: Sur les poèmes de Louis-René Des Forêts* (Dijon; Odysseus fin de siècle, 1992), 32, 29.
[2] Raphaëlle Branche, "The Martyr's Torch: Memory and Power in Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 435; Lahouari Addi, "Sociologie politique d'un populisme autoritaire," *Confluences méditerranée*, no. 81 (Spring 2010): 27–40.

military and political leadership of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which has dominated Algerian politics since the revolutionary party came to power in 1962.[3] Looming large as a gravestone over the memory of a million anonymous martyrs, the Maqam E'Chahid performs what the feminist cultural critic Ranjana Khanna has called a material form of national mourning, absorbing the absent dead into the nascent body politic in order to ascribe meaning and value to their death.[4]

At ninety-two meters in height, the hilltop memorial is visible from nearly all vantage points in the Algerian capital, an appropriate allegory for the virtual omnipresence of the Algerian War in the official narrative of Algerian nationhood.[5] Articulated around the affirmation of an ancestral, Arab-Islamic identity, forged in armed conflict against centuries of consecutive imperial occupations, this nationalist narrative has served, on the one hand, to redeem an indigenous history that had been effaced, humiliated, or denied by over 130 years of French colonialism, and on the other, to connect the political legitimacy of the post-Independence regime to the collective memory of a mythic, pre-colonial past.[6] As the

[3] Emmanuel Alcarez, "La Mise en scène de la mémoire nationale," in *Autour des morts de guerre: Maghreb-Moyen Orient*, ed. Raphaëlle Branche, Nadine Picaudou, and Pierre Vermeren (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 25.

[4] Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 20.

[5] Khanna, *Algeria Cuts*, 19.

[6] On the reclamation of history as an act of anti-colonial resistance, a passage from the introduction to Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* comes to mind: "Le colon fait l'histoire. Sa vie est une épopée, une odyssée. Il est le commencement absolu : 'Cette terre, c'est nous qui l'avons faite.' Il est la clause continuée : 'Si nous partons, tout est perdu, cette terre retournera au Moyen Âge.' En face de lui, des être engourdis, travaillés de l'intérieur par les fièvres et les 'coutumes ancestrales,' constituent un cadre quasi minéral au dynamisme novateur du mercantilisme colonial. . . . L'immobilité à laquelle est condamné le colonisé ne peut être remise en question que si le colonisé décide de mettre un terme à l'histoire de la colonisation, à l'histoire du pillage, pour faire exister l'histoire de la nation, l'histoire de la décolonisation"; Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), 52–52. Fanon expresses a similar sentiment in his concluding chapter, writing: "Le colonialisme ne se satisfait pas d'enserrer le peuple dans ses mailles, de vider le cerveau colonisé de toute forme et de tout contenu. Par une sorte de perversion de la logique, il s'oriente vers le passé du peuple

historian Raphaëlle Branche has argued in her analysis of commemorative policy in contemporary Algeria, state control over the production and dissemination of knowledge about the past has constituted a cornerstone of political capital since the country's independence in 1962, allowing the regime to illuminate an uncertain present in the mythic light of an invariably luminous past.[7] A product of historical circumstance rather than timeless, essential truths, the official narrative of Algerian nationhood reflects the dynamics of a perpetual power struggle over the historical legitimacy of political actors, the cultural, ethnic, and religious composition of the national community, and the ideological orientation of the state.[8]

opprimé, le distord, le défigure, l'anéantit"; Ibid., 201. In these passages, Fanon affirms the importance of history and historical writing to the postcolonial project of nation building. Elsewhere, however, Fanon cautions against the strategic appropriation, manipulation, and mythification of history in the political interests of the post-Independence regime, writing: "Le leader apaise le peuple. Des années après l'indépendance, incapable d'inviter le peuple à une œuvre concrète, incapable d'ouvrir réellement l'avenir au peuple, de lancer le peuple dans la voie de la construction de la nation, donc de sa propre construction, on voit le leader ressasser l'histoire de l'indépendance, rappeler l'union sacrée de la lutte de libération"; Ibid., 162.

[7] Branche, "The Martyr's Torch," 433. Similarly, for James McDougall, the perpetual "presence of the past" in Algerian political culture and discourse "means something more complex than the persistence of atavistic memory, immutable laws, or determining cultural structures of thought an action"; James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3. To the contrary, the production and dissemination of knowledge about the past constitutes an active and creative process of appropriation, conservation, and propagation, performing "a certain kind of socio-cultural work"; Ibid., 4. Consequently, historical discourse itself may be considered a cultural artifact that "'makes sense' (that is, produces meaning and explanation) in the present"; Ibid. From this perspective, McDougall argues, historical knowledge is both the discursive process through which past events are perceived as meaningful and the historically contingent product of power dynamics in the present.

[8] A cursory overview of commemorative policy in contemporary Algeria can offer compelling insights into the power dynamics that determine how the past is perceived and deployed to achieve certain political objectives in the present. Take, for example, the Musée National du Moudjahid in central Algiers, whose visitor is greeted upon entry by a larger-than-life portrait of Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1880–1940), the founder of the proto-nationalist Association des Oulémas Musulmans Algériens. In contrast to his more moderate contemporaries, many of whom favored equal rights and representation in colonial Algeria, Ben Badis was an early and vocal advocate of Algerian sovereignty, asserting in a 1936 letter to the nationalist leader Ferhat Abbas: "[La nation algérienne musulmane] a son histoire . . . elle a son unité religieuse et linguistique, sa culture, ses traditions. . . . . Le peuple musulman algérien n'est pas la France, il ne peut pas être la France, il ne veut pas l'être et, même s'il le voulait, il ne pourrait pas, car c'est un peuple très éloigné de la France par sa langue, ses mœurs, son origine et sa religion. Il ne veut pas s'assimiler"; Abdelhamid Ben Badis, qtd. in Bruno

Subsequent to the Algerian Civil War (1992–1999), however, the official narrative of Algerian nationhood has faced increased scrutiny, criticism, and contestation across the sociopolitical spectrum.[9] As authors, historians, and other Algerian intellectuals have sought to address the complexities and internal contradictions of the anti-colonial conflict and its traumatic aftermath, the Algerian regime's persistent monopoly on mnemonic

Etienne, "Les dispositions islamiques du droit public maghrébin," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 1 (1966): 52. Under the political and spiritual leadership of Ben Badis, the Islamic reform movement rejected the premise of assimilation on account of an essential cultural, ethnic, and religious incompatibility with the colonizer. Presenting a linear progression between the Arab-Islamic ideology of the Islamic reform movement and the armed resistance of the FLN, the Musée National du Moudjahid effectively effaces from official memory the political pluralism and recognition of minority rights that characterized a number of Algerian nationalist movements active in the first half of the twentieth century; Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris : La Découverte, 1991), 72–86. The curatorial emphasis placed on Ben Badis and the Islamic reform movement serves furthermore to marginalize the figure of Messali Hadj, a prominent nationalist leader whose Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) rivaled the military and political preeminence of the FLN during the anti-colonial conflict. Positing the revolutionary party as the harbinger and unique heir of a holy war against the colonizer, the museum commemorates the hallowed origins of Algerian sovereignty inside a circular crypt, where somber portraits of the founding fathers of the Algerian Revolution, known as the "Groupe des 22," surround a stone monolith that is stained, it is said, with the blood of martyrs and inscribed with Quranic verses depicting the divine glory of *djihad*; Alcarez, "De la guerre d'indépendance algérienne au *maqam al-chahid* d'Alger," 26. Commemorating "un seul héros, le peuple," united in arms, body, and spirit behind the revolutionary party in the sacred fight against French colonialism, the Musée National du Moudjahid presents the collective martyrdom of the Algerian people as the sole source of political sovereignty in contemporary Algeria.

[9] Echoing with absences, the official narrative of Algerian nationhood neglects to account for the fratricidal violence between the FLN and the Messalist faction of the nationalist movement, leading to the June 1957 massacre of more than three hundred civilians in the Algerian village of Melouza, condemned by the FLN for their alleged support of the MNA; Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); Mohammed Harbi, *Le FLN: Documents et histoire, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); Jacques Simon, *Le Massacre de Melouza: Algérie, juin 1957* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); the frenzied purge of resistance fighters suspected of spying for the French from within the ranks of the FLN in a bloody incident known as Opération Bleuite; Jean-Paul Mari, "Guerre d'Algérie: le poison de la 'bleuite,'" *L'Obs* (Paris), July 5, 2012, accessed November 12, 2018, https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/les-50-ans-de-la-fin-de-la-guerre-d-algerie/20120404.OBS5422/guerre-d-algerie-le-poison-de-la-bleuite.html; the summary execution, imprisonment, and mass exile of indigenous Algerians known as *harkis* who had fought on behalf of or otherwise supported the French colonial forces during the war; Michel Roux, *Les Harkis, ou, Les Oubliés de l'histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound That Never Heals* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); or the fractious infighting amongst political factions of the FLN upon Algerian Independence, resulting in the ousting of Ahmed Ben Bella, Algeria's first president, in a 1965 military putsch organized by his then Vice President, Boumédiène, with the backing of the powerful Clan d'Oujda; Fawzi Rouzeik, *Le Groupe d'Oujda revisité par Chérif Belkacem* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016); Luis Martínez and Rasmus Alenius Boserup, *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

discourse has gradually given way to a plurality of alternative perspectives on the past. At the same time, contemporary Algerian authors have been critical of binary or identity-based accounts of the Algerian War. The present chapter, much like the previous one, is concerned with an ongoing search for an appropriate discourse of commemoration that might recognize the victims of past and present violence while also resisting appropriation, exploitation, or political manipulation by competing mnemonic claims.

Shifting my attention from the stifled crimes of decolonization to the silenced or unsung heroes of the national liberation struggle, this chapter highlights the contributions of women to the anti-colonial cause. Although approximately 11,000 Algerian women participated actively in the fight against French colonialism, constituting over three percent of FLN membership by 1962, including an estimated 1,755 *mujahidat* who joined their male counterparts in the armed resistance, the personal stories and political contributions of these women have often been under- or misrepresented in "selective, stereotypical, and reductive ways": as "wombs of the nation," "guardians of national essence," or, from the French perspective, as the exotic objects of erotic desire, to be pitied, protected, or saved from the predatory impulses of Muslim men.[10] In contrast to these stereotypical or reductive portrayals, which reflect the problematic intersection between colonial paternalism and Algeria's patriarchal culture, this chapter considers the commemorative

[10] Ryme Seferdjeli, "Rethinking the History of the *Mujahidat* during the Algerian War: Competing Voices, Reconstructed Memories, and Contrasting Historiographies," *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 241; Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory, and Gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2015), 212. See also, Djamila Amrane, *Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1991); Monique Gadant, *Le Nationalisme algérien et les femmes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

representation of women in recent works by the Algerian author *cum* historian Assia Djebar (1936–2015). Throughout her long and storied career, Djebar consistently called attention to the contributions of Algerian women to civil and political society while also exposing the hegemonic practices of history that have served systematically to silence them.[11] However, while many of her early novels make gender-based appeals for a more inclusive narrative of Algerian nationhood, Djebar's later work (from about 1995 onward) can be characterized by its criticism of the notion of historical narrativity itself, examining the conditions under which the past is perceived as meaningful, or "makes sense," in the present.[12] In this chapter, I argue that the critical objective of these works is not simply to recover or restore the stories of history's silent (or rather, silenced) half, but also to interrogate the discursive, ideological, and material conditions of historical discourse and its transmission over time.

Blurring the discursive and generic boundaries between autobiography and oral history, fact and fiction, writing and film, both of the works discussed in this chapter incorporate material from a myriad of multimedia sources to constitute a kind of counter-archive commemorating Algerian women's contributions to the anti-colonial cause. In her semi-autobiographical novel *La Femme sans sépulture*, published in 2002, Djebar returns to the site of her Algerian childhood to recover the voice of Zoulikha, a female resistance fighter who was tortured and disappeared during the Algerian War, leaving behind two orphaned daughters and a bereaved community of women in the coastal town of Cherchell,

[11] Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Jane Hiddleston, "Political Violence and Singular Testimony: Assia Djebar's *Algerian White*," *Law & Literature* 17, no. 1 (2005): 1–20.
[12] McDougall, *Nationalism in Algeria*, 4.

formerly known as Césarée.[13] Inspired by informal interviews conducted by the author-narrator during the principal photography of her 1977 film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, Djebar's polyvocal text alternates between the oral testimony of the women of Cherchell and an imagined account of Zoulikha's final days, fictionalized by the author-narrator and recounted from a first-person narrative perspective.[14] In both *La Femme sans sépulture* and *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, the spectral figure of Zoulikha speaks in her absence through the stories kept and shared by a community of women, comprising a polyphonic chorus of overlapping voices, both real and imagined, including those of Djebar and a number of her narrative doubles. By mobilizing the imaginary as a mode of historical storytelling, these creative works posit a particular mnemonic posture in relation to the lost or mourned object, straining to listen, in the manner of Odysseus fastened to the mast of his ship, to the spectral voices of the past.

II. Une voix venue d'ailleurs

> Si faire entendre une voix venue d'ailleurs
> Inaccessible au temps et à l'usure
> Se révèle non moins illusoire qu'un rêve
> Il y a pourtant en elle quelque chose qui dure
> Même après que s'en est perdu le sens
> Son timbre vibre encore au loin comme un orage
> Dont on ne sait s'il se rapproche ou s'en va.
> —Louis-René Des Forêts, *Poèmes de Samuel Wood*[15]

Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* opens with an "avertissement," or warning, to the reader. "Dans ce roman," the author-narrator states:

[13] Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2002).
[14] *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, directed by Assia Djebar, 2014.
[15] Louis-René Des Forêts, *Poèmes de Samuel Wood* (Fontfroide-le-Haut: Éditions Fata Morgana, 1988), 44.

> tous les faits et détails de la vie et de la mort de Zoulikha, héroïne de ma ville d'enfance, pendant la guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie, sont rapportés avec un souci de fidélité historique, ou, dirais-je, selon une approche documentaire[.] Toutefois, certains personnages, aux côtés de l'héroïne, en particulier ceux présentés comme de sa famille, sont traités ici avec l'imagination et les variations que permet la fiction. J'ai usé à volonté de ma liberté romanesque, justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée davantage, au centre même d'une large fresque féminine—selon le modèle des mosaïques si anciennes de Césarée de Maurétanie (Cherchell).[16]

In this passage, reproduced here in full, the author-narrator proposes a novel approach to historical writing that explicitly interrogates the normative assumptions of the genre. First introducing the text in question as a novel, Djebar then claims, while simultaneously positing an autobiographical relation to her subject, to report the factual history of Zoulikha, a female resistance fighter from the author-narrator's hometown of Cherchell who was tortured and killed by French colonial forces during the Algerian War. In this opening statement, Djebar either conflates or intentionally equates fact and fiction, ironically subverting her own stated claim to represent the past "avec un souci de fidélité historique." The appearance of the conjunction "ou," followed by an inverted conditional in the first person, establishes an uneasy equivalence between the author-narrator's apparent concern for historical accuracy, or "fidélité historique," and what Djebar describes, somewhat hesitantly, as her "approche documentaire." The following sentence, introduced by the conjunctive adverb "toutefois," confirms that for Djebar the concept of "fidélité historique" is less a question of historical accuracy as it is a declaration of commitment, or

[16] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 9.

loyalty, to a community of women, described here as a "une large fresque féminine" organized compositionally around the central (forever absent) figure of Zoulikha. It follows, then, that the "approche documentaire" adopted by Djebar deliberately eschews the pretense to impartiality and objectivity that ostensibly characterizes the genre of historical writing. This observation clarifies the author-narrator's subsequent assertion that it is through fiction, or what she calls the free and full use of her "liberté romanesque," that she is best able to represent—or rather, to illuminate (*éclairer*)—the truth of Zoulikha's singular story. Finally, in her evocation of "[l]es mosaïques si anciennes de Césarée de Maurétanie (Cherchell)," Djebar situates the history of Zoulikha within a fragmented spatiotemporal frame characterized by discontinuity and the discordant coincidence of overlapping strata of Algerian history within the city limits of a single coastal village: Phoenician (Mauritanie), French (Césarée), and Arab (Cherchell).

Appearing in print before the epitaph, this opening passage sets the tone for the literary text that follows while also dictating the theoretical terms of Djebar's self-described "approche documentaire."[17] This approach operates according to several

[17] My interpretation of Djebar's approach to the writing of history has been inspired and informed, in part, by Michel Foucault's 1969 work *L'Archéologie du savoir*. For Foucault, whereas traditional historiography sought to trace the tedious progress of a linear past from a unique point of origin towards a more perfect future, an archaeological model of history has turned its focus from figures of continuity to instances of interruption. Following Gaston Bachelard, Foucault describes these moments of rupture as "*actes et seuils épistémologiques*" that "suspendent le cumul indéfini des connaissances, brisent leur lente maturation et les font entrer dans un temps nouveau, les coupent de leur origine empirique et de leurs motivations initiales, les purifient de leurs complicités imaginaires"; Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 11; Gaston Bachelard, *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique: Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967), 13–22. Consequently, in contrast to the progressive linearity of traditional historiography, history-as-archaeology "[fait] apparaître plusieurs passés, plusieurs formes d'enchaînements, plusieurs réseaux de déterminations"; Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 11. Furthermore, according to Foucault, history-as-archaeology not only allows for the presence of plurality in the past, but also alters the relations of causality that have traditionally informed historical analysis. Whereas traditional historiography sought to identify schematic or synthetic systems of sequential

theoretical assumptions. First, in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Djebar's "avertissement" willfully dispenses with the discursive premise that historical writing of any kind can ever accurately represent or restore the plenitude of the past. Furthermore, in her evocation of a form of "fidélité historique" articulated around an ethical affirmation of community, the author-narrator advances a normative claim about the material and ideological conditions of possibility of historical discourse in contemporary Algeria, which have been historically premised on the exclusion of women, minority identity groups, and entire periods of Algerian history. Additionally, by acknowledging her own implicated position within a polyphonic chorus of women's voices, the author-narrator seems to abdicate her own authorial ownership over the story that she relates to her reader in the coming pages, gesturing towards a mode of writing about the past that is not premised on the autonomous sovereignty of the writing subject in the present. Finally, by proposing the ancient mosaics housed at the museum of antiquities in Cherchell as a metaphor for history, Djebar portrays the past as an essentially fragmentary figure, which is constituted and traversed by traces of absence; in this image, the author-narrator establishes a

causation, history-as-archaeology is concerned with the aleatory appearance of chance, contingency, and contradiction. "Pour l'analyse archéologique," Foucault writes, "les contradictions ne sont ni apparences à surmonter, ni principes secrets qu'il faudrait dégager. Ce sont des objets à décrire pour eux-mêmes, sans qu'on cherche de quel point de vue ils peuvent se dissiper"; Ibid., 198. Finally, Foucault argues that history-as-archaeology, in its emphasis on contradiction instead of continuity, is symptomatic of a heightened skepticism about the causal significance of the conscious subject as an agent of historical change. "L'histoire continue," Foucault argues: "c'est le corrélat indispensable à la fonction fondatrice du sujet: la garantie que tout ce qui lui a échappé pourra lui être rendu . . . la promesse que toutes ces choses maintenues au loin par la différence, le sujet pourra un jour—sous la forme de la conscience historique—se les approprier derechef, y restaurer sa maîtrise et y trouver ce qu'on peut bien appeler sa demeure"; Ibid., 21–22. Denounced by its conservative critics as an "attentat contre les droits imprescriptibles de l'histoire et . . . le fondement de toute historicité possible," the advent of history-as-archaeology simply heralds, for Foucault, the final siege of the "vieille citadelle" where the subject once reigned sovereign; Ibid., 24.

calculated contrast to the illusion of continuity, homogeneity, and plenitude that tends to characterize traditional approaches to the writing of history. Taken together, these theoretical assumptions form the foundation of my broader argument in this chapter, which can be summarized as follows: the blurring of discursive and generic boundaries in Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* amounts to more than an aesthetic or stylistic choice on the part of the author-narrator; to the contrary, Djebar's so-called "approche documentaire" articulates an ethical case for fiction and the imaginary as an essential supplement to what has been historically construed as historical fact.

Following the author-narrator's "avertissement," an epitaph extracted from *Poèmes de Samuel Wood* by the French poet Louis-René Des Forêts further frames the aesthetic and theoretical stakes of the text. Invoking "une voix venue d'ailleurs / Inaccessible au temps et à l'usure," the epitaph summons a voice from the past that survives, as a storm on the horizon, "même après que s'en est perdu le sens."[18] Although it is unclear from the cited passage to whom the summoned voice belongs—to Zoulikha, who speaks in her absence through the stories kept and shared by the women of Cherchell, or to Djebar herself, who has returned, shackled with self-reproach, to the site of her Algerian childhood—the epitaph conjures the haunting refrain of a restless, roaming past, or what Maurice Blanchot, in a short essay on the poetry of Des Forêts, describes as a "contretemps."[19] Characterized by what Iain Chambers has called an "an unruly temporality . . . in which past and present are conjoined and mutually interrogated," the haunting of history evoked by the epitaph

[18] Louis-René des Forets, qtd. in Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 11.
[19] Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*, 38.

refers to the reappearance in the present of a repressed or occulted past, where the "addition of the unacknowledged" to our present understanding of the past works to disturb the abstract promise of historical progress."[20] In such a "con-temporary affiliation," Chambers continues, our "sense of the present, and its associated 'progress,' finds itself *in debt* to the questions that come to meet it from the past."[21]

In the opening pages of the "prélude" that follows the text's epitaph, Djebar similarly describes her own decades-long silence on the subject of Zoulikha in terms suggestive of an unpaid (and perhaps unpayable) debt to the past. "Histoire de Zoulikha," she begins, dispensing with both definite and indefinite articles: "l'inscrire enfin, ou plutôt la réinscrire."[22] In this opening fragment, the (or a; it is unclear) "histoire de Zoulikha" hovers, suspended, as the author-narrator hesitates between the narrative time of the present and that of the repressed or occulted past. Alluding in a literal sense to the twenty-five years that have eclipsed since the author-narrator first heard tell of Zoulikha's story while collecting footage and field research for her 1977 film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, the cited passage also figuratively suggests the spectral temporality of the heroine's suspended narrative, which, for Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, parallels "l'énorme retard d'une nation toujours en quête de son identité 40 ans après son indépendance."[23] Composed in large part in Paris in 1981 and completed two decades later in New York, *La*

[20] Iain Chambers, *Culture after Humanism: History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2013), 17.
[21] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[22] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 13.
[23] Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, "La femme-oiseau de la mosaïque: Image et chant dans *La femme sans sépulture* d'Assia Djebar," *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 19, no. 2 (Automne 2004): 104.

Femme sans sépulture was finally published in 2002, (re)born like a phoenix amidst the still-smoldering ashes of the *décennie noire*.

The traumatic history of the Algerian Civil War reinforces the haunting resonance of Zoulikha's story of resistance and torture at the time of the text's publication. First appearing in print at a precarious moment when postcolonial Algeria was plagued anew by the specters of the colonial past, the text's portrayal of striking parallels between the fight against French colonialism and the fratricidal conflict afflicting contemporary Algeria recalls what Homi Bhabha has characterized as a "postcolonial time-lag."[24] Consisting in a "temporal caesura that emerges in the tension between the epochal 'event' of modernity" and the "interruptive temporality . . . of modern times," the postcolonial time-lag appears for Bhabha where a plurality of temporalities "touch contingently, their spatial boundaries metonymically overlapping."[25] For Bhabha, the retrospective staging of colonial history in the postcolonial present does not suggest a regressive return to a repressed past. To the contrary, Bhabha argues, the postcolonial time-lag provides for the performative resignification of the past by "rendering evident the traces of the colonial past in the construction of modernity."[26]

From this perspective, the haunting temporality of Djebar's text not only performs the return of a repressed or occulted past, but also points to the potential of its narrative reclamation in the present. At the same time, however, the text also expresses skepticism

[24] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[25] Ibid., 363, 351, 364.
[26] Michael O'Riley, "Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*," *Research in African Literature* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

towards the "hauntological" trope of postcolonial writing, pointing towards the potential perils of "haunting" as a means to historical recovery. As Michael O'Riley has argued, responding to Bhabha in a reading of Djebar's *La Femme Sans sépulture*, the projection of history onto the spatiotemporal plane of the present also runs the risk of a melancholic repetition of the past. For O'Riley, the "spectral aesthetics" of the postcolonial time-lag can "reproduce a deferred colonial temporality of territorialism and produce a haunting static image of history," perpetually beholden to the territorial attachments of the colonial past.[27] Incorporating both of these interpretive angles, I would argue that that the text engages critically with the spectral aesthetics and temporality of the postcolonial time-lag while also offering a nuanced critique of its territorializing tendencies.

The author-narrator's critical perspective on the haunting of place as a means to historical recovery is perhaps best evidenced by her characterization of Cherchell, as Anne Donadey has suggested.[28] Characterizing the site of her Algerian childhood as a city inhabited, or possessed, by the specters of the colonial past, "cette capitale déchue," she writes, is "[p]lein à exploser . . . [d]'un passé qui ne s'est ni asséché ni tari."[29] Contrasting the "mémoire à vif" ensconced in the city's silent stones to the "ruines [qui] s'effondrent sans fin dans la tête de ses habitants," Djebar is critical, in both instances, of the mute immobility of memory, or its inoperative immutability. "[D]ans ce décor de pierres et d'histoire non altéré," she continues, the material accumulation of memory produces a

[27] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006); O'Riley, "Postcolonial Haunting," 75.
[28] Anne Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*," *L'Esprit créateur* 48, no. 4 (2008): 84.
[29] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 95.

mnemonic effect much like amnesia; "je commence à percevoir combien les êtres ici . . . s'oublient eux-mêmes . . . Ils veulent que rien ne se soit passé."[30] The haunting excess of memory that inhabits the city of Cherchell and its millennial stones is thus coupled by an impossible desire on the part of its inhabitants to mourn the past that perpetually haunts them, and in that proper mourning, to finally forget. But like Orpheus drawn to his death by the sound of a distant lyre, the past calls out, and the present can't help but listen.

The ambivalent coincidence of memory and its absence, both in excess, structures the mnemonic landscape of *La Femme sans sépulture*. Returning after a prolonged absence to her ancestral home in coastal Algeria—compelled by sudden, almost childish, longing to confirm "que le phare millénaire reste là, inentamé, que le théâtre romain, au cœur du vieux quartier arabe, garde ses ruines mal entretenues"—the author-narrator recognizes in her own prodigal quest for memory the shadow of a desire to forget. "Ce retard me perturbe, me trouble, me culpabilise," she finally admits in the text's epilogue, "[c]omme si mon lieu d'origine s'arrachait, mais à quoi: à mon propre oubli?"[31] Appearing in print after a period of both public and private amnesia, the resulting text thus attests to what Jane Hiddleston, citing Jacques Derrida, has described as "a process of *différance*, at once difference and deferral," always already out of step with itself, as the nostalgic object of the author-narrator's mnemonic quest is found to be irretrievably lost.[32]

[30] Ibid., 239–40.
[31] Ibid., 239.
[32] Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 160.

III. Parole bouche fermée

> La Voix réaffleure en moi, marmonnement incompréhensible, d'une langue d'avant, un berbère inconnu d'avant le berbère, un libyque évaporé d'il y a deux mille ans, gargouillis dans les creux de mon corps.
>
> —Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*[33]

The time-lag between the experience of loss in the past and its narrative representation in the present is apparent from the first pages of the text's prelude. Recalling her initial interactions with the women of Cherchell in 1976, Djebar adopts a tone of indebted self-reproach. "'Je vous attendais! . . . Je vous ai attendue des années, et vous ne venez que maintenant!'" cries out Zoulikha's youngest daughter, Mina, first in French, followed by the dialectical Arabic of Algeria, interpellating the author-narrator as she passes by, accompanied by a small crew saddled with camera equipment.[34] "'Ce mur qui limite notre patio, c'est bien celui de la maison de votre père, n'est-ce pas?'" asks Mina.[35] The author-narrator nods affirmatively: "en arrivant ici, une heure auparavant, je m'étais fait silencieusement la remarque: '*Tout contre* la vieille maison de mon père, vraiment!'"[36] (Here, too, the author-narrator calls the reader's attention to a temporal caesura in the text, between narrative time and the time of narration; the present, she suggests yet again, is always already past.) At once a literal marker of the proximity of Zoulikha's home with the site of Djebar's Algerian childhood and a metaphor for the distance that has separated them during the latter's long absence from Algeria, the image of the patio wall conveys the

[33] Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*, 40; Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 89.
[34] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 13–4.
[35] Ibid., 13.
[36] Ibid.; emphasis added.

duality of the author-narrator's position with respect to the narrative's heroine.[37] "Je fixe le mur qui nous sépare," sighs Djebar. "Je tente de vaincre mon remords: être restée si longtemps immobile."[38]

The image, both concrete and figurative, of the patio wall stands in stark contrast to the spectral voice of Zoulikha, which can be heard, Djebar writes, "flott[ant] . . . au-dessus des rues étroites, des fontaines, des patios, des hautes terrasses de Césarée."[39] This contrast between the massy immobility of the city and the flighty immateriality of sound echoes the opening scene of Djebar's *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, the cinematic antecedent to *La Femme sans sépulture*, in which the din of distant dialogues and airy ribbons ("flots") of music, both traditional and contemporary, are superimposed onto modern images of ancient Cherchell: "rues à demi désertées . . . belhombras au-dessus des visages de pierre, le phare millénaire immuable . . . la caméra fouille l'espace vide des artères, des places et des statues sans regard."[40] Dedicated to the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, who traveled to the Biskra province of Algeria in 1913 to research Arab folk music, Djebar's self-described cinematic "opus" is presented to the viewer as "l'histoire de Zoulikha," yet the female resistance fighter invoked in the film's introduction never appears in the flesh, figuring instead as an absent presence: "invisible" yet "perceptible" in the

[37] Aas-Rouxparis, "La femme-oiseau de la mosaïque," 99.
[38] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 15.
[39] Ibid., 17.
[40] Ibid., 16, 17.

backlit interstices between "les voix chevauchées [qui] laissent scintiller ce destin de femme."[41]

Confounding image and sound, this curious turn of phrase in the text's prelude situates Zoulikha's singular story ("ce destin de femme") between the ephemeral temporality of oral tradition ("ces voix chevauchées") and the ancient light of a lost object that still shines, as a distant star, in the dark night of the present. In the passive construction of the cited phrase ("laissent scintiller"), Djebar suggests that the essence of Zoulikha's story is immanent—that is, existing and emanating from within—rather than reflective of an extant or external narrative that might otherwise apprehend its historical meaning and significance. Flickering as a candle in a ghastly half-light and gasping for air, Zoulikha's story is represented in *La Femme sans sépulture* "as a pure spark of light which, though fragile and at risk of being smothered, radiates tentatively through the interstices of the country's ruins [and] the climate of amnesia and occlusion that followed the war," as Hiddleston has argued.[42]

This contrast between immanent luminescence and externally imposed exposure is further clarified by the text's self-conscious skepticism towards the arresting visual aesthetics of film. Recalling her decision to refuse the title role in a proposed television special that would depict her mother's commitments to the anti-colonial cause in a

[41] Ibid., 16–17. Allowing Zoulikha to shine through the stories kept and shared by the women of Cherchell, the author-narrator orchestrates the aesthetic confluence of image and sound, in which the "image 'surprises' the sound and the sound 'suspends' the image from a self-contained narrative"; Clarisse Zimra, "Sounding off the Absent Body: Intertextual Resonances in 'La Femme qui pleure' and 'La Femme en morceaux,'" *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 112.
[42] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*, 163.

flattering, flattening light, Zoulikha's oldest daughter, Hania, remarks with indignation: "'Croient-ils qu'ils vont se débarrasser ainsi de son souvenir?'"[43] Projected and disseminated as a televised spectacle, such a cinematic commemoration could only expose her mother's memory to a kind of mnemonic violence, akin to a second death: "'Je pense, moi, que ma mère . . . on la tue une seconde fois, si c'est pour l'exposer ainsi, en images de télévision . . . projetée[s] n'importe comment, au moment où les familles entament leur *dîner de ramadhan*.'"[44] Directing her indignation towards the false piety of the postcolonial regime and its hagiographic propaganda, Hania denounces forms of commemorative discourse that impose "preconceived myths and formulae, governed by religious and cultural politics," onto the individual experience of loss and mourning.[45]

Yet in her reference to the Ramadan *iftar*, or the evening breaking of the fast in Muslim cultures, Hania also alludes to the memory of her mother as a kind of edible object, one that can be conserved through consumption. As Donadey has observed in her analysis of the psychodynamics of loss in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Hania's relationship of mourning with Zoulikha is one of both figurative and literal incorporation, in which the body and voice of the mother seem to be "'swallowed and preserved'" by the daughter "'along with the trauma that led to [her] loss.'"[46] For the French psychologists Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, building on the Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholia, the "oral-cannibalique" incorporation of the lost love object signifies an incapacity or

[43] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 53; O'Riley, "Postcolonial Haunting," 72.
[44] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 54; emphasis added.
[45] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*, 128.
[46] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, qtd. in Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 73.

unwillingness to acknowledge its absence: "C'est pour ne pas 'avaler' la perte, qu'on imagine d'avaler, d'avoir avalé, ce qui est perdu, sous la forme d'un objet," the authors argue; "[a]bsorber ce qui vient à manquer sous forme de nourriture . . . c'est *refuser le deuil* et ses conséquences, c'est refuser d'introduire en soi la partie de soi-même déposée dans ce qui est perdu."[47]

In a similar manner, Hania articulates the absence of her mother as a kind of corporeal occupation. Possessed, or inhabited ("peuplée"), by her mother's memory, which alights as a restless bird from body to body, Hania has become a vector for Zoulikha's voice:

> Il y a dix ans tout juste, germa en elle cette parole ininterrompue qui la vide, qui, parfois, la barbouille, mais en dedans, comme un flux de glaire qui s'écoulerait sans perte. . . . À la fois un vide et un murmure en creux, pas seulement au fond de son large corps, parfois en surface, au risque d'empourprer sa peau si transparente; peau épuisée à force d'être tendue; gorge serrée à force d'être presque tout à fait noyée![48]

Bloated to the point of bursting with the memory of her mother, "[l]a parole en elle coule: à partir d'elle," replacing her menstrual cycle with "une sorte d'hémorragie sonore" that pours like rancid sweat from the pores of her strained and purplish skin.[49] In a queer reversal of roles, the daughter becomes a symbolic surrogate for her own mother; pregnant with loss, Hania cannot conceive, but rather carries her mother as a stillborn child.

Haunted in both body and soul by a specter from the past, Hania's incorporation of her mother's voice results, paradoxically, in the stifling of her capacity for interpersonal

[47] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 234, 261; emphasis in original.
[48] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 65, 64.
[49] Ibid., 64, 65.

communication in the present; Hania speaks through clenched teeth ("dents de l'amertume"), struggling to communicate her mother's story even as its memory inhabits her flesh and hijacks her mind.[50] As Khanna has argued, the melancholic incorporation, or "swallowing whole," of the lost love object "can be the cause of [a] breakdown of signification" that "manifests itself linguistically in terms of silence or demetaphorization."[51] Following Abraham and Török, Khanna argues that this traumatic breakdown of language can be transmitted trans-generationally through familial lines "as a phantom that haunts speech, unbeknownst to its carrier," such that the disenfranchised heirs of a past trauma find themselves, paradoxically, "in possession of (and therefore possessed by rather than in ownership of) someone else's repression."[52]

Similarly, in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Hania remains in possession of—or rather, possessed by—the unspeakable reality of her mother's certain torture and possible rape, a weapon of war that was used systematically during the Algerian War and for which there exists no direct translation in the dialectical Arabic of Algeria, only the dismissive euphemism "dommage."[53] As Joshua Cole and Sylvie Durmelat have both suggested in their respective work, "the swallowing up of rape was enforced not only at the national level, but also by the mothers of rape survivors [and] the survivors themselves," thereby producing and perpetuating a culture of silence, shame, and secrecy passed down from mother to

[50] Ibid., 51.
[51] Khanna, *Dark Continents*, 24.
[52] Ibid., 255.
[53] Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 84; Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris; J-C Lattès, 1985), 226.

daughter.[54] Consequently, for Donadey, the incommunicable "component of incorporation" made manifest by Hania's mourning parallels "the situation in [postcolonial] Algeria, in which the official projection of *mujahidat* as saintly martyrs interrupted the process of mourning for families," whose personal loss was subsumed under and subsequently silenced by the mythic narrative of Algerian nationhood.[55]

Veiled in secrecy and swaddled by silence, Hania's unspeakable mourning of her absent, martyred mother is deafeningly amplified by the absence of a physical monument to her memory. Shortly after the declaration of the ceasefire that would bring the Algerian War to its bloody end in 1962, Hania sneaks into the forest in the company of an elderly farmer to search for some trace of her mother's final days, convinced that "[u]ne marque, un signe que ses compagnons d'armes, ceux qui en avaient réchappé, lui auraient dressé, en hommage."[56] But Hania's search is in vain, and in the coming years, the daughter sublimates her compulsive desire to find her mother's missing body into a recurring dream of a majestic tomb that would mark her final resting place: "Plusieurs fois je vis, dans un rêve, sa sépulture: illuminé, isolé, un monument superbe, et je pleurais sans fin devant ce mausolée."[57] In the absence of an external monument or mausoleum, however, the mourned object is embalmed and entombed "à l'intérieur du sujet [dans] un *caveau secret*.

[54] Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 84; Khanna, *Dark Continents*, 25. See also Joshua Cole, "Intimate Acts and Unspeakable Relations: Remembering Torture and the War for Algerian Independence," in *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism*, ed. Alec G. Hargreaves (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books: 2005), 133.
[55] Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 83.
[56] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 63.
[57] Ibid., 61.

Dans la crypte repose, vivant, reconstitué à partir de souvenirs de mots, d'images, et d'affects, le corrélat objectal de la perte . . . ainsi que les moments traumatiques."[58]

Through the character of Hania, Djebar's text examines at least two contradictory aspects of the intractable relation between the private process of mourning and the politics of collective memory in contemporary Algeria. In some respects, the elder daughter's compulsive desire to conserve the singularity of her mother's story is consistent with the author-narrator's broader objective to "articulate a wholly singular idiom of commemoration, one that resides beyond the limits of institutionalized rituals of mourning and . . . encapsulates the contingency of [an] infinitely private experience of bereavement."[59] At the same time, however, Hania's melancholic incorporation of her mother's memory effectively cripples her capacity for interpersonal communication, impeding her ability to assimilate or appropriately mourn her loss. Consequently, Hania's compulsive desire to bury her dead mother's missing body might suggest a broader critique on the part of the author-narrator of commemorative practices in contemporary Algeria, where the individual memory of a million anonymous martyrs has been crushed under the weight of the colossal, concrete monuments erected in their honor.

Sympathetic yet critical in its portrayal of Hania, the text posits a striking contrast between the elder daughter's pregnant silence and the storytelling impulse of her younger sister, Mina. While Hania is initially skeptical of the author-narrator and often struggles to speak in her presence, Mina shows herself willing and eager to share stories about her

[58] Abraham and Török, *L'Écorce et le noyau*, 266; emphasis in original.
[59] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*, 129–30.

mother. Hania seems to choke on the incorporated memory of her mother; by contrast, Mina "introjects" her loss through language and storytelling. A psychosocial reversal of the mournful process of incorporation, the reparative work of introjection is to return the lost object to a relation of linguistic signification through the creative play of metaphor. "Introjecter un désir, une douleur, une situation," again according to Abraham and Török, "c'est les faire passer par le langage dans *une communion de bouches vides*," paralleling the process by which the child sublimates the absence of the mother's breast into the oral experience of speech.[60] "Opérer ce passage," the authors continue, "c'est réussir que la présence de l'objet cède la place à l'auto-appréhension de son absence. Le langage qui supplée à cette absence, en *figurant* la présence, ne peut être *compris* qu'au sein d'une 'communauté de bouches vides."[61] In contrast to incorporation, in which the survival of the mourned object is contingent on its silent encryption within the psyche of the mourning subject, the curative process of introjection is necessarily communal, dynamic, and linguistic, allowing for the narrative assimilation of a past trauma through its "performative resignification" in the present, as Bhabha might have put it.[62]

In *La Femme sans sépulture*, the relation between Hania and her younger sister, Mina, serves to illustrate the porous border between the aborted mourning of incorporation and the linguistic agency of introjection. In contrast to her older sister, who figures the lost and swallowed object in literal (albeit encrypted) terms as an internal crypt containing the embalmed body of Zoulikha, Mina conveys her mnemonic relation to her

[60] Abraham and Török, *L'Écorce et le noyau*, 263; my emphasis; Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 84.
[61] Abraham and Török, *L'Écorce et le noyau*, 263.
[62] Khanna, *Dark Continents*, 25; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 274.

mother through a complex, shape-shifting metaphor of a blooming womb. With a childlike candor, Mina admits:

> Elle voudrait se couler dans le corps d'une parole fluide. . . . Par instants, le souvenir est une fleur, un gardénia... Non, le souvenir de ma mère, je le porte comme un cercle fermé sur lui-même, moi au centre enveloppé de moire ou de taffetas raidi, me mirant parfois et parfois moi, m'obscurcissant à mon tour.[63]

In this richly textured passage, slippery with imagery and an unstable narrative perspective, Mina evokes what may be interpreted as a symbolic return to a primal, vaginal scene, in which the body of the mother figures metaphorically as a corpus of free-flowing speech ("le corps d'une parole fluide"). In contrast to Hania, who projects her desire for her absent mother onto the phallic symbol of a monument erected in her honor, Mina seems to invest her libidinal energies into images strongly suggestive of the female anatomy; she figures her mother's memory in the cited excerpt as a flower ("un gardénia"), silky and voluptuous ("enveloppé de moire"), with perfumed petals that fold closed ("comme un cercle fermé sur lui même") to envelop the orphaned daughter in their protective embrace ("[l]'obscurcissant à [s]on tour"). Elsewhere, Mina represents the memory of her mother as a clutch of tangled yarn balanced on an open palm ("une pelote de laine emmêlée dans la paume"), an image once again expressive of the "voix chevauchées" that are woven together throughout *La Femme sans sépulture*.[64] "Face à ces ombres," Mina continues, referring to the dark interstices between the disparate threads of Zoulikha's story, "[il faut]

[63] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 202.
[64] Ibid., 31.

s'approcher à tâtons, ou faire détours, cercles, méandres et rosaces, pour enfin regarder la source noire, maculée de boue, de cris gelés, de pleurs non taris."[65] In this cavernous passage, Mina advances blindly ("à tâtons") towards an obscure and unattainable point of origin ("la source noire"), tracing its viscous contours ("maculée de boue") with outstretched fingers as primal, pre-linguistic sounds ("cris gelés," "pleurs non taris") surge forth from the source.

Evocative, as before, of a symbolic return to the maternal "origine du monde" (as it was memorably depicted by Gustave Courbet, in any case), the excerpt cited above also foreshadows—or rather, recalls—Mina's final memories of her mother before her untimely death. Guided to "une casemate en pleine forêt et à haute altitude," a preadolescent Mina, aged twelve, spends four luminous days in an underground grotto in the company of her mother and the forty-five young men in her care, all militants in the anti-colonial cause.[66] There, Zoulikha muses aloud about her dreams for the future: "le mien, disait-elle, le nôtre, répondais-je, et elle corrigeait à son tour: 'Naturellement, celui de tout le pays!'"[67] In this way, Mina's final image of her mother powerfully implicates her memory in a lasting vision of collective liberation, for the Algerian nation in general and Algerian women in particular. Consequently, what Mina mourns in *La Femme sans sépulture* is not only the personal loss of her mother, who, in sacrificing herself to the nationalist cause, left behind two orphaned daughters and a bereaved community of women, but also the broader betrayal of the progressive ideals for which Zoulikha fought and died. Depicted as a modern, independent

[65] Ibid., 31–2.
[66] Ibid., 210.
[67] Ibid., 214.

woman, who lives alone, drives her own car, and teaches at a secondary school in Algiers, Mina both carries and carries out her mother's memory as a living legacy, fundamentally oriented towards the future, "dans le déroulé [irréversible] des jours qui ne reviendront plus."[68]

IV. Cris des oiseaux, chants qui échappent

> Mais . . . restent questions, paroles, silences, et aussi le soleil glorieux, les cris des oiseaux, chants qui échappent à la nécessité infernale du langage, liesse des créatures du ciel, musique où, par l'anacrouse, se soutient le silence de ce qui s'entend encore ou va s'entendre dans ce qui ne s'entend pas.
>
> —Maurice Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*[69]

In *La Femme sans sépulture*, the contrasting relation between Hania and her younger sister Mina serves to demonstrate the categorical distinction between two modes of mourning, described here as incorporation and introjection. Yet the mnemonic border between these discrete psycho-linguistic processes remains porous and dynamic, resisting a schematic reading. Throughout Djebar's text, mourning takes on the repetitive tremors of melancholia, the past reappears out of step with the present, and healing happens backwards, or abruptly, in bursts and fits suggestive of what Donadey has described as a "back and forth movement between acting out and working through."[70] In my interpretation, this "double movement"—this constant, dialectical slippage between incorporation and introjection, mourning and melancholia, speech and silence—that is

[68] Ibid., 204.
[69] Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*, 33.
[70] Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 87.

characteristic of Djebar's text amounts to more than a stylized articulation of trauma. To the contrary, I would argue that the author-narrator's self-styled "'esthétique'" constitutes an ethical choice concerning the present representation and authorial mediation of a repressed or occulted past. As Djebar herself has articulated in interviews, "'écrire . . . se joue dans un rapport obscur entre le 'devoir dire' et le 'ne jamais pouvoir dire,' ou disons, entre garder trace et affronter la loi de l'impossibilité de dire,' le 'devoir taire,' le 'taire absolument.'"[71]

In what follows, I argue that the narrative "esthétique" of *La Femme sans sépulture*—characterized by an obscure, triangular relation between the duty to speak ("devoir dire"), the impossibility of speech ("ne jamais pouvoir dire," "l'impossibilité de dire"), and the imperative to stay silent ("devoir taire")—can be clarified when considered in the context of the "approche documentaire" articulated by the author-narrator in the text's "avertissement." Obscuring the discursive and generic divides between autobiography and oral history, fact and fiction, Djebar's "approche documentaire" is premised on the constitutive impossibility of a singular story of the past. By contrast, the author-narrator adopts a mediated, multifocal perspective on history, thereby mitigating the risk of rhetorical appropriation by authoritative (or authoritarian) claims to historical truth. The text's "constant use and staging of mediation" calls further attention to "the fact that fiction is being used to supplement history," as Donadey has argued, while also highlighting the collaborative, collective, and constructed nature of all historical discourse. Incorporating a

[71] Assia Djebar, qtd. in Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 88.

polyphonic chorus of voices and narrative perspectives, the objective of Djebar's text is therefore not simply to recover Zoulikha's remarkable story and to resituate it within a larger nationalist narrative, but also to call attention to the internal contradictions and complexities constitutive of Algerian history by listening to its strange and dissonant chords.

Consequently, while each character in *La Femme sans sépulture* contributes individually to the recounting of Zoulikha's heroic narrative of resistance, none can offer an authoritative perspective on the past. To the contrary, the text stages the collective mediation of mnemonic discourse by transcribing the oral testimony (collected or imagined) of the women of Cherchell, who whisper in the wings of history to bear witness to Zoulikha's cherished memory. The interwoven testimony of this community of women—which includes, in addition to the author-narrator, several members of Zoulikha's immediate and extended family and her sister-comrades in the nationalist cause, as well as the first-person perspective of the heroine herself—comes together to constitute a textual tapestry of "voix chevauchées," intertwining or superimposed as each individual voice mediates or occasionally merges with the others. Four of the text's twelve titled chapters (not including the "avertissement," the prelude, or the epilogue) include sub-sections in which the voices of Zoulikha's friends and family members are rendered directly in the first person, a clever rhetorical device that works in turn to interpellate the reader as an implicated witness to these women's testimony. Representing the perspectives of Hania and Mina, their paternal aunt Zohra Oudai, and their mother's friend and fellow militant Lla Lbia, also known as Dame Lionne, these chapters frame four others in which the voice of

Zoulikha, fictionalized by the author-narrator and recounted from a first-person perspective, soliloquizes her own final days in a spectral future anterior. Elsewhere in the text, the narrative perspective often slips, sometimes imperceptibly, between direct and indirect discourse, confounding speech and hearsay, and occasionally interwoven with the disembodied sound of a blind girl singing melancholic love songs in the night.[72]

By deferring to those women whose stories have been all-too-often absent from the official narrative of Algerian nationhood, the author-narrator seeks not to speak for the silenced, "ou pis, 'parler sur'"; to the contrary, her objective in *La Femme sans sépulture* is to "parler '*tout contre*'" her narrative subject, adopting an approach that Djebar has described elsewhere as an intimate, inter-subjective "écriture du rapprochement, de l'écoute." For Donadey, Djebar's testimonial writing performs, at any given point, at least one of three functions:

> Il y a d'abord un aspect autobiographique: il s'agit de se porter témoignage à soi-même, de témoigner de sa propre expérience. . . . Il y a ensuite l'aspect d'écoute de l'intervieweuse: il s'agit là de porter témoignage au témoignage des autres, en insistant sur la médiation de cette transmission. . . . Le dernier aspect est l'aspect métacritique d'observation du processus, dans lequel il s'agit de porter témoignage au processus de témoignage lui-même.[73]

This third and final level of testimony, designating a testimonial narrative that explicitly acknowledges and attests to its own narrativity, is especially evident in *La Femme sans sépulture*, in which the author-narrator's stated "souci de fidélité historique" engenders,

[72] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 29–31.
[73] Anne Donadey, "L'Expression littéraire de la transmission du traumatisme dans *La femme sans sépulture* d'Assia Djebar," in *Assia Djebar: Littérature et transmission*, edited by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), 80.

counterintuitively, "un texte en méandres, qui ne peut s'approcher directement de son but mais l'encercle, se dérobe, insiste sur les ellipses, les impossibilités (la morte parle), les hésitations et les bégaiements."[74] Ceding the proverbial floor to the female storytellers of Cherchell, the author-narrator "met en sourdine son statut de conteuse ou de narratrice pour laisser place à la parole de l'autre."[75] In the tradition of the poet Des Forêts, who attributes the authorship of *Les Poèmes de Samuel* to its fictional title character, Djebar distances herself from her own narrative persona in *La Femme sans sépulture* by adopting a series of third-person appellations: "l'Algéroise," "l'amie," "l'autre," "celle qui . . . a interrogé," "la compagne," "la chroniqueuse," "l'écouteuse," "l'étrangère (pas tellement étrangère . . . du moins surnommée telle)," "l'intervieweuse," "l'invitée," "la passagère," "la quêteuse," "la visiteuse," and "la voisine."

Comprising a multitude of fragmentary, multifocal perspectives, the narrative structure of *La Femme sans sépulture* constitutes what Hiddleston has aptly described as "a mosaic of fleeting interventions," or, in Donadey's words, "a tentative gathering of half-forgotten traces."[76] Similarly, for Aas-Rouxparis, the narrative reconstitution of "cette mémoire en miettes" comes to resemble the ancient mosaic evoked in the text's opening pages. "Tout comme les multitudes de tesselles ou galets colorés d'un mosaïque s'accompagnent d'interstices, de brisures et de miettes," the text assembles a plurality of

[74] Ibid., 74.
[75] Lise Gauvin, "Les Femmes-récits ou les déléguées à la parole," in *Assia Djebar: Littérature et transmission*, edited by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), 56.
[76] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*, 116; Anne Donadey, "L'Expression littéraire," 74.

fragmentary forms and half-effaced colors.[77] And while "chaque détail de l'ensemble contribue activement à la construction d'une image globale," she continues, "chacun laisse également transparaître des cassures et des vides qui subvertissent l'image première pour suggérer en filigrane une image autre." Recalling the text's "avertissement," the recurring image of the mosaic is thus consistent with a vision of history as essentially incomplete, constituted and traversed by traces of absence. Painted in pale colors on broken stones, the past persists through the image of the mosaic as a "présence ineffacée, même si nous la ressortons brisée, émiettée, de chacune de nos ruines."[78]

In my reading, the recurring mosaic motif represents the aesthetic "mise en abyme," or self-reflexive repetition," of Djebar's "approche documentaire" in *La Femme sans sépulture*. After its initial appearance in the text's "avertissement," the image of the mosaic reappears in a pivotal chapter called "Les Oiseaux de la mosaïque," strategically positioned at the narrative midpoint of the text.[79] In this chapter, the author-narrator visits the home of Dame Lionne, where she finds Mina. As the young woman serves tea, the author-narrator shares with her hostess an anecdote from a recent touristic visit to the museum of antiquities in Cherchell. Adopting "un ton presque pédagogique," the author-narrator describes an ancient mosaic depicting:

> Trois femmes ou, plus exactement, trois femmes-oiseaux, oui! . . . De longues pattes d'oiseaux prêts à s'envoler au-dessus de la mer—c'est une scène marine, elles sur le rivage, contemplant un grand vaisseau au centre de la scène, flottant au-dessus des

[77] Aas-Rouxparis, "La femme-oiseau de la mosaïque," 98.
[78] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 142.
[79] Dana Strand, "Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture* as Postcolonial Primer," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no 3. (June 2009): 342.

> vagues. Leurs faces sont si belles, leurs couleurs nuancées ont traversé les siècles et conservent leur éclat.[80]

Representing a canonical story from the *Odyssey*, the mosaic recalls the Homeric hero's request to be strapped to the mast of his ship in order to listen in safety to the alluring song of the sirens, whose otherworldly voices are known to lure wayward sailors to a watery grave. In contrast to its classical antecedent, however, the mosaic housed in the Cherchell museum reimagines the myth's ichthyological singers as anthropomorphic birds, floating above the horizon as a sailing vessel skirts the shore.

Rich in symbolism, the image of the mosaic has figured prominently in scholarly readings of Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*. Mildred Mortimer, for example, has suggested that the Odyssean myth portends the death and disappearance of Zoulikha. For Mortimer, the symbolic flight of the ornithological sirens evokes the tragic fate of so many Algerian combatants, perhaps including Zoulikha, whose tortured bodies were cast lifeless from helicopters into the sea.[81] Several others, including Aas-Rouxparis and Dana Strand, both referencing the analysis of Mireille Calle-Gruber, have interpreted the three "femmes-oiseaux de la mosaïque" as symbolic counterparts to the text's female protagonists. Aas-Rouxparis, for instance, identifies two of the mosaic's three sirens as Dame Lionne and Mina, "l'un aux sources de la mémoire et l'autre image de la modernité."[82] Surrounding the central, ornithological figure of Zoulikha, "ces personnages relient le passé et le présent de

[80] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 116–17.
[81] Mildred Mortimer, "Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls: Algeria's Women Combatants as Depicted by Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Louisette Ighilahriz, and Assia Djebar," *Research in African Literature* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 114.
[82] Aas-Rouxparis, "La femme-oiseau de la mosaïque," 105.

l'histoire et de l'Histoire pour dessiner le cheminement vers un avenir possible, à travers la vérité offerte par l'exemple de Zoulikha."[83] In this way, she suggests, the mosaic evokes an Odyssean quest "non plus tournée vers le passé mais orientée vers un avenir inscrit hors des enceintes de l'Histoire."[84] Similarly, for Strand, the sirens' song evokes the "elusive but insistent voices of Zoulikha and those [singing] in her wake."[85]

V. Quand Ulysse devient Homère

> Et je songe au héros grec qui voulait, malgré tout, écouter, lui et lui seul, trois musiciennes dressées, lui que, pour cela, on a attaché au mât du navire. Du navire qui s'éloigne.
>
> —Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*[86]

While many readers of *La Femme sans sépulture* have remarked on the symbolic meaning of the Cherchell mosaic and its relation to the Homeric myth, far fewer have studied the allegorical significance of its primary subject, Odysseus. And although scholars have tended to focus on the sirens' song as a metaphor for some form of female emancipation through speech, it is in fact silent suffering of Odysseus that captures that attention of the author-narrator. Speaking to Dame Lionne and Mina, she admits:

> 'Je suis sortie du musée mais ces femmes-oiseaux de Césarée ne m'ont pas quittée: vont-elles attirer vers elles le bateau qui passe? S'ils entendaient ce chant, les hommes ne verraient plus que le rivage est dangereux: or la mosaïque ne rend pas présent ce risque de mort.'[87]

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 106.
[85] Strand, "Postcolonial Primer," 342.
[86] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 242.
[87] Ibid., 118.

Later that evening, kept awake "au cœur de la nuit" by a stubborn spell of insomnia, the author-narrator subconsciously summons to mind the mythical figures from the mosaic as the first, furtive images of a future narrative ("récit") unfurl before her eyes: "d'abord, la silhouette de Zoulikha soudain envahit la chambre, allant et venant, moi ne me demandant même pas la raison de cette hallucination . . . [de] ce demi-rêve fait autant d'actions que de couleurs nostalgiques un peu passées."[88] In this dreamlike scene, the fatal attraction of the sirens' song also acts as a catalyst for a future narrative, a dangerous enticement to dive into the depths of the past. "Énigmatique et inhumain, séduisant et fatal," the sirens' song thus serves as "le symbole d'un piège effrayant, celui de la parole romanesque."[89]

Turning my attention to the figure of Odysseus, I argue that the image of the mosaic heralds the perils of historical writing, along with the precarious position of the author-narrator in relation to her narrative subject.[90] My analysis here has been inspired and is informed in large part by a short essay by Blanchot entitled "Le Chant des sirènes," which serves as an introduction to his 1959 work, *Le Livre à venir*.[91] In "Le Chant de sirènes," Blanchot analyzes the myth of the sirens as an allegory for the enigmatic relation between the author and the event that constitutes the primary condition of possibility for a coming narrative, which he calls the "récit." For Blanchot, the song of the sirens is what lures "le navigateur," or author, "vers cet espace où chanter commencerait vraiment," or "la région

[88] Ibid., 120.
[89] Andrea Del Lungo, "Maurice Blanchot: La Folie du commencement," *Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises* 50 (1998): 343.
[90] Aas-Rouxparis, "La femme-oiseau de la mosaïque," 108.
[91] Maurice Blanchot, "Le Chant des Sirènes," in *Le Livre à Venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 14.

mère de la musique," that is, the source and origin of all narratives to come.[92] Yet for the hardy navigator, the point of origin that would orient his wayward prow towards home proves notoriously hard to identify. Some perish of impatience, affirming prematurely "c'est ici; ici, je jetterai l'ancre"; for others, "c'était trop tard au contraire: le but avait toujours été dépassé." For Blanchot, it is the aporetic temporality of the sirens' song—"toujours encore à venir, toujours déjà passé, toujours présent dans un commencement si abrupt qu'il vous coupe le souffle"—that constitutes the fatal enigma of the *récit*:

> Le récit est mouvement vers un point, non seulement inconnu, ignoré, étranger, mais tel qu'il ne semble avoir, par avance et en dehors de ce mouvement, aucune sorte de réalité, si impérieux cependant que c'est de lui seul que le récit tire son attrait, de telle manière qu'il ne peut même 'commencer' avant de l'avoir atteint, mais cependant c'est seulement le récit et le mouvement imprévisible du récit qui fournissent l'espace où le point devient réel, puissant et attirant.[93]

Born from what Blanchot calls "la rencontre de l'imaginaire," the *récit* relates an impossible relation with the event of its own inception: "[n]on pas l'événement de la rencontre devenue présente, mais l'ouverture de ce moment infini qu'est la rencontre elle-même, laquelle est toujours à l'écart du lieu et du moment où elle s'affirme, car elle est cet écart même, cette distance imaginaire."[94]

For Blanchot, the fatal allure of the sirens' song is that it entices the author-navigator to abolish this imaginary distance, to pursue his navigation towards that precarious point of narrative revelation until he is submerged in a silent, solitary space

[92] Ibid., 18.
[93] Ibid., 18, 14.
[94] Ibid., 9, 18.

beneath the waves where the imaginary ("une parole errante et infinie") is indistinguishable from the real of the *récit*.[95] In contrast to Ahab, the tragic hero of the Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, who sinks "sans cesse . . . dans cet espace sans monde vers lequel l'attire la fascination d'une seule image"—that of the great white whale—Odysseus's ruse is to "paraître limiter son pouvoir, de rechercher froidement et avec calcul ce qu'il peut encore, face à l'autre puissance," the unsettling sound of the female voice unbound from body.[96] "Il sera tout," estimates Odysseus, "s'il maintient une limite et cet intervalle entre réel et imaginaire que précisément le Chant des Sirènes l'invite à parcourir."[97] Put another way, it is only on the condition of his survival—that is, his cunning capacity to vanquish the sirens, and in so doing, to silence them—that Odysseus can become Homer and his navigation can survive as narrative.[98]

Similarly, in *La Femme sans sépulture*, the author-narrator embarks on an epic quest to the site of her Algerian childhood, returning home like Homer's hero after a prolonged period of absence and worldly adventures. Lured ashore by the sirens of Cherchell, the author-narrator is painfully aware of the peril that awaits her. Like her clever Homeric counterpart, however, Djebar has an ace hidden up her sleeve. Yet in contrast to Odysseus,

[95] Caroline Sheaffer-Jones, "Figures of the Work: Blanchot and the Space of Literature," in *After Blanchot: Literature, Criticism, Philosophy*, ed. Leslie Hill, Brian Nelson, and Dimitris Vardoulakis (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 194; Del Lungo, "La Folie du commencement," 343.
[96] Amr Kamal, "Undoing Odysseus's Pact: Marginal Faces and Voices in the Narratives of Assia Djebar and Agnès Varda," *The Romantic Review* 106, no. 1–4 (2015): 51; O'Riley, "Postcolonial Haunting," 79; Blanchot, "Le Chant des sirènes," 16.
[97] Blanchot, "Le Chant des sirènes," 16.
[98] Consequently, for Blanchot, Odysseus's story, or Homer's *Odyssey*, stages the epic victory of the written word over the otherworldly voice of the sirens, who are "either seen or heard but never at the same time . . . turned into either a faceless voice or a mute figure, an alienated sound or a mute image"; Kamal, "Undoing Odysseus's Pact," 50.

who only survives to tell his own story by imposing silence on the sirens that would seduce him to his own death, the author-narrator's Homeric task in *La Femme sans sépulture* is to feign her *own* silence, to witness the sirens' song without flinching or intervening, and to empower the specters of the past to pass through her and speak with her tongue. Comparing herself to Odysseus, the author-narrator acknowledges that her ability to bear witness to the women of Cherchell comes at the cost of her own self-imposed silence. Put another way, her capacity to make present the absent past is paradoxically continent on her perpetual absence. She writes:

> Mon écriture, avec ces seuls mots de l'écoute, a glissé de mes doigts, différée, en retard, enchaînée si longtemps. Et je songe au héros grec qui voulait, malgré tout, écouter, lui et lui seul, trois musiciennes dressées, lui que, pour cela, on a attaché au mât du navire. Du navire qui s'éloigne.[99]

In this melancholic passage in the text's final pages, the author-narrator again evokes Homer's epic tale in order to articulate a mode of narrative witnessing that is bound up in a perpetual process of *différance*, that is, both difference and deferral. Like Odysseus, Djebar cannot both live the story that she seeks to tell and live to tell that same story; she can only fasten herself to the mast of her ship as it retreats from the shore and listen to the voices of the past as they fade into the distance.

A figure of female emancipation as well as the perils of historical writing, the image of the mosaic performs a perfect "mise en abyme" of the text's "approche documentaire." For the author-narrator, the meta-reflexivity of the story-within-a-story—or in this case,

[99] Blanchot, "Le Chant des Sirènes," 14; Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 242.

the image of a historical myth about storytelling within a story about myths, history, and storytelling—parallels (or rather, reflects) the mnemonic posture of the text. Djebar asks:

> Une histoire dans l'histoire, et ainsi de suite. . . . [n]'est-ce pas une stratégie inconsciente pour, au bout de la chaine, nous retrouver, nous qui écoutons, qui voyons précisément le fil de la narration se nouer, puis se dénouer, se tourner et se retourner... n'est-ce pas pour, à la fin, nous découvrir... libérées ? De quoi, sinon de l'ombre même du passé muet, immobile, une falaise au-dessus de notre tête... une façon de ruser avec cette mémoire."[100]

Similar to the text's "avertissement," this passage intentionally plays on the semantic ambiguity of the term "histoire"—signifying both "story" and "history" in French—to blur the distinction between fact and fiction. Figuring the past as a cliff, recalling the rocky shore that threatens to wreck Odysseus's ship, the author-narrator finally frees herself from the silent shadow of history by ceding control of her own narrative voice to the sirens of Cherchell. Situating herself amongst a community of witnessing women ("nous qui écoutons, qui voyons"), who listen, watch, and speak in turn, the author-narrator affirms her commitment to a collective, collaborative, and communal approach to the writing of history. Even as she patiently follows the thread ("le fil") of the past as it twists and turns, the author-narrator fails to find historical truth; rather, the "souci de fidelité historique" that she espouses in the text's "avertissement" reveals itself to be, in her own words, an elaborate Odyssean "ruse": a ruse against patriarchal reason, a ruse against the hegemonic forces of colonial history, and a ruse against the genre of historical writing itself, as fiction finally reveals itself as history's unassimilable remainder.

[100] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 142.

VI. Point d'envol

> Ils disent: mon 'cadavre'; l'indépendance venue, peut-être diront-ils, ma 'statue,' comme si on statufiait un corps de femme, n'importe lequel, comme si, simplement, pour le dresser dehors, contre un horizon plat, il ne fallait pas des siècles de silence bâillonné pour nous, les femmes!
>
> —Assia Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*[101]

In my analysis thus far, I have focused on several vocal tropes in *La Femme sans sépulture*: the postcolonial haunting of voices from the colonial past ("Une voix venue d'ailleurs"), Hania's mournful incorporation of her absent mother's memory ("Parole bouche fermée"), the collective introjection, or voicing, of Zoulikha's story by a community of women ("Cris des oiseaux, chants qui échappent"), and the captivating song of the sirens of Cherchell, which coaxes the author-narrator home to the site of her Algerian childhood ("Quand Ulysse devient Homère"). When all of the others have been accounted for, the voice of Zoulikha remains, despite the disappearance of her tortured body. Supplementing the oral testimony of the women who survived to tell her story, Zoulikha "speaks" from beyond the grave in four fictional soliloquies, spoken in the first person and addressed to her youngest daughter, Mina, "devenue femme entre-temps."[102]

While much remains to be written about Zoulikha's soliloquies, I want to conclude by briefly relating these rhetorical performances to the broader argument that I have advanced in this chapter. First, the spectral aesthetics of these scenes seem to summon once again the scintillating ("scintiller") yet absent image of Zoulikha as implied by Djebar's

[101] Ibid., 135, 227–28.
[102] Ibid., 223.

film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, referenced above. Similar to Djebar's cinematic "opus," these scenes vacillate between the aesthetics of revelation and concealment, evoking the crude exposure of a spectacle while still resisting an exploitative appropriation of the heroic woman who speaks in soliloquies from center stage. Her bare and beaten body exposed before a crowd of silent spectators, Zoulikha speaks from the illuminated center of a clearing in the forest where she was last seen alive. Boldly addressing her audience even as they watch her body slump and start to rot, our heroine recounts her own story of resistance and torture in terms evocative of an erotic spectacle of cruelty:

> Comme si me trainer et m'exposer ainsi aux chacals errants, et auparavant aux yeux effrayés des paysans immobiles dans un cercle voyeur et impuissant, comme si ironiser sur ce corps femelle abattu, un des genoux plié sur le côté si bien que le mouvement à demi ouvert de la jambe, du mollet ne pouvait qu'évoquer une posture indécente—cet écartèlement, ce tableau de peinture à vif caricature—. . . liait bizarrement bourreaux et hommes victimes ou même témoins.[103]

Uniting victim, perpetrator, and witness within what O'Riley has called the "aestheticized enclosure" of an impotent male gaze, the eroticized and soliloquized (re)enactment of Zoulikha's death emphasizes the "phallic erotics" of the anti-colonial conflict.[104] Contorted like a pornographic caricature into an ironically erotic position ("cet écartèlement, ce tableau de peinture à vif caricature"), the indecent exposure of Zoulikha's tortured corpse both stages and subverts the patriarchal compulsion to figure the female body as a pure embodiment of the postcolonial nation and the maternal essence of its mythic, pre-colonial

[103] Ibid.
[104] O'Riley, "Postcolonial Haunting," 76.

past.[105] Interpellating the silent, shameful onlookers who encircle the clearing where Zoulikha's body is laid bare, this erotic spectacle of cruelty serves first as a feminist critique of commemorative practices in postcolonial Algeria.

In each of her four soliloquies, Zoulikha actively resists the reductive, gendered stereotypes that have been foisted upon her by her male counterparts in the fight against French colonialism, rejecting any form of praise or commemoration that would reduce her contributions to the symbolic topography of the reproductive. Recalling her final days in the forest, for example, Zoulikha remarks with frustration that the young militants in her care "'[l]'appellent tous 'ma mère.'"[106] The uninvited appellation ages ("vieillir") her, Zoulikha finds, and weighs her down ("alourdir"), prefiguring the platitudinous hagiographies that she suspects will one day be written in honor of her anonymous service to the nation.[107] Indeed, Zoulikha reserves her strongest criticism for the young militant, barely older than a boy ("garçon"), whom she suspects of having surreptitiously burying her beaten body in the forest following her death. She states:

> L'hagiographe qu'ils me destineront un jour pourra chercher ce jeune homme, lui tresser, au nom de tous, lauriers de reconnaissance. . . . Car s'il y a bien un homme qui un jour me limita, qui m'étouffa, qui me trahit, certes malgré lui, ce fut plutôt ce garçon![108]

For Zoulikha, this otherwise innocent display of filial devotion feels like an affront or a betrayal, a final death blow to her memory. The female resistance fighter's stubborn

[105] Ibid., 77.
[106] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 230.
[107] Ibid., 231.
[108] Ibid.

resistance to interment suggests a second, anti-ideological critique of commemorative practice in postcolonial Algeria, where the monumental, mythic memory of the Algerian War has served to suppress the individual stories of its supporters and martyrs.[109] In addition to immobilizing her memory, the possessive act of burial serves furthermore to assimilate Zoulikha's singular story of torture and resistance into the official narrative of Algerian nationhood, reducing her subjectivity to the martyrdom of her flesh.[110]

By contrast, Zoulikha's four soliloquies are constitutively averse to the sepulchral act. Resisting the false sense of closure afforded by ritual forms of commemoration, these spectacular rhetorical performances seek instead to exhume the specters of the past in order that the "dead continue to *dé-ranger*," as Donadey has argued.[111] While the morbidity of mnemonic discourse in postcolonial Algeria has seemed to paralyze the living in the image of the nation's martyred dead, the spectral revivification of the past in *La Femme sans sépulture* serves to "unsettle the living so that history is never buried," but rather continues to disturb the present.[112] Rather than taking root as a statue ("ma 'statue,' comme si on statufiait un corps de femme") in silent memory of the past, the tortured body of the female resistance fighter seems suddenly to take flight as her martyred flesh is transmogrified into purse sound by the faceless cry of a female voice. Arising suddenly from a farm beyond the forest clearing:

> [l]a plainte scandée de l'inconnue ne semble pas . . . un chant des morts : légère, tressautant, presque aiguë parfois, de celles qui

[109] Kamal, "Undoing Odysseus's Pact," 66.
[110] Anne Donadey, "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*," *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 69.
[111] Donadey, "Introjection and Incorporation," 86.
[112] Ibid.

> annoncent la bienvenue. . . . Comme si l'inconnue qui ne sait plus si . . . elle doit me fêter ou me pleurer, cette chanteuse, en l'honneur de mon corps qui s'enveloppe de sa vibration à elle, en me langeant lentement, oh oui, cette anonyme, ma sœur, se décidait peut-être, par le jaillissement de sa voix si pure, à me remplacer dorénavant chez les vivants.[113]

Intervening in the last pages of Zoulikha's fourth and final soliloquy, this stranger's song joins the text's chorus of female voices to perform one final critique of commemorative practice in postcolonial Algeria. It is not in the shadows of the silent, obsidian crypt beneath the Maqam E'Chahid in central Algiers that Zoulikha wishes to be remembered, her memory subsumed into the stagnant myth of the Algerian Revolution; rather, it is here, suspended in flight above "la place du douar, la voix de l'inconnue chantant inlassablement," that the female resistance fighter envisions the future of the country for which she fought and died with her eyes wide open ("yeux ouverts").[114]

Shifting focus, without losing sight of Zoulikha and her story, I want to conclude this chapter by calling the reader's attention to the photograph that inspired the title of American author Don Delillo's 2007 novel, *Falling Man*. Taken by the photographer Richard Drew on the morning of September 11, 2001, the photograph shows a man clad business attire, suspended strangely in space and time as he speeds headfirst towards earth after leaping from a window in the burning north tower of the World Trade Center.[115] For those familiar with both works of art, Drew's iconic photograph resonates disturbingly with Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture*, which was completed by the author as she was residing

[113] Djebar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, 227.
[114] Ibid., 234.
[115] Richard Drew, *Falling Man*, 2001, accessed April 1, 2020, http://100photos.time.com/photos/richard-drew-falling-man.

in New York in September 2001. Citing the shock and trauma of the event as a catalyst for finally publishing an unfinished manuscript penned two decades prior, Djebar has "explicitly linked her reflection on disappearance and reapparition" as presented in *La Femme sans sépulture* "with the experiences of the victims of the attacks" and the families they left behind to mourn their sudden disappearance.[116] Although "the connection" between the Algerian War and the turn of the twenty-first century "is a complex one[,] and Djebar is hesitant in stressing too strong a resemblance between the two periods," as Hiddleston has appropriately cautioned, the lack of a proper burial site for so many of the victims of the attacks on the World Trade Center reinforces the resonance of Zoulikha's story in the present.[117] Yet could Djebar have anticipated that curse of France's *sale guerre*, or "dirty war"—that is, its secret torture chambers, its electrified wires, its buckets of frigid water, and all the tortured bodies that would disappear without a trace—would soon resurface in a desert land not so far from Algeria?

[116] Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*, 161.
[117] Ibid.

Chapter Three

The Remains of an Empire in Ruin: Remembering Torture and the Colonial State of Exception in Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* and Alexis Jennis's *L'Art français de la guerre*

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.
Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*[1]

I. From Algiers to Baghdad: A Transhistorical Perspective on Torture

In the aftermath of the 2004 torture scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, "it was the photographs that disturbed us," writes Ronald D. Crelinsten, a counterterrorism expert. He describes:

> pictures of smiling soldiers, men and women, with thumbs up signaling approval of the degradations imposed on the hooded men in their charge. 'They knew it was wrong,' said a member of the House Armed Services Committee, but the photos actually told us the opposite. . . . How can this be possible?[2]

What is disturbing about the Abu Ghraib photographs, what alarms and disarms us, is the banality of evil these images lay bare, the moral indifference of the soldiers smiling next to anonymous bodies, the naked and the drowned. Under what circumstances, the photographs seem to ask, do otherwise ordinary men and women become torturers, capable of acts of such unspeakable cruelty? Despite its almost universal condemnation in international law and overwhelming evidence against its efficacy as a counterterrorism

[1] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (London, Edward Moxon & Co, 1859), 19.
[2] Ronald D. Crelinsten, "How to Make a Torturer," in *The Phenomenon of Torture: Readings and Commentary*, ed. William F. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 210.

tactic, how is it possible for torture "to be practiced systematically and routinely, to be taken for granted and even to be celebrated," not least by the forty-fifth president of the United States?[3] Absent legal and utilitarian justification, what cognitive, discursive, and ideological constructs warrant the use of torture?

Recent scholarship has often sought to understand the violence of torture by focusing on what it accomplishes, adopting approaches that can be characterized as either functionalist or instrumentalist. Functionalist approaches, often sociological in their methods and analysis, seek structural explanations for violence, explaining torture through an account of the social function served by its practice. However, in the effort to explain torture by nature of its necessary function within a cohesive social system, functionalist accounts tend to take existing social structures for granted, foregoing analysis of how these structures are constituted, normalized, and perpetuated over time.[4] Similar to functionalist accounts, instrumentalist approaches situate torture within a means-ends framework, in which the violence of torture is conceived as an instrument to achieve certain identifiable objectives. Instrumentalist approaches, typically political rather than social in their focus, "[seek] to explain violent acts in terms of the intentions, ideologies, and will of the perpetrators," as well as the "institutions, procedures, capacities, or technologies that allow them to achieve their ends."[5] However, by focusing on the intended objectives of torture,

[3] Crelinsten, "How to Make a Torturer," 210; Vanessa Schipani, "Trump on Torture," Annenberg Public Policy Center, last modified July 28, 2016, accessed August 20, 2018, https://www.factcheck.org/2016/07/trump-torture/.
[4] Joshua Cole, "Intimate Acts and Unspeakable Relations: Remembering Torture and the War for Algerian Independence," in *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism*, ed. Alec G. Hargreaves (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 129–30.
[5] Ibid., 129.

instrumentalist approaches eschew analysis of the social and political relationships that condition, inform, and emerge from the practice of torture, beyond its immediate material goals.

Moving beyond the means-end framework that characterizes both functionalist and instrumentalist accounts of torture, this chapter considers the cognitive, discursive, and ideological conditions under which torture is perceived as permissible over time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements. These conditions of possibility are not limited to the social function or political objectives of torture in a particular sociopolitical context. To the contrary, I contend that the practice of torture—wherever and whenever it occurs—is contingent on the construction of a perceptual *state of exception* in which the normative dictates of law and morality are *perceived* to have been suspended or have simply ceased to apply. Building on the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, this chapter seeks to understand the relation between the state of exception as a sociopolitical condition of possibility for the practice of torture and the state of exception as a conceptual paradigm, focusing in particular on the modes of perception and memory that tend to arise from the indefinite suspension of the rule of law. While existing scholarship has amply documented the extralegal codification of torture in the context of law, this chapter adopts an alternative approach, examining how the state of exception constitutes, normalizes, and perpetuates a *perceptual reality* that is characterized by the suspension of normative frames of reference.[6]

[6] Ronald D. Crelinsten, "The World of Torture: A Constructed Reality," *Theoretical Criminology* 7, no. 3 (2003): 295.

To begin, I turn first to a perhaps unlikely place in recent history: an informal film screening held at the Pentagon in August 2003 of the Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *La Bataille d'Alger*, which depicts in vivid detail the events of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), including graphic scenes of torture. According to reporting in the *Washington Post* and elsewhere, the idea for the screening came from the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, a conservative civilian advisory board charged with the "responsibility for thinking aggressively and creatively" on issues related to guerrilla warfare.[7] Frustrated by the guerilla tactics of the emergent Iraqi insurgency, the Pentagon turned to French operations in Algeria for historical insight, presenting Pontecorvo's revolutionary film as a primer on counterterrorism strategy. Recasting the Algerian combatants as unlawful actors in an internal conflict that the French had refused until 1999 to recognize as an outright war, the Pentagon's revisionist reframing of *La Bataille d'Alger* depoliticized and delegitimized the struggle for decolonization. Thus portrayed as petty criminals and terrorists, the Algerian combatants were shown to be exempt from the equal rights and protections of the law and yet simultaneously made "subject to the full force of the 'law' and all manner of 'extralegal' force," including torture.[8] It is of course impossible, if not irresponsible, to establish a direct causal link between the Pentagon screening and the human rights violations that occurred at Abu Ghraib. Yet the

[7] Michael T. Kaufman, "What Does the Pentagon See in *Battle of Algiers*?" *The New York Times* (New York), September 7, 2003, Accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/weekinreview/the-world-film-studies-what-does-the-pentagon-see-in-battle-of-algiers.html; Stephen Hunter, "The Pentagon's Lessons from Reel Life: *Battle of Algiers* Resonates in Baghdad," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), September 4, 2003.

[8] Sohail Daulatzai, *Fifty Years of* The Battle of Algiers*: The Past as Prologue* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 67.

impact of the Algerian conflict on American operations in Iraq may be evidenced by the use of certain methods of torture that were developed and deployed systematically by the French in Algeria, including electroshock, suspension, and waterboarding.[9]

The American torture scandal at Abu Ghraib is thrown into stark relief by its close historical coincidence with a similar controversy in France.[10] In June 2000, a former Algerian combatant, Louisette Ighilahriz, published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* an incendiary account of the rape and torture that she suffered at the hands of French paratroopers under the direction of Colonel Marcel Bigeard and General Jacques Massu during the Battle of Algiers in 1957.[11] While Bigeard denied the allegations, Massu later acknowledged the likelihood of Ighilahriz's account, although he was unable to recall the specifics of her case.[12] Ighilahriz's testimony, bolstered by Massu's begrudging admission, ignited a blaze of media coverage on the violent counterterrorism tactics employed by the French during the Algerian War, bringing the traumatic memory of torture to the forefront

[9] Neil MacMaster, "Torture: From Algiers to Abu Ghraib," *Race & Class* 46, no. 2 (2004): 8.
[10] While the recent torture controversy has reinvigorated discussion about the unresolved legacy of French colonialism in Algeria, the damning disclosures that prompted the debate were not in fact particularly revelatory. As Neil MacMaster has recalled in his account of the controversy, "throughout the course of the Algerian War . . . torture represented the central mobilizing issue for those who opposed the conflict and, in spite of censorship, a considerable literature exposed the practice and the complicity of the French state"; MacMaster, "The Torture Controversy (1998–2002): Towards a 'New History' of the Algerian War?" *Modern & Contemporary France* 10, no. 4 (2002): 450; William B. Cohen, "The Algerian War, the French State, and Official Memory," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 219–239.
[11] Florence Beaugé, "Torturée par l'armée française en Algérie, 'Lila' recherche l'homme qui l'a sauvée." Le Monde (Paris), June 20, 2000, accessed May 12, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/06/20/torturee-par-l-armee-francaise-en-algerie-lila-recherche-l-homme-qui-l-a-sauvee_3612185_1819218.html; Louisette Ighilahriz with Ann Nivat, *Algérienne* (Paris: Fayard/Calmann-Lévy, 2001).
[12] Florence Beaugé, "Le Général Massu exprime ses regrets pour la torture en Algérie," *Le Monde* (Paris), June 22, 2000, accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/06/22/le-general-massu-exprime-ses-regrets-pour-la-torture-en-algerie_3709222_1819218.html.

of national consciousness in France nearly four decades after Algerian Independence.[13] Further inflaming public debate, a former French intelligence officer named Paul Aussaresses published an unapologetic memoir a year later, challenging Ighilahriz not by denying her allegations, but rather by explicitly refusing to express regret for his participation in torture and rigorously defending its practice in Algeria.[14]

In the midst of the media maelstrom that followed, the French historian Raphaëlle Branche published her masterfully researched *La Torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie (1954–1962)*, the first academic study of its kind and caliber to draw source material from the military records of the Algerian War, which had been incrementally declassified in the mid-1990s after the legally stipulated thirty-year delay.[15] Departing from popular culture and media portrayals of torture as a meaningless aberration, an irrational excess, or a deviation from the norm, Branche demonstrated with meticulous detail how the French army, in collaboration with the colonial government and with support from mainland France, systematically eroded the rule of law to establish an extralegal torture regime in Algeria. Beyond its official justification as an instrument to

[13] Henri Alleg, et. al., "L'appel des douze à la condamnation de la torture durant la guerre d'Algérie," *L'humanité* (Paris), October 31, 2000, accessed May 12, 2020, https://www.humanite.fr/node/262099; Florence Beaugé, "Comment *Le Monde* a relancé le débat sur la torture en Algérie," *Le Monde* (Paris), March 17, 2012, Accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2012/03/17/le-monde-relance-le-debat-sur-la-torture-en-algerie_1669340_3212.html; Florence Beaugé, "20 juin 2000: Louisette Ighilahriz raconte comment elle a été sauvée de la torture par un inconnu pendant la guerre d'Algérie," *Le Monde* (Paris), July 28, 2014, accessed May 12, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/festival/article/2014/07/28/20-juin-2000-louisette-ighilahriz-retrouve-la-trace-de-son-sauveur_4463627_4415198.html; Sophie Bouniot, "Mohamed Garne, né d'un viol collectif dans un camp, demande réparation à l'Etat français," *L'Humanité* (Paris), November 9, 2001, accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.humanite.fr/node/255156; Robert Solé, "La mémoire torturée," *Le Monde* (Paris), December 2, 2000, accessed May 12, 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/12/02/la-memoire-torturee_124464_1819218.html.

[14] Paul Aussaresses, *Services spéciaux, Algérie 1955–1957: Mon témoignage sur la torture* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2001).

[15] Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l'armée pendant la Guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

combat terrorism, intended to extract essential information from enemy combatants through what the Americans have codified euphemistically as "enhanced interrogation" tactics, Branche advanced and substantiated the argument that torture amounted to an institutionalized form of terror that had been systematically implemented and explicitly sanctioned by the French security apparatus in colonial Algeria.

A quick review of some of emergency legislation enacted in the years leading up to the Battle of Algiers corroborates Branche's central thesis. On November 7, 1954, one week after coordinated attacks carried out by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) marked the beginning of what would become Algeria's eight-year war for Independence, François Mitterrand, then Minister of the Interior, defended French sovereignty in Algeria as indivisible and absolute. After over a century of French colonial rule in Algeria, Mitterrand could unequivocally assert that: "L'Algérie, c'est la France, et la France ne reconnaîtra pas chez elle d'autre autorité que la sienne."[16] Citing the inadequacy of existing legal provisions to suppress the smoldering rebellion, the Council of the Fourth Republic declared a state of emergency in Algeria soon thereafter, on April 3, 1955, granting the Governor General extralegal jurisdiction over "toute personne . . . [qui] constitue une menace pour la sécurité et l'ordre publics."[17] By March 16, 1956, the colonial government in Algeria had been endowed with "des pouvoirs les plus étendus pour prendre toute mesure exceptionnelle commandée par les circonstances en vue du rétablissement de l'ordre, de la protection des

[16] *L'Écho d'Alger* (Algiers), November 7, 1954, 1.
[17] Qtd. in Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 36.

personnes et des biens et de la sauvegarde du territoire."[18] A decree issued the following day finalized the transfer of judicial power from civilian to military courts, effectively authorizing the warrantless arrest, indefinite detention, enhanced interrogation, and summary execution of individuals suspected of engaging in terrorist activities. By the time the Battle of Algiers erupted in January 1957, the sovereign power that Mitterrand had so vehemently defended consisted essentially in the exercise of a power beyond the pale of law.

Practiced deliberately and systematically, "[la torture] n'est donc pas un débordement, une excroissance monstrueuse de la guerre d'Algérie[;] elle en est l'une des manifestations naturelles, indissociable et complémentaire du quadrillage militaire, des regroupements de populations, des dispositifs de développement économique et social du pays," as one reviewer of Branche's monograph has rightly observed.[19] Put another way, while the outbreak of the Battle of Algiers may have signaled the indefinite suspension of the rule of law in the Algerian capital, the atrocities committed over the course of the anti-colonial conflict derived from a politics of exception that had characterized French colonial policy in Algeria since its violent conquest in 1830.[20] As the historian Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison has argued, it was the exceptional status of Algeria—at once an integral part of France and yet excluded from the normal rule of law—that made it possible for the French government to codify the "événements" in Algeria as an internal pacification

[18] Qtd. in Ibid., 37.
[19] Daniel Lefeuvre, review of *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962*, by Raphaëlle Branche, *Outre-mers* 89, no. 334–35 (2002): 678.
[20] Stephen Morton, "Narratives of Torture and Trauma in Algeria's Colonial State of Exception," in *States of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature and Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 149.

mission rather than an outright war between states with equal claims to political and territorial sovereignty.[21] Excluded from the legal norms of French constitutional law by nature of its very inclusion, through conquest and annexation, as a colony of France, Algeria was constituted from the outset as a permanent state of exception.

II. The State of Exception

A 'Real Particular Case'

The first argument that I have advanced in this chapter is that the systematic use of torture during the Algerian War was consistent with the constitution of the colony as a permanent state of exception. Yet beyond the legal codification of torture in the colony, what are the cognitive, discursive, and ideological contours of the state of exception, and how are these exceptional, perceptual conditions transmitted, reproduced, and remembered over time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements? To answer these questions, let us first consider the case advanced by Agamben.

In *State of Exception*, the second volume of his ongoing *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben traces the genealogy of the state of exception in French constitutional law to the decree of October 20–21, 1789, which provided for the provisional suspension of civil liberties in the event of an imminent threat to public safety.[22] Originally envisioned as a temporary

[21] Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, exterminer: Sur la guerre et l'État colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).
[22] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5. The sequence of Agamben's ongoing *Homo Sacer* series has been a continual source of confusion, partly because the volumes have been published out of order, but also because Agamben himself has repeatedly revised the order of the series. Adam Kotsko, a prominent scholar and translator of Agamben's work, considers *State of Exception* to be volume 2.1 of the series, which comprises nine volumes to date; Adam Kotsko, "The Order of

measure to maintain law and order in times of crisis, the decree also provided for the extension of the military's wartime powers into the civil sphere even in the absence of an official declaration of war. A decade later, after nearly ten years of revolutionary terror, Article 92 of the Napoleonic constitution of 1799 established additional provisions for the indefinite suspension of the rule of law, constituting the legal precedent for what Agamben has characterized as an era of legal and political exception in modern Europe.[23]

From these observations concerning the history of French constitutional law, Agamben advances the argument that the state of exception has come to constitute the condition of possibility of modern sovereign power. Drawing on the German political theorist Carl Schmitt's formulation of sovereign power as the capacity to decide on the normative conditions under which the law can be applied—or in the absence of such conditions, suspended—Agamben argues that sovereign power always already exists in a relation of exception to the law.[24] For Agamben, the structure of exception identifies an extralegal condition of inclusive exclusion, or what Jean-Luc Nancy has called "abandonment," in which the law applies only to the extent that it no longer applies.[25] To illustrate the condition of abandonment in which sovereign power is made manifest, Agamben introduces the term "bare life." Following the Aristotelian distinction between the natural life (*zoe*) of the merely biological and the politically qualified life (*bios*) of the

the *Homo Sacer* Series," *An Und Für Sich*, last modified August 26, 2015, accessed May 16, 2018, https://itself.blog/2015/08/26/the-order-of-the-homo-sacer-series/.
[23] Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 164–5.
[24] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13.
[25] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 29.

citizen-subject, Agamben argues that Western political society is founded on the inclusive exclusion of natural life from politics. For Agamben, the notion of bare life reemerges in the modern era when natural life becomes politicized through an exposure to political violence and the sovereign power of death.

At the threshold of political subjectivity and visibility, the bodies that haunt the barren landscape of the Nazi concentration camp represent for Agamben the paradigmatic embodiment of bare life, both exposing and exemplifying the internal logic of the sovereign exception. As Agamben writes:

> *The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order.[26]

Assigned a "permanent spatial arrangement" in the concentration camp, the state of exception "inaugurates a new political paradigm in which the norm has become indistinguishable from the exception. The camp is thus the structure in which the exception—the possibility of deciding on which founds sovereign power—is realized *normally.*"[27] In this passage, Agamben argues that the concentration camp has come to represent the *nomos*, or paradigm, of modern sovereign power, designating a state of exception-as-rule where the exercise of law has merged to a point of indistinction with its indefinite suspension.

[26] Ibid., 168–9; emphasis in original.
[27] Ibid., 96–7; emphasis in original.

Agamben's paradigmatic conception of the state of exception has proven controversial on a number of accounts, particularly among scholars of colonialism, slavery, and critical race theory. Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall, the editors of a collected volume on the subject of Agamben and colonialism, have argued that despite his preoccupation with "the origins and development of Western political and legal thought and the ways in which it supports exclusionary structures of sovereign power," Agamben consistently fails to account for "the ways in which the geopolitical entity of 'the West' emerged as such through its imperial domination of others," namely, the colonized subjects of European imperial empires.[28] Accordingly, "although he is often concerned with the status of Europe's oppressed others and the legal anomalies and forms of state-sanctioned violence that make such oppression possible," Agamben's focus on the totalitarian states of twentieth-century Europe occludes productive analysis of the actualization and normalization of the state of exception in European colonies and other extra-Occidental contexts.[29]

Joseph Pugliese advances a similar argument, asserting that "the danger of fetishizing the concept of exceptionalism" in the context of European law "is that it functions to erase the serial practices of violence actually constitutive of the internal operations of the state and their very normalization precisely through law."[30] Nasser Hussain and Stephen Morton have echoed this sentiment, demonstrating in their respective

[28] Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall, eds., *Agamben and Colonialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1.
[29] Ibid., 2.
[30] Joseph Pugliese, *State Violence and the Execution of Law: Biopolitical Caesurae of Torture, Black Sites, Drones* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 18.

work how extreme forms of colonial violence, including torture, represent the continuation of a legal order premised on exclusion rather than an exceptional rupture in the rule of law.[31] Constituted as and maintained through a permanent state of exception, the colony normalizes a set of sociopolitical relations in which indigenous or otherwise racialized populations are at once disenfranchised of legal protections yet made subject to the full force of the law.

Alexander Weheliye similarly criticizes Agamben's failure to account for the conceptual category of race, suggesting that Agamben's paradigmatic conception of the state of exception can only function by rendering invisible the specific modes of (de)subjectification and sociopolitical death at work in the colony. For Weheliye, Agamben's conception of bare life "accomplishes a conceptual feat that race as an analytical category cannot: it founds a biological sphere above and beyond reach of racial hierarchies."[32] In other words, in his characterization of the *homo sacer*—that is, the life that can be killed without impunity but not sacrificed—as a form of life emptied of all agency and subjectivity, or a universal category of the less-than-human, Agamben applies the humanist category of "man" in a space categorically emptied of all racial and sociopolitical signifiers.[33]

By questioning the constitutive relation between the colony, its subjects, and the dominant paradigm of sovereign power in the West, each of the scholars cited above

[31] Nasser Hussain, *Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Morton, "Narratives of Torture and Trauma."
[32] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 53.
[33] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 47.

addresses a common theoretical concern with Agamben's paradigmatic methodology, which can be paraphrased as follows: what is the relation between the state of exception as a "real particular case," or singularity, and the set of historical phenomena that it exemplifies?[34] While each of the aforementioned scholars is absolutely right to call attention to the relative absence of the colony and the sociopolitical signifiers of race, gender, and class in Agamben's analysis, the methodological tension that they have each identified—"between respect for the uniqueness of the historical phenomena and the use to be made of those phenomena for understanding other situations"—is in fact inherent to Agamben's broader theoretical project. As Leland de la Durantaye has observed, Agamben's concern with the structure of the exception in fact arises from and can be linked to his early and sustained engagement with structural linguistics and set theory, discussed below.[35]

A 'Set of Historical Phenomena'

Throughout his diverse and prolific oeuvre, Agamben has consistently sought to develop a conception of community, or being together, that does not presuppose an affirmation of collective identity as a condition of belonging. To envision such a collectivity, Agamben turns to structural linguistics and set theory to analyze the ambiguous structure of the example, or *para-deigma*: "that which is shown alongside."[36] For Agamben, the example neither illustrates nor presupposes its belonging in a previously constituted set or

[34] Giorgia Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Mineapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 19–20.
[35] Leland de la Durantaye, "The Paradigm of Colonialism," in *Agamben and Colonialism*, ed. Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 235.
[36] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 10.

category of knowledge; rather, the example is "one singularity among others . . . which stands for each of them and serves for all." Positioned next to or "shown alongside" a set of singularities, the example produces a "virtual" relation "between a singularity (which thus becomes a paradigm) and its exposition (its intelligibility)."[37]

At once inclusive of and excluded from the category that it uniquely constitutes, the example corresponds symmetrically to the exclusionary structure of the exception:

> In being part of a class, 'a normal case,' the example is *included*. In its serving as exemplary, however, it is also in some sense *excluded* from that same class, for it stands outside it. To be an example, to constitute the very class to which it belongs, it must also be excluded: it must be placed 'next to' ('para') but outside that class. In the case of the exception, the converse relation obtains. The exception is *excluded* from a class, but . . . it is defined as an exception because of the class. *Were there no class, there would be no exception*.[38]

"Neither clearly inside nor clearly outside the group or set it exemplifies," the example comes to resemble the power of the sovereign: "it is in a state of exception, both within and lying beyond the set of phenomena it represents."[39] Put another way, both the example and the exception designate aporetic relations of inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, belonging and abandonment. From this perspective, it should come as no surprise that Agamben would later choose to adopt a paradigmatic method to expose and exemplify the logic of the sovereign exception.

[37] Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D'Isanto with Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 23.
[38] Jacob Meskin and Harvey Shapiro, "'To Give an Example is a Complex Act': Agamben's Pedagogy of the Paradigm," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2014): 426.
[39] Leland de la Durantaye, "The Potential of Paradigms," 218.

In his early writings on structural linguistics and set theory, Agamben looked to the example, or paradigm, to envision a community based on the free association and interplay of singularities rather than the affirmation of any condition of belonging or commonality. Yet it is only in his subsequent work on sovereign power and the state of exception that the ethical and epistemological implications of such a paradigmatic method become clear. For Agamben, singularity "such as it is" poses a threat to sovereign power, because "what the State cannot tolerate in any way" is that such singularities should "form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging."[40] In other words, the paradigm is intended to posit a radical rejoinder to the exclusionary logic of the state of exception, in which the exercise of sovereign power depends on a strict delineation between inside and outside, "us" and "them."[41]

Through its "suspension of reference and normal rule," the paradigm produces a new form of "intelligibility," one that gives rise to dynamic analogies rather than reified or exclusionary categories.[42] As Samuel Weber has observed, the suffix "-ability" connotes possibility or potentiality, designating a relation that "can never hope to be fully instantiated or exhausted in any one realization."[43] Consequently, to think paradigmatically about the past not only to reveals the "concealed political coordinates" and deep historical structures" underlying a specific historical experience, such as the concentration camp or the colony, to give two concrete examples, but also "constitute[s] and make[s] intelligible a

[40] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 86; Jenny Edkins, "Whatever Politics," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 74.
[41] Meskin and Shapiro, "Agamben's Pedagogy of the Paradigm," 426–7.
[42] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 24.
[43] Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's Abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 14.

broader historical-problematic context," such as the global emergence and deployment of the state of exception as the condition of possibility of modern sovereign power.[44] To write and remember history through paradigmatic figures is therefore "to engage in [an] unyielding, radical critique of the present in relation to the past," as Dominick LaCapra has argued.[45] From this perspective, the paradigm performs what Richard Terdiman has defined as the principle work of memory: that is, making the past present.[46]

Underpinning Agamben's use of historical paradigms is therefore a central ethical and epistemological claim that is closely related to the theoretical concerns of collective memory. By revealing analogical relations between singular historical experiences, the paradigm has the potential to produce innovative, ethical forms of transcultural, transnational, and transhistorical solidarity that are irreducible to the affirmation of a collective identity. Through the suspension of the conceptual categories that conventionally inform historical inquiry and mnemonic discourse—the nation-state, for example, or East and West, ancient and modern—the paradigm exposes points of contact between discrete histories and historical experiences. Understood as a perceptual condition for the intelligibility and visibility of history, the paradigm presents the past, present, and future as a metonymic chain of potential connections across space and time, between self and other, and beyond the boundaries of territorial or temporal categories.[47]

[44] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 9; Leland de la Durantaye, "The Potential of Paradigms," 216.
[45] Dominick LaCapra, "Resisting Apocalypse and Rethinking History," in *Manifestos for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (London: Routledge, 2007), 161.
[46] Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[47] Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 3.

III. Torture and the Colonial State of Exception in Contemporary French Literature

In my analysis thus far, I have identified some of the methodological limitations of functionalist and instrumentalist accounts of torture by calling attention to certain *perceptual* conditions of possibility for the practice of torture that exceed, evade, or sometimes even undermine the means-end analytical framework of these approaches. In support of this argument, I have subsequently shown how the state of exception—as defined and analyzed in depth by Agamben—not only prepares the terrain for the practice of torture through the suspension of the normal rule of law, but also produces a kind of *perceptual reality* (as Crelinsten calls it) in which the torture comes to be perceived as permissible. Connecting Agamben's theory of the case to his sustained engagement with structural linguistics and set theory, I then consider the implications of such a paradigmatic methodology for the study of collective memory and the literary representation of colonial violence.

In what follows, I apply these insights to a close reading of two recent French novels prominently featuring scenes of torture: Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laisse mon âme* and Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre*, both set, at least in part, during the Algerian War.[48] Published in 2010 and 2011, respectively, both novels situate the collective memory of the anti-colonial conflict within a transhistorical geography of exception, ranging from the torture chambers of Algiers to the tropical tangles of the jungle of Tonkin and the

[48] Jérôme Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* (Paris: Babel, 2010); Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

impoverished outskirts of Lyon. Adopting what I characterize in this chapter as a "paradigmatic" approach to the literary representation of history, both novels present the Algerian War as a paradigm, or example, that serves to explore the juxtaposition, superimposition, and interaction between a set of discrete historical experiences. Set at the height of the Battle of Algiers, Ferrari's novel explores the complex connections that link the French counterinsurgency in Algeria to the totalitarian violence of the Second World War, the collapse of French colonialism on two continents, and finally, the advent of Islamic extremism and the Algerian Civil War. Similarly, Jenni's novel traces the history of the "twenty-year war" that afflicted France in the mid-twentieth century, beginning with the Nazi invasion in 1940 and ending with Algerian Independence in 1962. Set in suburban Lyon in the early 1990s, Jenni's novel explores the legacy of France's colonial past in a city plagued by racial tension and a resurgence of fascism in the postcolonial present. Through the narrative juxtaposition and superimposition of discrete histories of violence over the course of the twentieth century, both novels situate the practice of torture within a transhistorical paradigm of exception. Drawing together a set of seemingly disparate histories, these literary works present the violence of decolonization not as a horrific exception to the modern civilized norm, but as exemplary of the state of exception-as-rule.

Jériome Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*

> C'était la fin du monde, mon capitaine, nous n'étions plus que les vestiges pitoyables d'un empire en ruine.
> —Jérôme Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*[49]

Centered on three pivotal days during the Battle of Algiers, Ferrari's novel presents the Algerian War as a point of convergence between past, present, and future histories of violence. The novel relates the intimately entangled stories of two high-ranking officers in the French army, Horace Andreani and André Degorce. Bound by their common experiences of armed combat and captivity during the French Resistance (1940–1944) and the First Indochina War (1946–1954), Andreani and Degorce have grown distant due to their divergent positions on the practice of torture in Algeria. While Andreani enthusiastically espouses his role as a torturer in service of the French empire, Degorce begrudgingly justifies his actions through an increasingly dispassionate appeal to the logic of French sovereignty in colonial Algeria. After the war, a growing antagonism between the two men on the subject of torture compels Degorce to denounce Andreani for his comrade's involvement in acts of terror carried out by the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS), a far-right paramilitary group, on the eve of Algerian Independence. Pardoned in accordance with the French amnesty legislation of 1968, Andreani returns to Algeria three decades later to find the newly independent nation embroiled in a bloody civil conflict that has exposed the fratricidal fractures of the national liberation movement. The practice of torture runs as a refrain through each of these spatiotemporal folds, revealing complex

[49] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, 51.

relations of complicity between the perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of violence.

Recounted from alternating narrative perspectives, the novel's dual narrative structure raises concomitant questions about the agency, responsibility, and subjectivity of its principal actors. Degorce is depicted from a third-person narrative perspective that is occasionally interrupted by his own thoughts and reflections, which are typographically identified by italics and set apart in parentheses. Proceeding chronologically, the captain's narrative opens with the image of an immense *organigramme*, or organization chart, where the messianic mug shot of an FLN commander named Tarik Hadj Nacer, known as Tahar, has reigned supreme "comme le souverain d'un royaume invisible" since Degorce moved into his office in the Bologhine prison in Algiers in early 1957.[50] For Degorce, who experienced torture while detained as a political prisoner at Buchenwald during the Second World War, the organization chart represents the redeeming possibility of a rule-based and convention-bound combat in Algeria, a comforting if illusionary contrast to the apparent chaos of French operations on the ground.[51] A mathematician by training, Degorce believes, naively, that once the French authorities have fully deciphered the cryptic organizational structure of the Algerian insurgency, the dirty work of torture will have been justified by its accomplished ends. The sterile image of the organization chart evacuates the practice of torture of its painful content, the mess of flesh and blood, and with the elegance of a mathematical equation, torture suggests itself to Degorce as the only

[50] Ibid., 29.

[51] The torture and disappearance of Degorce's mathematics instructor, Charles Lézieux, a communist and political dissident, evokes the famous case of Maurice Audin. In June 1957, Maurice Audin, a communist mathematician active in the Algerian anticolonial cause, was tortured and "disappeared" by French paratroopers.

logical solution to a problem whose operative elements are numbers, not bodies:

> Il a été entraîné dans le déploiement d'une logique souveraine, mathématique. Une fois les données du problème clairement établis, chaque inférence a été rigoureusement tirée de l'inférence précédente et le capitaine Degorce est contraint d'admettre que leur splendide enchaînement s'impose avec l'autorité d'une absolue nécessité devant laquelle la raison humaine ne peut que s'incliner.[52]

Confronted with a conclusion that he can "ni rejeter, ni assumer," Degorce is depicted both here and elsewhere in the novel as a deferential servant to a sovereign logic that surpasses both his conscious control and his capacity for personal intervention. Depicted in the third person and deprived of narrative agency, "[il] n'y peut rien."[53]

In the passage cited above, the perception of an imminent threat, implied by the remaining gaps in the organization chart, articulates an implicit authorization for the use of torture, even in the absence of explicit orders. The image of the organization chart operates on the order of what Roland Barthes, writing about the semantic mythologies that shape our perception of reality, has defined as a second-order semiotic system; that is, the signifying set of signifier (empty squares on an organization chart) and signified (unidentified FLN combatants) is received as a preconceived sign (an emblem of the French counterinsurgency strategy in Algeria) to which a second level of conceptual signification is then added (an implicit authorization for the routine practice of torture against those members of society perceived as less than human).[54] From this perspective, insofar as torture, through the extraction of information, is perceived to help avert an imminent

[52] Ibid., 35.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1957).

threat to the security of a population presumed innocent, one might argue, as the American torture apologist Michael Levin has, that "there are situations in which torture is not merely permissible but morally mandatory."[55]

In common parlance, the situation to which Levin refers is called a "ticking bomb," designating a scenario in which torture is seen as necessary in order to stop an imminent threat. The classic example of such a scenario is a concealed explosive set to detonate in a crowded public place, whose location is known only by a captured terrorist, who must be coerced into cooperation through enhanced interrogation techniques.[56] For John Kleinig, who has written extensively on the ethics of criminal justice, what gives the ticking bomb argument its persuasive force is that constitutes retroactively a perceptual reality in which torture is perceived as permissible:

> First, it posits a *known*—and not merely a possible or even probable—threat. Second, there is a *pressing* need for action. Third, the threatened evil is of *enormous magnitude*. Fourth, *only* torture is likely to succeed in getting the information needed to avert the evil. Fifth, the person to be tortured is *the perpetrator* of the threat. And finally, as a result of the torture, the evil is *very likely* to be averted.[57]

David Luban, a legal scholar, has similarly argued that the ticking bomb argument is what has allowed liberal societies to accept and authorize torture while simultaneously denouncing its immorality or irresponsibility when practiced elsewhere, in countries

[55] Michael Levin, qtd. in Justin Clemens, "Oath, Torture, Testimony: Language, Law, and Life in the Work of Giorgio Agamben," *Res Publica* 28 (2012): 81.
[56] Christopher Kutz, "Torture, Necessity, and Existential Politics," *California Law Review* 95, no. 1 (2007): 235–76.
[57] John Kleinig, "Ticking Bombs and Torture Warrants," *Deakin Law Review* 10, no. 2 (2005): 616. Emphasis in original.

perceived as "uncivilized" or otherwise underdeveloped.[58] Similarly, for Mattias Gardell, who has studied the political ideology of torture, what is compelling about the ticking bomb argument is that it presents a utilitarian, anti-ideological premise for torture. "Here," he writes, "the reason for torture is not inhumanity, pleasure, or revenge. . . . The purpose of torture is not to inflict pain. Rather, pain is the byproduct of a method used for obtaining information."[59]

In their respective analyses, the scholars cited above have each argued that the perception of an imminent threat retroactively posits a *perceptual reality* in which the normative dictates of law and morality no longer apply. This observation is consistent with Degorce's ethically questionable actions throughout *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, as the captain consistently situates the use of "enhanced interrogation tactics" within the utilitarian framework of information gathering. What these scholars do not explicitly say, however, is that is that the ticking bomb argument rests essentially on the presumption of a corollary relation between severe physical and psychological pain and the production of something that is perceived or functions as fact. Similarly, throughout Ferrari's novel, Degorce repeatedly appeals to the capacity of torture to produce actionable truths in the service of French counterterrorism objectives:

> Il faut que les prisonniers parlent. Il faut que tout le monde parle. Et il est rigoureusement impossible de distinguer *a priori* ceux qui se taisent pour dissimuler des renseignements de ceux qui n'ont rien à dire. Seule l'épreuve de la souffrance les

[58] David Luban, "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Tomb," *Virginia Law Review* 91, no. 6 (2005): 1427.
[59] Mattias Gardell, "Torture, Terror, and Truth: On the Meaning of Guantánamo and the Future of the Global Order," *Temenos* 44, no. 1 (2008): 145.

distingue. Si c'était faisable, il faudrait interroger toute la ville.[60]

In this passage, Degorce's appeal to the productive capacity of the tortured confession exposes what I call the perlocutionary tyranny of torture. As the cultural anthropologist Nancuñán Sáez has argued, the linguistic content of the tortured confession—the name named, the place designated, the crime confessed—is largely irrelevant when placed in the perceptual reality of a torture regime; to the contrary, the confession serves only to drive the infernal machine of torture, producing future subjects of the same absurd violence.[61] And as the subjects of torture proliferate, Sáez continues, so too does the need to interrogate. Under torture, language regresses to a point where its mere conformity to syntax, the empty artificiality of its intelligibility, allows it to perpetuate itself as a pure potentiality, regardless of its reference to an objective or empirically verifiable reality. The rhetorical anomaly of the tortured confession is that it produces truth as an empty sign, whose signifying potential is at once arbitrary and absolute.

Independent of its function or instrumental objectives in a particular sociopolitical context, the invariable ambition of torture, as Michel de Certeau has described it, is therefore "to produce acceptance of a State discourse, through the confession of putrescence. What the torturer in the end wants to extort from the victim he tortures is to reduce him to being no more than that [*ça*], rottenness."[62] Torture, in other words, enacts a

[60] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, 35. As Jean-Paul Sartre writes in the preface to Henri Alleg's 1958 torture memoir, *La Question*: "Everybody, everywhere, is hiding something. They must be *made to talk*"; Jean-Paul Sartre, "Une Victoire," preface to Henri Alleg, *La Question* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958), xxxix.
[61] Nancuñán Sáez, "Torture: A Discourse on Practice," in *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment: The Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text,* ed. Frances E Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 138.
[62] Michel de Certeau, qtd. in Clemens, "Oath, Torture, Testimony," 77.

totalizing transition between the most intimate, biological substance of the body—its bare life—and a spectral manifestation of sovereign power. The relation between the body in pain and the specter of sovereignty is mediated by language, through the extraction of a forced confession from the body in pain. Consequently, the objective of torture consists not in the acquisition of information to avert an imminent threat, but rather in the transformation of a resisting body into the docile subject of a sovereign power.

In this way, the language of torture comes paradoxically to resemble the power of the sovereign, whose authority resides in the right to decide to let live or make die. Yet those who execute the sovereign right to kill in Ferrari's novel are neither dictators nor kings; rather, they represent the power of what Judith Butler, discussing the extralegal practices of torture and indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay, has described as *petty sovereigns*:

> . . . beholden to nothing and to no one except the performative power of their own decisions. They are instrumentalized, deployed by tactics of power they do not control, but this does not stop them from using power. . . . These are petty sovereigns, unknowing, to a degree, about what work they do, but performing their acts unilaterally and with enormous consequence. Their acts are clearly *conditioned*, but their acts are judgments that are nevertheless *unconditional* in the sense that they are final, not subject to review, and not subject to appeal.[63]

For Butler, petty sovereigns "abound . . . in the midst of bureaucratic army institutions they do not inaugurate or fully control," where the power to let live or make die—the sovereign decision *par excellence*—is delegated unilaterally, "accountable to no law and without any

[63] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 65.

legitimate authority."[64] The power of the petty sovereign corresponds not to "the form of power that guarantees the representative status of political institutions," but rather to a rogue or lawless power—the power of the state of exception.[65] The practice of torture mediates this transition.

Returning now to the primary text in question, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* repeatedly demonstrates how the redistribution of responsibility across a rigid structure of hierarchical power relations results in individual impunity and structural unaccountability for the perpetrators of torture. Degorce, for example, seems aware of the power that he exercises over the life and death of his detainees, yet he is consistently portrayed over the course of Ferrari's novel as powerless to act or speak otherwise:

> Il a le pouvoir de faire apparaître ou disparaître une paire de chaussures, de décider qui doit rester nu et combien de temps, il peut ordonner que le jour et la nuit ne franchissent pas les portes des cellules, il est le maître de l'eau et du feu, le maître des supplices, il dirige une machine . . . il la fait fonctionner mais c'est elle qui régit son existence et, contre elle, il ne peut rien. Il a toujours méprisé le pouvoir, l'incommensurable impuissance que son exercice dissimule, et jamais il ne s'est senti aussi impuissant.[66]

In this passage, the reader bears witness to the way in which Degorce is shown to be progressively instrumentalized in the service of a sovereign logic that surpasses his cognitive comprehension and conscious control. Similarly, over the course of the novel, Degorce finds it increasingly difficult to control his own violent impulses, as though his own body were acting at someone—or something—else's command. In one disturbing

[64] Ibid., 56.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, 93–4.

scene early in the novel, Degorce violently assaults his second lieutenant when he discovers that his subordinate has raped a female detainee by penetrating her vaginally with the stock of his weapon. Desperate to justify his rash act, Degorce appeals again once to the utilitarian efficacy of torture, which imposes ostensible limits on the level of acceptable violence: "'[I]l est question du sens de notre mission . . . il est question de ce qui la justifie. . . . Notre action n'a de sens que parce qu'elle est efficace, elle n'est acceptable d'un point de vue moral que parce qu'elle . . . nous permet de sauver . . . des vies innocentes.'"[67] It is clear in this passage that Degorce's indignation arises not from the violent act itself, but rather from its sadistic inutility. Not long after, however, Degorce shadows the sexual sadism of his subordinate when he shoves a knife into the anus of a male detainee, a young Frenchman sympathetic to the Algerian cause, and whom the captain suspects, without evidence, of lying.[68]

Depicted by Ferrari as though he were longer the author of his actions or his words, Degorce defends himself and his behavior as though he were speaking with the voice of another:

> [Le] plus troublant, c'est qu'il n'a même pas eu à forger lui-même l'argumentaire qui l'absolvait et le justifiait, il était déjà là, immédiatement disponible . . . il n'en est pas l'auteur et . . . il lui a suffi de se laisser traverser par le flux puissant qui coulait en lui comme de l'eau sale dans un égout, un flux de paroles dont l'enchaînement impeccable ne réclamait ni sa collaboration ni son assentiment.[69]

In this graphic passage, it is not only Degorce's body that has been reduced to an

[67] Ibid., 74.
[68] Ibid., 140.
[69] Ibid., 75.

instrument of violence, but also his voice; he experiences speech as a form of suffocation. Furthermore, the image of foul water surging through the throat—an image strongly evocative of waterboarding—seems paradoxically to suggest that Degorce is not only the perpetrator of torture, but also its unlikely victim.

Coopted in both body and soul in the service of the torture regime that he continues, in spite of himself, to support, Degorce's experience of torture ironically parallels that of his unsuspecting victims. As Elaine Scarry has argued in her seminal work on the language of torture, *The Body in Pain*, the practice of torture performs a kind of violent ventriloquism by transforming the body of the victim into the embodied expression of an external agent of power. For Scarry, physical pain does not simply resist linguistic objectification, but also actively destroys language, signaling a regression to a primal, prelinguistic state of screams.[70] By effecting a breach in the individual's experience of self, time, and the world, the violence of torture suspends what Cathy Caruth, an eminent scholar of trauma theory, has described as the subject's "locus of referentiality," or a set of structural relations that allows an individual to identify with a political community that transcends the physical, psychological, or subjective bounds of his or her own body.[71] By contrast, under the extreme conditions of torture, the contours of the victim's reality retract to such an extent that all subjective experience is reduced to a physical or psychological experience of pain; indeed, the body itself—its broken bones, its seared and lacerated flesh, its contorted

[70] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.
[71] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1996), 4, 6.

limbs—becomes an agent of pain, an intimate betrayal that wounds the self from within. Incapable of reaching beyond the confines of the body through the discursive structures of speech, the torture victim is rendered unintelligible and therefore unrecognizable as a political subject, reduced to bare life.

Yet in Ferrari's novel, what Scarry has described as the "world destroying" consequences of torture impact not only the veritable victims of torture—that is, those individuals on whom it is inflicted—but also its perpetrators. As the novel progresses, Degorce finds himself increasingly alienated from language and unable to communicate beyond the immediate demands of the torture regime. Kneeling in the dark before an absent God, Degorce can't find the words to pray.[72] His favorite scriptures read as vague threats issued from the mouth of "une idole tyrannique et barbare," and the daily delivery of letters from his family becomes unbearable, giving way to a deepening affective void. He admits: "Les liens qui l'unissaient [à sa famille] ont disparu et n'ont laissé derrière eux, comme une empreinte absurde, qu'un certain nombre . . . de pensées machinales dont il est impossible de se défaire mais qui ne font plus signe vers rien."[73] Degorce's capacity for speech is similarly reduced to mechanical machinations:

> Il est capable d'élaborer des raisonnements complexes et de prendre des décisions. Il sait formuler et comprendre les données d'un problème, hiérarchiser des informations. . . . Mais, bien sûr, quand il s'agit d'écrire une lettre aux siens, quelque chose d'autre est nécessaire, quelque chose qu'il a manifestement perdu. L'âme, peut-être, l'âme qui rend la parole vivante.[74]

[72] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, 30.
[73] Ibid., 100, 102.
[74] Ibid., 111.

Like the broken bodies of his victims, the torture regime comes to define the perceptual contours of Degorce's self-imposed reality: "Voici les frontières du monde. Des salles d'interrogatoire. Des cellules et des couloirs sans fin. Cet affreux ciel jaune. Des corps perdus. Des âmes perdues. La nudité intolérable."[75] Confounding his own perceptual reality with the physical restraint he has imposed on his prisoners: "[Degorce] a l'impression d'être prisonnier d'un labyrinthe infini."[76]

It is perhaps the asphyxiating claustrophobia of Degorce's affective environment that compels him to seek recognition in the eyes of Tahar, the Algerian combatant, whose long-anticipated capture was made possible through a confession extracted under torture earlier in the novel.[77] As the two men sit face to face in Tahar's cell, the memory of another damp prison cell, in another time, in another place, erupts into the present moment.[78] Suddenly confronted with the deeply repressed memory of his own traumatic experience of torture over a decade prior, during the Second World War, Degorce recalls what he describes as "l'irruption souveraine de la souffrance physique qui disloque aussi la mémoire, la pensée et le temps."[79] He remembers how "la douleur est devenue la substance intime de son être," collapsing his sense of time, self, and the world.[80] Returning to the present, and finding himself sitting opposite a man that he perceives as his enemy, Decorge

[75] Ibid., 101.
[76] Ibid., 112.
[77] As a number of reviewers of Ferrari's novel have observed, Tahar represents a recognizable fictionalization of the FLN commander Larbi Ben M'Hidi, who was murdered by French troops in March 1957. Ferrari's deft transfiguration of several prominent historical figures of the Algerian War includes Jacques Allaire, Maurice Audin, Paul Aussaresses, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Louisette Ighilhariz, and Jacques Massu.
[78] Ibid., 97.
[79] Ibid., 81.
[80] Ibid., 81–2.

desperately reaches across the gulf that separates him from his prisoner and seeks recognition for the pain that he, too, has survived. He whispers, "'Vous savez . . . j'étais dans la Résistance. . . . Et j'ai été arrêté. En 1944. Arrêté et interrogé.'"[81]

From Buchenwald to Bologhine, the superimposition of memories of torture should suggest a degree of solidarity between the captain and his prisoner. Yet rather recognizing the political agency of the Algerian combatant in his keep, Degorce instead retreats into an affirmation of his own victimhood and fails to forge an ethical connection with Tahar. Seeking recognition for his own political contributions to the Resistance while simultaneously refusing to recognize the political subjectivity of his prisoner, Degorce accuses Tahar of forcing the hand of the French army.[82] "Vous ne nous laissez pas le choix!" says Degorce, denouncing the civilian casualties that have resulted from the FLN's increasingly frequent bombings of European neighborhoods in Algiers. Tahar laughs sardonically: "Oui, c'est étrange . . . moi, vous voyez, j'étais certain que c'était nous qui n'avions pas le choix des méthodes."[83] In this passage, the limits of the captain's capacity for empathetic solidarity become painfully clear, as Degorce continues to abdicate all agency and responsibility for his unethical actions in Algeria.

The following morning, Tahar is found dead in his cell. "'Tarik Hadj Nacer s'est donné la mort dans sa cellule,'" says Andreani, bringing news of Tahar's assassination to an emotionally distraught Degorce.[84] Despite his apparent affection for Tahar, the captain

[81] Ibid. 79.
[82] Morton, "Narratives of Torture and Trauma," 156.
[83] Ferrari, *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, 83.
[84] Ibid., 132.

quickly and quietly acquiesces to his comrade's lie, finally admitting to himself that he, too, takes pleasure in the perverse fiction of power that it dissimulates: "Et moi-même, je désire le mensonge et je m'y complais. . . . J'ai le pouvoir, le pouvoir m'écrase, je ne peux rien."[85] Rendered impotent by the power he himself wields, Degorce is once again portrayed as a passive actor in a mechanism of historical violence in which true carries the same weight as a lie: "l'impudence règne désormais au point qu'un mensonge n'a même plus besoin de se parer des atours de la vraisemblance."[86] Staged as a suicide by hanging, the brazen assassination of Tahar signals not only the indefinite suspension of the rule of law in the context of the Algerian War, but also the final disintegration of the distinction between truth and falsehood. As Degorce himself admits in the final pages of his narrative, "le mal n'est pas l'opposé du bien: les frontières du bien et du mal sont brouillés, ils se mêlent l'un à l'autre et deviennent indiscernables dans la morne grisaille qui recouvre tout et c'est cela, le mal."[87] And as for "l'esprit de la logique exsangue", lost somewhere in the fog of war, "il ne peut qu'errer sans fin dans la brume grise, perdu entre le bien et le mal."[88]

Despite his initial resistance, Degorce's impotent complicity in the perpetration of torture raises at least two pressing issues for the purposes of the broader argument that I present in this chapter. From one perspective, the trajectory of the captain's political career—from his own experience of torture and internment as a political prisoner at Buchenwald to his bureaucratic oversight of enhanced interrogation tactics at the

[85] Ibid., 135.
[86] Ibid. 132.
[87] Ibid., 149.
[88] Ibid.

Bologhine prison in Algiers—allows the reader to perceive how the abhorrent practice of torture was progressively normalized over the course of the twentieth century. From Weimar to Algiers by way of Tonkin, Degorce's experiences are exemplary of the kind of complicity that can exist between seemingly discrete subject positions and historical experiences of violence. This multidirectional perspective becomes particularly pertinent when it comes to understanding the psychology of victims of torture who later become its perpetrators, a peculiar yet surprisingly pervasive historical phenomenon that is explicitly addressed in Ferrari's novel through the character of Degorce and others.

At the same time, however, the portrayal of a historical slippage between the victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence in *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* patently fails to produce forms of recognition or solidarity that cut across cultural, temporal, or territorial boundaries, as evidenced by the truncated interactions between Degorce and Tahar. To the contrary, the novel's depiction of Degorce as a hapless cog in some cruel, transhistorical machine actively deprives the captain of agency and seems to absolve him of responsibility for his unethical actions. The progressive instrumentalization of the captain's character over the course of the novel serves as an apt illustration of the perceptual reality that served to sustain and perpetuate a torture regime in colonial Algeria. Consequently, while Ferrari's novel may reveal certain perceptual conditions of possibility for the practice of torture that both preceded and persisted beyond the particular historical context of the Algerian War, the novel raises several unresolved questions pertaining to the characters' individual or collective capacity for intervention, resistance, or ethical responsibility.

The interrelated issues of agency, action, and authorial control raised above are

further exposed and exacerbated by the character of Andreani, who fought alongside Degorce during the First Indochina War and subsequently served under his command in colonial Algeria. Although Andreani's experiences of armed combat and captivity are intimately intertwined with those of Degorce, the novel's dual narrative structure draws a sharp distinction between the two characters. In contrast to Degorce, whose third-person narrative circles like a bird of prey around three pivotal days during the Battle of Algiers, Andreani recounts his own story in the first person through a series of nonlinear, internal monologues addressed to his absent comrade, to whom he refers with the cadence of a mantra as "mon capitaine." Presented on the page in an unbroken block of text, Andreani's narrative reads at times as a testimonial ran, and at others, like an amorous confession. Intervening in both the novel's exposition and its conclusion, as well as between each of the captain's chapters, Andreani's testimonial narrative is in fact assured by the absence of its silent addressee, Degorce, Andreani's narrative double. Speaking both to and for Degorce, who has been all but deprived of his own capacity for autonomous speech, Andreani serves as the sole surviving witness to the captain's story: "Je me souviens de vous, mon capitaine, je m'en souviens très bien."[89]

From the phonetic parallels between the characters' full names (André Degorce and Horace Andreani) to the serendipitous alignment of their personal and political trajectories, Ferrari's novel consistently presents Andreani as a narrative foil to Degorce. Born to a poor Corsican family in the interwar period, Andreani joins the French Resistance

[89] Ibid., 11.

at the age of sixteen as Axis occupation forces stream onto the Mediterranean island. A dark mirror of Degorce's political engagement, which was inspired by the captain's beloved mathematics instructor, Andreani stumbles into an act of armed resistance when he and his cousin shoot and kill an adolescent Italian soldier whom they suspect of stealing one of their three sickly hens.[90] Similarly, in contrast to Degorce, who deploys to Dien Bien Phu with an air of graceful patriotism, Andreani presents a more pragmatic sense of duty.[91] Reflecting on his military service to the French nation, Andreani admits to an absent Degorce:

> Je ne vous parle pas de la France éternelle, de l'intégrité de la Nation, de l'honneur des armes ou du drapeau, toutes ces abstractions ineptes sur lesquelles vous avez cru bâtir votre vie, je vous parle des choses concrètes et fragiles dont nous fûmes les dépositaires.[92]

Put another way, while Degorce seeks to uphold the ideological superstructure of French sovereignty (whether it is threatened from without by German expansionism or from within by emerging independence movements in the colonies), Andreani acts according to an almost tribalistic impulse to protect his own.

Three years after the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu, as the Battle of Algiers engulfs the Algerian capital half a world away, Andreani again invokes the collective values of loyalty and self-sacrifice to support the use of torture against the Algerian combatants. Again, in contrast to Degorce, Andreani does not approach the Algerian War as an ideological conflict, in which one side (the French colonizer) must fight to maintain its

[90] Ibid., 56–57.
[91] Ibid., 57–58.
[92] Ibid., 22.

moral superiority or sociopolitical influence over the other (the colonized Algerian). To the contrary, Andreani recognizes full well that if he had been born in Tahar's skin, he would have fought just as hard as the enemy that he sought to defeat in Algeria. In contrast to the captain's moral humanism, Andreani sees all men as equally contemptable: "Les hommes ne valent pas grand-chose, mon capitaine. . . . Il est impossible de les distinguer en fonction de leur valeur. La partialité est le seul recours. Il ne s'agit que de reconnaître les siens et leur être loyal."[93] Calling out the hypocrisy of the captain's ideological commitments and his treacherous affection for Tahar, Andreani claims that "ce n'est pas avec notre compassion ou notre respect . . . que nous rendons justice à notre ennemi mais avec notre haine, notre cruauté—et notre joie."[94] A moral relativist to the core, Andreani is not particularly concerned with the political or ideological justifications for war, but rather one's unfailing commitment to his own camp. If, for Andreani, all modern conflicts can be seen as equally unethical, then the only way to justify an essentially unjust war is by winning, and by any means necessary.

From the above description, one might expect Andreani's character to come across as a caricatural villain. Yet the effect of Andreani's first-person narrative is quite the opposite, portraying him instead as the sympathetic anti-hero of *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*. In contrast to Degorce, whose third-person narrative reads at moments like the dispassionate machinations of a morally stricken man seeking to mitigate the cognitive dissonance of his own actions, the confessional quality of his Andreani's narrative has a strangely

[93] Ibid., 24.
[94] Ibid., 15.

humanizing effect, enticing the reader into a kind of sympathetic complicity in spite of his character's ethically compromised position. Yet Andreani's confession, which effectively supplants the speech of the captain, is often unreliable, circuitous, and elusive. While the chapters attributed to Degorce attempt to record the events of the Battle of Algiers in an ostensibly objective, methodical way, Andreani approaches the memory of the Algerian War obliquely, through non-linear narrative digressions and compulsive rhetorical repetitions that would attest to an element of unassimilated trauma.

On several occasions over the course of his narrative, for instance, Andreani repeatedly returns to a stretch of desert road between the villages of Béchar and Taghit in Algeria. Carrying the bloody memory of a massacre carried out by the OAS on the eve of Algerian Independence in 1962, the site is again bathed in blood thirty years later when a group of Islamic extremists, posing as military guards at a security checkpoint, slaughters a civilian wedding party.[95] Reflecting on the seemingly cyclical return of bloodshed in Algeria, Andreani insists on the awful inconsequentiality of his small role in history:

> Tout est si léger, mon capitaine, tout s'oublie si vite. Le sang des nôtres et le sang que nous avons répandu ont été depuis longtemps effacés par un sang nouveau qui sera bientôt effacé à son tour. . . . Nos actes ne pèsent rien, mon capitaine.[96]

Establishing an analogical relation between the terrorist attacks carried out by the OAS in the twilight of the French colonialism and the arbitrary acts of violence enacted by Islamic extremists during Algeria's *décennie noire* three decades later, Andreani's transhistorical

[95] Ibid., 128.
[96] Ibid.,, 21–2.

perspective seems to suggest an historical equivalence between the victims of violence and its perpetrators. In contrast to Degorce, who seems, at the very least, deeply troubled by his personal complicity in the perpetuation of a torture regime in colonial Algeria, Andreani sees nothing particularly exceptional in the captain's experience, stating:

> Vous n'avez rien vécu d'exceptionnel, mon capitaine, le monde a toujours été prodigue d'hommes comme vous et aucune victime n'a jamais eu le moindre mal à se transformer en bourreau, au plus petit changement de circonstances. . . . Ce qui s'est joué dans votre vie a déjà été joué sur des scènes semblables, un nombre incalculable de fois, et le millénaire qui s'annonce ne proposera rien de nouveau. . . . Nous avons si peu de mémoire. Nous disparaissons comme des générations de fourmis et tout doit être recommencé.[97]

Succinctly summarizing Andreani's perspective on history, this remarkable passage shows the limits of a paradigmatic representation of the past. Comparing his absurd role in history to the repetitive labor of ants, Andreani seems to absolve himself of responsibility for his actions. Condemned to remember in an atmosphere of amnesia ("dans l'oubli général, je me souviens de tout, mon capitaine, je m'en souviens très bien"), Andreani's excessive, traumatic memory of the transhistorical phenomenon of torture provokes apathy and abdication rather than agency or the assumption of responsibility.

Through the equally ethically compromised characters of Degorce and Andreani, the captain's narrative foil, Ferrari's novel replicates the central paradox at the core of the recent torture controversy in France, as well as its trans-Atlantic reverberations in the United States and elsewhere around the world. On the one hand, the transhistorical

[97] Ibid., 23.

perspective of Ferrari's novel allows the reader to perceive how the abhorrent practice of torture was progressively normalized over the course of the twentieth century, revealing perceptual conditions of possibility that are irreducible to a particular sociopolitical context. Furthermore, by exposing analogical connections and relations of complicity between past and present, Ferrari's novel provides a unique perspective on the pertinence of past histories of violence for understanding the present proliferation of structures of inequality and exception in today's postcolonial and increasingly transnational world. In this regard, the representation of the past in *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* could very well be read as a radical critique of the present, providing critical insight into contemporary questions of national belonging and identity, cultural and religious pluralism, mass migration, and the globalization of both technology and terror.

On the other hand, however, the transhistorical perspective of Ferrari's novel also produces problematic mnemonic intersections "in which histories can become blurred, conflated, [and] universalized."[98] As Debarati Sanyal has cogently argued, the "convergence of subject positions and memorial pathways" in Ferrari's novel risks relativizing the respective experiences of the victims and perpetrators of extreme violence.[99] In *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, the risks of historical conflation become clear in the characters of Degorce and Andreani, whose complicit participation in political violence ultimately confounds their capacity for agency, resistance, and solidarity while seeming to absolve them of responsibility for their unethical actions. Despite their divergent positions on the practice

[98] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 12.
[99] Ibid., 12.

of torture in colonial Algeria, both Degorce and Andreani participate in and actively perpetuate a historical paradigm in which torture is perceived not only as permissible, but also as unavoidable and historically inconsequential.

In this way, I argue, Ferrari's novel exemplifies the essential proximity between the paradigm as a method for reading, writing, and remembering history and the sovereign power structure that it is meant to exemplify: the state of exception. Although mnemonic paradigms such the state of exception (to return to Agamben's original example) can reveal points of contact and complicity between discrete histories and historical experiences, as evidenced by Ferrari's novel, the suspension of contextual frames of reference also risks flattening our perception of the past to relations of similitude or equivalence. Is it possible to adopt a paradigmatic approach to history without conflating past and present or equating the experiences of victims and perpetrators? To address these questions, I turn now to Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre*.

Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre*

> Nous perdons des mots à mesure de l'effilochement de l'Empire. . . . Il est des morceaux pourris en notre langue, une part malsaine de mots immobilisés, du sens coagulé. La langue pourrit comme la pomme là où elle a reçu un choc. Cela date du temps où le français, langue de l'Empire, langue de la Méditerranée, langue des villes grouillantes, des déserts et des jungles, du temps où le français, d'un bout à l'autre du monde, était la langue internationale de l'interrogatoire.
>
> —Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre*[100]

Much like Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* uses the

[100] Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre*, 712–13.

Algerian War as a historical paradigm for understanding the perception and memory of past violence in present-day France. Jenni also adopts several of the same rhetorical strategies as Ferrari, including the alternation between first- and third-person perspectives and the juxtaposition or superimposition of past and present narratives. The novel's unnamed narrator, an unemployed business executive whose narcissistic cynicism has ended both his career and his marriage, serves primarily as a conduit for commentary and metaphor; the real protagonist of the novel, Victorien Salagnon, is an accomplished army veteran who fought in the French Resistance, the First Indochina War, and the Algerian War before retiring to Lyon with his wife Eurydice, the daughter of a Jewish *pied noir*. Separated in age by several decades, the unlikely pair strikes up a friendship when the narrator, who has fallen into a depressing routine of drinking with retired men at a local dive, encounters Salagnon, a bar regular, selling hundreds of his ink paintings at an amateur art fair in Lyon. Salagnon, a gifted artist, promises to teach the narrator to paint, and in exchange, the narrator agrees to write a memoir of the artist's storied military career. The resulting narrative, recounted in the third person, is as blood-soaked and graphic as the successive battles that Salagnon stubbornly survived.

Although the novel adopts, at least in part, the pretense of a linear chronology, the origins of Salagnon's story remain obscure: "'De quoi vous souvenez-vous vraiment, au début?'" the narrator asks Salagnon; "'Du brouillard; du froid humide, et de ma haine de la sueur," he responds.[101] Despite the chronological progression of Salagnon's story, the

[101] Ibid., 62.

narrative is marked by the serendipitous reappearance of familiar characters in new settings over the course of the novel. The German officer who overlooked a young Salagnon's fraudulent bookkeeping during an inspection of his father's shop in Lyon reemerges in Allied captivity following a village massacre reminiscent of the June 1944 slaughter of civilians in Oradour-sur-Glane. "'La roue tourne, jeune homme," says the German officer, recognizing Salagnon from his youth. "'J'étais chargé de maintenir l'ordre, et peut-être demain ce sera vous.'"[102] The wheel turns, and the same German officer shows up in the Tonkin jungle in French Indochina, where he has been assigned as a sergeant in the Foreign Legion to interrogate Viet Minh suspects in French, which has already supplanted German as "la langue internationale de l'interrogatoire poussé."[103] Salagnon's uncle similarly reappears repeatedly throughout the novel, first in Lyon to recruit young men seeking to avoid compulsory work service by joining the French Resistance, and later in Algiers to enlist support for the OAS, the far-right paramilitary group opposed to Algerian Independence. Another recurring character, Mariani, who intervenes to save Salagnon's life after an ambush in Vietnam, later founds an informal organization of far-right fascists in Lyon that goes by the ironic name Groupe d'Autodéfense des Français Fiers d'Être de Souche (GAFFES).

Much like Ferrari's novel, the transhistorical perspective of *L'Art francais de la guerre* reveals problematic points of contact and complicity between the victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence over the course of the twentieth century in France.

[102] Ibid., 325.
[103] Ibid., 507.

Yet rather than reducing these singular historical experiences to relations of similitude or equivalence, Jenni's novel posits an explicit critique of the problem of paradigmatic resemblance when it comes to remembering the past. In contrast to *Où j'ai laissé mon âme*, Jenni's novel actively highlights the cognitive, discursive, and ideological conditions under which certain historical narratives emerged and evolved historically, calling attention to the semantic slippage that can occur when historical paradigms are transmitted and transformed over time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements. In this way, I argue, Jenni's novel mitigates the risk of mnemonic conflation and historical relativism while also calling for a critical reflection on the ways in which the perceptual reality of the present continues to inform or contort our collective memory of the past.

While Jenni's nearly 800-page tome merits more attention and patient analysis than I have either time or space in the present chapter, I want to conclude by addressing three themes or vignettes in *L'Art de la guerre*, each emblematic of the author's broader historical critique. First, the narrative returns repeatedly to the evocative image of a pestilent past, with the author's detailed description of the city of Lyon doubling as a metaphor for "plague" of history afflicting contemporary France. Described by the narrator as "une ville de sédiments, de sédiments compactés en maisons, enracinés dans le sédiment des fleuves qui la traversent," Lyon is portrayed throughout the novel as a repository of history, washed up like mud on the shores of a city that has yet to flush out the dregs of its violent past.[104] In this city of muddy sediment, sickness flourishes; plagued by racial tension,

[104] Ibid., 67.

xenophobia, and a rise of a resurgent fascism, present-day Lyon is shown to be sick with the rot of France's colonial past.

In contrast to what the narrator calls the "fascist" metaphor of the body politic, however, the epidemiological language of Jenni's novel serves instead to illustrate the errant "spread" of historical terms as they are taken out of context and transmitted over time and space.[105] Jenni's idiosyncratic use of organic metaphors throughout *L'Art français de la* guerre is perhaps best illustrated by a scene in which the narrator, burning with a fever one summer night, ventures into the deserted streets of the city center in search of medication. Speaking aloud as he perambulates—"comme une ombre folle, un spectre parlant, une logorrhée qui marche"—his illness, a sore throat, becomes an extended metaphor for the "sickness" of chauvinism in contemporary France.[106]

> La douce France, le pays de mon enfance, est ravagée depuis toujours d'une terrible violence, comme ma gorge labourée de virus. . . . Je ne parle que de ma gorge. Le pays, c'est juste la pratique de la langue. La France est l'espace de la pratique du français, et ma gorge dévastée en est le lieu le plus matériel, le plus réel, le plus palpable. . . . Comprendre l'autre reviendrait à accepter ses paroles à lui en notre bouche, ce serait avoir la bouche toute remplie de la puissance de l'autre, et se taire pendant que lui parle. C'est humiliant, cela répugne. Il faut que l'autre se taise ; qu'il plie; il faut le renverser, le réduire à quia, trancher sa gorge parlante.[107]

In this slippery passage, simile shifts quickly to embodied metaphor: the narrator's throat

[105] "Je sais bien qu'une métaphore organique de la société est une métaphore fasciste; mais les problèmes que nous avons peuvent se décrire d'une manière fasciste. Nous avons des problèmes d'ordre, de sang, de sol, des problèmes de violence, des problèmes de puissance et d'usage de la force. Ces mots-là viennent à l'esprit, *quel que soit leur sens*"; Ibid., 206–7, emphasis added.
[106] Ibid., 207.
[107] Ibid., 189–91.

is *like* France; the throat, the site of language, is the symbolic *embodiment* of the French nation; France itself *is* sick with foreign antigens that are supposed to have "infected" its language down to the roots. The metaphor mutates, and the throat—the symbolic embodiment of the nation—becomes both the site and the ongoing source of the infection: "[J]e souffrais d'angine nationale, d'une grippe française qui tord la gorge . . . qui attaque l'organe précieux des paroles et fait jaillir ce flot de verbe, le verbe qui est le vrai sang de la nation française."[108] Finally, the illness afflicting the French society metastasizes into a devastating autoimmunity, in the Derridean sense of the term:

> [C]'est ma propre défense qui ravage ma propre gorge; mon système immunitaire épure, il pacifie, il extirpe, il liquide mes propres cellules pour en extraire la subversion. Les virus ne sont qu'une parole . . . et cette parole s'introduit en mes cellules, se mêle à ma parole propre, et ensuite mon corps parle la langue du virus. Alors le système immunitaire exécute mes propres cellules une par une, pour les nettoyer de la langue de l'autre qui voudrait murmurer tout au cœur de moi.[109]

For the narrator, in other words, the "foreign" is not the source of the sickness that afflicts him and his homeland; to the contrary, it is France's "immunitarian" impulse (to adopt a term theorized by yet another Italian philosopher, Roberto Esposito) towards self-protection that works to destroy the nation from within.[110]

As the passage continues, the author's organic metaphor metasticizes once again and manifests as physical violence against bodies perceived as foreign. Returning home from the pharmacy, the narrator comes across a group of youths, admitting: "j'entendais de

[108] Ibid., 208.
[109] Ibid., 206.
[110] Robert Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

loin leurs éclats de voix sans distinguer leurs mots; mais leur phrasé précipité me révélait . . . d'où ils venaient. J'apprenais de loin, par le rythme, de laquelle de nos strates sociales héréditaires ils étaient issus."[111] The narrator watches without intervening as four uniformed policemen step out of a patrol car to interpellate the youths, identifying them in the act of asking for a proof of identity: "on vérifie l'identité de ceux dont on vérifie l'identité, et la vérification confirme que ceux-là dont on vérifie l'identité font bien partie de ceux dont on la vérifie."[112] The encounter ends precipitously, with violence, as one of the young men is arrested for resisting arrest.

Secondly, as a natural outgrowth of the author's use organic metaphors, the novel consistently expresses criticism of the "militarization" of civil and political discourse in contemporary France. Indeed, the perpetual threat of racial violence permeates Jenni's novel: a random identity check ends in arrest and imprisonment; a discarded train ticket sparks a race riot and a state of emergency; an armored column stalks a "sensitive urban zone" on the outskirts of Lyon to apprehend an insurgent cell of delinquent youths at dawn. For the narrator, the contemporary city comes to resemble its colonial antecedent: "La présence policière affichée permet la pacification. Oui, la *pacification* ! Nous pratiquons la *pacification* au cœur même des villes de France, au cœur même de l'autorité, car l'ennemi est partout."[113] Salagnon's friend Mariani, who has transformed his high-rise apartment in the suburbs into an armed fortress, with military-grade guns trained permanently onto the parking lot, claims that France is being colonized by its immigrant minority: "'Nous

[111] Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre*, 207.
[112] Ibid., 228.
[113] Ibid., 195.

sommes colonisés. Il faut dire le mot. . . . [N]ous sommes dans une situation coloniale, et nous sommes les colonisées. . . . Les centres-villes sont devenus les casemates de notre camp retranché.'"[114] A caricatural ideologue, Mariani's racist digressions are representative of the kind of semantic slippage that, according to the author, have "infected" the political discourse of the fascist far-right in contemporary France.

As evidenced by the character of Mariani, Jenni's critical perspective in *L'Art français de la guerre* comprises at least two interrelated points of view. From one angle, the author and his narrative proxy are both profoundly alarmed by the wave of violence that has washed over contemporary France, even in the absence of war. At the same time, however, the novel's condemnation of the use of military force in peacetime France also serves to contextualize the author's larger critique of language as a potential vector for violence. From this perspective, Jenni's novel demonstrates how the state of exception, as a sociopolitical condition of possibility for the practice of violence, can also produce and perpetuate its own perceptual reality that preemptively authorizes additional violations.

The semantic component of the author's argument in *L'Art français de la guerre* is succinctly articulated by a short interaction between the narrator and the owner of a small newspaper stand. Railing against an anti-discrimination initiative recently enacted in France, the owner declares: "'Ils me font rire, là, avec leurs CV anonymes.'"[115] Speaking ambiguously about race relations in contemporary France, the shopkeeper corners his interlocutor into an affirmation of communitarian camaraderie by assuming correctly that

[114] Ibid., 298.
[115] Ibid., 235.

he, the narrator, knows exactly and instinctually who "they" are.

> Il n'affirmait rien de précis, [mais] je comprenais ce qu'il disait, et cette compréhension seule valait déjà l'approbation. Il le savait. Nous sommes unis par la langue, et lui jouait des pronoms sans jamais rien préciser. Il savait que je ne dirais rien, à moins entrer en conflit avec lui. . . . Si j'entrais en conflit avec lui, je lui montrais avoir compris, et j'avouais ainsi posséder en moi le même langage que lui: nous pensions en les mêmes termes.[116]

Although the narrator disagrees with the shopkeeper's politics, a shared language unifies the two men. As the narrator begrudgingly admits: "Une complicité discrète unit les Français qui comprennent sans qu'on le précise ce que ce 'ils' désigne. . . . Le comprendre fait entrer dans le groupe de ceux qui le comprennent."[117] Through the clever use of a single pronoun, or what the narrator describes as "une boîte vide" that founds the perceptual field of its own comprehensibility, the shopkeeper manages to interpellate his unsuspecting interlocutor as a member of a shared community ("us") that defines itself in ontological opposition to a racialized Other ("them").[118]

Insidiously, in the subtle interstices of grammar, the French language festers with "la pourriture coloniale" so vehemently decried by the narrator: "Ce monde englouti subsiste encore, des formes flottantes errent dans la structure de la langue, ils nous vient à l'esprit sans qu'on le leur demande certaines associations de mots que l'on ignorait connaître."[119] From the "pacification" of the suburbs of Lyon to the racist shopkeeper's invocation of "la paix pour dix ans"—a portentous phrase with its origins in the Sétif

[116] Ibid., 237.
[117] Ibid., 238.
[118] Ibid., 211.
[119] Ibid., 239.

massacre of 1945—the remnants of an empire in ruin persist in the rifts of the French language.[120] Unmoored from the historical context of their emergence in the colony, these "floating" linguistic forms suspend the chain of signification that links signifier to signified, reducing reference to superficial relations of resemblance. For the author and his narrative proxy, the concept of resemblance operates according to the second-order semiotic system of myth, a phantom signifier ("un fantôme vient errer que l'on ne peut définir") that can be seen but not said ("on ne sait rien en dire mais cela se voit").[121] Synonymous with race, the concept of resemblance is, for the narrator, an imaginary yet operative category, one that comes with real-world consequences: "La race est une identité effective qui déclenche des actes réels. . . . [Elle] est l'idée visible qui permet le contrôle. La ressemblance, confondue avec l'identité, permet le maintien de l'ordre. Ici comme là-bas."[122] Here and now (in present-day France), just like then and there (in the French-occupied Algeria), race is the constitutive myth that founds the perceptual reality of the colonial state of exception; race is the operative abstraction that turns otherwise ordinary men and women into torturers, capable of acts of unspeakable cruelty.

Coincidentally, my third and final point concerning Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* brings us right back to where this long and circuitous chapter first started, with a retrospective screening of *La Bataille d'Alger*. Near the end of the novel, after Salagnon's story has come to a close, the narrator attends a screening of Pontecorvo's revolutionary film in the company of a newfound love interest. "Le film," observes the narrator, "est d'une

[120] Ibid., 240.
[121] Ibid., 231.
[122] Ibid., 231.

clarté admirable. Les héros algériens meurent, mais le peuple anonyme les remplacera ; l'agitation de la rue est irrépressible, les techniciens de la guerre ne peuvent rien contre le sens de l'Histoire."[123] Stoic, heroic, anonymous, and proud, the Algerian people performs its revolutionary role in history in admirable silence, with all the magnanimity of the proletariat: "Les Algériens, eux, ont la noblesse d'un people soviétique."[124] And as for the representation of torture, the narrator continues, "le film ne montre aucun débordement. . . . Ces techniciens militaires n'éprouvent pas de haine, leur professionnalisme peut faire peur, mais ils font la guerre, et ils tâchent de la gagner ; à la fin ils la perdent."[125] For the narrator, in short, the film founds the constitutive myth of the Algerian War, sweeping all its sordid details beneath the appearance of clarity and documentary candor.

In the final scenes of *La Bataille d'Alger*, filmed in a housing project on the periphery of Algiers, a single tank ("la figure du maintien de l'ordre, la figure de l'écrasement du people") appears on screen, surrounded by soldiers dressed in black.[126] The narrator bursts into laughter in the theater. Recognizing the tank from his childhood obsession with the illustrated *Encyclopédie Larousse*, the narrator identifies the armored vehicle as an ISU–122, a Soviet tank. "Ce char," he observes:

> clôt l'Histoire, et son déguisement montre ce qui se passe. Le char faux français mais vrai soviétique, entouré de figurants déguisés en Français qui sont de vrais militaires algériens, réprime de véritables Algériens qui jouent des Algériens. Mais eux sont les vrais réprimés.[127]

[123] Ibid., 718.
[124] Ibid., 718.
[125] Ibid., 718.
[126] Ibid., 720.
[127] Ibid., 723.

Like a Freudian slip ("qui montre en voulant cacher, qui tente de dire ce que l'on estime vrai mais manifeste ce qui est vraiment") in an otherwise impeccable film, the foreign tank parading as French paraphrases the problem of resemblance in Jenni's novel.[128] In this penultimate passage, both the author and his narrative proxy seem to posit the collective memory of the Algerian War as the product of a fiction founded on a simulacra of truth.

* * *

In the end, my concluding argument in this convoluted chapter is excruciatingly simple: what the retrospective representation of torture and other forms and iterations of colonial violence in both *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* and *L'Art français de la guerre* reveals is that when it comes to remembering the past, context matters just as much as content. While historical events and experiences do not—and indeed, cannot—exist in isolation from one another, a paradigmatic representation of the past nevertheless raises a number of ethical and epistemological concerns, from the potential conflation of subject positions and memorial pathways to the semantic slippage of historically specific terms. By calling attention to these questions, my objective in this chapter has not been to discount the merits of a paradigmatic methodology, but rather to prod at the limits of historical paradigms in a literary context. I continue this line of questioning in the following chapter, which considers the contemporary resonance of canonical works by Albert Camus when projected retrospectively in a postcolonial context.

[128] Ibid., 725.

Chapter Four

An Impassible Crossing: Albert Camus and the Horizon of Postcolonial Hospitality in Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête* and David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*

> La seule hospitalité heureuse que l'auteur puisse offrir est celle de son œuvre.
> — Mohamed Kamel Eddine Haouet, *Camus et l'hospitalité*[1]

I. Stranger Danger: Revisiting the French Colonial Canon in a Postcolonial Context

There is a beach in the Algerian port city of Oran known by locals as *la plage de l'étranger*, or "the stranger's beach," bearing the name of Albert Camus's notorious novelistic allegory of the absurd.[2] A number of the author's biographers have identified this sandy stretch as the site of a seaside scuffle between two Arabs and a group of Camus's *pied noir* compatriots, as reported in the July 31, 1939 issue of *L'Echo d'Oran* under the headline "A Brawl on the Beach at Bouisseville."[3] There were enough of these heated, interracial exchanges in those days that the conservative colonial newspaper ran a regular column in its back pages called "Attacks," as Alice Kaplan notes in her 2016 book, *Looking for 'The Stranger': Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic*.[4] Kaplan has speculated that this otherwise unremarkable incident—a knife was brandished, and a gun drawn, but no shots were fired, and the two Arabs fled on foot—may have inspired the pivotal scene in Camus's 1942 novel, *L'Étranger*, in which the protagonist, Meursault, murders an unnamed Arab at noon on a beach ablaze with blinding light.[5]

1 Mohamed Kamel Eddine Haouet, *Camus et l'hospitalité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 200.
2 Ryu Spaeth, "The Camus Investigation," *The New Republic*, September 22, 2016, accessed July 1, 2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/137009/camus-investigation.
3 Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).
4 Alice Kaplan, *Looking for 'The Stranger': Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 212.
5 Ibid., 212, 215.

The "majestic nonchalance" with which Meursault commits this act of seemingly absurd violence has been the subject of much reasonable scorn amongst postcolonial scholars of Camus's literary oeuvre.[6] Indeed, "if there has been one consistent criticism of *L'Étranger* since its publication," Kaplan observes, "it has turned around the nameless, voiceless Arab shot by Meursault."[7] Edward Said, for example, in an essay that is today considered one of the founding texts of postcolonial studies, famously criticizes the *pied noir* author for the "incapacitated colonial sensibility" of his absurdist prose, describing the Arab characters in Camus's Algerian fiction as disposable pawns "used as a background for the portentous European metaphysics" explored by the author.[8] Yet while combing through the archives of the *El Djoumhouria* newspaper in Oran in her patient search for Camus's "stranger," what Kaplan discovered—with that rare fortuity that inflames every researcher's archive fever—was that the nameless victim of Meursault's perfect, "philosophical crime" had once had a name: Kaddour Touil.[9]

[6] As early as 1961, a year before Algerian Independence, the historian Pierre Nora suggested that the racial contours of Meursault's crime of radical indifference "represented the unconscious wish of the French in Algeria [to] keep the land and destroy the enemy"; Pierre Nora, qtd. in Spaeth, "The Camus Investigation." Or, as the critic Conor Cruise O'Brien has succinctly written, "it is not easy to make the killing of a man seem irrelevant . . . unless one is led in some way to regard the man as not quite a man"; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus of Europe and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 25.

[7] Kaplan, *Looking for 'The Stranger,'* 203.

[8] Edward Said, "Camus and the French Colonial Experience," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 176; Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 223. Arguing against the scholarly reception of Camus's novels and short stories as universal "parables of the human condition," Said has elsewhere asserted that "Camus's most famous fiction incorporates, intransigently recapitulates, and in many ways depends on a massive French discourse on Algeria," reviving and reinscribing the history of colonial domination "with a circumspect precision and a remarkable lack of remorse or compassion"; Said, "Camus and the French Colonial Experience," 175, 181.

[9] Roger Cohen, "Algeria's Invisible Arab," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2015, accessed July 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/25/opinion/roger-cohen-algerias-invisible-arab.html; Kaplan, *Looking for 'The Stranger*,' 212. Contrary to the claims of many of Camus's postcolonial critics, however, Kaplan argues in *Looking for the Stranger* that Camus's literary depiction of Arabs was both deliberate and political. "The relationship between Europeans and Arabs is, as Kaplan writes, the 'backbone' of the book, not merely a

Kaplan's literary biography of *L'Étranger* in *Looking for 'The Stranger'* is characteristic of a recent spate of redemptive scholarship on Camus, who remains even today one of French literature's most consistently controversial figures.[10] For Valérie K. Orlando, Camus's recent comeback can be attributed, in part, to the political violence that has plagued Algerian society since the 1990s; as the country plunged into the bowels of a bloody civil war only thirty years after Algerian Independence, the *pied noir* author's notoriously measured perspective on the value of violence as a means to political liberation seemed suddenly, tragically, prescient.[11] At the same time, several contemporary adaptations of *L'Étranger* in France, Belgium, Britain, and Germany have all tapped into timely anxieties about the political status of Camus's silent Arab character, recast in recent theatrical productions as an allegorical figure of the refugee crisis facing contemporary Europe.[12] In an age marked by the globalization of terror, rising tides of trans-Mediterranean migration, and proliferating fears of Islamic fundamentalism alongside a resurgence of populist nationalism in Europe and elsewhere, the postcolonial recuperation of the figure(s) of Camus—as a friend, foe, or prophetic fantasy—raises critical questions

platform to pontificate about the absurdity of life. Furthermore, she argues, convincingly, that his use of appellations like 'Arab' and 'Moorish' are not evidence of unconscious prejudice. Rather, 'by reducing a man to his ethnic label,' they are meant to convey a wider prejudice prevalent in colonial Algeria—an inability to see the Arabs as people"; Spaeth, "The Camus Investigation."

[10] Adam Kirsch, "Why Camus Remains Controversial," *The Daily Beast*, July 11, 2017, accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-albert-camus-remains-controversial.

[11] Valérie K. Orlando, "Conversations with Camus as Foil, Foe, and Fantasy in Contemporary Writing by Algerian Authors of French Expression," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 5 (2015): 869, 867.

[12] Camus's *L'Étranger* has recently been adapted in France by Benjamin Ziezimsky, in Belgium by Benoît Verhaert, in Britain by Ben Okri, and in Germany by Philipp Preuss. As the director Philipp Preuss has remarked, commenting on his recent staging of *L'Étranger* in Berlin, "What interests me is what otherness or strangeness means in our society. Do people from the Arab world have to remain strangers in order to turn us into who we are?"; Philipp Preuss, qtd. in Philip Oltermann, "Stranger Things: Albert Camus' Enigmatic Outsider Hits Berlin," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2016, accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/25/stranger-albert-camus-outsider-berlin-schaubuhne.

about the status of the French colonial canon in a postcolonial context. At a global moment when the Manichean boundaries of old have come increasingly unbound, and yet the specter of dualism has found new and dangerous expressions, what does it mean to revisit—or rather, to be revisited by—the stranger?

My objective in this chapter is to trace the trans-Mediterranean migrations of Camus through an analysis of recent adaptations of two classic texts by the French-Algerian author. Although several of Camus's works have been adapted in recent years across a range of genres and media, this chapter focuses on Kamel Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, a complex, postcolonial counter to Camus's *L'Étranger* (1942), and David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*, an aesthetically sparse, cinematic response to Camus's short story "L'Hôte" (1957).[13] Inspired in part by Jacques Derrida's classic reading of "L'Hôte" as an allegory of hospitality, I argue in this chapter that the adaption of canonical, colonial texts in a postcolonial context contributes to a kind of cosmopolitan "hospitality," blurring the categorical boundaries between host and guest, colonizer and colonized, and inside and outside. The hospitable gesture of adaptation, I argue, calls attention to the shifting status of self and stranger in an era of increasingly fluid frontiers, fragmented identities, and crystallized fears of the foreign Other, reflecting the contours and stakes of contemporary debates about identity and immigration, security and sovereignty in France and Algeria.

[13] Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2014); Camus, *L'Étranger*; *Loin des hommes*, directed by David Oelhoffen, One World Films, 2014; Albert Camus, "L'Hôte," in *L'Exil et le royaume* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 79–99.

II. Stranger than Fiction: Kamel Daoud and the Algerian Absurd

To introduce this chapter's broader argument, I turn first to Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête*, a blockbuster, postcolonial rebuttal to Camus's *L'Étranger*. Initially published by the Algiers-based Éditions Barzakh in 2013 and reissued in France a year later by Actes Sud, the premise of Daoud's novel is deceptively simple: that Camus's text, far from fiction, was in fact the true story of the seaside murder of a young man named Musa Uld el-Assas, whose killer, a French colonialist called Albert Meursault, went on to international fame by framing his own indefensible act as a fictional allegory in a novel entitled *L'Étranger*.[14] Daoud's protagonist, Harun, a bitter, blasphemous alcoholic, is the aging younger brother of Musa, whose absurd death has haunted the brothers' elderly mother—still alive, as the narrator tells us in the novel's opening sentence, and poisoned by her perpetual mourning and a redoubtable desire for revenge—for decades. Adopting the unsettling second-person narrative perspective of Camus's 1956 novel, *La Chute*, the narrative of *Meursault, contre-enquête* consists in a confessional monologue addressed to a silent interlocutor, identified only as "l'universitaire." Drinking alone in a dingy bar in present-day Oran—a city that Daoud's narrator decries as "une sorte d'enfer croulant et inefficace . . . construite en cercles," recalling Clamence's disparaging description of

[14] As Alice Kaplan has noted, the killer's first name, Albert, is only included in the first Algerian edition of Daoud's novel. In the French edition, published by Actes Sud in 2014, the character Meursault is referred to only by his first name. For Orlando, "[t]he reworking of the edition published in France indicates just how sensitive and protective the French still are about their conflicted, canonical author, Albert Camus, and his legacy within the colonial context of French Algeria"; Orlando, "Conversations with Camus," 873.

Amsterdam in *La Chute*—Harun confidently declares that Meursault's fictionalized account of his brother's death is a flat-out lie.[15]

Daoud's novel is, in part, "about the legacy of colonial violence, how it traumatizes its victims, and begets more violence," as Ryu Spaeth has suggested in his review of the novel, but as its title implies, *Meursault, contre-enquête* can also be read as a kind of critical inquiry, or counter-investigation, into the causes and consequences of a uniquely Algerian crime.[16] In this respect, the novel may be compared to Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares*, in which the author interrogates the official narrative of Algerian history by strategically subverting the generic conventions of classical detective fiction, a conventionally Western genre. Similarly, in *Meursault, contre-enquête*, Daoud appropriates a canonical, colonial tale in order to call attention to the historically contingent terms according to which some stories are told in preference to others. Strategically conflating *L'Étranger* and its *pied-noir* author in an ironic effort to contradict both, Daoud turns Camus's novel into a true story about past crime precisely in order to expose its status as a colonial fiction in the present. Yet as Aaron Bady has aptly observed, "the inversion of a fiction is not truth," but rather "another fiction."[17] In an increasingly absolutist world that, as Jeffrey C. Isaac has suggested, "seems to have forsaken the subtleties of experience meaning that novels can disclose," the critical contribution of Daoud's novel is that disturbs

[15] Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête*, 127.
[16] Spaeth, "The Camus Investigation."
[17] Aaron Bady, "'A Sort of Post-colonial Studies Joke': Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*," *The New Inquiry*, June 29, 2015, accessed July 5, 2019, *https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/a-sort-of-post-colonial-studies-joke-kamel-daouds-the-meursault-investigation/*.

the historically contingent terms according to which some stories are told in preference to others, calling attention its own narrativity as a fictional construct.[18]

Shifting its focus "from the absurdity of Meursault's act in the giddying sunlight to the blindness of the colonial mindset," Daoud's *Meursault, contre-enquête* posits a complex postcolonial counter to Camus's classic novel of the absurd.[19] Seeking to speak "la vérité nue" of his dead brother—in the manner of the Biblical figure of Aaron intervening on behalf of his brother Moses, the favored, silent son—Harun reconstructs Musa's story using the very words and expressions of his killer, taken up like old stones from the houses abandoned in haste by the colonists "[pour] en faire une maison à moi, une langue à moi."[20] Rich with intertextual references to Camus's oeuvre, both literary and philosophical, the text "pays homage to, critiques, summarizes, analyzes, refutes, echoes, quotes, and competes with" *L'Étranger*, such that Daoud's postcolonial novel comes uncannily to resemble its colonial antecedent, its drunk and disillusioned narrator a distorted mirror of Camus's absurd anti-hero, or perhaps, as Robin Yassin-Kassab puts it, his "sympathetic companion."[21]

As a number of the novel's reviewers have noted, Daoud's world in *Meursault, contre-enquête*, like Camus's in *L'Étranger*, "is absurd, but also a very Algerian absurd," shrouded not in blinding sunlight but in the opaque shadows of a "dimly remembered past"

[18] Ibid; Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Camus on Trial," *Dissent* (Winter 2016).
[19] Cohen, "Algeria's Invisible Arab."
[20] Daoud, *Meursault*, 150, 12.
[21] Robin Yassin-Kassab, "An Instant Classic," review of *The Meursault Investigation,* by Kamel Daoud, trans. John Cullen, *The Guardian* (London), June 24, 2015, accessed July 5, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/24/meursault-investigation-kamel-daoud-review-instant-classic; Spaeth, "The Camus Investigation."

that has been distilled in the present as a toxic national myth.[22] After carrying the Sisyphean burden of his brother's memory on his back for two decades, Harun can only liberate himself from his domineering mother's demand for justice by committing his own act of senseless violence against an arbitrary, *pied noir* victim. At two o'clock in the morning under a luminous moon, Harun kills a French colonist named Joseph Larquais mere hours after the official celebration of Algerian Independence on July 5, 1962. Like Meursault, Harun is soon caught in the slippery grip of a Kafkaesque justice system when he is found guilty not for having committed a crime, but "pour ne pas l'avoir fait au bon moment"; he is ultimately condemned (and subsequently, inexplicably, absolved) by the provisional courts set up by eleventh-hour freedom fighters "for his lack of fidelity to the revolution."[23] And where Meursault rails against the priest who visits him in prison as he awaits his death sentence, Harun is repeatedly hounded by a pack of religious fanatics who, confounding country with God, chastise him for not having taken up arms in the divine service of national liberation.[24] Harun, like the *pied noir* author that he ostensibly condemns, has become a stranger in his own home, adrift and alone in a country caught between "the tyranny of official religion and an asphyxiating national history."[25]

As the novel comes to a close, Harun imagines locking himself inside one of the many minarets that has sprung up near his home and howling heretical profanities into the

[22] Orlando, "Conversations with Camus," 872; Isaac, "Camus on Trial."
[23] Daoud, *Meursault*, 117; Isaac, "Camus on Trial."
[24] In the final pages of the novel, when a local religious leader urges him to pray, Harun rejects the *imam*'s listless appeal to religion in terms lifted all-but verbatim from the closing scene of *L'Étranger*, stating "il me restait si peu de temps que je ne voulais pas le perdre avec Dieu"; Daoud, *Meursault*, 150.
[25] Alice Kaplan, "Camus Redux," *The Nation*, February 4, 2015, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.thenation.com/article/camus-redux/.

muezzin's microphone while a seething crowd assembles outside and calls for his public execution. Recalling Meursault's excoriating rejection of religion in the final pages of *L'Étranger*, the closing scene of Daoud's novel also ironically anticipates the absurd death sentence that was issued shortly thereafter against its author. In December 2014, soon after *Meursault, contre-enquête* fell two votes short of securing the prestigious Prix Goncourt in France, an obscure Salafist *imam* by the name of Abdelfattah Hamadache—a former member of the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), a terrorist organization active during the Algerian Civil War, and a suspected informant for the state security apparatus—appealed via social media to the Algerian government to mete out capital punishment to Daoud for "Zionism and crimes against Islam and the Arabic language."[26] Calling to mind the misguided *jihad* directed against journalists and other public intellectuals during Algeria's deadly *décennie noire*, Hamadache's so-called "Facebook *fatwa*" provoked an immediate outcry amongst liberals as well as some religious leaders, who questioned the Internet provocateur's clerical authority while also denouncing him as a corrupt tool of the Algerian state, known locally as *le pouvoir*.[27] Meanwhile, the Algerian government has remained ominously neutral on the whole affair, showing the limits of a sclerotic secular liberalism in contemporary Algeria. Daoud, shadowing Camus, has suddenly become "someone you [have] to take a side on, in Algeria [as] in France."[28]

[26] Kaplan, "Camus Redux." Daoud, accustomed to insults and criticism for the incendiary opinions he often expresses in his daily column for the local newspaper *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, has nevertheless sought legal redress in the Algerian courts, so far without success; Doreen Carvajal, "An Algerian Author Fights Back against a Fatwa," *The New York Times*, January 4, 2015, accessed July 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/books/an-algerian-author-fights-back-against-a-fatwa.html.
[27] Shatz, "Stranger Still."
[28] Ibid.

The literary dialogue between Camus and Daoud in *Meursault, contre-enquête* not only demonstrates the multiple, often-conflictual facets of the *L'Étranger* when read in a postcolonial context, but also raises critical questions about the use of adaptation as means of historical and political critique. By repositioning a canonical, colonial tale in the sociopolitical context of postcolonial Algeria, Daoud seeks to articulate a story of Algerian modernity that challenges the dualisms of colonial discourse while also eschewing the strategic essentialism of postcolonial identity politics. By contrast, Daoud's adaptation of *L'Étranger* in *Meursault, contre-enquête* opens space for an ethical, hospitable exchange between a colonial host text and its postcolonial reader(s) without appealing to the politically ambiguous alloys of "hybridity." Consequently, by deconstructing the dialectic between self and stranger, or identity and difference, Daoud's novel suggests a radical means of rethinking the relations of domination, occupation, and hospitality that continue to define the cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical relations between France and Algeria today.[29]

III. "Une sorte de chute": Albert Camus and the Limits of Colonial Hospitality

Daoud's novel, along with the international polemic provoked by its publication, has afforded a productive foundation for the broader argument that I present in this chapter. Building on my reading of *Meursault, contre-enquête*, I argue that the postcolonial adaptation of canonical, colonial texts such as Camus's *L'Étranger* performs a form of

[29] Isaac, "Camus on Trial."

cosmopolitan hospitality, articulated around what Gideon Baker has described as a "radically decentering" encounter with the Other.[30] Following Mireille Rosello, I define hospitality as a relation of asymmetrical or non-reciprocal exchange between two or more parties of dissimilar status: a host (or hosts), characterized by a capacity to give (safety, shelter, or sustenance, for instance), and a guest (or group of guests), who seeks recognition as such without the ability or obligation to give in return or in kind.[31] As Judith Still has suggested, hospitality always relates in both principle and practice to the crossing of boundaries, thresholds, or limits, including those between self and stranger, private and public, interior and exterior, or personal and political, as well as human and animal, *bios* and *zoē*.[32] Traversing or transgressing cultural frontiers to occupy a formerly occupied territory or text, I argue that adaptation, as an act of cosmopolitan hospitality, can disturb or pervert the dynamics of appropriation, (co)habitation, and (dis)possession that have historically defined the range of possible relations between the colonizer and his (post)colonial counterpart.

Although the concept of hospitality in the Western tradition can be traced to classical antiquity, the theoretical perspectives that I engage with in this chapter emerge primarily from an ethical approach that was first articulated by Emmanuel Levinas and later developed by Derrida.[33] In contrast to the Kantian concept of hospitality as a

[30] Gideon Baker, *Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality* (London: Routledge, 2011), 99.
[31] Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
[32] Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 4.
[33] Baker, *Politicising Ethics*, 9.

communicative right to "offer oneself for exchange or community," a Levinasian ethics of hospitality posits a "radical openness to the coming of the other," or what Baker has called the "irruptive and decentering power of 'what comes.'"[34] For my part, I am particularly concerned in this chapter with the dialogue between Derrida, a student of Levinas, and Camus, his French-Algerian compatriot, and whose short story "L'Hôte" is prominently cited in Derrida's various writings on the subject of hospitality.

A terse, enigmatic tale, "L'Hôte" tells the story of three men from disparate backgrounds in colonial Algeria—a French *gendarme*, a *pied noir* teacher, and an Arab prisoner—who each confront complex ethical choices about law and order, freedom and morality, and hospitality and justice in the historical context of the Algerian War of Independence. Set on a snow-blown plateau high in the Atlas Mountains, the story opens with an image lifted from a postcard distributed by the Secours Rouge (a communist aid organization active in Algerian solidarity movements in the 1930s), depicting an Arab worker arrested on trumped-up charges and brought by force to trial with a rope around his neck.[35] This unsettling image is reproduced in the opening scene of "L'Hôte," in which a civil officer of Corsican origin arrives on horseback at a remote desert schoolhouse, accompanied on foot by an Arab prisoner attached by a rope to his saddle. Balducci, the *gendarme*, instructs Daru, the *pied noir* schoolmaster, to take charge of the unnamed Arab, who had been arrested for the murder of his cousin in retaliation for the latter's theft of grain, and to turn him over to the colonial authorities in the nearby town of Tinguit.

[34] Ibid., 61, 3.
[35] Kaplan, "Camus Redux."

Although he initially rejects Balducci's request, Daru ultimately acquiesces and agrees to host the Arab in his schoolhouse for the night. The following morning, after the two men travel together for some distance in the direction of Tinguit, Daru decides to leave the prisoner alone at a desert crossroads with a small package of food and a thousand francs. There, Daru points out the path that leads to the hospitable pastures of the nomadic people to the south, but later turns back to discover the Arab slouching towards judgment in the colonial settlement to the east. Finally, Daru returns home to find an enigmatic threat scrawled across his classroom chalkboard: "'Tu as livre notre frère. Tu paieras.'"[36]

Composed in 1952 and first published in 1957 as the Algerian War of Independence was lurching towards its bloody apogee, "L"Hôte" is the only work of fiction in Camus's literary oeuvre to explicitly address the anti-colonial conflict in Algeria.[37] For this reason, the short story has often been interpreted as an allegory of the ethical and political dilemmas faced by French progressives such as Camus in the age of decolonization, as they confronted pressure on one side from liberal advocates for revolutionary violence, and on the other, from conservative supporters of ongoing conditions of colonial oppression.[38] Yet

[36] Camus, "L'Hôte," 99.
[37] Diana Festa-McCormick, "Existential Exile and a Glimpse of the Kingdom," in *Critical Essays on Albert Camus*, edited by Bettina L. Knapp (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co, 1988), 109; Yves Ansel, *Albert Camus totem et tabou: Politique de la postérité* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 106.
[38] As Yves Ansel has argued, commenting on the cultural legacy of the figure(s) of Camus in contemporary France, the sense of solitude and exile expressed by Daru in the closing line of "L'Hôte," quoted above, correlates to that of its author, who much like his protagonist, "ne satisfait aucun des deux camps, se retrouve *vox clamans in deserto* (ou 'en l'air'), désespérément 'seul,' et, à terme, exécuté, tué par l'Histoire"; Ansel, *Albert Camus totem et tabou*, 108–9. The ambiguity of Camus's political stance, which is poetically articulated within the compact narrative of "L'Hôte," has been a subject of common critique among postcolonial scholars of Camus's literary oeuvre. For Ena C. Vulor, for example, Daru's attempt to distance himself from the sclerotic colonial apparatus as well as the escalating anti-colonial conflict amounts to "a tacit withdrawal from commitment," illustrating what she calls the "sterility" of Camus's stance on the Algerian War; Ena V. Vulor, *Colonial and Anti-Colonial Discourses: Albert Camus and Algeria: An Intertextual Dialogue with Mouloud Mammeri, Mouloud Feraoun, and Mohammed Dib* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 174–75.

for Derrida, commenting on the essential untranslatability of the short story's enigmatic title, "L"Hôte" also tells a story about the paradox of hospitality in colonial Algeria.[39] As Derrida has observed, each of the three characters in Camus's short story occupies, often simultaneously or interchangeably, the relative positions of both "guest" and "host," continually confounding the possible range and configuration of power relations that exist between them, both individually and as a trilateral group.

> L'instituteur français cohabite . . . avec l'Arabe, son hôte prisonnier, son otage. . . . Le colonisateur est aussi un hôte en Algérie et l'Arabe est chez lui, c'est lui l'autochtone. . . . Le colonisateur français est chez lui, mais chez l'autre, chez l'Arabe, et voilà ce qu'est l'hospitalité : être chez soi chez l'autre sans qu'aucune des faces soit secondaire. L'hôte est l'otage du prévenu qu'il tient en otage.[40]

Calling attention to the uncomfortable coupling of "hôte" and "otage" in Camus's short story, Derrida furthermore argues that hospitality always already coexists with the possibility of hostility, as the host becomes beholden to an uninvited guest, who comes seeking recognition or staking claim to a space that is not his. To open one's home to an outsider—and in doing so, to demonstrate one's authority over, belonging in, or ownership of a designated space—is also to risk its appropriation or exploitation, or to expose one's self, home, or family to harm from a stranger. Yet at the same time, to seek shelter in another's home is also an explicit admission or implicit intimation of vulnerability, an appeal for care and recognition that may give rise to violence at the hands of the host.

[39] Jacques Derrida, "Responsabilité et hospitalité," in *Manifeste pour l'hospitalité*, ed. Mohammed Seffahi (Grigny: Éditions Paroles d'Aube, 1999), 117.
[40] Ibid. 120.

For Derrida, the dialectic slippage between hospitality and hostility, accommodation and abuse, or tolerance and tyranny that appears in Camus's short story serves to highlight the pragmatic hazards of any political practice or system that is articulated around the principle of hospitality in the abstract. Insofar as an absolute ethics of hospitality remains untranslatable as an actionable politics of care and accommodation, as Derrida has argued, each individual act of hospitality is consequently made subject to at least two concomitant yet incompatible sets of law. Conditioned by pacts and politics, rights and ritual, the so-called "laws of hospitality" coexist but do not necessarily coincide with a coextensive "Law of hospitality," which may paradoxically be characterized by the constitutive impossibility of its own present realization or potential ritualization.[41] Culturally, politically, and historically codified, the laws of hospitality dictate the normative conditions of accommodation, or *accueil*, under which a guest may be received or welcomed by his host in a given social, political, or historical context. By contrast, an unconditional hospitality, or *accueil pur*, constitutes an "événement sans grammaire préalable," which must not be subject to the conditions of any preexisting language or (lowercase) law(s) of hospitality.[42] Consequently, in the passage from principle to practice, ""[l]'hospitalité pure, l'accueil de l'autre sans condition et sans question" contains within it "une menace intrinsèque de perversion," constituting what Derrida calls (using an appropriately Camusian term) "une sorte de chute."[43]

[41] Ibid., 124.
[42] Jacques Derrida, "Une hospitalité à l'infini," in *Manifeste pour l'hospitalité*, ed. by Mohammed Seffahi (Grigny: Éditions Paroles d'Aube, 1999), 98.
[43] Ibid., 100.

In practice, then, each relation of hospitality comprises an inextricable couple of contradictory imperatives. In the first instance, Derrida argues, an ethical relation of hospitality "doit partir de *rien*. On ne doit *rien* présupposer de connu, de déterminable; aucun contrat n'est imposé pour que l'événement pur de l'accueil de l'autre soit possible."[44] Insofar as the (sovereign) "décision de l'hospitalité me demande d'inventer ma propre règle . . . [il faut que] mon acte d'accueil soit comme le premier dans l'histoire, soit absolument singulier."[45] From this perspective, Derrida posits, "le langage de l'hospitalité doit être poétique," that is, unique, unprecedented, or unknown. At the same time, however, each concrete act of accommodation must also respond or correspond to a circumstantial reality, which cannot be *nothing* ("rien"), but rather comes bearing its own historical context and sociopolitical conditions. Positioned at the precarious cusp between poetics and politics, the abstract principle of hospitality put into practice provokes:

> un compromis, une transaction, entre la nécessité de s'adresser singulièrement à quelqu'un dans un langage poétique, pour un événement sans précédent, et *l'inscription* de cette poétique dans une politique. . . . La responsabilité dans ce cadre ne consiste ni à inventer un cri imprévisible et sans précédent, ni à répéter des règles ou appliquer la loi, mais à trouver à chaque fois . . . un lieu de rencontre et . . . à inventer ce lieu de rencontre comme un événement unique.[46]

At the crux of Derrida's analysis in the passage cited above is a concept of iterability, conceived and developed in conversation with John Searle, a philosopher of language, and signaled here by the repeated use of the conjunction "comme." For Derrida, the conjunction

[44] Derrida, "Responsabilité et hospitalité," 112; emphasis in original.
[45] Ibid., 113; emphasis added.
[46] Ibid.,113–14; emphsis in original.

comme can serve, sometimes at the same time, two functions: first, as a rhetorical tool, to establish a comparison or analogy between two terms (taken as such) of an existing discursive system; and secondly, as a discursive supplement, eliciting a transformative event that can threaten the legitimacy and limits of established categories of knowledge and experience. So, too, the poetic language of hospitality poetically announces its own coming politics *as* ("comme") absolutely unprecedented, *as if* ("comme si") it were possible to speak without grammar. Confronted with the constitutive impossibility of an infinite hospitality ("une hospitalité à l'infini"), or hospitality without condition, a responsible politics can only emerge and operate "à l'intérieur de l'hospitalité conditionnelle, de façon que celle-ci soit la meilleure possible; la responsabilité consiste donc à donner la meilleure conditionnalité."[47]

What, then, are the conditions of a responsible hospitality, and how can a host act responsibly if it is, by definition, impossible for these conditions to be determined in advance by any preexisting rule or ritual, language or law? Derrida's analysis of the aporias of justice in his essay "Force de loi: Le 'Fondement mystique de l'autorité,'" published several years prior to his writings on hospitality, proves clarifying on this particularly perplexing point.[48] In "Force de loi," Derrida asserts that in order for a decision to be considered just and responsible, it must not merely comply with or conform to a pattern of preexisting judgment, which is codified in (case) law, but also "assume it, approve it, confirm its value, by a reinstituting act of interpretation, as if [*comme si*] ultimately nothing

[47] Derrida, "Une hospitalité à l'infini," 101.
[48] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, edited by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 230–98.

previously existed of the law, as if [*comme si*] the judge himself invented the law in every case."[49] In other words, while a judgment may (and oftentimes, must) replicate a preexisting law, the responsible exercise of justice requires that the "freely decisive interpretation" of the judge consist not simply "in conformity, in the conservation and reproductive activity of judgment," but rather consider each case as singular in origin, nature, and outcome.[50] Insofar as "each case is other," it follows that each decision also demands "an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely."[51] Both "regulated and without regulation," a responsible judgment must therefore "conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case."[52] By consequence, the constitutive condition for a responsible judgment also founds its own impossibility in the present, for each "reinstituting interpretation" of the law "only defers the problem of justice," such that the "same problem of justice will have been posed and violently resolved" in perpetuity, which is to say, "buried, dissimulated, [and] repressed."[53]

From this first aporia follows a shadowy second, which has been described by Derrida as the "ghost of the undecidable." If, as Derrida claims, the responsible exercise of justice requires a relentless mediation of and reflection on the uniqueness of each case, then each decision—if it is to be just and responsible—must first traverse a moment of undecidability, that is, "the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the

[49] Derrida, "Force of Law," 251.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 252.
[53] Ibid.

order of the calculable and the rule, is still obligated . . . to give itself to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules."[54] The ethical anxiety that accompanies the responsible exercise of justice "remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost—but an essential ghost—in every decision, in every event of decision," deconstructing "from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supposed criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision." [55] According to Derrida, however, the ever-present possibility of the injustice of a decision, or the haunting presence of the undecidable in every decisive judgment, does not absolve a judge of his responsibility; to the contrary, failing or neglecting to pass judgment, or acting apathetically in an effort to avoid the ghastly ordeal of the undecidable, would in fact enact a decision equally as unjust. Derrida's third and final aporia, which he calls the "urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge," thus states that: "justice, however unpresentable it may be, doesn't wait. It is that which must not wait."[56] Required immediately, the responsible exercise of justice "cannot furnish itself with infinite information and the unlimited knowledge of conditions, rules or hypothetical imperatives that could justify it," but rather "remains a finite moment of urgency and precipitation," always already intervening "in the night of non-knowledge and non-rule."[57]

Derrida's reading of "L'Hôte" rests on a similar interpretation of the aporetic relation between responsibility and hospitality. In Camus's short story, Derrida argues, the

[54] Ibid., 253
[55] Ibid., 255
[56] Ibid.
[57] Derrida, "Force of Law," 26.

responsibility of the colonial "hôte" towards his colonized counterpart can only emerge when the rituals of hospitality have been exhausted, compelling the *pied noir* teacher to make an urgent decision regarding the Arab prisoner in his charge. After untying the Arab, cleaning the wounds on his chaffed wrists, and serving him tea and supper, Daru prepares a bed for the stranger in his home. When the Arab prisoner slips out from under the sheets in the middle of the night, his reluctant keeper feels a "surge of joy" at the thought that "he would find himself once more alone" in his exilic kingdom "with no decision to make."[58] Yet the Arab soon returns of his own volition, having only stepped outside to relieve his bladder, and Daru is compelled once again to carry the burden of decision. Thus confronted with what Derrida calls "the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge," Daru ultimately decides to leave the Arab prisoner alone at a desert crossroads to choose his own fate, "le laissant libre de choisir entre deux lois, celle de la police et celle de la hospitalité, fortement enracinée dans la culture nomade."[59] In this instant, at the abrupt end of Camus's short story, Daru's responsibility towards the Arab is urgent, indeterminate, and ultimately in vain; when the prisoner chooses the route to the colonial prison over the path to refuge, the *pied noir* teacher becomes tragically complicit in the condemnation of a man that he sought instead to liberate. For Derrida, "[t]elle est l'aporie de la responsabilité."[60]

[58] Jungah Kim, "Rooted and Rootless, Exiled and Belonging: Aporetic Moments of Justice as Law in Camus's 'The Guest,'" *Law & Literature* 25, no. 2 (2013): 251.
[59] Derrida, "Hospitalité et responsabilité," 120–1.
[60] Ibid., 122.

Derrida's reading of the relation between hospitality and in "L'Hôte" has met a mixed reception amongst postcolonial scholars of Camus's short story, who, like many critics of Camus himself, tend to take issue with the political ambivalence of Daru's action towards the Arab prisoner in his charge. Daniel Muhlestein's article "A Teacher and His Student: Subversion and Containment in Camus's 'The Guest,'" is characteristic of this postcolonial critique. Applying Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, along with concepts of subversion and containment adapted from Stephen Greenblatt, to an analysis of "L'Hôte," Muhlestein argues that the story's historical setting not only conditions the hospitable encounter between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart but also, paradoxically, precludes the possibility of its ethical outcome. According to Muhlestein, although the *pied noir* teacher seeks in principle to subvert "the repressive power of the colonial state by releasing the prisoner from physical bondage," Daru nevertheless remains in practice an ideological agent of the colonial state apparatus, whose inescapable function is to "[propagate] an ideology that transforms individuals into [submissive] subjects."[61] Consequently, by dutifully performing his role as a host, the Daru interpellates, or "hails," the Arab as "'an honorable man who deserves all the privileges of a guest,'" and as a result, imposes upon the prisoner a relation of "reciprocal obligations" towards his reluctant keeper. Conflating the hosted, or "hailed," identity of the Arab prisoner with his status as a submissive subjective of the colonial state apparatus, Muhlestin contends:

[61] Daniel K. Muhlestein, "A Teacher and His Student: Subversion and Containment in Camus's 'The Guest,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 36 (1999): 230, 224.

> Once the prisoner acknowledges his status as a guest, he is thus forced to accept his status as a prisoner. To do anything less would be to violate the law of hospitality; to do anything less would be to dishonor the host. . . . In establishing the prisoner's status as a free subject *of* the state . . . Daru imposes upon his guest the same requirement of obedience that is common to all such subjects: the requirement . . . to live in subjection *to* the state.[62]

Working against the host's benevolent intentions, Daru's seemingly subversive acts of hospitality serve paradoxically to "produce their own containment," compelling the Arab prisoner to choose bondage over freedom because, in Muhlestein's words, "he must."[63] In the final analysis, Muhlestein maintains, the relation between teaching and hospitality in "L'Hôte" can only be coercive and counterproductive to the apparent hospitable aims of Camus's sympathetic hero.

In a close reading of the institutional rituals and relations of hospitality in "L'Hôte," Eve Célia Morisi has similarly argued that the host's hospitable intentions are ultimately and inevitably undercut when considered in the historical context of colonial Algeria. Responding to Moishe Black's reading of Camus's short story as a ritual narrative of hospitality, Morisi counters that "la structure de 'L'Hôte' . . . est bien . . . celle d'une hospitalité dé-ritualisée: les étapes d'un soutien, d'une communion sociale et humaine ne suivent pas la progression linéaire qui sous-tend l'hospitalité traditionnelle, mais se trouvent systématiquement bousculées, entravées."[64] Over the course of the compact

[62] Ibid., 230.
[63] Peter Roberts, "Teaching, Learning, and Ethical Dilemmas: Lessons from Albert Camus," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 38, no. 4 (December 2008): 533; Muhlestein, "A Teacher and His Student," 232.
[64] Eve Célia Morisi, "Camus hospitalier, Camus fraternel? Les impossibilités de 'L'Hôte' dans le contexte colonial," *French Forum* 32, no. 1–2 (Winter–Spring 2007): 157.

narrative, each opening towards the Other is accompanied or succeeded by an equal and opposite impasse. Morisi demonstrates that although Daru dutifully performs the rituals of hospitality that have been prescribed to him by his cultural milieu, he remains distrustful of the Arab character, as dramatized by the recurring image of a loaded gun, a potent symbol of potential violence. Constantly ebbing and flowing, "l'élan hospitalier" of Camus's short story thus displays "une dynamique constante d'ouverture(s) et de fermeture(s) successives," which may be visualized as "une sorte de courbe sinusoïdale."[65] Ultimately, Morisi argues, the colonial "hôte" in Camus's short story cannot fully accommodate the subjectivity of his colonized counterpart, but is rather condemned (in a Sisyphean posture) to replicate "le dysfonctionnement du cérémonial hospitalier et des rôles qu'il suppose" in the very same system of colonial injustices that he seeks, absurdly, to subvert.[66]

In their respective analyses, both Muhlestein and Morisi posit the constitutive impossibility of an ethics of hospitality in a colonial context by calling attention to the inhospitable practices, policies, and politics of French colonialism in Algeria. However, while they are by all means correct to call attention the cultural, political, and ideological entanglements that condition, complicate, or even counteract the possibility of hospitality in the colonial context of Camus's short story, I take issue with their respective conclusions on at least three accounts. First, following Peter Roberts, I would contend that Muhlestein's Althusserian reading of the student-teacher relation does not adequately address the "forms of resistance that are often part of the [education] process," but rather reduce both

[65] Ibid., 155–56.
[66] Ibid., 161.

parties to "mere pawns in a larger repressive game."[67] As Henry Giroux has argued, discussing the limitations of an Althusserian theory of ideology:

> Althusser has developed a notion of power that appears to eliminate human agency. The notion that human beings are neither homogeneously constituted subjects nor passive role bearers is lost. . . [T]here is no theory of mediation in this perspective; nor is there any conception of how people appropriate, select, accommodate, or simply generate meaning. Instead, in Althusser's reductionist schema human beings are relegated to static role-bearers, carriers of pre-defined meanings, agents of hegemonic ideologies inscribed in their psyche like irremovable scars.[68]

Consequently, in his schematic application of an Althusserian analytical framework to Camus's short story, Muhlestein's interpretation of "L'Hôte" conveys a sense of tragic inevitability, categorically precluding the possibility of hospitality in a colonial context.

Furthermore, by focusing on the institutional, ideological, or ritual structures that condition the responsibility of the colonial host, both Muhlestein and Morisi fail to account for the subjectivity of the Arab character, effectively foreclosing his capacity for resistance.[69] By presenting the prisoner as "a passive performer in a role that has already

[67] Roberts, "Lessons from Albert Camus," 534.
[68] Henry Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 82–83.
[69] Scholarly literature on Camus "L'Hôte" has focused in large part (with a number of notable exceptions) on the *pied noir* protagonist, the relative moral and political merits of his paradoxical choice, and its attendant consequences, intended or otherwise. By comparison, critics have often tended to dismiss or disregard the Arab character as a racialized trope in Daru's existential drama. As D. F. Hurley has remarked in an article entitled "Looking for the Arab: Reading the Readings of Camus's 'The Guest,'" a continuous thread in the critical commentary on Camus's short story has been the "constant, virtually unexamined, assumption that the Arab prisoner has committed a foul murder and is on the outer boundaries of the human, whether he is vicious or mad or deeply stupid"; D. F. Hurley, "Looking for the Arab: Reading the Readings of Camus's 'The Guest,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 30 (1993): 79. In this way, Hurley argues, the scholarly literature surrounding Camus's short story has compulsively, perhaps subconsciously, replicated the colonial mindset for which the author of "L'Hôte" has himself been so routinely reprimanded.

been decided for him by the mechanical workings of a repressive state ideology," both scholars not only deny the possibility of psychological depth or dissonance on the part of the Arab, but also forget that he comes carrying the ideological considerations of his own indigenous milieu, which may have been influenced, interrupted, or oppressed by the colonial state, *certes*, yet survive in some form all the same.[70]

Finally, in contrast to Morisi, who sees in "L'Hôte" the ill-fated failure of the rituals of hospitality in a colonial context, I would argue that it is in fact the apparent dysfunction or deficiency of a ritualized form of hospitality that provides an ethical potential for Camus's short story. Following Derrida, I would argue that an ethics of hospitality is necessarily existential rather than deontological, that is, relying on and emerging as a consequence of choice rather than the application or reaffirmation of an existing rule.[71] The fact that the "ethical subject of hospitality is always torn, divided, compromised or caught in a [political] bind" does not abstract his hospitable actions from the realm of the ethical; to the contrary, this apparent "failure" of an ethics of hospitality simply implies the "*irreducibly political* aspect of ethical action," because "the political is precisely that which must still be decided on even in the absence of foundations."[72] Historically embedded in the sociopolitical context of colonial Algeria, Camus's short story warrants a similar analysis. By extracting hospitality from the abstract realm of ritual and reinstating its realization in relation to the infinite singularity of the event, "L'Hôte" points to the political responsibility of the colonial "hôte" towards his colonized counterpart. From this perspective, the

[70] Roberts, "Lessons from Albert Camus," 535.
[71] Baker, *Politicising Ethics*, 3.
[72] Ibid., 8, 4, 8.

relevant question is therefore not the extent to which Daru dutifully or successfully executes the rituals of hospitality that are expected of him, but rather the singularity of his response when he is compelled to recognize the humanity of the stranger in his home.

IV. An Impassable Crossing: Aporias of Postcolonial Hospitality in David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*

Camus's "L'Hôte" ends in ambiguous tragedy, with the Arab prisoner trudging towards Tinguit as the *pied noir* teacher slouches home to find that the sanctity of his desert schoolhouse has been shattered by an imminent threat of violence. And it is here, on the same wind-blown plateau, that David Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes* picks up the time-frayed thread of Camus's short story. Set in November 1954, as a series of anti-colonial attacks across the Algerian territory announce the opening salvo of Algeria's eight-year war for independence, the film brings the historical backdrop of "L'Hôte" to its narrative forefront, affording additional depth and nuance to Camus's protagonists while also fleshing out their personal histories and political calculations. Opening with a sweeping horizontal scan of an arid horizon high in the Atlas Mountains, the first scenes of Oelhoffen's film remain remarkably faithful to Camus's short story: Balducci arrives on horseback to transfer a rope-bound Arab—who is given a name: Mohammed—to a reluctant Daru, who refuses to turn him over to the colonial authorities but reluctantly agrees to host the prisoner in his home for the night.

However, the film abruptly departs from its literary antecedent when Daru is forced to take responsibility for Mohammed even before they leave the shelter of his schoolhouse:

the teacher first protects the Arab prisoner from an attack from his cousins, who have come to avenge the murder of their kin, and then soon thereafter shelters him from the displaced vengeance of a group of colonial settlers. Later, on the path to Tinguit, Daru and Mohammed spend not hours in each other's company, but several days, encountering various trials and tribulations along the way that solidify the budding solidarity between the two men. In the course of their journey, they are first taken hostage by a band of Algerian freedom fighters and subsequently survive an attack from the French colonial forces. By the time the two men part company at a desert crossroads, exchanging material gifts and signs of mutual respect as they bid each other farewell, Daru and Mohammed have become comrades, conversing in a common tongue and calling each other by their given names. Drawing directly on Camus's short story while departing at critical junctures from its literary antecedent, Oelhoffen's film transforms a private encounter with existential dread into an overtly political choice with profound ethical and historical ramifications.

Expounding on the hypothesis, introduced above, that adaptation constitutes a kind of cosmopolitan hospitality, I approach the issue of postcolonial hospitality in Oelhoffen's film from two mutually enmeshed perspectives. First, adopting a Deriddean approach, I consider the question at the level of narrative content and form, focusing in particular on recurring images of wounding generosity, precarious shelter, and suspended justice in *Loin des hommes*. From this perspective, I examine how Oelhoffen's film engages productively with the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of "L'Hôte" while also calling attention to the limits of colonial hospitality as articulated in Camus's short story. At the same time, however, and never separate from my initial textual analysis, I also address the practice of adaptation *as*

an act of hospitality in and of itself, especially when the "hôte" in question is a canonical, colonial text that has been adapted in or transposed onto a postcolonial context. Turning for inspiration to the theoretical contributions of contemporary translation studies—an academic field that has been greatly influenced in recent years by Derrida's theories on deconstruction, which are themselves theoretically indebted to the work of linguists such as Émile Benveniste and Ferdinand de Saussure—I consider how a hospitable act of creative adaptation can perform a form of cultural border crossing, carrying the possibility of a postcolonial cosmopolitanism to come.

My analysis of *Loin des hommes* proceeds in three parts, each focusing on the irresolvable paradoxes, or "aporias," of hospitality that arise in the hospitable encounter between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart. First, contra Muhlstein's Althusserian reading of "L'Hôte," I call attention to the significance of the schoolhouse (school-house) setting that opens both Camus's short story and Oelhoffen's film. I argue that the schoolhouse provides an ethical framework for the film's exploration of hospitality, transforming the transactional exchange initiated by Baluducci into an intransitive encounter between a teacher-host and his student-guest. Next, I consider the aporetic relation between hospitality and hostility in the film's depiction of the Algerian War. By placing the anti-colonial conflict in Algeria in conversation with the Second World War, the film's transhistorical perspective further blurs the boundaries between host, guest, and hostage, liberator and oppressor, and freedom and bondage.[73] Lastly, addressing an issue

[73] For more on the ethical implications of such a transhistorical perspective, see my discussion of Jérôme Ferrari's *Où j'ai laissé mon âme* and Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre* in the previous chapter.

that has been largely absent from the scholarly literature on Camus's short story, I discuss the sexual dynamics of hospitality in *Loin des hommes* through a brief reading of a brothel scene near the end of the film. In my analysis, I consider the relations of generosity, hospitality, and ownership that are implied by the practice of sex work, calling attention to the corporeal hospitality of the female body and the place of the feminine in the broader context of hospitality. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the lessons that might be learned from the brothel scene and Oelhoffen's film more broadly for a coming "cosmopolitics" of postcolonial hospitality.

* * *

"Pourquoi on fait commencer l'histoire en 3000 B.C.?" asks Daru, played by a stoic Viggo Mortensen, of his class of Algerian students in the opening scene of Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*. "L'invention de l'écriture," he responds after a student hazards an incorrect answer, "pas loin d'ici, en Égypte." This short classroom dialogue, a noteworthy departure from the text of Camus's short story, serves at least two expository aims. First, in his comments on the non-Western origins of Western historiography, the *pied noir* teacher alludes to a certain tradition of cultural imperialism while also acknowledging his own complicity in the conservation and propagation of the French colonial canon. Acting as a narrative double of both Camus's protagonist and the *pied noir* author himself, Oelhoffen's protagonist adopts an ironic, self-critical perspective on his own pedagogical authority as a teacher and a storyteller alike. In this way, the opening scene performs a compact *mise en abyme* of the film's broader critique, calling attention to the colonial origins of Camus's

short story while also inviting reflection on its own relation to the French canon in a postcolonial context.

Secondly, in addition to framing the film's critique of cultural imperialism, the opening scene also introduces Daru's character first and foremost as a teacher. In both "L'Hôte" and *Loin des hommes*, a French geography lesson left on the classroom chalkboard signals the hostile concept of colonial hospitality alluded to in the short story's title, calling attention to the relation of territorial appropriation and exploitation that exists between the colonial "hôte" in Algeria (an uninvited guest, who has assumed the role of host in a home that is not his) and his colonial counterpart (an unwilling host, who has been made a guest in his own home by an ungrateful guest). Yet in contrast to Camus's short story, which opens on an empty classroom, Oelhoffen's film focuses on a pedagogical encounter between the *pied noir* teacher and his students, explicitly connecting the schoolhouse (school-house) setting to its broader engagement with the question of hospitality.

In its expository emphasis on the pedagogical act, Oelhoffen's film invites reflection on the uneasy conjunction between the "school," as an ideological apparatus of the colonial state, and the "house," as a private site of hospitable accommodation. As Derrida has suggested in *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, a farewell address dedicated to the memory of his longtime friend and mentor, the practice of teaching, or *enseignement*, can itself perform a paradoxical form of hospitality, in which the power dynamic between the teacher-host and his student-guest is destabilized by a discursive surplus. For Derrida, this uncontainable excess is not only inherent in but also constitutive of any ethical relation of *enseignement*. Citing Levinas, Derrida comments:

> 'Aborder Autrui dans le discours . . . c'est *accueillir* [je me permets de souligner déjà ce mot] son expression où il déborde à tout instant l'idée qu'en emporterait une pensée. C'est donc *recevoir* [souligné par Levinas] d'Autrui au delà de la capacité du Moi ; ce qui signifie exactement : avoir l'idée de l'infini. Mais cela signifie aussi être enseigné. Le rapport avec Autrui ou le Discours, est un rapport non-allergique, un rapport éthique, mais ce discours *accueilli* [je souligne encore] est un enseignement. Mais l'enseignement ne revient pas à la maïeutique. Il vient de l'extérieur et m'apporte plus que je ne contiens.'[74]

For Derrida, following Levinas, the act of teaching must therefore not be reduced to the false equality of the *maieutic*, or Socratic, method, in which the master, or teacher, "feint de s'effacer derrière la figure de la sage-femme," poised with palms outstretched to catch a crowning student in the infancy of his wisdom.[75] Such an exchange, Derrida argues, would simply:

> dévoile . . . ce que je suis *à même*, déjà, de savoir *moi-même* (*ipse*), de pouvoir savoir de *moi-même*, en ce lieu où le *même* . . . rassemble *en lui-même* pouvoir et savoir, et comme le *même*, le même *être-à même-de* en la propriété de son propre, en son essentialité même.[76]

By contrast, in an ethical relation of *enseignement*, the teacher must renounce his status as master, and in that act of self-abdication, learn to accommodate the alterity of the Other, his student, beyond his own capacity to give or to teach. Exceeding the measured reciprocity of a transitive or transactional exchange, such a relation would require the teacher to receive his student intransitively, to welcome him along with a discourse that comes uniquely *from* him, to accept his student as well as the possibility of being changed *by* him. To teach, in the

[74] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1997), 43; emphasis in original.
[75] Ibid., 42; emphasis in original.
[76] Ibid.; emphasis in original.

Levinasian sense, is therefore to open the self to a teaching that is not proper to the self, but rather comes to it from the outside, in and through the discourse of the Other.

From this perspective, the schoolhouse setting featured in the opening scene of Oelhoffen's film can be approached and apprehended from at least one of three angles. In one regard, Daru's desert schoolhouse accentuates the asymmetrical power relation between the *pied noir* teacher and his impoverished indigenous students, who are seen streaming out of the classroom with a small gift of grain. Situated at the literal, liminal threshold between the public and the private spheres, the schoolhouse allows for an otherwise impossible encounter between the two communities of "hôtes" while still supporting the institutional and ideological barriers that separate them. At the same time, however, the film's emphasis on the pedagogical act also provides an additional, *ethical* framework for the film's exploration of hospitality, transforming the transactional prisoner exchange initiated by Baluducci into an intransitive encounter between a teacher-host and his student-guest. Recast as a practice of hospitality, the pedagogical act allows for the possibility of change or growth on the part of the colonial "hôte" while also acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of his colonized counterpart. Lastly, the Levinasian concept of *enseignement* can serve as an interpretive framework for understanding the relation between Camus's short story, "L'Hôte," and its cinematic adaptation in Oelhoffen's *Loin des hommes*. Analogous in some respects to a student and his teacher, the film not only learns from its literary antecedent, but also provides its own unique and powerful perspective on the paradoxes of the anti-colonial conflict, perhaps teaching us more about the possibility of (post)colonial hospitality than "L'Hôte" alone could purport to do.

* * *

Although the opening scenes of *Loin des hommes* do not stray far from the text of Camus's short story, the film asserts its storytelling autonomy at daybreak, when a stray bullet punctures the dusty window of Daru's desert schoolhouse. The following two scenes, each serving as an uncanny reflection of the other, set the stage for the coming narrative. In contrast to the quiet suspense of Camus's short story, the eruption of violence in Oelhoffen's film is sudden, intense, and strangely devoid of affect: the distant relatives of the Arab prisoner have come to avenge the death of their murdered kin. Grabbing the weapon that was given to him by Balducci, Daru springs into action to defend Mohammed; after a brief gun battle, the Algerians flee on horseback, leaving a wounded horse to die on the ground. The Arab prisoner watches warily through the classroom window as the teacher shoots the wounded animal in violent act of compassion. "React! Are you not a man?" shouts the Daru in dialectical Arabic as he stands with his arm still drawn over the dead horse, whose blood has been spilled in the place of the Arab prisoner's. Mohammed retreats silently inside, turning his back to the animal that has died in his stead.

Mere moments later, a trio of colonial settlers arrives on horseback to ask Daru about a herd of cattle that was slaughtered the night before, allegedly in connection to a series of recent anti-colonial attacks across the Algerian countryside. Seeing the Arab prisoner lurking sheepishly inside the schoolhouse, one of the men accuses Daru of sheltering an Algerian combatant. The *pied noir* teacher provides an alibi for the Arab prisoner, ironically protecting Mohammed from imminent harm by claiming to deliver him to the colonial authorities. In these parallel scenes, both involving the sacrificial slaughter

of large animals, Daru twice assumes responsibility for the Arab prisoner in his keep, defending him against the ritual vengeance of his Algerian kin as well as the reactionary judgment of the colonial settlers. At the same time, however, in his repeated attempts to assure Mohammed's safety, the *pied noir* teacher paradoxically imposes his colonial authority over the Arab prisoner. By protecting the Arab prisoner against the violent, vengeful intentions of not one but two groups of non-state actors, Daru also reaffirms a restricted notion of justice that remains connected at this juncture to the disciplinary apparatus of the colonial state.

Unfolding on the literal frontier between Daru's schoolhouse and the symbolic wilderness beyond, these parallel scenes establish a critical threshold in *Loin des hommes*, showing the ethical and political stakes of the film's engagement with the question of hospitality in a colonial context. First, in contrast to Camus's short story, in which the anti-colonial conflict seems to rumble beyond the horizon as a distant storm, Oelhoffen's film addresses the Algerian War as an imminent historical event, one requiring urgent attention and action. In Oelhoffen's film, the advent of violence not only interrupts the illusion of solitude and safety in Daru's desert schoolhouse, but also transforms a ritual act of accommodation into an overtly political assumption of responsibility. Consequently, the perpetual threat of hostility in *Loin des hommes* does not simply pervert the abstract principle of hospitality, but also constitutes the primary condition of possibility for a potential ethical encounter between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart. Finally, by accepting to host a stranger in his home, Daru has clearly become a stranger in his own home, as his physical safety and the symbolic sanctity of his personal space are

imminently threatened by the mere presence of—and his perceived sociopolitical affinities with—the Arab prisoner. Compelled to reenter his own home from the outside, through a door to the self that has been opened to him by the Other inside, "l'hôte invitant, accueillant, devient l'invité de son invité."[77] Despite coming at the cost of violence, this reversal of roles founds the possibility of an ethical relation between the two characters in the scenes that follow.

Thus punctured by violence, Daru's desert schoolhouse can no longer protect the *pied noir* teacher or the Arab prisoner in his keep, and so the two men set off together on the path towards Tinguit. Although their dialogue remains sparse and pragmatic, alternating between broken French and dialectical Arabic, a certain gestural understanding emerges between Daru and Mohammed as they travel and converse, so to speak, with their eyes, hands, and bodily postures. Yet the provisional détente between the two men proves fragile; as the travelers pause in the shadow of an escarpment to share an evening meal, the sudden arrival of an armed Algerian on horseback reminds them of their respective political affinities. After a failed attempt to communicate with the stranger, Daru abruptly shoots and kills the Arab man, then blames Mohammed for having brought them both to this absurd and fateful juncture, alone together in the steppes of the hostile desert. However, in a tender yet disturbing reversal of Daru's sacrificial slaughter of the wounded horse seen earlier in the film, Mohammed reacts to the teacher's rash and violent act by performing the requisite burial rites for his slain compatriot. As Mohammed quietly

[77] Derrida, "Responsabilité et hospitalité," 118.

mourns the anonymous Arab man who has been murdered by Daru, the Arab prisoner emerges ironically as an ethical foil to his *pied noir* keeper.

Darkness brings danger in the desert, and soon the two men's mutual anger has been muffled by their base desire to survive; as night descends with a sudden rainstorm, Daru and Mohammed seek shelter in an abandoned, makeshift village high in the mountains. A poignant metaphor for colonial hospitality, the settlement is populated with roofless houses, their proud and sturdy walls providing no shelter from the rain. The following morning, after spending another restless night in each other's company, the relative roles between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart are once again reversed, as the Arab prisoner forages for roots to feed his shivering companion. Plucking cautiously amongst a field of poisonous plants, Mohammed finally breaks his stubborn silence to confess why he has continued to followed Daru rather than seizing on any one of several obvious opportunities to escape. Fully aware of the death sentence that likely awaits him in Tinguit, the Arab prisoner explains that his Algerian kin will continue to seek vengeance, as seen in an earlier scene, until he is brought to justice for his crime. By submitting himself to the judgment of the colonial authorities, Mohammed reckons, he will be able to spare the lives of his younger siblings, who will be killed in his place if he himself escapes punishment. It becomes apparent that Mohammed has set out to strategically appropriate the colonial justice system in order to resist—and ultimately, to interrupt—the violent cycle of ritual vengeance that has been dictated by the moral codes of his own cultural milieu. Ashamed of a crime that he felt compelled to commit in order to save his family's honor, Mohammed shows himself here to be an autonomous and intelligent agent

of his own tragic narrative, acting according to his own personal convictions, political calculations, and cultural imperatives.

From the moment a stray bullet punctures the sanctuary of Daru's desert schoolhouse—and the structure of Camus's short story along with it—Oelhoffen's film progresses systematically through a series of narrative pairs and skewed parallels: the ritual vengeance of the Arab prisoner's kin is offset by the reactionary judgment of the colonial settlers; Daru's protective instincts towards the Arab prisoner are later seen reproduced in Mohammed when he prevents his companion from slipping down a steep, rocky slope along the mountain path; and the murder of the unnamed Arab, strangely recalling the killing of the wounded horse, pulls Daru and Mohammed into a precarious moral proximity. In contrast to the "courbe sinusoïdale" described by Morisi, commenting on the constant opening and closing of hospitable postures in "L'Hôte," the representation of hospitality in Oelhoffen's film more closely resembles a cubist fractal, as the encounter between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart is repeatedly subjected to a series of ironic reversals and shifts of perspective. With each successive perspective shift or reversal of roles, the stakes of responsibility are incrementally raised, as the practice of hospitality reveals its essential proximity with its hostile counterpart.

* * *

De-ritualized, undecidable, and repeatedly disrupted by violence, the aporetic dialectic of hospitality is most clearly evidenced by the film's parenthetical depiction of the anti-colonial conflict, which appears onscreen at the precise narrative midpoint of the film. When a group of armed Algerians—members of the recently militarized Front de

Libération Nationale (FLN), Algeria's revolutionary party—arrives unexpectedly on horseback, Daru and Mohammed are taken prisoner and led by rope (an allusion to the Secours Rouge postcard referenced in the opening scene of Camus's short story) to an underground grotto where the combatants have set up camp for the night. Along the way, Daru recognizes an Algerian opposition leader named Slimane from his infantry regiment during the Second World War. Later, evoking the uncanny historical coincidence between the closure of the European campaign of the Second World War and the civilian massacres of Sétif and Guelma on May 8, 1945, Slimane asks Daru to join the anti-colonial cause.[78] Daru respectfully declines, perhaps anticipating, like Camus, that the coming revolution will cost him the only home that he had ever known. In an ironic reversal of Camus's famous Stockholm speech, Slimane admits that although he harbors no malice towards his former brother-in-arms, he would not hesitate to kill him if the revolution required it.

The following morning, the Algerian combatants are caught in a surprise ambush by the French colonial forces. Deploying an anachronistic tactic used during the French conquest of Algeria in the nineteenth century, the soldiers set smoky fires at the entrance to the underground grotto, forcing the Algerians encamped within to either surrender or suffer death by asphyxiation.[79] After conferring in haste with Slimane, Daru reveals his presence to the French soldiers and asks his compatriots to hold their fire, claiming to have been taken hostage. By posing ironically as a hostage, Daru strategically aligns himself with

[78] Renaud de Rochebrune and Benjamin Stora, *Des origines à la bataille d'Alger*, vol. 1, *La Guerre d'Algérie vue par les Algériens* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2011), 74–85.
[79] For more on the "enfumades d'Algérie" and other tactics of the French colonial expeditionary forces in Algeria, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser Exterminer: Sur la guerre et l'État colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 138–45.

the French colonial forces in order protect his Algerian comrades, allowing some of them, including Slimane, to escape unscathed. But the teacher's benevolent intentions tragically misfire when a French soldier, consciously violating the international rules of war, summarily executes the remaining Algerians shortly after Daru encourages them to surrender. Only Mohammed is left miraculously alive, protected once again by his perceived status as a prisoner under Daru's protection. Surveying the carnage once the French soldiers have decamped, Daru begins to mimic Mohammed's pious gestures, as both men pray over the bodies of the slain Algerians.

Through a dizzying series of ironic role reversals and shifts of perspective, the paradox of hospitality becomes painfully apparent here, as the colonial "hôte" and his colonized companion *cum* prisoner are taken hostage by the self-professed liberators of an occupied territory that has been held captive for over a century by the very same colonial forces who, in the film, finally set the two men free to proceed together on the path that leads to the prison in Tinguit. In the film's representation of the coming anti-colonial conflict, the categorical boundaries between host, guest, and hostage, liberator and oppressor, and freedom and bondage become blurred, if not recklessly interchangeable, calling into question the ethical integrity of each political stance, each aborted attempt at accommodation or care, each proffered shelter that proves roofless or unsafe. So, where does this leave the sympathetic viewer, if not bound up in the same irresolvable both-sides-ism that afflicted Camus, which is to say, politically impotent and subject to reasonable charges of moral relativism? And how can a cosmopolitan hospitality help to cross this ethical impasse?

* * *

Oelhoffen's film does not afford easy or explicit answers to these urgent questions. To the contrary, in its repeated and consistent rejection of any form of hospitality that has been codified by law or ritualized by culture, the film seems to call into question the very concept of community, or what it means to be at "home" in the context of colonial Algeria. In its ambiguous representation of the anti-colonial conflict, the film does not regret the coming of the revolution, nor does it appeal to the moderate assimilationist model advocated by Camus. At the same time, however, the film also expresses criticism of the communitarian essentialism of the FLN and explicitly criticizes the cyclic rituals of territorial reclamation, summary expulsion, and identity crystallization that would come to characterize the Algerian War and its violent aftermath.

This apparent contradiction in terms can be better understood—although not necessarily resolved—by returning to the conditions of a cosmopolitan hospitality alluded to above. Recognizing the irreducibly political aspect of all ethical action, the concept of cosmopolitanism operates according to the assumption that an unconditional Law of hospitality cannot survive in complete abstraction from the laws of hospitality that come to condition or limit it. Consequently, while an absolute ethics of hospitality unambiguously calls for the universal recognition of the Other, this principle cannot be universalizable in practice because, as Baker puts it, "[a] hospitality that could not be refused would not be worthy of the name."[80] According to the same principle, while the "welcome of hospitality,

[80] Baker, *Politicising Ethics*, 4.

considered as an ethics, should not depend on a spatialized framing of the inside-outside," or the "territorialization of world politics characteristic of international order," no form of inclusion, including hospitality, "can banish exclusion, since all acts of inclusion constitute their own exclusions or outsiders."[81] In contrast to a universal political community, then, which would seek to "transcend international plurality in the name of putative universals," cosmopolitanism as hospitality calls for the recognition of political communities in the plural, the coexistence of which is indeed necessary for the exercise of ethical action.[82] From this perspective, the anti-colonial conflict in Algeria would not only be consistent with the political tenets of cosmopolitanism, but would also be considered essential for the future of hospitable relations between the two postcolonial communities.

At the same time, however, the political pluralism called for by cosmopolitanism should not be confounded with the particularism of identity politics or the political ambiguity of postcolonial "hybridity." "Contra communitarianism," Baker clarifies, "where the threshold between inside and outside . . . becomes significant for what it encloses and the 'outside' is rendered less morally relevant than the 'inside,'" cosmopolitan hospitality "proposes an inversion of this order of priority," such that the "'outside' is what the inside of political community opens up to, exists for and is indeed constituted by."[83] Put another way, while cosmopolitanism as hospitality cannot abolish all borders or exclude its own inevitable exclusions, an ethics of cosmopolitanism—or what Derrida has called on occasion a "cosmopolitics"—is expressed essentially in its orientation towards an

[81] Ibid., 4–5.
[82] Ibid., 91.
[83] Ibid., 7.

undefined Other, whose status and station are constantly shifting. Consequently, the conditions of a cosmopolitan hospitality must also be "continually . . . challenged and rethought," constituting an approach to ethical action that repeatedly appeals to the responsibility of the decision-making subject.[84] In this regard, while cosmopolitanism would undoubtedly recognize a nation's right to sovereignty and self-determination, it would also reject the permanent reification of cultural, linguistic, or political borders.

In Oelhoffen's film, the conditions of a cosmopolitan hospitality can be seen from several angles. First, to revisit an earlier point about the ethics of *enseignement* in Levinas and *Loin des hommes*, I would argue that Oelhoffen's film is, from the outset, oriented facing outwards towards the agency and subjectivity of the Algerian Other, such that the teacher-host—the intrepid, solitary hero of Camus's short story—is shown repeatedly to learn from the personal experience, political convictions, and sociocultural identity of his student-guest—the Arab prisoner in his reluctant charge. Rather than valorizing the cultural, political, or racial differences between Daru and Mohammed—or, to the contrary, reducing the two men to a flat relation of hybridity, resemblance, or similitude—the film presents a model of mutual recognition that emerges existentially through concrete acts of responsibility and solidarity.

Furthermore, in its ambiguous representation of the anti-colonial conflict, the film proposes a possible response to the Algerian problem that was confronted with such palpable apprehension and ambivalence by Camus in "L'Hôte." In contrast to Camus's short

[84] Ibid., 99.

story, Oelhoffen's film does not seek to suspend the question of Algerian sovereignty within the allegorical confines of an abstract ethics of care or accommodation. To the contrary, the prospect of Algerian Independence is presented in *Loin des hommes* as both imminent and imperative, as evidenced by the film's repeated and strategic representation of a reversal of roles between the colonial "hôte" and his colonized counterpart. However, while remaining unequivocal in its rebuke of existing conditions of colonial oppression in Algeria, as well as the illegal counterinsurgency tactics of French colonial forces, the film also rejects the communitarian impulse to reify an essentially Algerian identity, reclaimed dialectically through (and only through) armed conflict. Consequently, instead of indulging the perhaps infinitely regressive problem of "identifying the 'true' hosts" in the North African territory called "Algeria," Oelhoffen's film posits the anti-colonial conflict as an existential (rather than essential or ontological) condition for a coming hospitality, fundamentally oriented towards a cosmopolitan future[85]

However, no matter how measured and pragmatic as it may be in its representation of the anti-colonial conflict in Algeria, Oelhoffen's film remains haunted, as is Camus's short story, by an aporetic remainder, which is the unavoidable paradox of hospitality, cosmopolitan or otherwise. Although the concept of cosmopolitanism affords an actionable alternative to both the impractical idealism of a universal political community and the particularism of postcolonial identity politics, a cosmopolitan hospitality put in practice remains both "impure" and perpetually "incomplete."[86] As Baker has argued, the inclusions

[85] Ibid., 7.
[86] Ibid., 8.

of even the most generous articulation of hospitality inevitably constitute their exclusions, which may call for future action but can never be perfectly, completely, or permanently resolved through the static establishment of an inclusive community, homeland, or state.

And so, the film's friendly protagonists find themselves once again at a familiar ethical impasse. While Daru, like his Camusian counterpart, fully recognizes the legitimacy, veracity, and urgency of the grievances of the Algerian combatants, he cannot in good faith give himself fully to their political cause. At the same time, while Mohammed recognizes the futility of a fair trial for his crime in the colonial courts, he cannot rightly absolve himself of his responsibility towards his family by fleeing some form of judgment, even if the colonial justice system is recognizably unjust. Confronted once again with an irresolvable aporia, or what Derrida has called an "impassable crossing," the two men retreat for temporary relief to the only home that remains open to them both: the brothel.

V. "Loin des hommes": The Feminine, or Hospitality's Forgotten Remainder

The brothel is in Brézina, where Daru, the son of poor Spanish settlers of Andalusian descent, worked as farmhand in his youth. Like Camus, the *pied noir* teacher confesses to his Arab companion that he has always felt like a foreigner in Algeria; the locals in Brézina, he recalls, would call him a *caracole*, or "snail" : one who, carrying own his home on his back, is always at home, yet a stranger wherever he goes. "Pour les Français on était des Arabes," Daru says, "et pour les Arabes on était des Français." When Mohammed asks Daru why he has brought him here, the teacher responds cryptically, "Tu verras." The brothel is closed when the two men arrive, but recognizing Daru, the matron calls at his request for a

girl to accompany Mohammed to a private room. The prostitute is Daru's parting gift to Mohammed, who, in a whispered confession to his *pied noir* companion the night before, expressed regret that he would die without ever having "known" a woman. The matron of the brothel gives Daru a girl, too, upon learning of the death of his late wife, and in the musky gloom of a darkly curtained room, the prostitute is seen washing her client's face. After, in a tender moment of complicity and catharsis between the two men, Daru and Mohammed share a cigarette on the steps to the brothel before setting off on the final stint of their journey towards Tinguit.

While a prolonged discussion of the sexual dynamics of hospitality is well beyond the scope and aims of the present chapter, the brothel scene near the end of *Loin des hommes* nevertheless raises several issues with relevance to my broader critique. First, in its conflation of hospitality and the feminine (erotic, maternal, or both), the brothel scene in Oelhoffen's film reinforces an unresolved dynamic of sexual difference in the Derridean conception of hospitality as a coming "cosmopolitics." For Derrida, the constitutive paradox of hospitality cyclically returns to the problem of ownership as it relates to the dynamics of generosity, (dis)possession, and control. As Irina Aristarkhova has observed, the patriarchal terms of property create a fundamental contradiction for Derrida: "how can one give away what one owns if one wants to continue to be hospitable, to give away?"[87] This paradox, Aristarkhova argues, can only be solved performatively, "through and as *acts* of hospitality that confirm ownership of property (house, cow, wife, daughter, servants,

[87] Irina Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix: Philosophy, Biomedicine, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 36.

slaves, things, body) even while questioning it," pushing the concept and conditions of ownership and property to their logical limits.[88] Put another way, while the practice of hospitality itself is inevitably conditioned by the conditions of ownership and property, the principle of hospitality both precedes and exceeds property, suggesting the possibility of an "'absolute, absolutely originary, or even pre-originary hospitality,'" which, for Derrida is "'nothing less than the pre-ethical origin of ethics.'"[89]

For Derrida, this so-called "anarchic origin of ethics," which founds the possibility of hospitality, may be located, along with the feminine, inside the home:

> The home is not owned. Or at least it is owned, in a very singular sense of this word, only insofar as it is already hospitable to its owner. The head of the household, the master of the house, is already . . . a *guest* in his own home. This absolute precedence of the welcoming . . . would be precisely the femininity of 'Woman,' interiority as femininity—and as 'feminine alterity.'[90]

Thus, as Aristarkhova and other feminist scholars have argued, the founding premise that "'hospitality precedes property' is based on a sexual division of ownership, where the hospitality of the feminine is defined as an involuntary, automatic quality, independent from" and prior to "any acts of hospitality."[91] Although the "'anarchic origin of ethics . . . *belongs*,'" in Derrida's own words, to "'the dimension of femininity,' and not to the empirical presence of a human being of the 'feminine sex,'" the feminine—as an immaterial

[88] Ibid., 36.
[89] Derrida, qtd. in Ibid., 38.
[90] Derrida, qtd. in Ibid.; emphasis mine. Derrida's discussion of the "preoriginary and foundational status of the femininity in/of hospitality" strongly echoes that of his mentor, Levinas, who similarly writes: "'The home that founds possession is not a possession in the same sense as the movable goods it can collect and keep. It is possessed because it already and henceforth is hospitable for its owner. This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcoming in itself—the feminine being'"; qtd. in Ibid., 38.
[91] Ibid., 42.

function, or a facilitating metaphor—"does not own anything because it cannot own anything."[92] Consequently, for Derrida, the problem of ownership that constitutes the primary paradox of hospitality can only be resolved on the condition of a hospitality that precedes all property, which belongs (without the possibility of belonging) to the feminine.

A tender respite in an otherwise tense and arid film, the brothel scene in *Loin des hommes* adds a final ethical dimension to the film's exploration of hospitality. In the historical context of an anti-colonial waged especially (although by no means exclusively) by men, the brothel in Brézina provides a space of safety, shelter, and (sexual) solace for the war-weary protagonists. Radically removed from the realm of the political, the brothel resituates the practice of hospitality within the intimate privacy of a proxy home (away from home), where the two men are seen caressed, coddled, and cared for by women who figure interchangeably as mothers and lovers. Additionally, although Daru scatters a few coins on the bar countertop as payment for the first girl's sexual services, the matron's subsequent "gift" of a second girl effectively neutralizes the transactional nature of the initial exchange, taking the "work" out of "sex work" and recasting its practice as a kind of radical generosity, a giving without the possibility of repayment.[93] Consequently, in stark contrast to the territorializing or transactional tendencies of what Still has called "the masculine economy of hospitality," the brothel scene in Oelhoffen's film performs a form of

[92] Derrida, qtd. in Ibid., 38, 42.
[93] Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

care that cannot be returned or reciprocated, provisionally suspending the conditions of ownership and property that inevitably condition the practice of hospitality.[94]

In its appeal to the hospitality of the feminine, the film calls attention what Bonnie Honig, in an essay on hospitality as an "agonistic cosmopolitics," has characterized as hospitality's forgotten remainders.[95] Even in an universal order of hospitality, founded on the cosmopolitan invocation of "the other who comes," there is always a risk of forgetting the self-same stranger that hides inside the self, intimate and unacknowledged.[96] As Oelhoffen's film repeatedly reminds us, there is always a remainder to every ethical relation of hospitality: the faithful civil servant who risks his life and status to save that of a stranger; the burgeoning friendship that is violently severed by the establishment of new frontiers; the female body that is asked to give without having; or the stateless refugee who carries both home and country on his back.

In the final analysis, the ethical contribution of Oelhoffen's cinematic adaption of "L'Hôte" comes not simply from having given Camus's Arab character a voice (although this of course is important to the film's plot), but from its patient, poetic exploration of the paradox of colonial hospitality when repositioned in a postcolonial context. In *Loin des hommes*, the relentless reversal of roles between the *pied noir* teacher and the Arab prisoner not only reveals the asymmetrical dynamics of appropriation, (co)habitation, and (dis)possession that have historically defined the hospitable relations between the colonial

[94] Still, *Derrida and Hospitality*, 22; Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix*, 34.
[95] Bonnie Honig, "Proximity and Paradox: Law and Politics in the New Europe," in *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible*, edited by Thomas Claviez (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 108.
[96] Baker, *Politicising Ethics*, 5.

"hôte" and his colonized counterpart, but also calls for a constant renegotiation of these boundaries and relationships in a postcolonial context. Furthermore, although the film is set entirely in colonial Algeria, its historical perspective on the anti-colonial conflict suggests a critique of postcolonial hospitality in contemporary France, where the Arab im/migrant is often perceived or cast in public discourse as an ungracious "guest" in the former colonizer's home. As Rosello has argued, commenting on the discourse of hospitality in contemporary immigration policy, the "hegemonic transparency" of "hospitality as a metaphor blurs the distinction between a discourse of rights and a discourse of generosity, the language of social contracts and the language of excess and gift-giving."[97] From this perspective, the film's depiction of gift-giving is particularly poignant. Is it a gift when Daru gives sacks of grain to children whose parents have been deprived of the capacity to grow their own wheat? Is it a gift when Mohammed gives Daru an Arabic coin that has lost all its value, or when Daru calls Mohammed by his God-given name? Can the warmth of a woman's body be considered a gift, or is she simply the forgotten remainder in a masculine economy of exchange?

In the film's final scene, Daru returns home late at night to survey the damage done to his desert schoolhouse; the blood of the dead horse still stains the dirt outside. The next day, however, the teacher's sunny classroom teams again with eager students; the rivers of France have been erased from the chalkboard, and on an easel to right hangs a map of Africa. Supplanting the enigmatic threat that closes Camus's short story, Daru writes "the

[97] Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, 9.

Atlas (mountains)" in Arabic script (الأطلس) on the board, then adds in French, "On habite dans l'Atlas." Oelhoffen's film does not purport to change the currents of history, nor does it find a permanent solution to the paradox of colonial hospitality at the core of Camus's short story. However, by placing an emphasis on the political responsibility of the (post)colonial "hôte," the film appeals to an ethical principle of hospitality rooted firmly in political action, calling for a constant, unremitting right to care and refuge.

Conclusion

Forgetting to Remember: An Algerian Revolution for the Twenty-First Century

In the final section of Alexis Jenni's *L'Art français de la guerre*, after the Algerian War of Independence has drawn to its bitter end, the novel's protagonist, Victorien Salagnon, recalls visiting his uncle in a prison in Algiers, where he is awaiting a death sentence in solitary confinement. Salagnon's uncle, a career military officer who entered the service as a clandestine recruiter for the French Resistance during the Second World War in Lyon, had been arrested and condemned for his role in terrorist attacks carried out by the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), a far-right paramilitary group opposed to Algerian Independence. His uncle's sole regret, Salagnon says, was that the prison guards had confiscated his cherished, paperback copy of Homer's *Odyssey*, which he had carried faithfully from the snow-covered battlefields of Alsace to the sweltering jungle of Tonkin, wrapped protectively in two scraps of red fabric ripped from Nazi and Viet Minh flags, respectively. As chaos reigned outside the prison walls—"Alger était un chaos, un labyrinthe de sang," Salagnon remembers, "on s'entretuait dans les rues, dans les appartements, on torturait dans les caves, on jetait des cadavres à la mer, on les enterrait dans les jardins"— his uncle preferred in his final moments to reflect on the end of Odysseus's saga, which he had committed to memory after years of war-weary reading.[1]

[1] Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 731.

In the Homeric tale, Salagnon recalls from his uncle's retelling, Odysseus returns home after spending twenty years at sea, swiftly kills the men who have plundered his stores in his absence, and makes passionate love to his loyal wife, Penelope. Odysseus is tired, but his journey is far from over. Years prior, the prophet Tiresias, sitting at the entrance to Hades drinking sacrificial blood as an elixir of truth, prophesied that Odysseus would have to make one final sacrifice to Poseidon, the wrathful god of the sea, before he could rest in peace:

> *Il faudrait repartir avec ta bonne rame à l'épaule et marcher, tant et tant qu'à la fin tu rencontres des gens qui ignorent la mer […] le jour qu'en te croisant, un autre voyageur demanderait pourquoi, sur ta brillante épaule, est cette pelle à grains, c'est là qu'il te faudrait planter ta bonne rame et faire à Poséidon le parfait sacrifice d'un bélier, d'un taureau et d'un verrat de taille à couvrir une truie ; tu reviendrais ensuite offrir en ton logis la complète série des saintes hécatombes à tous les Immortels, puis la mer t'enverrait la plus douce des morts ; tu ne succomberais qu'à l'heureuse vieillesse, ayant autour de toi des peuples fortunés.*[2]

"'Quand personne ne reconnaîtra plus les instruments de la guerre, ce sera fini,'" Salagnon remembers his uncle saying, regretting that he himself would never know "cette fin d'apaisement et d'oubli."[3] Several decades later, sitting in the dusty sanctuary of his living room on the suburban outskirts of Lyon, Salagnon seems to agree with his late uncle, who was executed the day after his visit to the prison "pour haute trahison, complot contre la République, tentative d'assassinat du chef d'État."[4] Speaking to the novel's narrator,

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2 Homer, qtd. in Ibid., 645; italics in original.
3 Ibid., 645, 731.
4 Ibid., 732.

Salagnon asserts: "Nous ne retrouverons la paix que quand tout le monde aura oublié cette guerre de vingt ans où l'on enseignait le piège, le meurtre, et la douleur infligée, comme autant de techniques de bricolage."[5] Yet those who survived the war, Salagnon regretfully suspects, would never forget it, but would die knowing the sound of a bomb that has been set to explode in the street.

Must we forget, as Jenni's novel seems to suggest, in order to work through and move past the traumatic memory of the Algerian War? Is it an absence of memory that has afflicted France and Algeria alike for the last half century, or is it its persistent surplus, marked by a nightmarish incapacity to forget? Is memory a prerequisite for peace and reconciliation, or can it paradoxically impede progress by miring the present in the bloody mess of the past? Besides, what do we really remember when we recall the memory of the Algerian War today: the anachronistic image of a Soviet tank rolling slowly through the streets of Climat de France in the final scene of Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger*, or the face of an Arab stranger seen lurking on a street corner at Barbès-Rochechouart selling sticky blocks of hashish to Parisian passersby? Which of several massacres springs to mind when we hear the words "slaughter" and "Algerian" spoken together in a sentence—Sétif (May 1945), Paris (October 1961), or Oran (July 1962)—and what might such an unspoken, instinctual association imply about our personal affiliations with the Algerian War? Why was the flying of an Algerian flag on the Champs-Élysées after the Algerian national soccer team advanced to the quarter finals of the World Cup in 2014 denounced by Prime Minister

[5] Ibid., 731.

Manuel Valls as a dangerous "débordement" of nationalist fervor over fifty years after Algerian Independence, and why would Emmanuel Macron even consider making a campaign stop in Algeria during the 2017 French presidential elections?[6] How can France and Algeria ever hope to coexist in peace when even the catastrophic burning of the Notre Dame cathedral in April 2019 could not escape the modern scourge of racist and Islamophobic right-wing conspiracy theories?[7]

The present study does not purport to offer satisfactory answers to these pressing questions. However, by plotting the migratory patterns of the memory of the Algerian War over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I have sought in this study to highlight the complex nexus of narratives that has coalesced around the anti-colonial conflict in contemporary France and Algeria alike. Against the quasi-psychoanalytical narrative of repression and recuperation, I have argued in this study for a new perspective on the Algerian War and its traumatic aftermath, showing how a perceived absence of memory has also paradoxically coincided with a kind of mnemonic excess, confounding amnesia and anamnesis. Furthermore, by calling attention to certain historically underrepresented aspects of the anti-colonial conflict, I have also shown where official accounts and histories have acted counterintuitively as agents of collective forgetting, and how cultural sources have constituted an alternative historical archive, incorporating a

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[6] "Match de l'Algérie: Manuel Valls dénonce des 'incidents insupportables,'" *Le Figaro*, June 27, 2014, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2014/06/27/01016-20140627ARTFIG00050-mondial-2014-liesse-des-supporters-algeriens-quelques-incidents.php.

[7] Ben Collins, "Notre Dame Cathedral Fire Spurs Islamophobic Conspiracy Theories on Social Media," *NBC News*, April 16, 2019, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/notre-dame-cathedral-fire-sparks-islamophobic-theories-social-media-n995091.

heterogeneity of memories, narratives, and perspectives. Finally, by placing the French-Algerian conflict in conversation with other histories and historical experiences of violence, I have raised awareness about the traumatic reverberations of the Algerian War across time and in discrete spatiotemporal arrangements.

This final point, concerning the transhistorical resonance of historical trauma, proves particularly relevant today, as present-day Algeria is facing its most significant and sustained political upheaval since the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s. On Friday, February 22, 2019, hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators took to the streets in protest of Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's announcement that he would seek a fifth term despite having suffered a debilitating stroke six years prior, in 2013.[8] Although Bouteflika finally resigned on April 2, 2019 under pressure from the Algerian military, weekly protests have continued like clockwork in Algeria and across the Algerian diaspora, calling for constitutional reforms, political transparency, economic accountability, civil liberties, media freedoms, and the separation of powers.[9] The popular protest movement, known as the *Hirak*, or the "Revolution of Smiles," has revealed the fragility of the Algerian regime, as well as the rapidly atrophying power-sharing arrangement between Algeria's political establishment, the state security apparatus, and the military. As Amel Boubekeur has observed in a recent policy brief on the subject, the remarkable persistence and resilience

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[8] Karima Aït Dahmane, *Vendredire en Algérie: Humour, chants et engagement* (Algiers: Édition El Ibriz, 2019); Mahdi Boukhalfa, *La Révolution du 22 février, de la contestation à la chute des Bouteflika* (Algiers: Chihab Éditions, 2019); Salah Guemriche, *Algérie 2019: La Reconquête* (Algiers: Éditions Orients, 2019); Mohamed Metboul, *Libertés, dignité, algerianité: Avant et pendant le 'Hirak'* (Algiers: Koukou Éditions, 2019); Rachid Sidi Boumediene, *Aux sources du Hirak* (Algiers: Chihab Éditions, 2019).

[9] James McDougall, "How Algeria's Army Sacrificed a President to Keep Power," *BBC News*, April 6, 2019, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47821980.

of the *Hirak* points to the need for a "national debate on truth and reconciliation, transitional justice, corruption, and models of future economic redistribution," as well as the role of the army in an eventual negotiated transition.[10]

The popular protest movement has once again raised questions about the legacy of the Algerian War in contemporary Algeria, revealing the revolutionary party's sclerotic clutch on power at the highest possible rungs of the political establishment. Calls for accountability, popular representation, and an end to state corruption have not only challenged the political hegemony of the Algerian regime in the present, but also threatened its historical claim to power, securely rooted in Algeria's revolutionary past. Additionally, many of the social and political issues raised and left unresolved in the early 1990s have returned with a renewed vigor, including Algeria's ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, the place of women in Algerian society, and the role of religion in politics and the public sphere. Concerns about inclusion, equality, and representation have raised questions about what it means to be Algerian today and who will decide the country's democratic future.

Meanwhile, across the Mediterranean in present-day France, the memory of the Algerian War remains politically salient, informing private attitudes as well as public debates about identity and immigration, security and sovereign power. Although the Macron administration has made repeated attempts to atone for France's colonial past, recognizing French colonialism in Algeria as a "crime against humanity" and publicly

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[10] Amel Boubekeur, *Demonstration Effects: How the Hirak Protest Movement Is Reshaping Algerian Politics* (n.p.: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020), 21.

acknowledging the torture and murder of Maurice Audin, a French mathematician, after decades of silence and denial, these rhetorical gestures have done little to rectify prevailing racial animosities and Islamophobic rhetoric in France.[11] Half a century after Algerian Independence, how far into the postcolonial future must we walk, following the weary footsteps of Odysseus, until we are finally ready to put down weapons of the colonial past?

[11] "En Algérie, Macron qualifie la colonization française de 'crime contre l'humanité,'" *Libération*, February 15, 2017, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2017/02/15/en-algerie-emmanuel-macron-qualifie-la-colonisation-francaise-de-crime-contre-l-humanite_1548723; Adam Nossiter, "French Soldiers Tortured Algerians, Macron Admits 6 Decades Later," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2018, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/world/europe/france-algeria-maurice-audin.html.

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